

Epiphany

Reflections from Doug Thorpe - Creation Care Ministry

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In a chapter on Celtic Creation Spirituality in his book *The Mountain Behind the Mountain*, the theologian and teacher Noel Dermot O'Donoghue writes about the Gaelic prayer *Buiochas le Dia*; thanks be to God. A more solemn version was "Blessed be the Holy Will of God." O'Donoghue writes that this prayer suggests the Celtic culture's "constant relation to the creative springs of life. For in this vision of life and death *all is gift*. In the beginning is the gift and the gift is with God and the gift is God" (71, italics in the original). He clarifies this through a story from his own childhood: an elderly neighbor, crippled with arthritis, would say as he stood by the gate "Tis a fine day, thank God," or "Tis a wild day, thank God." O'Donoghue then adds: "These are the voices of a people . . . that had survived the dark centuries and such holocaust experiences as the Irish Famine, survived, like Job, still giving thanks to the Creator and the sources of life. . . . The gift of Creation . . . is a costly gift, as costly as the Passion and Death of Christ and the Seven Sorrows of Mary" [71].

A costly gift—surely we're invited to hear an echo of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who talks about cheap versus costly grace in the context of 1930's Germany.

The point is that from the moment of creation – and the Logos, incarnate in the child Jesus according to Christian belief, is Himself the energy behind creation – from this moment until now it is all a costly gift. A gift surely, this life, but costly because creation, at least as we know it, is built on death, on one creature feeding on another, and so it is as costly as Love itself, which by its very nature offers itself for the sake of all that it loves.

And Love loves everything. Everyone.

And perhaps this is a hint of what the magi see in this child: what life and love truly are, that at the very heart of things is, well, heart – not just nature red in tooth and claw as Tennyson said, not just endless competition for survival but an offering of love, an offering of itself over and over again. That child lying there in its complete vulnerability is the same one who will years later hold up a chalice of wine and say to a group of friends *this is my body. I give it to you freely because of love, from which we are all created, the same love that forged the universe itself. That made everything that is. This is what we do for one another.*

And this is of course the same child who will the very next day lie there on the cross, just as vulnerable as that baby, and offer up forgiveness. This too, this cross, is a sign: *This is what love looks like.*

The magi, I like to imagine, saw something of this in that child. Epiphany: *this is how everything works. It's not just death but love, all the way down.*

Let us imagine that those three old men who travelled that great distance were themselves fathers and grandfathers: what they saw at the end of their journey was the very meaning of the love that they bore for their own offspring. Their love, they suddenly saw, is no different than (in Dante's words) the Love that moves the sun and other stars. They belong to that Love which is incarnate in that child. And long before Easter they saw, I like to believe, that Death is not the end. That this love that we carry like a precious burden in our hearts is not extinguished at my death or your death, that it does transcend time and space, and yes, that while it lives in this world and flourishes in this world it is not limited to this world.

It's a costly gift, this life. It is, I believe, worth the price.