Through The Cross To The New Creation

**The Church In Action**

Based on a talk given by May Tripp at the Retreat For Animal Welfare, Maryvale, 19th June, 1993

When I first began to think about this talk I fully intended to speak about the work of Animal Christian Concern, about our various campaigns, about the Services we had held, the pract­ical difficulties we had faced and the help we had received. But almost as soon as I had begun to write I found that the Cross was dominating my thoughts and that the talk had changed direction away from the practicalities of our work and towards the concerns of all those enquirers who seek our help, many of whom never even become our members. Most of these people are suffering in some way either from personal problems or vicariously for creation. Almost invariably their impression of Christians seems to be that we are comfortable people who have got life, “taped”, and that within our tidy churches we, and all other things within, are in perfect order. But it isn’t like that at all, it never has been. The followers of Jesus who watched His crucifixion - or fled in terror - had to work their way through that experience until, with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1v8) they became a **NEW CREATION**. After that, they had to endure all manner of troubles and persecutions whilst they proclaimed His Name and the Gospel. So it has been throughout the ages and so it still is. Christians still face relig­ious and political persecution in some parts of the world. In Africa they face civil war, famine, starvation; recently in south­ern Sudan 100 Christian leaders were crucified by government troops. In Czechoslovakia they face the destructive pollution and poverty of their country as they preach the Gospel amongst those who have been taught to hate all religion. They now send ACC literature to Christian Centres in the other countries of Eastern Europe. In Canada the Christian animal welfarists have to live with the hunting and trapping which is ever around them. Here, in our own country, we Christians suffer the pains of unemploy­ment, broken relationships, homelessness and abuse.

Why? Why doesn’t our Lord look after us rather better? It is an age-old question and the only answer we can find lies in the Cross. Let us begin by looking at some of the concerns raised by those who seek our help.

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The most difficult enquiries we have to deal with are those - and there are very many of them - which concern **vegetarianism**. The letters and phone calls we receive on this subject are filled with grief, anger and confusion about the suffering and slaugh­ter of those animals used for food and they question the love of God who allows, even created, or so they believe, that pattern of suffering ...and they question the compassion of Jesus who, as Lord of Creation, has Himself an involvement in it. What can we say! I am sure that all of us in this room can identify with the pain of these enquirers. How often it is said that we animal welfarists are emotional, use emotive language. Well, how can this not be so when feelings run so strong? Some of these enquirers on vegetarianism are already Christians, but most of them are simply reaching out to Christianity and they are more closely linked with other faiths and New Age philos­ophies. This is today’s pattern, of course. Until this last decade the Christian Churches have allowed, or even positively en­couraged, vegetarians and animal welfarists to walk away from Christianity.

One of our most recent members is a young man, a vegetarian who is looking into our faith, trying to know Christ for him­self. He has been taking ACC literature into his local church, but the response there has been disappointing. He has been told how much the Christians agree with our literature but, in his own words, that: "as factory farming and vivisection can never be stopped, there isn't much point in abstaining from their products. Also, that I have no right putting Christians on guilt-trips." He then expressed his puzzlement about something he had been told: "that Jesus didn't want ANY laws on food and said that it is not what goes into your mouth that is important but what comes out of it: therefore, what happens to an animal before it is eaten is not an issue." The young man went on to ask for an explanation of all this and commented: "I understand that a law cannot be passed forbidding people to eat flesh (and God made a compromise on this matter) as abstaining from flesh eating is an act of love and above the law."

Well, from out of the mouths of, ***“babes and sucklings”***, as they say (Psalm 8). It seems to me that this young seeker already knows Jesus far better than the established Christians who seem to have missed the whole point of Matthew 15 v 1-20.

Looking at the passage in question we see that Jesus is here talking to Pharisees and teachers of the law and we know well how Jesus constantly warned them against their legalism. In fact the whole passage is about legalism, not directly about food at all, but about rituals such as hand washing and food laws. Yes, Jesus reminds his listeners, as He always did, that we are not saved by undue attention to religious laws, but by the righteousness of our hearts and that what is in our hearts shows in our **CONSEQUENT ACTIONS** (v 19). What point is there indeed, (v 3-9) in saying that we keep God’s law to honour our father and mother if we neglect them in His name? Surely, too, Jesus’ teaching here has something to say about our refusal to do anything positive against a use of animals which we have acknowledged to be cruel? For all caring Christ­ians, meat eaters or not, can and should do their level best to avoid products of an acknowledged cruelty.

But the efforts of this young ACC member illustrate what an animal welfarist, particularly a vegetarian, is still up against in our churches.

Traditional Christians have largely forgotten that vegetarianism is an original facet of our faith. Walking through Kirkstall Abbey recently I spotted a plaque on one section of the ruins marking the meat kitchen. This, noted the plaque, had been built in the 15th Century. Prior to that all the monks had been vegetarian, and this more recent meat kitchen had been kept very separate from the original one in which vegetables only were cooked. Not only in the monastic traditions was abstin­ence from meat to be found. It is clear from Paul’s Epistles (Roman 14) that meatlessness was an issue amongst the first Christians and it may be that Paul himself, at least in part, sympathised with this (1 Corinthians 8v13) **“So then, if food makes my brother sin, / will never eat meat again, so as not to make my brother fall into sin.”**

The Church must never lose sight of the essential truth as written in Genesis (Ch. 1 v 29 & 30) that God’s perfect will for His creation is vegan harmony. The dreadful bloodiness of a predatory creation, “the food chain”, as scientists like to call it, can never be part of God who is Love.

**“Now the message that we have heard from His Son is this: God is light and there is no darkness at all in Him”** (1 John 1 v 5).

When God did make a concession on the eating of flesh: **“Just as / gave you the green plants, / now give you everything.”** (Gen. 9 v 3), it was a concession to a people gone wrong, to a fallen people in need of redemption, and it gave them a choice. But as Paul pointed out in Romans 14, there can be a trap in abstinence from meat, if this abstinence becomes a religion in itself, if it makes us proud of our own virtue and if it makes us think that we are not fallen people. Because we are, all of us, vegetarian or not, and we are all dependent upon the saving grace of Christ Jesus. Indeed in our fallenness we can spoil even this cherished ideal.

I well remember an occasion several years ago when I went to a local Vegetarian Society committee meeting. This was chair­ed by our hostess, a very elderly lady in her eighties who, knowing that two young vegans were going to be present, had spent most of the day baking a vegan supper. She had bought and used a special vegan margarine, but that week the makers of this margarine had announced that, because of some diffi­culty in obtaining ingredients, there was a small chance that a little dairy produce may have been used in some of their batches. On the strength of this, the two young vegans proudly rejected the carefully prepared supper. Our octogenarian host­ess was deeply hurt and the rest of us ate in acutely embarrassed silence. This episode illustrates for me the same compassionless legalism about which Christ Jesus challenged the Pharisees. We are all capable of this sort of self-righteousness and in the end it does our cause no good.

We animal welfarists encounter similar dilemmas all the time. How easy is it to sit next to a fur coat in church and warmly pass the peace to the wearer? How easy is it to accept medica­tion when we don’t know how the treatment was researched? Or to walk past the collecting tin of an earnest collector for a charity which we are pretty sure will use it for animal experi­mentation? This is not a comfortable world for any committed Christian; emphatically it is not comfortable for one who is an animal welfarist. Of course our enquirers always want to know what Jesus actually did about the eating of meat, and for them this is of vital importance. But we don’t know. I would like to offer my own thoughts on this, for over the years what Jesus actually did was of vital importance to me too. First of all, I cannot conceive that He could have had less compassion for slaughtered animals than we here do: **“no servant is greater than his master”** (John 13 v 16).

My own understanding is that, in the area in which Jesus lived and ministered, very little red meat was eaten. Sheep were rear­ed largely for wool and the number of those animals which were eaten was largely limited by sacrificial laws. Then again, in those times animals were all, “free range”, and a good Jew would take it for granted that they would all have been well cared for (Proverbs 12). Yet Jesus did, very angrily, cleanse the Temple of the sacrificial animals and their traders. I do not believe that His passions were stirred merely by the financial exploitation involved or even by the misuse of the Temple Courts. I do believe that He would have been sickened by the slaughter and even that He, as Lamb of God preparing to be sacrificed Himself in order to raise us all above our fallenness, was at this event symbolically cleansing God’s Temple of all further need of animal sacrifice. It could have been possible for Jesus, without even declaring Himself, “vegetarian”, to live and minister without eating meat. But my understanding also is that the area was very heavily dependent upon the eating of fish and that the bulk of the population could scarcely have survived without it. Here we have Jesus drawing Peter, Andrew, James & John away from their trade as fishermen, but also miraculously sharing out bread and fish to His hungry follow­ers. We do not know whether He ate the fish Himself on that occasion, but we are told that Christ did eat fish with His disciples after the Resurrection as a confirmation that He had indeed risen in the flesh.

I do not believe that Jesus ate Passover lamb at the Last Supper. According to the Gospel of St John, Jesus’ death on the Cross coincided with the slaying of the paschal lambs the day before the Passover. What could have been more appropri­ate for the sacrifice of the Lamb of God?

But really, you know, all this speculation about what Jesus actually did is quite irrelevant when you know Jesus for your­self. This is what makes it virtually impossible to explain to a secular animal welfarist, for our understanding in this is totally dependent upon our understanding of the divinity and purpose of Christ Jesus; of our realisation of what happened at the Fall and what a vast and terrible effect this had upon the whole creation (Genesis 3).

All vegetarians, Christian and non-Christian alike, have had to live through pain for the fallenness of creation and for the suffering of its creatures - this in itself is a sharing of the pain of Christ’s Cross. How many of us here are, like me, so foolish as to have wept for a worm trapped helplessly in the beak of a bird, or to have pursued a woodlouse struggling across a barren carpet to return it to its teeming fellows in the garden, or in­deed to have felt anger at the inevitability of the death of the greenfly or grubs which had made their home on the green vegetables we need to eat. Yes, absurd - but also deeply funda­mental, I believe, in that this absurdity points to an awareness of the sufferings of a fallen and suffering creation. It is the absurdity of a, “fool”, for Christ, recognised by us all in St Francis of Assisi. (1 Corinthians 3 v 18).

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We know that the New Testament contains, “hard sayings”, of Jesus in which his words are difficult to understand - impossible I believe unless you read them within the context of the Fall and of Redemption. But the Old Testament is even worse in this respect, for me at any rate. At one time I would not look at the Old Testament or listen in church when it was read and I remember one Maundy Thursday when I almost walked out of church during the reading of the passage which described the preparation of the Passover lamb. That ruined my Easter. But the passage which troubled me the most and which I tried the hardest to avoid was that of Genesis 4 v 2-7. You know it, the one where Cain worked the land exactly in accordance with the instructions of Genesis 1 and in the course of time offered the fruits of his labour to God. His brother Abel had become a shepherd and he killed the first born lamb of his flock, a killing not in accordance with the will of God as out­lined in Genesis 1. But what happened? God accepted the lamb and rejected the fruits of the soil. Why? How can animal welfarists accept this, a puzzle even to orthodox Christians?

Well, as I say, I avoided such passages and tried to discount them. But we can’t do that and certainly after founding ACC I had to take note of these things. One day, worrying on this story, I had a sudden thought. The thought was to compare it with the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and I now believe that the answer to this troublesome story of Cain and Abel lies within that parable. Here also we have two sons, one who is living by his father’s rules and one who is not. Yet the father chooses to honour the son who has flouted his will, simply because he has returned to him in love and trust. Here, too, we have an apparently righteous, but a deeply angry and jealous son. In the forgiving father we recognise how glad our own heavenly Father always is to welcome home a penitent sinner: A penitent sinner like Abel who had faithfully present­ed his slain lamb. But the apparently righteous Cain, instead of rejoicing with his brother Abel, killed him; and what the elder brother of the prodigal son did we do not know. Both these stories speak of the inherent fallenness of our world and of our chance for forgiveness, a chance often rejected. Animal welfarists are hurt by the celebratory killing of the, “fattened calf”, in Luke 15. They shouldn’t be. What this story tells us is that it is Christ Himself, sacrificed upon the Cross, just as innocently as the, “fattened calf”, and Abel’s first born lamb were sacrific­ed, who brings about the celebration of our reconciliation with God, our Father. We see that reconciliation in all its glorious wonder when, like John, we look at, **“the Lamb looking as if it had been slain”** (Rev 5 v 6), now at one with God the Father and taking to Himself the love of the whole creation.

How difficult it is for a secular animal welfarist to understand the pattern of **animal sacrifice** throughout the Old Testament and the necessity of Christ’s own sacrifice in the New Testa­ment. How difficult indeed for us Christians to understand it. In this we are little better than Peter, who hotly argued against the need for our Lord’s impending death and had to be told, **“Get behind me, Satan”**, (Matt 16 v 23) for truly when we question the need of the Cross we do Satan’s work for him. Somehow in our fallen world the sacrifice of the innocent seems always to be there and even today we, as Christians, are sent out, **“to be a living sacrifice ... to live and work to His praise and glory.”** These difficulties of understanding are not helped by the ubiquitous detractions of Christ Jesus which abound in the media today. These seek to turn Christ into a prophet at best or a terrorist at worst. **What else can we expect of a media** **guided by the values of a fallen world?** **One of the most popular of these detractions is that which seeks to dis­count the first ten chapters of Genesis, and whilst this at first glance looks to be fairly harmless and fits very neatly into an acceptance of Darwin’s theory of evolution, a closer examina­tion will note that by throwing out these early chapters of** **Genesis, the concept of the Fall has been successfully removed. The logical extension of this removal has then taken away our need of redemption, our need of a Saviour - our need of the Cross.** Not only have the early chapters of Genesis, the concept of our separation from God, and the concept of the Fall, been removed but most of the Truth of the Gospel has been negated. The Cross has become an unhappy failure instead of the sacri­fice which has reconciled us to God, our Father in heaven.

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We look at the Cross - gold, silver, polished wood - we Christ­ians, and love it as a symbol of Christ’s abiding love for us. We wear it around our necks or in our lapels as a token of our own love for Him. **BUT** **WAIT,** the cross is a horrific symbol of evil. That is how the disciples must have seen it. It signifies that evil in the world which nailed Christ to His death and which He had to face, had to endure and then overcome before He could qualify as our Saviour and Redeemer. It is a symbol of the world’s cruelty, a symbol of the world’s separation from God (Gen. 3 v 23.24). Even Jesus Himself had to feel this as He bore our sin at Calvary: **“My God, my God, why have you for­saken me.”**

I think it is a bit like that for all of us as we bear the pain of our own crosses, our own separations from God. But just as the pain was necessary for Christ, so in our own small ways are these necessary pains for us, for if we have never encountered the evil that is in the world, in ourselves; never fallen victim to our own particular cross, how then can we ever hope to recog­nise that evil, and to understand the great gulf which lies between our own sinfulness and the purity of God. How too, without our crosses, can we recognise the need of a Saviour? It is well attested in evangelical and charismatic circles that the most fervent Christians are those who, like Mary Magdalene, have recognised their sins and have laid them in sorrow at the feet of Christ. When we have done that, and only when we have done that, can we hope to be lifted above our human involvement in sinfulness. When Christ Jesus told His followers: **“... and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me,”** I believe that He knew what that pain would be, and that He also knew that it would be an essential pain - but a pain which had the potential to **DEFLECT** us from our Christian mission. And that mission must always continue, for there is a way to rise above our unworthiness. Just as Christ needs us to share His Cross, so too does He want us to share in His Resurrection. Look at Saul of Tarsus, an exemplary, if self-righteous, Jew, but an accuser and a persecu­tor of Christians; suddenly struck by the Truth of the Risen Christ and immediately transformed. It is not as dramatic as that for most of us, but the transformation is there just the same. Penitence, forgiveness, rebirth into Christ is a process; thank God that we can repeat for as long as it takes. How can it not be so for inhabitants of a fallen world constantly immers­ed in sinfulness?

No, the real danger for us is not that of falling victim to sin, but that of believing that we never do fall victim to it: the danger of the Pharisee, the danger which the exemplary, self-righteous, Saul of Tarsus displayed, but which the transformed apostle Paul did not.

Last March our valued ACC member Bishop Peter Ball, former Bishop of Gloucester, had his own experience of the cross as he faced a police caution regarding homosexuality. There is a point of view which suggests that homosexuality is not in accord with scriptural teachings and I am inclined to hold to that point of view - but then I am a remarried divorcee and that is not in accord with scriptural teachings either, so I am in no position to cast a stone. Nonetheless, Christ has called me back into His service after a long twenty years away from His church, and for that I am truly thankful. I have no doubt that Bishop Peter will also continue his ministry for Christ, and quickly I hope, offering the same care and compassion which have so endeared him to the people of Lewes and Gloucester, and who are now deeply saddened by this loss of a beloved Bishop. But be warned all those of you who feel that you have no sin, for pride deflects from the Christian mission as surely as guilt and, at the end of the day, it is continuing to carry our cross that is important. Greed, ruthlessness, mercilessness: These are sins which strike from the heart itself, poison the heart itself. Yet these are sins which are almost a qualification for success in our materialistic world, and success can pair very happily with **self-righteousness**. These are the human sins, I think, which exploit and they are those from which our natural creation suffers the most and is most threatened. These are the sins which have led successive governments to squeeze out natural farming and replace it with callous intensive farming. These are the sins which have allowed homelessness, unemploy­ment, division between the rich and the poor. And these, too, are sins in which we all of us here have played, and do play, our own parts.

**“Do not love the world or anything in the world.”** (1 John 2 v 15). It is difficult to love the world if we love Christ’s Cross. Paul too, put a clear distinction between the two: **“May / never boast except in the Cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and / to the world.”** (Galatians 6 v14). The world: “cosmos”. What do we mean by this multi-faceted word? Certainly wholeness and entirety of God’s creation, but more importantly in our present context, I think, the organisation of our worldly, human syst­ems. It is our, ‘‘worldliness”, from which we have to be cruci­fied for it is worldly eyes which make it so difficult to recognise the Risen Christ. His friends on the Emmaus road did not recognise Him except in the breaking of bread - the sharing of His broken body, the sharing of His Cross. Even Mary at the tomb did not recognise Him: **“Who is it you are looking for?”** He asked her.

She was looking in the wrong place for the wrong thing, in a tomb for a corpse, not for a Risen Saviour. Do we always look in the right place for the right thing? Do we look for the Saviour of a fallen creation or do we look for a political super­man who can change laws to protect our treasured animals? The disciples had expected Jesus to exert God’s authority in great power, had expected Him to free the children of Israel and to right all wrongs - they had starvation, poverty and oppression, just as we have today. But Jesus did not do any of those things, He chose the Cross: the powerlessness of the Cross. As animal welfarists, secular or Christian, we often look for the Church itself to exert power on behalf of animals, but a Church faithful to Christ should have no worldly power, only the pain of the Cross. This it seems to be bearing in full measure at the moment: denominational divisions, the ordina­tion of women, the loss of animal welfarists, for, yes, that is a, “hidden”, division, scarcely recognised. But these pains should give us cause for hope, not despair, for they show that the Cross is at the heart of our Church. And in our own work for animals, let us not be surprised when we feel the helplessness, and even hopelessness of our endeavours, for this too, is part of the pain and the powerlessness of the cross which we must carry: **“My dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering, as though something unusual were happening to you. Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may be full of joy when his glory is revealed.”** (1 Peter 4 v 12-13).

Yet the Church does have its own power, a power which should represent the will of God. In 1990 the Synod of the Church of England failed to forbid intensive farming and hunt­ing from its lands, and this year it is announced that the revised catechism of the Roman Catholic Church will include an acceptance of animal experimentation and genetic engineer­ing. Do I need to tell you what these things have done to our chances of reaching animal welfarists for Christ? Has the Church recognised the Lord of Creation in making these decis­ions? Thomas in the Upper Room was reluctant to recognise the Risen Christ - but when he did, when he finally did - he recognised Him in all His glorious fullness: **"My Lord and my God."** Many Christians today have lost that sense of the wonder of their Risen Saviour. I hope that we who are animal welfarists and who know Christ Jesus as Lord, not just of humanity but of the whole creation, may - with God’s grace - play a part in helping His Church, His sheep, and all His creat­ures, to a full recognition of the Lord of Creation, our Lord and our God.

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**Sickness is yet another cross**, another separation from God. Oh yes, I know that some people can be saintly in illness, but others more readily doubt the love of God and feel anger against Him. Again, we remember how Jesus Himself cried out forsakenly as He felt the pain of the Cross. Our human sickness is also shar­ed by the natural creation, particularly by its animals. They suffer their own natural illnesses of course, but many today suffer the additional distress caused by human pollution. And this is not the only burden of sickness borne by animals. For those who are used as laboratory tools, life begins and ends in a suffering deliberately caused by humans and for humans. This compounded sin is justified by our legal system and our society as intensive farming, bloodsports, etc., etc., are also justified by the world.

Of course the theology of the Cross is complex, a deep Mystery of the Christian faith, and our reactions are necessarily person­al. Francis of Assisi cared nothing for theology; he adored the Cross and prayed fervently that he might share its pain for Christ. Shortly before his death, he was granted the stigmata. Thomas Aquinas is known as one of the world’s greatest intellects and he devoted his life to theological study and lecturing, but two years before his death, he had a personal encounter with Christ which made him acknowledge that all his great intellect and theological study was as nothing compar­ed to knowing the living Lord in his heart. We cannot under­stand the Cross by scholarship.

Is it easy to understand that those of us who are sinners (and have we anyone here who is not?) are victims of evil as well as perpetrators of it and that sickness itself is in some way linked to evil. We look at Christ’s healing of the paralysed man (Matthew 9 v 1-8) and see that this healing took place as the result of the forgiveness of his sins. It could seem to us that this young man, who so clearly needed the close attention of his friends probably hadn’t been in any position to commit any, “sins”, yet here Jesus was forgiving them. In this parable, as in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus tells us that to hate in the heart is to murder and that to desire is to commit adultery (Matt 5), we see the impossibility of our human situa­tion and our inevitable involvement with sin. We then under­stand our need of a Saviour; we understand our need - as well as we ever can - our need of the Cross.

For the truth is that as people of the Fall we are in confusion. We are children of God, yearning for God, but drawn also to the self-centred disobedience which we, as Adam, chose when in Eden we opted for the sweet fruits of worldliness. Of course you and I personally did not do this opting. We wouldn’t have done - or would we? Nonetheless, we are born into the result­ing confusion and into a world where the innocent are just as likely - or more likely - to suffer than the guilty.

Our earth is also carrying its cross. Our earth is sick because of our use of it; many now believe that it is terminally sick. Rob Brighton, Principal of the Worcestershire College of Agricul­ture, believes this and he and his colleagues argue that the land must return to the small natural, organic farm of grains, fruits, vegetables, livestock and dung. They see a necessary wholeness and interdependence of human, animal and plant life in a natural situation and worry that growing vegetarianism and the resultant intensive farming of the land is serving further to deplete its exhausted soil. On the other hand, vegans argue that it is meat production with its profligate use of natural resources and its pollution which is destroying our earth. I, like most others, have insufficient scientific knowledge to judge between these two cases, but as a Christian, I believe that they both are supported by the scriptures: The vegan case arguing the truth of Genesis 1 and the organic case arguing the interdependent imperfections of human, animal and earth as the result of the Fall. (Gen 3).

**Depression is a cross** which can easily separate its victim from God and, not surprisingly, many animal welfarists are prone to suffer in this way. Some folk assert that no true Christian should ever suffer from depression, and we do appreciate that ideally we should all radiate, **"love, joy and peace."** (Gal 5 v 22). The fact is that many worthy Christians, saints like St Francis of Assisi, David Watson, a faithful charismatic of our own day, have suffered this sickness. Thirty years ago I suffer­ed from very severe depression during three difficult pregnan­cies, one of which thankfully resulted in the birth of our son, but two of which ended in miscarriage. I well remember the pain, guilt and inadequacy of those bleak years. One day I received a letter from a fairly distant acquaintance about the love of God and the healing to be found in Christ Jesus. I ripped it into shreds, bitterly angry that this woman should think that she could console me in this way. I often wonder how many of the letters I write to depressed animal welfarists end up in shreds. But recently I received a telephone call from a young woman who seemed determined to get rid of her two, “very good”, dogs because she couldn’t cope with them and her young family. She had had a thin time with the animal sanctuaries she had contacted, who already had their hands full with neglected and homeless animals, and she was now prepar­ing to have the dogs destroyed. But I was very quickly able to recognise that behind this apparently callous story was a young woman sick with post miscarriage depression and I was able to put her in touch with a Christian group which, hopefully, could help her, as well as to persuade a sanctuary to take the dogs for re-homing.

It is perhaps when we have to face the **loss of a loved one** that we feel our keenest separation from God, carry **our heaviest cross**, for this separation calls into question the very nature and significance of death in our world. This is when it is im­portant to remember the effects of the Fall, for difficult though it may be to believe, death is one of them: **“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die. (Gen 2 v 16-17). This belief is reiterated by Paul: "Sin came into the world through one man and his sin brought death with it ...”** (Romans 5 v 12) and **“The last enemy to be defeated will be death.”** (1 Cor 15 v 26). Death is the enemy of both man and animal. It is not part of the perfect will of God and those who make a friend of it, who kill lightly and with pleasure as in bloodsports, are flouting His love and working against the saving grace of His Son. For the vital Truth of the Cross is that Christ Jesus **HAD** to endure the death which we die and which animals and all creatures die in order to rise out of it and show us that in Him the power of death, the power of the Fall, is broken. In the Holy City there is no death (Rev 21 v 4) and it is the whole creation which worships God (Rev 5 v 13): His **NEW CREATION**.

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Those who are servants of God have, **“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,"** (Rev 7 v 14). The **“blood of the Lamb”**: shuddering, terrible words to a non-Christian vegetarian who does not understand their significance - they used to appal me. So, too, the words at the Eucharist: **“We thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son, Jesus Christ”**. Even after I had returned to the Church, after much wandering through other faiths and philo­sophies, and once again called myself a Christian, for a long time I could not say these words. Not until I really knew Jesus could I say them, and love them. How difficult it is for ACC and for all of us here to take Christ to animal welfarists using such terminology. And yet the truth of these pictures is funda­mental, totally essential to Christianity, for there can be no faith in Christ Jesus without the faith that His Cross has saved us from the consequences of the Fall, that He has saved the whole creation from eternal death and raised us into the eternal life of Redemption. Christianity is not an ethic, not a philos­ophy of life, and Jesus was not and is not, a “good teacher”. He is a Saviour and Redeemer - or just a religious man who was deluded and eventually faced execution. The Gospels present us with no other option.

Contemporary rationalism, of course, would try to tell us otherwise, which is why rationalism is, and always has been, an enemy of the Gospel (1 Timothy 6 v 20). Of course it is not easy to believe all these supernatural and wonderful things about God sending His only Son to earth to reconcile us to Himself, for we all have feet of clay firmly planted in the world. Most of us have to take stock of our faith from time to time and say, “Is this really what I believe?” It is hard to keep faith and we cannot do it unless we remain, **“on the vine”**. (John 15 v 4) This is why we must be, **"born again"**, with new eyes to see the Kingdom of God, with new ears to hear God’s word, and then to open our hearts to Christ Jesus, so that He may make His home within us. (Rev 3 v 20). No, we do not easily hold fast to our faith and most of us need His encourage­ment and promptings as we stumble along, clutching our crosses with one hand and trailing our vines in the other.

All of us here, as individuals, are taking our walks with God and yet, even as animal welfarists, we all have our own different ideas. Take, for instance, the very basic argument as to whether or not we should keep companion animals. Some, like me, believe that these animals are life-savers for the lonely, as well as a bonus for children, and that they fulfil a happy and worthy role as companions. Also that, without them, city dwellers especially would lose touch with the animal world altogether and would be even less likely to think about animal suffering. But I have colleagues who would disagree and who would consider companion animals to be exploited and point to massive neglect. Even amongst ourselves we have to respect each other’s points of view. This is so with our Christian beliefs. And sometimes in our walk with Christ we are even called upon to make dramatic U-turns, and we see around us Roman Catholics becoming Pentecostalists, Anglicans becoming Roman Catholics; meat eaters becoming vegetarians and vegetarians having to become meat eaters; opponents of the ordination of women preparing to work and worship with women priests, and so on. Remember the Roman Catholics of old who were martyred for their faith, and the Protestants of old who were martyred for theirs, all of them believing themselves to be right, and all of them now honoured for their faith and courage. How crazy it all must seem to the non-Christian. Yet each one of us has an individual walk to take and what really matters is that we take it with integrity. For one day, in God’s good time, all our strivings and all our differences will be hallowed and reconcil­ed by the Cross - which points in four different directions, to all corners of creation.

**"For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in Heaven by making peace through His blood shed on the Cross..."** (Colossians 1 v 19)

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I have tried in this talk to show how we, as Christians, share in the strivings and sufferings of secular animal welfarists, the sufferings of the Cross. Especially I want to say how we in our work are dependent not upon our own strengths - which are frail - but upon God, by the strength of His Holy Spirit. This strength we always have, however imperfect we are. As St. Paul said to the Corinthians, ***“There is nothing in us that allows us to claim that we are capable of doing this work. The capac­ity we have comes from God; it is He who made us capable of serving the new covenant, which consists not of a written law but of the Spirit”***. (2 Corinthians 3 v 4-6).

I have spoken of transformations, of promptings from God and these are blessings to be treasured. The most significant one for me was in 1987, two years after ACC had been formed. It was one Christmas, on “Boxing” night, when jaded from commercialism and even from the glitter of church services, I fell asleep pondering on the true meaning of Christmas. **It seemed that I was immediately given a picture of a task.** Before me lay the body of the crucified Christ Jesus, traditionally naked except for a loincloth, His face turned away from me, and I knew that I had to place His body back upon the Cross. In the background a non-Christian ceremony was taking place and I felt an increased urgency for my task; a sort of conflict was present. I looked for the Cross, but before me was not a cross but a thorn hedge, and the thorns were not thorns but metal spikes and rods. I thought that I should never be able to lift the body of Christ but I tried, and from behind me came a shadowy figure whom I never saw and who helped me to lift Him. I scrambled up the hedge, holding Christ, who was dead but warm and vibrant. In the strange way that happens in dreams my practical consciousness was thinking: “I could be hurt on these spikes and I don’t want that.” I hastily fastened Christ on to one of them and climbed down quickly. I awoke briefly, overawed and still feeling the blessing and warmth of Christ. The picture changed and I stood looking through a latticed window preparing, with much pride, to show a very dear friend the body of Christ which I had placed on His Cross. We looked. The hedge was empty. I awoke with a shock, betrayed, thinking that my task had all been a dreadful mis­take. Not until later did I realise that my heart had needed to “crucify” the Lord of Creation and then allow Him to rise. And that the wood which makes the manger is of the same wood which makes the Cross. So, too, I learned that in pro­claiming Christ crucified it simply is not possible to avoid the pain of the thorns.

I make no extravagant claim for this dream, which may well have been the result of my own ponderings. But the singular thing about it was that, almost imperceptibly, it had changed me. Gone were my previous multi-faith ideas, my reluctance to accept the need of the Cross, my uncertainties. When reading the Bible I began to recognise the ONLY Son of God, Christ Jesus crucified, risen, ascended and awaited. Gone too was any timidity about our cause for animals. My convictions were strengthened and I saw with a new clarity how God’s love for His whole creation had been there from the very beginning, as had been our responsibilities of caring for His creatures. I recognised that His natural creation now awaits His coming and the fulfilment of Redemption, just as we do.

Sadly, I also saw that most of His Church is not proclaiming this, and that its failure to do so is undermining not only our work on behalf of animals but the very fabric of our Christian faith. It is the whole Truth of the Gospel which is increasingly under threat.

So I end by calling upon the Church to preach the **WHOLE** Gospel to the **WHOLE** creation. Only thus will we Christians fully honour our Lord and fully accept our responsibilities for all of His creatures. Then, as in the old Christmas carol, we shall know the way of the **CROSS** to the **NEW CREATION.**

**“Trace we the Babe who hath retrieved our loss,**

**From the poor manger to the bitter Cross;**

**Tread in His steps, assisted by His grace,**

**Till man's (creation’s) first heavenly state again takes place.”**

**“Christians Awake, Salute The Happy Morn.”**

With love and prayers,

May Tripp

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