

# Abraham's Children

by Andy White.

## Introduction.

The mosaic triptych 'Abraham's Children' is about the the hope for reconciliation between Isaac and Ishmael, estranged brothers of the Old Testament whose fate has resulted in conflict between them for the centuries thereafter.

The purpose of this short essay is to think afresh about Christendom's long standing conflict with Islam and it's current manifestation in the Iraq war. I intend to give our Western ideals a rocky ride in the process, but before I do that I want to tell you a personal story to place all this in context.

You see, a generation ago, I used to be at the spear head of the 'war on terror'. I was raised in an extremist reactionary culture that feared and hated 'the godless threat'. I could strip a sub-machine gun when I was fourteen. I went to a boarding school with grenade screens on the windows and rifle drill after classes. By the time I was eighteen I had trained with military special forces and enlisted in an elite commando unit. I went to war and fought in many a bloody battle against 'terrorists'. My unit was eventually so decimated that it had to be disbanded and the remaining few of us reassigned to other troops that were in turn cut to pieces by a supposedly inferior enemy. I know what it is to fight with utter conviction for 'our way of life'.

One day something happened to change all of this forever, something that then culminated thirty years later in the project 'Abraham's Children'. I was nineteen. We had been dropped behind enemy lines into a terrorist training camp deep in the bush. There was a brief but intense battle which, with surprise on our side, we had won. Now we swept across the camp looking for weapons, documents and survivors. The sweep line crossed a clearing and on the far side I saw the broken body of a man.

I approached him cautiously. Multiple wounds. Large pool of blood. Twisted limbs. Then he opened his eyes and looked at me. He was alive. He stared at me impassively and without fear. His eyes bored into me. I made a quick check for weapons to distract myself from his gaze but he was unarmed. He was however desperately wounded. A total of eight bullet holes in his upper legs and lower belly. I stood and stared at him. He stared back. His eyes ripped into me. Not a word was spoken.

Strange thoughts forced their way into my head. This is a man in his own backyard. Someone's son. Someone's sweetheart. What am I doing? He has a family as I have a family. He has a name as I have a name. He looks to the skies and prays for rain. As I do. He wants to go home and longs for peace. As I do.

What on earth am I doing? Something in my chest started to splinter and then suddenly snapped. Some nasty, rotten, fetid piece of ugliness in me broke and in one moment my most urgent task in the world became to save this man.

I called a medic, radioed for a chopper and began to patch his wounds. His eyes never left my face. The sergeant arrived to see what the hold up was. He raised his rifle to shoot the wounded man. No prisoners. I growled at him to back off. He was my superior officer but didn't argue further and the whole sweep line waited while I continued with my work. As I bound one wound after another I noticed a ring on his finger. I took it. He said nothing, offered no resistance, just continued staring at me. I patched another wound then gave him the ring back. Suddenly ashamed. When I had finished I picked him up and carried him to a clearing in the bush where a chopper was waiting. As I slid him onto the helicopter floor he pressed the ring back into my hand and said, 'Datenda Nkosi'. 'Thanks boss'. I never went into battle again. I wear the ring to this day.

Why they want to kill us.

It suits us to be called policemen of the world. It lends us the glow of being the upholders of some moral value. Despite the lies about WMDs, the pretext of ousting Saddam Hussein, the hypocrisy of claiming to bring stability to the region and the laughable contradiction of imposing political systems on others in the name of freedom we are still supportive, in the main, of meddling in the Middle East.

We do this because we think we are better than them. Our political system is better than theirs and our religion is better than theirs. Because of this we need never examine our conscience, need never inquire into our own motives and whatever disasters our actions give rise to there will be no come back because its ultimately all for their own good. All of this means we cannot understand the unfolding third world revolution that is international terrorism.

Do we really not know that sucking the third world dry for hundreds of years is going to produce more than a smidgeon of resentment? We are all so convinced by our own purity that we can conquer countries for their own good. We invade in the name of liberation and occupy in the name of freedom. And we do this in exactly the same way as our grandfathers brought civilisation to the savages and saved their souls from the devil.

We usually think of democracy and the church as purely noble causes. But they have an underbelly. Our conviction in one God and one political system permits us the luxury of being superior to other people. This allows us to conduct ourselves in relation to those others as if our needs had greater validity than theirs. We view tribal systems of government with patronizing dismissal, and

other religions as the spawn of Satan. At the very least they are children of a lesser God.

If we demonize Islam it will grow horns and a tail and prod us with its pitchfork. Our task is to drop the childlike assumption that our religion is better than theirs and remember that there are none so wicked as those that are convinced by their own purity. We like to claim that we are simply preserving our way of life whilst ignoring that we have been pillaging the third world and trying to convert it by the sword for centuries. It is they who are defending themselves from our aggression. For God's sake whose troops are in whose country?

Is our occupation of Iraq any different to Saddam's occupation of Kuwait? He too evoked ancient rights and privileges to justify his brutality. Of course we are there to "promote stability" and so its okay. The fact that there are more civilian deaths in the five years after Saddam than during the five years before goes unnoticed. Collateral damage.

Also unnoticed is the 70 million dollar cheque given to Fatah to 'boost their security forces' in the wake of Hamas winning their election according to the very democratic principles we are otherwise so busy ramming down everyone else's throats. Of course the US is not really funding the military overthrow of a democratically elected body in direct contradiction of their stated purpose in the region. After all they made them promise not to spend it on guns. Perhaps they will spend it on posies and ribbons for their hair.

All this rhetoric about democracy is nothing more than a verbal form of the Emperor's new clothes. We are waging war on the poor and quelling insurrection of the underclasses in time honoured Orwellian tradition. Whether the setting is the Red mosque of Islamabad, the streets of Baghdad, the suburbs of Mogadishu, or the jungles of Sri Lanka, the rich and powerful are preserving their interests in the name of an ideal rooted in the right to rule.

If our foreign policy is going to continue in the vein of "let them eat cake", we would do well to remember the outcome of that particular slice of history. The underdog always wins. Why? Because he is prepared to die. The powerful may have might and technology but they have to live to enjoy their spoils. They care about dying. For the jihadi fighter it is different. They don't have to win to be victorious. As the older relatives of a student in the Red Mosque said during its storming by government troops, 'well, whether he is alive or dead, we will have a body'.

While we are beating the drum of democracy what's actually going on is that we are suppressing the poor in their own backyard. Is it really coincidence that all the folk in need of democratizing by force of arms are those nations of the world with the lowest GDP? Pillaging sovereign nations and then foisting the principles of government upon them that enslaved them in the first place is going to tick

people off. Being preached to about morality by a robber will stick in your throat. How would we feel if a delegation of some foreign nation arrived on our soil backed up with troops to bestow their philosophy of life on us? Oh yes, and to take the grain store. We'd kick them into the sea.

We idealize democracy. Yet it has its dark side like any political system. How many of the world's top ten murder capitals are in the US? Freedom of expression does not stop at speech. It also takes the shape of job culture, hooliganism, huge hikes in violent crime statistics. People are so free in their expressive outpourings that they can break into your house and expect you not to defend yourself. They can expect to sell crack cocaine on the streets, walk free from court, and not be named lest their human rights be infringed. Poor drug dealer.

Freedoms must be curtailed. How else can culture evolve, or our children feel safe on the streets? A child cannot mature without definite sets of rules and sanctions to its behaviour. How shall a nation? Our failure to help the child engage with the real world means that it gets to stay in omnipotent fusion with the nanny state which it then abuses mercilessly. We become a nation of Asberger's syndrome. Democracy breeds brats.

In order to stay in power the democratically elected have to appeal to the lowest common denominator in their electorate. They have to remain popular and give the people what they want. Unfortunately human whim is invariably to regress and be babied. The state complies and within a few generations we need to be told how to get the tops of bottles and dispose of chewing gum.

The end game of the democratic gambit is a society based on instant gratification and greedily sucking at the world's teat. That is not to advocate a different system. It's just that we need to face ourselves and take the puritanical twinkle out of our eyes.

Political systems have their shadows just as people do. The shadow of communism is its suppression of the middle classes, that of democracy is its tyranny of peasantry. In the old days peasants were oppressed but tolerated at the rough end of town. Today they live at least a border post and a role of razor wire away. They may "have the vote", but the self-determination it promises is all illusion if the elected are in turn beholden to an unelected uber-master.

There is a principle in psychology called 'the rule of intentionality'. Quite simply it says that things generally pan out the way they are intended. Stuff doesn't happen out of the blue. Events grind on from each other. This principle suggests that the world food crisis facing the global peasantry isn't simply unfortunate, but the inevitable and even desired outcome of western democratic policy. If the world can be fed but isn't then someone is withholding the spoon. This withholding

is murder. It is the intentional if unconscious maintenance of the global underclass teetering in the balance of starvation.

It's not just the US state department must realize that heavy subsidy of Texan farmers is going to put the Mexican peasantry in jeopardy. They know it full well and are rubbing their hands together. After all, the pursuit of happiness doesn't say anything about it not having to be at the expense of others. Unlike the medical oath that says, 'first do no harm'. And so with clear conscience we can exercise our constitutional right to bring entire communities to their knees.

Of course, in the long run the fact that the world's peasants are being systematically starved in their droves means either that they begin to bang on the gates of our fortress wanting to be let in, or they start pelting it's walls. Perhaps selling them billions of dollars worth of arms was not such a good idea after all. The irony is pythonesque. You can just see John Cleese goose stepping up and down, frothing at the mouth about the Iranian nuclear programme until Eric Idle reminds him of who sold them the plant and stocked it with knowhow in the first place.

The four stages of slavery.

Democracy's conviction in its own purity was recently demonstrated by the home office ruling that information extracted under torture could be considered legal provided it hasn't been perpetrated by an Englishman. Our purity is sending us mad. This pronouncement is no more thought through than granting torture licences to anyone called Gary or not wearing a hat. Our conviction in the inherent correctness of democratic ideals blinds us to the obvious that it is the fact of torture and not the nationality or shoe size of the torturers that is the problem.

Such an assertion is bound to be the logic of a government long used to the doublethink that slavery itself is fine so long as it doesn't actually occur on British soil. The abolition of slavery, the birth of political correctness, was only the end of a preliminary phase in a sequence of ever more sophisticated spins on the problem of maximizing economic gain with a clear conscience. And so the first stage of total enslavement, the actual taking of people by force gives way to the second stage, taking the country instead.

Despite the deepening entrenchment of slavery that this involves we enable ourselves to do it with two shining badges of merit. 1) we've graciously freed the slaves from their iron shackles. And then 2) we've generously gone to their country and brought them flush toilets, bicycles and God's word. The fact that we've simply traded in carting people away

for ripping off their resources in situ is lost in the proud gesture of what we are so generously doing for the savages.

At the time of 'abolition', European nations were busy carving up the rest of the world, including Iraq, like a couple of drunks at a turkey dinner. A nation's moral conscience has to be repressed in order to enjoy such a feast. It then reappears as a collective neurosis, an avenging harpie that castrates the overblown power, denying eros to those that would deal so blithely in thanatos. And so our Victorian grandparents fainted at the sight of a wellturned ankle at home whilst indulging the whim to rape and pillage abroad. The unconscious is always poetic in it's afflictions. The rampant consumption, the phallic thrusting into the third world is bound to evoke it's counterpoint in the psyche.

In today's world we've moved on a bit from the initial symptoms of organised greed into the upland plains of collective stress and that vaguely troubled feeling that accompanies long term denial. The patient has become depressed. The shape of western guilt has shifted from the punishing moratorium on sexuality to a broader embargo on enjoying life itself. We need the efforts of a multi billion pound service industry to help us 'relax'. Putting your feet up has taken the place of getting your leg over in the collective imagination.

It has been suggested (Poliakoff) that the emptiness of modern life can be traced back to western collusion with the horrors of Nazi Germany, but of course the west had been treating peoples around the world as sub human scum for a long time prior to Auchwitz . These ghosts are bound to haunt the corridors of the modern psyche for as long as our denial persists. One cannot demean the humanity of others without it rebounding upon oneself. We share in the fate of all people and for as long as there is even tacit subjugation of others then we ourselves become unfree.

After a hundred odd years when even the most ardent fascists amongst us are starting to wince at our strangle hold over the third world, we need a new level of covert operations to continue to live with a clear conscience. This third stage is that we then give them back their country in a show of generous beneficence having set in place an economic infrastructure to replace the political one.

This new infrastructure, the multinationals, single crop farming for export, the mining companies, render direct political control redundant anyway. We are absente landlords. Exactly the same policies can now be implemented in total silence and from a distance. So we export not armies but corporations to cream off the remaining wealth without the cumbersome expense of domestic affairs.

This renders our now free people slaves in their own lands. Our immigration policy then throws an invisible wall around these nations no less vigorous in its intent than the pass laws in apartheid South Africa. They have the freedom to

speak in the same way that they have the freedom to starve. Say what you like just stay on your own side of the wire.

How artful we are. We bask in the warm glow of our benevolence and correctness whilst subscribing to a system that is squeezing by the balls while it gives the kiss of life.

The final stage in the ever more sophisticated process of third world enslavement is the one unfolding. While we have been lulling ourselves into the moral sloth generated by the illusion of how concerned we are for the masses, the peasants have been getting riled at all this selfless charity and missionary effort. When the millions start to die because of famines that are the direct result of western economic policies and wars that are fuelled by foreign interests they down tools and lash out. Of course, because we have oppressed him for his own good we can't understand this terrible lack of gratitude. Convinced by our own purity and innocence we respond by indulging in even further greed and violence on the grounds that we have now been forced to it. Nothing like a good war to lift life's tedium.

The fact is that we wanted to go to war. We collectively failed to determine the source of dodgy information about WMDs because we wanted to believe it. We accepted what we heard as gospel and then forgot what we'd failed to do in just the way that it is so easy to forget things that fail to occur.

To keep the illusion going we need a public enemy to keep our eyes off the ball, and so Bin Laden becomes Saddam Hussein becomes Mactad al Sadr becomes Al Zarkawi becomes any number of willing volunteers.

Wars waged on this basis can never be won. The indignation of the peasant at having his acre of millet trampled by a power that wastes more than the peasant produces puts a resolve into his breast that the powerful other does not possess despite his superiority of strength.

Now we make our biggest blunder. We call him a terrorist. Lao Tzu, a Chinese sage 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. said, "there is no greater misfortune than underestimating the enemy". We cannot reason or reckon with him unless we know his motive or what drives him. Without this knowledge we deprive ourselves of the discrimination that can determine wars which can be won from those that cannot. When we then refer to him as 'terrorist' we confer upon him a kind of immortality. Our willfull ignorance deprives us of effective strategy. We refuse to know what we are really dealing with.

One might object that those killed in 9:11 were innocents and that this in itself is enough to strip the enemy of any legitimacy. This would be to turn a blind eye to Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where millions of innocents were deliberately targeted and compared to which 9:11 was surgical. When the twin cities in Japan

were destroyed, the Allies were so convinced in the legitimate use of innocents in order to shorten the war that they were quite candid about the carnage involved.

The loss of innocent lives was outweighed by those that would subsequently be saved. Our killing of innocent civilians is okay because it brings the enemy to it's knees faster. The 'terrorist' , however, is a medieval barbarian. Two legs good. Four legs bad.

I say all this precisely as one of the pure who has waged war on peasants for their own good. I know what it is to be utterly convinced in the virtue of a quest that is really no more than the further subjugation of an already oppressed people. When I went to war against 'terrorism' we soldiers told ourselves endlessly about the inferiority of those we faced, the lack of training, the poor weapons, their inability to use them, the fact that some only had wooden cut out AK47's. Didn't they know they were going to die? What couldn't be discussed was why they didn't seem to mind. Certainly not as much as we did.

The fact is that western subjugation of sovereign lands and its systematic destruction of tribal integrity has given rise to entire peoples who are now happy to choose death over slavery. When life is rendered dishonourable beneath the yoke of another you develop a disdain for that life. There's none so brave as those with nothing left to lose.

When the psychologist Carl Jung went to Kenya in the fifties he asked some of the local people whether they dreamt or not. 'We used to', replied the headman, 'but now the District Commissioner dreams for us.'

People whose imaginative spirit has been taken away like this are no longer simply material slaves. We have also snatched something of their souls, something that connects a person to the wellspring of life. Without this vitality of the inner world life is barely worth it. There are worse things than death.

### The Psychology of Extremism.

Extremism shares many traits with racism but there is an important difference. Racism is unconditional. There's nothing you can do about the colour of your skin. Extremism is about beliefs which can be changed. You can be redeemed through conversion.

Conditional love and the possibility of atonement are archetypally masculine. It's about father. It is not simply that I will approve of you if you become more like me but that I myself will gain more love in the eyes of the father if I bring you around to my way of thinking. This is a recipe for boys fighting with the kind of fervour you don't get over an argument about whose turn it is on the play station. Especially if both brothers feel a little rejected and assume deep down that the other has the edge of father's affections.

This desperation to bring others around to our point of view is something we have a tendency to equate with muslim nations. Indeed we can hardly use the word 'extremist' without the prefix 'Islamic'. But our own culture is riddled with extremism. We have been gaily oppressing people for their beliefs for centuries. We even justify military conquest of sovereign states because it can be offset by the conversion of the heathens concerned which not only saves their souls, but washes away the sins of our own greed in the process.

The fait accompli of missionary effort is that we can go to war to do God's work and that all the violence and destruction is pleasing in His eyes, indeed that through our aggression against the heathens we are bought closer to Him. How comforting, how dangerous, how terrifying.

It is not unlike a rapist feeling that he has done his victim a favour and become a better person himself as a result. Perhaps this is the real meaning of Armageddon, not some future megawar that destroys the world but any war that has lost its horror and destroys men's hearts. Armageddon is war waged with the psychopathic conviction that the killing of those who won't be converted makes God love us more. It is war waged in the hope of personal redemption, 'the baptism of fire'. This utter loss of soul that manages to indulge the most base lusts and desires of Man in the name of the Divine is the insistence on battle that says, 'If you are not with us then you are against us.'

Wars fought on this basis are not really about oil, or gold, or land, but about ideology, final solutions, the eradication of difference. 'The Good' are affronted by the otherness of foreign faiths which then generates the anxious need to incorporate the world behind its white picket fence. Today's falafal will be tomorrow's apple pie. Wars that deny the humanity or legitimacy of the enemy are rooted in this narcissistic aggression, the belligerent refusal to relate to anything that is not me. It means being psychologically stuck at a stage of development that precedes curiosity, wonder, the excitement of the unknown; ironically, all those qualities that define what it means to be fully human.

The end of the cycle of enslavement is not the victory or defeat of the slaves. The results of the 'war on terror' will not be the crucial feature of this century. All Empires built on slavery collapse by the same phenomenon. They rot from within.

Extremism operates without the mediation of respect for other people and other faiths that indicate political maturity. We are permitted the regressive route of least resistance into greedy snatching and blaming others for our behaviour. Greed always overstretchs itself and then loses its footing. The slave system itself works so well that all the free people on the 'good' side of the wire suddenly find themselves out of a job. In the eighties and nineties layoffs were a result of companies going bust. These days the trend is redundancy due to relocation. Ironically the slaves have finally become more economically viable than their masters. The quest for power wreaks chaos on us collectively just as surely as the individual must descend into madness in his bid to secure himself against fate at the expense of others.

If we are to prevent this cycle going full circle our task will be to face our complicity in being so seduced by our own innocence and face up to why the terrorists want to kill us. We have to grow out of the childlike naivete that we are 'correct' and ask ourselves what we're compensating for. We have to face up to the conviction in our own superiority that fosters extremism. We need to learn to view material wealth as a form of obesity. What does it say for our civilized values that our highest good is to amass what we do not really need while others die from want?

Peter versus Paul.

Christ gave the future of the church into the hands of Peter. This is represented symbolically by the image of crossed keys with which Peter is associated. Given that this is so, how is it that Peter is given so little to say in the New Testament? Paul on the other hand has more to say than all the others put together and yet he wasn't even there. How can this be?

Firstly, let's remember that even though the Bible is the word of God, it was compiled and edited by men who had other things besides divine inspiration to take into consideration. The early church needed to present a united front to escape persecution, they needed to appear as a movement not to be trifled with. They needed confidence. They needed big, bold and beefy. Their book had to emphasize that Jesus was God incarnate and that other opinions were frankly wrong. Peter did not fit this profile, but Paul did.

We are permitted to know of the man Peter through a story actually told by Paul. He tells of Peter's vision on the roof of the house of Simon the tanner who lived by the sea. A great vessel descended, "as it were a great sheet let down from Heaven", containing all earth's creatures. God speaks, "Peter, rise and eat". Peter refuses, "for nothing common or unclean hath entered into my mouth".

God rebukes him. "What God hath cleansed make thou not common." This is repeated three times. Suddenly Peter gets it. Equality.

Three men then appear at the gate calling him to go to the house of a certain Cornelius, someone unknown to Peter. He leaves straight away, "making no distinction." He realizes from the vision that it doesn't matter who Cornelius is. A Jew, a gentile, circumcised or not, sinner or saint. He realised in his pious abstinances that he was disrespecting God's infinite variety.

When he arrives at Cornelius' place he says, "God is no respecter of persons". On the journey he has reflected upon his vision. He feels chastened. I am not so great he says. Not only are folk with other customs okay in God's eyes but I myself, God's servant, "am only a man." If God chooses to give others some different experience then I must respect that. "And if God gave unto them the like gift as He did also unto us who was I that I could withstand God.?"

Paul seems to think that he can. Though he is the author of the story he doesn't seem to have taken it in at all. His ministry is rooted in contempt for the customs, traditions and Gods of other races. He got beaten up a lot. In Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, Iraq...

Paul liked to rant and tell everybody how wrong and bad they were. Of course the crowd might be interested to know that he himself is a betrayer and a murderer, yet nowhere do we see the confession of Paul that he so exhorts from everyone who dares get within earshot. It turns out that Paul doesn't really feel responsible for whatever it is that he has done. "So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me" (Romans7:20). "For not what I would, that do I practice." (7:15) 'I do not sin', he says, 'sin sins'....

Now we can begin to appreciate the popularity of Paul. He gives us leave to focus on the speck in the eyes of others rather than on the beam in our own. This is why he cannot grasp the meaning of Peter's vision, and why the church fathers gave him so much air time in the new Testament. You only have to be sorry in principle. He allows us the luxury of a duplicitous life, the route of least resistance, "I myself with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans7:25) I am not really responsible, sin is responsible. The devil made me do it.

Peter, despite being given the keys, is largely written out of the bible. He asks too much, that we be humble, that we treat others with respect, that we take responsibility. Paul on the other hand lets us rant and rave at the sins of others whilst being given permission to behave as we please. If you were going to promote a crowd pleaser, who would you write into the main role?

Paul's greatest failure however, and his appeal to the lowest common denominator in us all, is the matter of who gets the final say in this world. Its not

just about getting off the hook, but about who is the final arbitrator in human affairs. In Saul's vision God appears and promises, "to deliver him from the people." (Acts 26:17) When he is eventually arrested after a particularly offensive speech, what does he do? He appeals to Ceasar, to the bastion of worldly authority.

Despite having been given the personal surety of God in a vision that not only blinded him, but rendered him so incapacitated with divine intervention that he had to be carried to Damascus and be made to lie down three days in the dark, when it came to the final crunch Paul opted for the arbitration of Man over God. Of course his route across the Mediteranean looks like he was being beaten the whole way with a stick. He was plagued by storms and nearly drowned, but still he doesn't get the message and makes his appeal before Ceasar who promptly beheads him.

Peter says that God is no respecter of persons which is a bit of a blow to the ego of anyone who happens to be an elected big nob, whilst Paul fawns to the big nobs and gives us permission to do the same. Paul allows us to be seduced by worldly power which means that going into Iraq and beating hell out of everyone we don't like is okay really. In fact its our godgiven duty.

What can we do?

Firstly we can name the third world debt for what it is. It is not enough to waive it. What an appalling travesty of justice it is to bring nations to their knees by force of arms, to suck them dry and then 'grant' them independence once maintenance costs begin to outweigh profit margins. Then, shame mounted upon shame, we strap them with a 'loan' that ensures these exploited nations will never recover, indeed that their shackles are bound even tighter. It's like handing someone a dry cleaning bill for the bloody mess they've made of your suit while you beat them up. Or, not to put too fine a point on it, like the Nazis handing the clean up costs of Kristalnacht to the Jews.

The West's lack of vision in arranging all this is staggering. Poverty, like cancer, spreads. Dustbowls don't need visas and have no respect for national boundaries. If politicians will not loosen the bonds they have placed on poorer nations out of shame let them do so out of expediency. Terrorism is the least of our worries. The voice of third world protest is trying to point to something that will soon engulf us all.

So, let this waiver of third world debt not be used as yet another magnanimous gesture, another peg for western pride. Let's cancel the debt because it was wrong in the first place. Aid programmes should not be given this spin of beneficent concern, all donated out of the goodness of our hearts. It's blood money. It's what we owe them in recompense and so far it has been small change.

Second, we have to face the reality of what Empire has meant to the millions that were crushed by it. We still live in an idealized fantasy world of Orb and Sceptre, of empire being about a civilized Pimms on crisp colonial lawns rather than the blood soaked soil of sovereign lands butchered by the frothing servants of Mammon.

We collectively suffer from a romanitized nationalism that is far more subtle and insidious than black shirts or parading zealots. We still believe that Empire was good for everybody, a benevolent mantle cast across the shoulders of the world for its own prosperity rather than the brutal rape of maiden states. It is this rose-tinted view of history that renders acts of 'terrorism' unintelligible.

On the way into Exeter past St David's Station you pass a huge statue of Alfred Milner. A grand figure in full military regalia prancing on a fine horse. I know who he is because my boarding house was named after him at the academy of young fascists I was sent to as a boy. This man systematically tore the heart out of an African nation three times the size of England. He took Matabeleland by force of arms and garrisoned its population in huge infertile camps absurdly titled Tribal Trust Lands. He robbed, imprisoned and murdered. He was no different from Saddam Hussein. Just how hypocritical are we that we can villify the one whilst making statues of the other? We have to repair our relationship with the third world and we can begin by tearing down our own statues to cruelty. Bomber Harris included. We can educate ourselves in the reality of our own terrorism against the weak and defenseless of this world whom we crush for no better reason than because we can.

When we stuff ourselves with the third world turkey we do more than plunder their resources. Not only do you get to be rich, you get to be riteous. The humanity drained from the oppressed is used to top up one's own measure and suddenly we are all ubermenschen. De-humanization is not a by-product of oppression, it is its goal. The problem is not simply the wholesale robbery involved but the finessed hauteur of the West, now high on the self esteem of whole nations, and having their dreams for them.

Our reluctance to face ourselves is not just about the material deflation involved, but that we have to give them their dreams back. Helping those up that we've beaten to the floor means returning to them their humanity and a regaining of our own smaller proportions. This moment is beautifully portrayed in the Lord of the Rings when Frodo reminds Sam that Gollum was once one of the river folk and

not unlike them – he even had a name, Smeeple, and that they depended upon him for the success of their quest.

Of course we will have to tighten our belts en route. But isn't that just what the doctor ordered for a nation whose government has to spend their own taxes on initiatives to combat obesity? How dare we call ourselves civilized when the rest of the world starves while we 'try to lose weight?'

Facing what the third world's experience of empire has been means looking at ourselves in a new light. We are not very evolved at all . We are civilised in the same way as a three year old tyrannizing a creche thinks he is big. Our political correctness is no more than a pandering to the spoilt brat in all of us. Political parties collude and run around their voters like anxious maiden aunts trying to find out what little johnny wants so that she can make him love her.

Correctness is the witch hunt of principled leadership. It is a fawning obsession with image, with what we cannot say or think, and all this in a society equally obsessed, in some far flung corner, with freedom of expression. We're prepared to export our freedom halfway around the world whilst suspending article 5 of the Bill of Rights in our own land. It's mind boggling. It offends our intelligence and asks us to abandon our own common sense.

Of what use is our 'freedom' if we are to remain children in the process? On a recent trip to the shops I bought a packet of peanuts that warned me it may contain traces of nuts. Then, a light bulb, complete with instructions for use. A Harry Potter toy broomstick in the next store bore the legend, 'does not actually fly.' I finally lost my cool when I picked up a packet of salt in the supermarket that touted a serving suggestion.

Thirdly. Those being held at Guantanamo and Belmarsh must be charged or freed. How can we demand the rule of law from others when we refuse to abide by it ourselves? Or are we above the law? It is precisely this two tier legal system that is the spawning of master races. It is the carte blanche that confers innate rightness upon us so that we need not reflect upon our dealings with others. This is the one good thing that can come out of Abu Grad and Guantanamo. The whisper of our own wickedness. Perhaps it can crack the hard boiled shell of our arrogant self conviction.

Also, the right to equal treatment of individual persons is not enough. Islam affords Christianity the respect of acknowledging Jesus as a great prophet. Christianity responds to this by casting Mohammed into the seventh region of hell. What can come out of such a slap in the face? Christians in general and the church in particular have to get off their hobbyhorses and acknowledge the fact that there are many paths to God.

Fourth. We must reappraise and revalue the role of the feminine. In ancient times, the ark of the covenant, housed in the first temple of Solomon, was protected by two immense images of the Divine made of olive wood and covered in gold leaf. They represented Yahweh and Hokmah/Wisdom, his consort. After the destruction of the temple, these images were interpreted as male and female aspects of Yahweh alone. With the building of the second temple their significance was changed further to mean the union of Yahweh and his bride, the people of Israel.

Over centuries the Goddess was deposed, made secular and excluded from Divinity. Remaining pockets of those faithful to the Goddess were systematically persecuted. Hilltops to which the Goddess had effectively been exiled were defiled with bones and ashes. Even groves of trees within a certain distance of Jerusalem were cut down to prevent Her taking refuge there.(Exod 34 13-14).

After centuries of witch burnings this desacralization of the feminine has continued on a more subtle level in modern times with the way in which church fathers have presented us with those books considered worthy of inclusion in the Bible. The Apocrypha, those books that managed to escape destruction but still excluded from the 'good' book, all have something in common. They are feminine. They are either about women, the books of Esther and Judith, about the Goddess Herself, the book of Ben Sirach, or, as in the Song of Solomon, the unashamed delight of man in the Queen of Heaven, Wisdom.

The Apocrypha is what remains of those works that celebrate Yahweh's consort. At one time it was included in the Bible, at the back. Then it was published separately but freely available. When I researched it myself I had to order it from an inter library loan because there was no copy on the shelves and when it arrived after two weeks it had a stamp on the fly leaf saying, 'last copy in the county'.

The Goddess is in the final throes of banishment. What will happen to us all if She disappears altogether? The Divine Feminine is the keeper of ethical values that contain the male psyche and cool his blood lust. It is She that "inspires spontaneous trust and joy in life."(p469mtg) Both the extremist factions of the Islamic and Christian camps have this in common, a deeply ingrained contempt for the feminine that then brings out the worst in men.

Solomon's Wisdom is degraded to being a mere attribute of the man himself. Such inflation must end in disaster. 'Inflation', say the Alchemists, 'beckons the raven's claw'. When the male psyche is sufficient to itself and eschews the values of the feminine he loses his anchor in Nature. He becomes so puffed up he feels he can do no wrong and dispenses with his conscience. He ceases to

care about what kind of legacy he leaves for his children and is overcome by the kind of ennui that only adrenaline and the cry of battle can momentarily relieve.

As a psychotherapist in private practice for twenty years I have had all kinds of people with all kinds of problems come through my doors. I noticed something consistently throughout. When a person develops a sense of the Divine Feminine or even simply feels the void in themselves for want of it, their issues are more readily resolved. To have a living relationship with the Great Mother makes all kinds of suffering tolerable and brings balm to many a wound. Perhaps psychotherapy itself only becomes a necessity in cultures with belief systems that uphold the disrespect of other faiths as a virtue.

We have to love our neighbours not for their sake but for our own. For as long as we demonise others our own devils will get the better of us. When our successes are at the expense of others we can never really enjoy them or be fulfilled.

If we are to live well, it has to be on the basis of equality with others. And it is not enough to agree in principle. We have to root out the extremism in ourselves that says our religion is better than the next. God, after all is, not a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim. When we can celebrate the wonderful diversity of the Divine and honour the variety of all religions that are nothing less than the many faces of God then there will be peace in the world and fellowship between nations. The project 'Abraham's Children' symbolizes this equality and represents my own fervent hope for atonement between his estranged offspring.

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