

2010-20 Five Poems with a Spiritual Slant

(Some incidents which get linked to my theological reflections and experiences.)

St. Simon Eucharist

Harry Strachan, January 2012

In this barnlike auditorium in the last session
Of a conference on emerging Christianity
Catholics, protestants of many stripes,
And us agnostic “church alumni”
Are singing old hymns, spirituals,
And new songs I don’t recognize.

Our speakers, a Catholic priest,
An Evangelical pastor,
And the Anglican rector, a woman,
Invite us to the front
To celebrate the core ritual of our faith,
To receive a bit of bread dipped in wine.

My mind is in permit-me-to-doubt mode.
So many ideas I no longer believe:
We’re bombing the Vietnamese to save them,
You can trust the government,
The markets will bring nirvana,
A just God must kill his son to forgive us.

And I’m feeling I don’t belong.
A stranger in dark shadows
Outside a lighted dance hall,
A visitor in a Pentecostal Church
Enviously watching waving hands of praise,
A dinghy drifting toward the shoals.

My conscience tells me I lack empathy.
I’ve never really understood
Ascetic desert fathers, the Islamic bombers,
My pro-life neighbor or vegetarians,
The angry lesbian feminists,

Sometimes not even my loving wife.

Skeptical, lonely, convicted, and thoroughly undeserving
I nevertheless decide to go forward.
I know the brokenness of life,
Health from sickness, life from death,
Believe we are all members of one body
Suffer and flourish together.

The makeshift choir is now singing.
The song moves me deeply.
“Let us break bread together on our knees.”
And from my deepest place
With tears rises that ancient prayer,
Oh Lord, have mercy on me!

The Empty Chair

(With thanks to Clare First for the idea)

Harry Strachan, January 26, 2012

1.

There is what you know you know,
Not much and sometimes dangerous.

There is what you know you don't know,
Important, target of investigation.

There is what you don't know you know,
More than you think. Be quiet, listen.

Finally there is what you don't know you don't know,
Vast and decisive.

2.

In my living room in a place of honor,
I've placed an empty easy chair,

A reminder of the mystery beyond knowing
An invitation, a tangible prayer:

Speak, Oh Mystery, in whom we live and move
And have our being, Thy Servant Listens.

3.

Grant me this day:
Caution about what I think I know,
Courage to investigate what I know I don't,
Awareness of what unwittingly I already know,
And guidance through the unknown unknown.
Amen.

Don Fernando's Orchard,

Harry Strachan, March 23, 2015

"The Incarnation is not to fix something broken. God loves this dense world he created and participates in the mystery of love at the heart of all creation."

Idea from Cynthia Bourgeault, The Wisdom Jesus.

Whether my morning walk
Brings me early or late,
He's always hard at work
With machete or rake.
"Buenos dias, what a lovely morning."
He pauses wiping away sweat.

"You are a hard worker!" I praise,
"May I know your name?"
"Fernando, at your service,"
"Here from four until ten.
Up the hill in the afternoon."

"A coffee farm?" I ask.
"No just an orchard."
Through the barb wire all I see
Is a tangled hodge podge.
Of tress, vines, and bushes
Crowded together on the hillside.

I recognize orange and mango trees,
Some raged bananas, a strand of sugar cane
Ornamental plants, a compost heap,
Trays with seedlings.
The plants don't look well, but
There is an inviting grassy knoll further up.

Businessman that I am, I think,
"This farm can't be productive.
He must be retired with a pension.
But why work so hard?"

On the side of the road
He has a hot fire of pruned branches.

He dumps raked leaves on it
The buried fire explodes in gray smoke and flames

“Don Fernando, what about the plagues?”
“Ay the bugs and the weeds give me fits,”
“And look at the mess the lovers leave.”
As he adds to the fire paper cups
“But I love it! I love my finca!”

What if it is true?
Fifteen billion years ago God created
Space-time and sent the Universe forth
On a quantum bed of his energy.
We evolved to experience a dualistic world
Of good and evil, suffering and joy.
But He sees only a good creation,
An underlying unity that He loves enough
To come down and share it with us.

Two Walks on the Same Beach Ten Years Apart

2008

Esterios Este
January 20, 2008

Two gulls, one behind the other, ride the waves,
Spray from a breaking wave bounces them into the air,
Gliding they return to hug the next
Searching for beauty and breakfast.

Two pup tents on the beach surprise me
Like eyes of a giant frog
They guard the lawn chairs and camp site
And wait for the return of their prey.

More shades of green than I can imagine
Come from the trees on the shore
Standing in a dense crowd,
Watching the walkers or waiting to catch the sun's rays.

A mushroom cloud, bright white like a crown
Sits on the gray curtain of rain
The contrast far out on the dark sea
Full of ambiguous meaning.

Four birds the color of dark sand
March stiffly across my path
Then lift off at some hidden signal
For more meaningful work in the marsh.

Delicate footprints in the sand
From the journey out
I recognize with surprise that they are mine
And already blurred and fading.

We thought we saw the sun rise in the east
Believe this daily cycle was made for us.
How many centuries did it take to realize the opposite --
The earth circles the sun; we were designed by and for the world.

2017

Esterios Este
December 25, 2017

Ten years later
The Pup Tents are gone
But the gulls
Still bounce the waves.

It's the birthday
Of the man
Father Rohr claims
"Really got it!".

He never claimed
To be the only son of God.
He never said "Worship Me."
He did say, "Follow Me."

Where? Through the deaths.
Small and big, into life?
Shedding Illusory Selves
To Find the True Self

A unity with this bright morning
The mushroom clouds
The green tress still watching
The stiff birds still marching

All of us grounded
In the mystery in whom
We live and move
And have our Being.