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I WAS ADORED ONCE TOO

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Among the saddest lines in English literature is the wistful comment of the buffoonish Andrew Aguecheek in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: "*I was adored once too....*" So many, many of us can sadly say the same: "*I was adored once too....*"

It's a phrase that tells of love's fragility, impermanence and inevitable end. It recalls being abandoned by a beloved one, supplanted by someone else, or bereaved by death. "*I was adored once too.....*"

Weeping for her children

In the Christmas story the saddest of sad lines is: "*A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.*" It tells of the vulnerability of children, and the impotence of mother love in the face of human hatred, violence, fear and anger. It reminds us of the millions of little ones who have died and still do, by way of terrorism, war, pogrom or by poverty exacerbated disease: "*Rachel weeping for her children;*" refusing "*to be consoled, because they are no more.*"

The most significant line in the Christmas story is Mary's acceptance of personal disaster: "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*" The story, as it has come down to us, shimmers with the wonder of divine reality illuminating and transfiguring ordinary reality: heavenly dreams, angels, wise men, guiding stars, celestial singing and ancient prophecies being fulfilled, all of which dull factualists deplore but the imaginative love.

But, but... at the story's heart is Mary faced with personal disaster, an unwanted, unlooked for, undeserved pregnancy and yet praying, not for shimmering signs or wonders, not to be spared her personal disaster, but instead praying her acceptance, "Yes!" "Yes!" Praying, not "*take this cup away from me Lord*", but "*here am I... let it be with me according to your word.*"

"Yes" not "No"

It is the most significant line in the Gospel. Jesus embedded it in the only prayer he left for us, the Lord's Prayer and like Mary prayed it himself in Gethsemane. In the Lord's Prayer: "*Thy will be done*". In Gethsemane: "*Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done*". Acceptance, not resistance. "Yes" not "No".

All the glory, signs, wonders, beauties and miracles that so illuminate and halo the Christmas narratives are subsequent to and dependent upon Mary's acceptance of her personal disaster. "Yes" to social disgrace and possible abandonment by Joseph. Acceptance, not resistance. "Yes" not "No".

All the glory, signs, wonders, beauties and miracles that so illuminate and halo the Easter narratives, likewise, are subsequent to and dependent upon Jesus's acceptance of his personal disaster, his "Yes" to social humiliation, disgrace, brutal torture and a likely hideous death. Acceptance, not resistance. "Yes" not "No".

Acceptance: "Yes" not "No", lies at the heart of the Christian ethic, of the radical Sermon on the Mount ethic: *turn the other cheek, walk the second mile,*

love your enemy, if anyone sues you for your coat, give him your cloak as well. Acceptance, not resistance. “Yes” not “No”. Courage, not cowardice.

This shouldn't be dismissed as submissive fatalism. Acceptance opens the door to change, to new creative possibilities, to grace. Acceptance provides the nitty gritty substance to forgiveness. Mary's prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Gethsemane Prayer and ideally our own prayer, are to do with acceptance, not avoidance: “Yes” not “No”.

Unwanted pregnancy, judicial murder

According to Christian theology, God did not create the world in six days, and then step back and sleep forever. He continues to create. He holds in existence the world and everything in it, now: the sub atomic particle, molecule and amoeba, the rain-forests, Himalayas and satellites, your kitchen table, my little finger and your mind.

When we say yes to what happens, like Mary, when we accept and so can forgive, like Nelson Mandela, when like my first wife Margaret and so many others, we accept and say “Yes” to cancer, or injury, or misfortune, when we say “*Yes, Yes, Yes,*” we begin to work creatively with and shape what follows. Instead of whining “*no, no, no, let black be white, spare me, save me, let my will, my will, my will be done not yours....*” we say instead: “*Yes*”. To do so allows God, the continuing Creator, to work wonders in cooperation with us. An unwanted pregnancy enables God's Incarnation. a judicial murder enables Jesus's Resurrection.

If we refuse to bog ourselves down in the desire for unattainable proofs and certainties, if we refuse to hear the Gospel narratives and Christmas and Easter stories as mere historians, which we're not, and instead say “Yes” to them, how illuminating it is. We are freed to love and revel in them, to look not sceptically for unattainable, factual certainty or proof, but imaginatively for beauty, truth and meaning.

Saying “Yes” to the music of what happens

The fundamental Christian narratives are unprovable and sometimes downright otherworldly and fanciful. They are a mixture of fact and fiction, as is all historical narrative, biography, and even autobiography. The Christmas and Easter stories contain what is closely remembered and partially remembered, what is interpreted and then shaped by later circumstances. At their heart, though, lies Mary's incontrovertible “*Yes*” to a birth and Jesus' incontrovertible “*Yes*” in Gethsemane to likely crucifixion.

I was adored once too

To say “*Yes*” to the music of what happens, be it happy or doleful, can transfigure what will happen. It enables God to work his wonders and flood our life and story, with the glory, signs, wonders and beauties that illuminate and halo the life-enhancing, purpose-imparting Christian Faith. *I was adored once too...* I still am.

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