

**Impressum**

Klaus Bung: The Spell of Xmas and Other Stories:  
a memoir and associated texts

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# **Klaus Bung: The Spell of Xmas and Other Stories: a memoir and associated texts**

**The reader can jump from the beginning of one story  
to the beginning of the next  
by searching for the ^ symbol.**

## **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

In this volume, the author has brought together a memoir (The Spell of Christmas) and stories about the arrival of the Millennium (Sleepers Wake) on New Year's Eve of 1999, about a school's nativity play, about a kafir (infidel) and a Muslim ending their feud on Xmas day ("Muslims are not as stupid as they look," said Kevin and affectionately slapped his new-found friend Shahabudding on the shoulder.) etc.

1. Klaus Bung:  
The Spell of Christmas  
(A memoir: Xmas in post-war Germany in 1945,  
and internationally as from 1960)
2. Klaus Bung:  
And peace on earth  
(Muslim and Kafir make friends on Xmas day)
3. Klaus Bung: Drama at Quaggy Moor  
(A nativity play where Mary and Joseph start fighting and  
swearing and Baby Jesus falls out of the crib)

4. Klaus Bung:  
Baba God Rules OK  
(An organist on his way to church receives information and a blessing at the Rail Enquiries Office)
5. Klaus Bung:  
Two Nigerian Nurses  
(They help a patient visitor to sleep comfortably on the floor of Accident and Emergency)
6. Klaus Bung:  
The Five Commandments  
(How to keep out of trouble, remain healthy, live long and lead more contented lives)
7. Ashutosh Vardhana:  
Janmashtami: The Birth of Lord Krishna  
(Similarities between Christian and Hindu stories)
8. Klaus Bung:  
Goa Constrictor  
(A naive and rubbishy travel brochure for Goa)
9. Klaus Bung:  
Chromaticism  
(Colour coding of study texts in France)
10. Klaus Bung:  
Morningale  
(Alarm clocks going berserk)
11. Klaus Bung:  
The Conversion  
(A Christian and a Muslim try to convert each other)
12. Klaus Bung:  
A Simple Cure  
(How to lose weight, and why Russian Bishops are prone to obesity)
13. Klaus Bung:  
Wedding Wishes  
(A letter from an old Westerner to a young Indian)
14. Klaus Bung:  
Sleepers Wake  
(A story about the arrival of the millennium, punctual in Portugal, belated in the USA, and a dramatic honeymoon flight)

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# ^(1) Klaus Bung: The Spell of Christmas A Memoir

## Impressum

Klaus Bung: The Spell of Christmas

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The narrator, no longer a Christian, has been challenged by a **native** atheist: 'Christmas isn't Christmas for you'. He explores the meaning of that statement by relating his childhood memories of a Roman Catholic Christmas in the post-war Germany of 1945 to 1948. These merge with Lutheran Christmas memories, largely resting on Lutheran chorales and church music. He describes the lasting subliminal effects and benefits of these early memories and argues that they were beneficial, even though he no longer takes the Christian doctrines literally. Notwithstanding the scepticism of his later years, the early teaching, firmly asserting the truth of the Christian stories, was beneficial and desirable. There is an important subliminal message which can only be learnt if it is learnt in early childhood and on the basis of stories and practices which are, at least then, taken as absolute truth. It is not enough to give a child information about religion: only one religion should be taught, and it should be practised rather than talked about. As an adult, the narrator has Christmas experiences in many countries, none of which have the evocative power of those of his childhood.

The naïve Christmas of childhood is balanced by the philosophical Christmas in the rarefied atmosphere of a desolate Swiss mountain village, in which the adult narrator finds himself on Christmas Day. He hears a rather unorthodox sermon from a priest who has been posted there, out of harm's way, because of his progressive (or heretical) beliefs. The atheist narrator and the old priest warm to each other, both lonely in their own way. They discover that they share many of their views on God, on religions. The narrator knows many of the foreign places the priest has visited, and they find that they have been influenced by the same books

and theologians. They agree that the old religious traditions must be kept alive, that lifestyle is more important than truth in practising and evaluating a religion, and that atheists and believers do not "come from different planets". Even from a religious point of view both are of equal value and both must exist.

"We, the atheists," says the narrator, "need the believers and the priests to keep the churches warm, the organs sounding and God alive. They need us to stop them from becoming too confident and overbearing. It is a symbiotic relationship. I thank God every day that not everybody is as smart as me. Otherwise who would pray for me, just in case? A God who is not worshipped dies, as happened to the gods of Egypt, Greece and Rome, who were once as real as God Father Son And Holy Ghost. A God-forsaken church building, however artistic, without prayers becomes a sight, and a pretty sad one too."

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## **Klaus Bung: The Spell of Christmas**

### **CHRISTMAS ISN'T CHRISTMAS FOR YOU**

"I know," my tender friend had written apologetically on her Christmas card, not knowing whether or not to send it, "that Christmas isn't Christmas for you," thinking that I had converted to Islam or Buddhism, an abomination in the eyes of a blue-blooded atheist.

I started wondering whether Christmas was Christmas for me, whatever that might mean. Could Christmas be anything but Christmas for anybody, Christian or not? So what was Christmas for me, so many decades after I left my native Germany? I started musing, and that's how this story came about.

I sent her an interim reply: "I like to follow the customs of the community in which I live. While I am in Europe, therefore, Christmas is Christmas for me, even though I do not believe in Father Christmas and hate 'Jingle Bells' and Christmas music in department stores. During 'the festive season', I have to take refuge in the churches to escape from Father Christmas. They are islands of sanity in a world gone mad with jingle bells and silent nights. I like to go to church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, no matter what exactly I may or may not believe and no matter what exactly is meant by 'believing'. But if I lived in India, I would not miss Christmas. I would happily let the 25th of December pass without any acknowledgement but would join in the celebrations for Ram Naumi (God Rama's birthday) or Janmashtami (God Krishna's birthday). And if I lived in a Buddhist or a Muslim country I would likewise ignore Christmas but join in their festivals, and benefit from their lessons, as far as I am allowed to. To that extent Christmas is indeed not Christmas for me. But if you really want to understand my attitude, I have to tell you about my childhood and about a curious encounter I had as an adult."

Two months later I sent her my story, which contains more truth than fiction.

## ^Part One

[HOME](#)

### THE HUNGER YEARS

The romance of Christmas starts with the first Sunday of Advent, four weeks before Christmas Day. I try to describe it mainly as I may have experienced it as a 13-year-old (1948), even though in my memory I am merging my experiences of many preceding and following years. There was no essential difference in what I considered, and do consider, important for my experience.

We were four children, my sister Hildegard, one year older than me, then I, then my sister Ina, five years younger than me, and Britta, eight years my junior. My mother and maternal grandmother were always part of the Advent scene, but I do not remember my father as an essential participant in the Advent singing. He might have been absent because of his war service (before 1945) or later because he had a job in a different town.

If I had chosen the Christmas when I was ten, 1945 A.D., the picture would have been different: there was a severe shortage of food, sawdust was baked into bread because there was not enough flour, money was worthless, the shops were empty of goods, one could not even buy books or electric torches or knives or toys, to say nothing of bicycles and other things we consider normal today, and I cannot imagine, how there could have been many or any presents in those years.

Since food was rationed, each of us received his supply of, say, butter or margarine (say an ounce) and of sausage (salami-type) and other scarce things at the beginning of the week, each of us had his own labelled containers for keeping these, and it was up to us, according to temperament, how we managed to make them last (if we wished to) to the end of the week. For sausage, there was a famous approach called 'Schiebewurst' (sliding sausage). To understand its significance, one has to consider the alternatives, all of which were practised in our family:

1. Eat the whole ration at the beginning of the week and have nothing for the rest: That was Britta's method.
2. Save the whole ration for the last day of the week, eat dry bread and water until then, and be comforted by the thought of joys to come on the seventh day: That was Ina's approach, thoroughly Christian in its way (die mit Tränen säen, werden mit Freuden ernten: They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. [Psalm 126:5]), should have made her ideal nunnery fodder, but, paradoxically, it was written otherwise.
3. Cut the little piece of sausage into seven exactly equal slices, so thin that you could look from Bonn to Berlin

through them, and have one slice every day: That was Hildegard's approach. She should have become an engineer or a Chancellor of the Exchequer later in life, but it was written otherwise.

4. Cut a goodly slice from the whole ration, put it on a dry slice of bread, open your mouth, let your teeth close in on the slice of bread but so as not to bite the slice of sausage. Have the teeth so close to the bread that, as you push the bread into your mouth and the sausage is under your nose so that you can enjoy its scent, the sausage slides along over the bread. Close your teeth, chew your first bite of dry bread while imagining that you are chewing bread with sausage. ("Think when you smell a sausage, that you eat it!") Eat the second bit of bread, ..., in a similar fashion, until the slice of bread is finished. Like in the 'pebble soup' or in the story of the Arab with 17 camels to be divided exactly among his three sons, the slice of sausage, having done its duty, will be left over and returned into its container till tomorrow. It will be eaten only when it has given off all its scent and flavour and is no longer enjoyable to eat. My gain was that I had bread with sausage, and lots of it (albeit imaginary) every day. That approach was called 'Schiebewurst' (sliding sausage). Today it would be called 'virtual sausage'.

In my ignorance it did not occur to me at the time that there was an even better solution, namely to become a vegetarian, eat only dry bread and be happy with it, and give my ration of sausage to my sisters to fight over. No doubt, the whole family would have agreed that vegetarianism is not a heresy after all and a very good life-style indeed, provided it is practised by others.

I do not remember any specific Christmas, especially no Christmas during the 'hunger years', and I remember all Christmases as the same, all equally pleasant for me. So let me be 13 or 14, after the currency reform of 1948, when goods had suddenly reappeared in the shops.

#### THE YEAR OF THE CHURCH

The illuminations in the street, if there were any at the time, Father Christmases, recorded Christmas carols and goods on offer in department stores (in those years when there **was** something to be bought), were irrelevant and indeed considered a secular irritant by us, and I still share that feeling.

For Christmas is for me and was for us an exclusively religious festival that provided enough joy of its own, especially when its customs were strictly and intelligently observed.

For the experience to be real and effective, the Christmas story and its interpretation has to be taken seriously by the family,

at least for a time, and only then can, for some people with the right disposition, a certain amount of scepticism set in. If they have enough understanding, they can 'go through the motions' of a literal believer and attach private, more liberal, interpretations ('mental reservations') to the customs which can bind a family and a community together and which continue to give real joy to all, irrespective of the exact nature of their beliefs. The symbols are the same for all.

The year of the church is an annual drama. It ends with Eternity Sunday (Ewigkeitssonntag), the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, the 23rd Sunday after Trinity, the Sunday before the first Sunday of Advent, when the gospel of the destruction and the horrors at the end of time is read (Matthew 24:15-35), doomsday, das Ende der Welt, the sign that the second coming of Christ is nigh: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

During the weeks and months that follow, the birth of Jesus, his appearance to the world at large, his life as a youth, his first miracles, his preaching, his passion, execution and resurrection, his ascension to heaven, his sending of the holy spirit at Pentecost, his work on earth through the holy spirit will be mapped, presented, retold, in historical sequence, until Eternity Sunday arrives again, foretelling his second coming. Thus, the year of the church begins on the first Sunday of Advent.

Each new event, even though well-known in advance, is taken note of and rejoiced or wept over, as if it were announced for the first time in the newspapers. That is the important thing about our celebration of Advent. We looked forward to Christmas, but Christmas had not yet arrived. We took our hymns seriously and did not sing that 'Christ was born in Bethlehem' when evidently he was still in his mother's womb. We had of course celebrated the feast of the Annunciation (conception of Jesus by the Virgin Mary) on 25 March, exactly nine months before Christmas Day. So this was Advent, a distinct period and a distinct joy, intelligently celebrated in an intelligent family.

## ADVENT

Of course we went to church every Sunday, as we did during the rest of the year. I was a loner and would always have preferred to go on my own and derived my own pleasure from this. During Advent, on weekdays I believe, special services (masses) were held, the Rorate-masses, because they contained the chant of 'Tauet, Himmel, den Gerechten':

Rorate, coeli, desuper et  
nubes pluant iustum, aperiatur  
terra et germinet salvatorem  
(Isaiah 45:8)

Drop down, ye heavens, from  
above, and let the clouds pour  
down the righteous one, let  
the earth open, and let it  
bring forth the saviour.

Thus went the prayer asking for Jesus to be sent to save the world.

Advent was a time of waiting and preparation. A quiet time, and not yet time for rejoicing. I loved the Advent chorales, knew all their tunes and many of their texts by heart and played them in four-part harmonies on the piano at home. Later in life I added the more ancient Lutheran Advent chorales (e.g. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*; *Wie soll ich dich empfangen*), to the Catholic ones (e.g. '*O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf*' by the liberal 16th century Jesuit Friedrich von Spee, rational defender of women during the witch hunts), in my repertoire, and I still love and know them both, which is to say that I can respond to them emotionally. They spell Advent tide to me.

I would, like our sensible parents, have rejected singing and listening to **Christmas** carols during that time, carols talking about Christ having been born, for Christ had **not** yet been born: we were still waiting for his arrival and birth, and the joy of waiting, of anticipation, would have been spoilt if we had mixed it all up into some vague, non-specific 'seasonal' emotion or merriment. We had emotion heightened by reason and precision.

Advent is marked by the Adventskranz, a reef made of spruce, spiked with four candles. Large reefs are hung horizontally in churches, smaller reefs sit on tables or sideboards in homes. During the first week of Advent one candle will be lit, during the second two, until during the fourth week, with all candles burning, we know that there will soon be a whole Christmas tree radiating candle-light.

Many evenings and perhaps all, the family would sit around the Advent reef for fifteen minutes or half an hour to sing Advent carols, the room lit only by its candles, and I would certainly have been eagerly asking for it. Sometimes I or my sisters would play along on our recorders, and I knew how to improvise a second part so we would have at least two-part singing on these occasions.

I think that during the better years biscuits with special Christmas spices (coriander seed, cinnamon and cloves) were released on some of these occasions, but very sparingly, for it was still Advent, the subdued time of anxious waiting and hoping, and handing out sweets too generously would have destroyed the long-awaited pleasure of having them on Christmas Eve, and not an hour before then, together with the tree, the presents, and the Christmas carols (**Hodie** *Christus natus est: Christ is born today*), which were meticulously avoided before then.

One of the "good rooms" in the house was designated the 'Christmas room'. Its door was locked about five days before Christmas, a sheet was hung to cover its frosted glass, and the children were not allowed to enter. Sometimes lights were on inside, sometimes our parents silently entered and left, mysterious preparations were going on which we did not question.

We knew that the Christ child, the Christkind (not Father Christmas, the pathetic bumbling clown in his ridiculous garb, who had no religious tradition and sanction) was bringing the Christmas presents. The child was God's present to the world and he gave us additional presents to make sure even simple-minded children enjoyed his arrival, whose significance they could not yet understand.

Even when we knew that it was not really the Christ child who brought the presents and when we had presents of our own for other members of the family and gave them to our parents to place them in the Christmas room or give them to the Christ child to pass on, the fiction that presents come from the Christ child was upheld.

Such suspension of disbelief is a good thing, it gives real joy and allows the old customs to be maintained and passed on. Once the tradition has been interrupted by one generation, it is difficult to re-connect. Suspension of disbelief is as important to religion, especially for intelligent people, as it is when we go to a film, read a novel or listen to a fairytale. We do not want our pleasure spoilt by saying or hearing incessantly: 'It is not true, it is only fiction.' It is even important in love and in love-making, when sometimes it is good not to look too closely, to have the lights low, and not to put the beloved under the microscope -- at least not under the electron microscope.

Ernest Renan wrote:

L'homme fait la beauté de ce qu'il aime et la sainteté de ce qu'il croit.

It is man who infuses with beauty that which he loves and with holiness that in which he believes.

In other words:

Let us not complain about religion because it is as it is:  
Religion is not what it is,  
but what we make it.

**CHRISTMAS EVE**

So the 24th of December, Christmas Eve, arrives, the day when the light of Christ came into a dark world:

"Das Volk, das im Finstern wandelt, sieht ein großes Licht, The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2). He "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9)

The Christmas celebration starts after nightfall, at 6 or 7 p.m.: then the light of the Christmas tree will be more powerful. But first we have to say goodbye to Advent -- one last round of Advent carol singing.

At half past five we sit around the Adventskranz on the kitchen table. All four candles have been lit. We sing three or four Advent, not Christmas, carols. Somehow Father has left the room, nobody has noticed, or if he has, he says nothing in order not to spoil the effect for which we all wish, for Father's task is to act as a locum for the Christ child, light the many thin candles on the Christmas tree and the five big candles in front of the crib (or 'creche', as the Americans, or 'presepio', as the Portuguese say) and the four candles on the candelabra attached to the piano.

When everything is ready, he will, in the hall, hit the gong we had in one house or ring the big Alpine cowbell we had in the other. Mother, who is sitting with us by the Advent reef, will say: "I think, I've heard the Christ child," and we all have heard him/her too, everything is ready, and we all would like to storm into the Christmas room, but we also know that we must first sing the last of the Advent carols, always the same at this point of the proceedings, and all its stanzas too, we have our hymn books on the table.

<p>1. Macht hoch die Tür, die Tor' macht weit, Es kommt der Herr der Herrlichkeit, Ein König aller Königreich', Ein Heiland aller Welt zugleich, Der Heil und Leben mit sich bringt; Derhalben jauchzt, mit Freuden singt: Gelobet sei mein Gott, Mein Schöpfer, reich von Rat!</p>	<p>1. Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates! Behold, the King of Glory waits; The King of kings is drawing near, The Savior of the world is here. Life and salvation He doth bring, Wherefore rejoice and gladly sing: We praise Thee, Father, now, Creator, wise art Thou!</p>
<p>2. Er ist gerecht, ein Helfer wert, Sanftmütigkeit ist sein Gefährt, Sein Königskron' ist Heiligkeit, Sein Zepter ist Barmherzigkeit. All unsre Not zum End' er bringt. Derhalben jauchzt, mit Freuden singt: Gelobet sei mein Gott, Mein Heiland, groß von Tat!</p>	<p>2. A Helper just He comes to thee, His chariot is humility, His kingly crown is holiness, His scepter, pity in distress, The end of all our woe He brings; Wherefore the earth is glad and sings: We praise Thee, Savior, now, Mighty in deed art Thou!</p>
<p>3. O wohl dem Land, o wohl der Stadt, So diesen König bei sich hat! Wohl allen Herzen insgemein, Da dieser König ziehet ein! Er ist die rechte Freudensonn', Bringt mit sich lauter Freud' und Wonn'. Gelobet sei mein Gott, Mein Tröster, früh und spat!</p>	<p>3. O blest the land, the city blest, Where Christ the Ruler is confessed! O happy hearts and happy homes To whom this King in triumph comes! The cloudless Sun of joy He is, Who bringeth pure delight and bliss. We praise Thee, Spirit, now, Our Comforter art Thou!</p>
<p>4. Macht hoch die Tür, die Tor' macht weit, Eu'r Herz zum Tempel zubereit't! Die Zweiglein der Gottseligkeit Steckt auf mit Andacht, Lust und Freud'! So kommt der König auch zu euch, Ja Heil und Leben mit zugleich. Gelobet sei mein Gott, Voll Rat, voll Tat, voll Gnad'!</p>	<p>4. Fling wide the portals of your heart; Make it a temple set apart From earthly use for Heaven's employ, Adorned with prayer and love and joy. So shall your Sovereign enter in And new and nobler life begin. To Thee, O God, be praise For word and deed and grace!</p>
<p>5. Komm, o mein Heiland Jesu Christ, Mein's Herzens Tür dir offen ist! Ach zeuch mit deiner Gnade ein, Dein Freundlichkeit auch uns erschein. Dein Heil'ger Geist uns führ' und leit' Den Weg zur ew'gen Seligkeit! Dem Namen dein, o Herr, Sei ewig Preis und Ehr'!</p>	<p>5. Redeemer, come! I open wide My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide! Let me Thy inner presence feel, Thy grace and love in me reveal; Thy Holy Spirit guide us on Until our glorious goal is won. Eternal praise and fame We offer to Thy name.</p>
<p>(Text by Georg Weissel, 1590–1635)</p>	<p>(Translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1829–1878)</p>

The seed of this carol is Psalm 24:7: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in," enriched by references to the prophet Isaiah and the attributes that are given to Jesus.

I must not conceal the fact that my dictation program transforms 'ein Helfer wert' into 'ideal for Fiat' (Sanftmütigkeit ist sein Gefährt!), 'Jesus' into 'cheeses' (un-pastorised, of course) (sic!) and 'prophet' into 'profit' (prophet forecast). That is the modern age knocking at the door and clamouring 'Macht hoch die Tür", et nubes pluent in justum. (pluent: sic!) It reinforces my desire to write all this down before it is forgotten and becomes entirely incomprehensible to future generations.

Father has meanwhile discreetly rejoined us. We get up and leave the Advent room. We are in the dark hall which separates the Advent room from the Christmas room. The sheet that has covered the door of the Christmas room for the last week has been removed. A flood of warm candlelight comes through the frosted glass of the door, and we smell the scent of burning wax.

But it is still too soon to enter that longed-for room. All the scenes of the drama have to be played out. We are like the shepherds guarding their flocks at night. How can we know what is to be seen and where to go? The angel of the Lord has to tell us.

1. "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her. Ich bring' euch gute neue Mär, Der guten Mär bring' ich so viel, Davon ich sing'n und sagen will.	"From Heaven above to earth I come To bear good news to every home; Glad tidings of great joy I bring Whereof I now will say and sing:
We know many of his words in the verses of Luther's Christmas carol by heart, and we have our hymn books handy too.	
2. Euch ist ein Kindlein heut' gebor'n Von einer Jungfrau auserkor'n, Ein Kindelein, so zart und fein, Das soll eur' Freud' und Wonne sein.	To you this night is born a child Of Mary, chosen mother mild; This little child, of lowly birth, Shall be the joy of all your earth.
To be realistic <b>one</b> of us should sing the words of the angel, but according to custom we sing them all together.	
3. Es ist der Herr Christ, unser Gott, Der will euch führ'n aus aller Not, Er will eu'r Heiland selber sein, Von allen Sünden machen rein.	'Tis Christ our God who far on high Hath heard your sad and bitter cry; Himself will your Salvation be, Himself from sin will make you free.
4. Er bringt euch alle Seligkeit, Die Gott der Vater hat bereit, Daß ihr mit uns im Himmelrich Sollt leben nun und ewiglich.	He brings those blessings, long ago Prepared by God for all below; Henceforth His kingdom open stands To you, as to the angel bands.
This carol has fifteen wonderful stanzas, and we sing eight of them.	
5. So merket nun das Zeichen recht, Die Krippe, Windelein so schlecht, Da findet ihr das Kind gelegt, Das alle Welt erhält und trägt."	These are the tokens ye shall mark, The swaddling clothes and manger dark; There shall ye find the young child laid, By whom the heavens and earth were made."
The angel has spoken. We take over.  In the sixth stanza, we identify ourselves with the shepherds outside the stable who will see God's Christmas present to mankind, namely his own son as a little baby. Or the shepherds identify with us outside the Christmas room in which we will see the presents which are tokens of the gift that God, in this sacred night, has given to the world. The Christmas room now merges with the stable.	
6. Des laßt uns alle fröhlich sein Und mit den Hirten gehn hinein, Zu sehn, was Gott uns hat beschert, Mit seinem lieben Sohn verehrt.	Now let us all with gladsome cheer Follow the shepherds, and draw near To see this wondrous gift of God Who hath His only Son bestowed.

<p>The door opens, we slowly enter the Christmas room and stand in front of the Christmas tree and the crib underneath, and see everything as it is described in the carol.</p>	
<p>7. Ach, mein herzliebes Jesulein, Mach dir ein rein, sanft Bettelein, Zu ruhen in mein's Herzens Schrein, Daß ich nimmer vergesse dein!</p>	<p>Ah! dearest Jesus, Holy Child, Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled, Within my heart, that it may be A quiet chamber kept for Thee.</p>
<p>While we chant the doxology (minus the Holy Ghost), we see the Christmas tree decorated with two or three dozen live wax candles, they warm the room as if there were a big open fire, we smell the wax and the spruce. And one of my sisters once truly saw the angels of Bethlehem hovering around the Christmas tree. "Cross my heart!" But one has to be very young and bright-eyed to be able to see that!</p>	
<p>8. Lob, Ehr' sei Gott im höchsten Thron, Der uns schenkt seinen ein'gen Sohn! Des freuen sich der Engel Schar Und singen uns solch neues Jahr.</p>	<p>Glory to God in highest Heaven, Who unto man His Son hath given! While angels sing with pious mirth A glad New Year to all the earth.</p>
<p>Text by Martin Luther, 1483–1546, based on a secular popular song "Aus fernen Landen komm ich her" [I come from strange exotic lands]</p>	<p>Translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1829–1878</p>

In our family, 'lametta' (aluminium tinsel) was 'verpönt', was considered to be in bad taste, too modern, artificial or smacking of industry. The tree was mainly decorated with edibles, apples (usually coxes), Christmas biscuits (spekulatius), coloured fondant sugar rings, and a few glass globes, in dark red, blue and green, and on the highest tip of the tree stood the star of Bethlehem, made of straw.

A Christmas photograph showing my mother and her sister (Tante Hilde, Aunt Hildegard) when they were about five (circa 1915) underneath the Christmas tree of my grandparents, shows that tree completely covered in tinsel. What I call "our family tradition" was therefore not as old as it appeared to us children but merely reflected the ideals of my parents, perhaps especially of our father. In his youth he would have been strongly influenced by the Jugendbewegung [Young Awakening] (ca. 1895–1930), a rebellion against lifestyle and tastes of the bourgeoisie (in England it would be called 'Victorian values'). These youngsters and their leaders praised youth versus age and decay, the simple life, strove back to nature (against industry), revived the old folk

songs, loved hiking and camping, undertook all-night hikes ending on a mountain to admire the rising of the sun, they slept in barns, tried to be tough and healthy, .... Tame and pure by our standards, these youngsters were considered as quite disgraceful by many of their elders. This movement was later absorbed by the Nazis, but its, denazified and unpolitical, ideals, customs and music, re-emerged after the war (1945) and were important until modern pop culture (hippies, Elvis, the Beatles, drugs, liberal sex &c) came along and could compete with it.

Now follows the recitation of the Christmas gospel (Luke, ch. 2) which I quote in German, because only in that language does it conjure up, for me, the associations, the spell, I wish to recall:

Und doch, an diesen Klang von Jugend auf gewöhnt, Ruft er auch jetzt zurück mich in das Leben. (Goethe, Faust)	Used to this sound from the days of my youth, it now calls me back to life.
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I think when we were very young, one of us would have memorised the gospel, but there would also be the missal handy for prompting if necessary. Strangely enough, the older one gets and the easier it gets, the less trouble one takes (e.g. with memorising a short text).

Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, daß ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augustus ausging, daß alle Welt geschätzt würde.	And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.
Und diese Schätzung war die allererste und geschah zu der Zeit, da Cyrenius Landpfleger von Syrien war. Und jedermann ging, daß er sich schätzen ließe, ein jeglicher in seine Stadt.	(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
Da machte sich auch auf Joseph aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt Davids, die da heißt Bethlehem, darum daß er von dem Hause und Geschlechte Davids war, auf daß er sich schätzen ließe mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe, die war schwanger.	And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
Und als sie daselbst waren, kam die Zeit, da sie gebären sollte.	And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippe; denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.	And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.
Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hüteten des Nachts ihre Herde.	And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
Und siehe, des Herrn Engel trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herrn leuchtete um sie; und sie fürchteten sich sehr.	And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen: Fürchtet euch nicht! siehe, ich verkündige euch große Freude, die allem Volk widerfahren wird;	And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
denn euch ist heute der Heiland geboren, welcher ist Christus, der Herr, in der Stadt Davids.	For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
Und das habt zum Zeichen: ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.	And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Und alsbald war da bei dem Engel die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen, die lobten Gott und sprachen: Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Frieden auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen.	And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
Und da die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel fuhren, sprachen die Hirten untereinander: Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethlehem und die Geschichte sehen, die da geschehen ist, die uns der Herr kundgetan hat.	And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
Und sie kamen eilend und fanden beide, Maria und Joseph, dazu das Kind in der Krippe liegen.	And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.
Da sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, welches zu ihnen von diesem Kinde gesagt war.	And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.
Und alle, vor die es kam, wunderten sich der Rede, die ihnen die Hirten gesagt hatten.	And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.
Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen.	But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.
Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, priesen und lobten Gott um alles, was sie gehört und gesehen hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesagt war.	And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

**Note:** The text of the Christmas gospel does not have to be published in full, and especially not in both languages. The first few paragraphs in English would suffice. However, considering ever fewer people know anything about Christian traditions, it would be better to publish the full text, and since in this story so much is made of the exact words which bring back childhood memories, there is an argument for publishing the German text as well.

We all sing 'Silent Night', which is de rigeur.

When we were very young, 'Ihr Kinderlein, kommet' (Come, children, to the manger) also had to be sung. The text is by the once popular 18th century Bavarian priest and children's writer Christoph von Schmid, whose pious sentimentality was ridiculed by Gottfried Keller in 'Die drei gerechten Kammacher'. Christoph von Schmid could perhaps not have foreseen that even his simple verses could be misinterpreted by children, for there was a time when we sang, in all earnestness,

instead of (below)	we sang (below)
'hoch oben singt <b>jubelnd</b> der Engelein Chor' (in heaven, the choir of angels is singing in jubilation),  jubelnd = joyfully	'hoch oben schwimmen <b>Juden</b> den Engeln was vor' (in heaven, Jews are putting on a swimming demonstration for the angels)  Juden = Jews

instead of (below)	we sang (below)
'da liegt es, <b>ach Kinder</b> , auf Heu und auf Stroh' (there, oh children, he lies on hay and on straw),  ach Kinder = oh children	'da liegen <b>acht Kinder</b> auf Heu und auf Stroh' (eight children are lying on hay and on straw)  acht Kinder = eight children

The present pope would no doubt have been delighted with the eight children, unlike Friedrich Engels (nomen est omen), who called this ironically 'The Holy Family'.

In the Cologne Christmas carol 'Menschen, die ihr wart verloren', we managed to turn left text into right text, thus:

instead of (below)	we sang (below)
'Laßt uns vor ihm nieder <b>fallen</b> ' (Let's bend our knees before him)	'Laßt uns vor ihm niederknallen' (Let's bang down before him).

We have heard the official news and can be sure that Christmas has really started. But the Christmas presents are not yet to be touched or, strictly speaking, even to be looked at, even though, during all these proceedings, our eyes of course wonder curiously all over the room where for each member of the family there will be a little pile of presents, on a chair, a table, sideboard, on the floor. The presents were never wrapped.

We have only sung one Christmas carol so far, there must be a few more.

"What shall we sing?"

"In dulci jubilo," someone suggests.

We know that one by heart, and I sit already on the piano stool to accompany the chant: '.... unsers Herzens Wonne, leit in praesepio, und leuchtet als die Sonne, matris in gremio' (our heart's joy lies in the manger and shines like the sun on his mother's lap).

### RECITATIONS

When we were very young, three of us, Hildegard, Ina and myself must have put on a very short nativity play, or perhaps it was only a tableau vivant. I have seen some photographs of these performances, me or Hildegard with cardboard wings to represent the angel, or me as St Joseph with a painted moustache, Hildegard as the Virgin Mary, and Ina less than a year old lying in a laundry basket to present baby Jesus.

As we grew older, recitations of poems, psalms, stories, Christmas poems ('Die Nacht vor dem heiligen Abend', and the like), lesser-known Christmas carols, became part of the proceedings at this stage. We have memorised and rehearsed them throughout Advent.

The recitations were presents of us children to our parents and especially to our maternal grandmother, Paula Faßbender (known as 'Mütterchen' or briefly 'Mütter'). She, who knew dozens of long classical German ballads (Schiller, Goethe, Mörike, ...) by heart, and who, after having tucked us in, sent us to sleep at night not by telling bedside stories but by reciting our favourite ballads or singing one of the Lutheran evening chorales (Breit aus die Flügel beide, o Jesu, meine Freude, und nimm dein Küchlein ein: spread out both your wings, o Jesu, my joy, and let your chicks shelter under them) she loved so much from her Lutheran childhood before she converted to Roman Catholicism at the age of thirty.

Mütterchen appreciated it as a personal gift if we had memorised some text or other in her honour. It was our effort in memorising the poem, rather than the recitation itself, that made the present valuable for her, and she knew, of course, that **we** would benefit, as we did, later in life from having learnt so many beautiful texts by heart. The benefit arises decades later when it is far too late to make up for whatever one has failed to do during one's childhood.

This was the kind of Christmas present which money could not buy and for which money was not needed. As children we had no money.

We did not feel that we had to give Christmas presents to our elders, but we may have made some presents of our own for our parents, for example, plywood figures cut with the fretsaw, knitted garments, painted some watercolour pictures or done some calligraphic work.

Part of the recitations was a musical performance, usually a Baroque trio sonata or other pieces by composers like Corelli, Vivaldi, Händel, Telemann (1681-1767, not only a prolific composer and in his time more popular than his contemporary, Bach, 1685-1750, but also the first virtual husband [Tele-Mann]), Johann Rosenmüller (c.1619-1684), and other pre-Bach composers,

played by Hildegard and Ina on the violins and me on the piano, all rehearsed and practised throughout Advent.

#### **PRESENTS**

Then at last the great release: having done our duty to God and man, we are allowed to see our pile of presents. Ina says they were always modest, by modern standards or those of richer families, or families with fewer children, for we were poor (a budding lawyer is worth nothing in times of a barter economy, a farmer or a doctor is), but we were always happy with what we received and did not feel that we had had a scarce Christmas.

I must insert here the Christmas letter my father wrote to me in 1943 **when I was eight** and he was a soldier at the Russian front, because it refers to the scarcity of Christmas presents which, in a way, persisted after the end of the war.

## A WAR-TIME CHRISTMAS LETTER FROM FATHER TO SON

Feldpost  Herrn Klaus Bung Gut Angenrod bei Alsfeld, Oberhessen  Von: Stabsintendant Bung Feldpost-Nr. 38462  O.U., den 10. Dezember 1943	Feldpost – Military Mail Service  10 December 1943
Mein lieber Klaus!  Ich bin so froh darüber, daß Du in Godesberg bei den Großeltern so lieb und artig warst. Zwar weiß ich nicht, ob Dir das Christkind im fünften Kriegsjahr viel schenken kann. Aber ich denke mir, Du wirst schon Deine Freude daran haben, daß Vater und Mutter und alle Großeltern Dich lieb haben.	My dear Klaus!  I am so happy that you were so sweet and well-behaved when staying in Godesberg with your grandparents. I do not know whether the Christchild can bring you many presents in this fifth year of the war. But I think you will be happy knowing that father and mother and all your grandparents love you.
So sehr möchte ich Weihnachten bei Euch sein. Aber es geht nicht, weil ich wie so viele andere Soldaten in Rußland auch aufpassen muß, daß die Russen nicht in die deutsche Heimat kommen und alle Häuser verbrennen und die Menschen totmachen. Aber weil hier so viele Soldaten sind und im Schnee stehen und aufpassen, dadurch können die Russen nicht nach Deutschland kommen, und Ihr könnt in Ruhe beim Weihnachtsbaum sitzen und die schönen Lieder singen und Euch freuen, daß es mitten im Winter eine so schöne Zeit gibt wie Weihnachten. Der Vater wird am heiligen Abend viel an Euch denken.	I would so much love to spend Christmas with all of you. But it is not possible because, like so many other soldiers in Russia, I too must watch out and ensure that the Russians do not come into our German home land and burn the houses and kill the people. But because there are so many soldiers here who stand in the snow and are on guard, that's why the Russians cannot come to Germany, and you can sit in peace underneath the Christmas tree and sing beautiful carols and be happy that in the middle of winter there is such a beautiful time as Christmas. On Christmas Eve your father will think of you a lot.
Er hat sich schön in die Erde vergraben in ein ganz großes Loch, fast so groß wie ein kleines Zimmer. Da wird er sich am Weihnachtsabend ein großes Holzfeuer anmachen, daß das Erdloch ganz warm wird. Und außerdem wachsen in Rußland so viele Weihnachtsbäume, daß ihm wohl das Christkind auch einen kleinen hinstellen wird.	He has dug himself nicely into the ground, into a very big hole, almost as big as a small room. That's where he will make a big wooden fire on Christmas Eve so that his earth hole will become very warm. Moreover so many Christmas trees grow in Russia that he is sure that the Christchild will also set up a little Christmas tree for him.
Wenn dann die Kerzen brennen, dann wird der Vater sich davor setzen und gar nichts tun und nur an Euch denken, wie Ihr in Angenrod oder Godesberg, wo Ihr vielleicht gerade seid, auch am Weihnachtsbaum sitzt,	Then, when the candles are lit, your father will sit down and do nothing except think of you and imagine how all of you, in Angenrod or Godesberg, where you might be spending Christmas, are also sitting

wie der Kerzenschein auf Euren Gesichtern leuchtet, und wie Ihr alle glücklich seid, daß alles so schön ist.	around the Christmas tree, how the light of the candles is shining on your faces and how you are all happy that everything is so beautiful.
<p>Wenn Du groß bist, mein lieber Klaus, dann wirst Du auch merken, wie schön das Leben ist, wenn es auch nicht immer was zu lachen gibt. Am schönsten ist es aber zu Weihnachten. Und Weihnachten kommt jedes Jahr wieder. Wenn Du erst einmal richtig gespürt hast, wie schön das Leben ist, dann kannst Du nie mehr wirklich unglücklich sein. Und Dir, lieber Klaus, wünsche ich alles Glück im Leben.</p> <p>○ Dein (Vater)</p>	<p>When you are big, my dear Klaus, then you will learn that life is so beautiful, even if it is not always fun. But it is most beautiful at Christmas. And Christmas returns every year. If you have once experienced properly how beautiful life is, then you can never again be truly unhappy. And to you, my dear Klaus, I wish all happiness in life.</p> <p>○ (= kisses) Your father</p>

Re-reading Father's letter today, I wonder whether, when talking about the Russian danger, he was aware of cause and effect (who had invaded whose territory first, what were German soldiers doing in Russian Christmas tree plantations?), but I presume that, whatever his state of awareness, in those years, only 18 months before what was for many people and in historical, moral and human terms Germany's liberation (Befreiung) (by the Allies), but in Nazi perception and in military terms the "collapse" (Zusammenbruch), it would not have been wise for him to write anything else. He had to explain his absence at Christmas to his young son in simple terms. There was censorship of mail, and "defeatism" was a crime that has been punished with death as the war came to a close. Writing anything else would, at that time, have served no useful purpose.

Ina tells me of floppy dolls which Mother made for the girls out of old "silk" stockings, embroidered with coloured wool for eyes and mouth. Even Father once made dolls out of pieces of wood. These were the luxuries.

Necessities, like clothes and shoes, were also concentrated on Christmas and given as Christmas presents, to make the Christmas pile richer and higher. Dresses were repeatedly recycled. Mother would take one child's dress carefully apart, piece by piece, turn it around to the side which was not yet threadbare, and make other dresses, perhaps for the younger children, out of the material. She was a qualified lawyer but, having become a mother, never practised her profession.

This shows what we could expect to find as presents when singing and recitations were over. Each of us would inspect his own pile first, enjoy what was there, sometimes a surprise, sometimes a wish fulfilled, (how in heaven did the Christ child know our wishes! Was he a mind-reader? Or even omniscient?). Then we would settle down, each in his corner, start reading our books and eat our sweets. Sometimes the radio was on, which on Christmas Eve

was always saturated with Christmas carols, nicely orchestrated and sung by excellent choirs, and by baroque music. Once, I remember, the music was repeatedly interrupted by sad news from the Korean War. When I was tired of reading, I might go to the piano to play Christmas carols and sometimes the others would sing along.

#### CHURCH SERVICES

At about 11 p.m., having had our fill of Christmas romance, we would leave, muffled up in warm clothes to attend the Christmette, midnight mass, a wonderful occasion because lots of carols would be sung, there was the festive organ, a choir, sometimes even an orchestra, the church bells would be ringing for a long time, unusually late, in the silence of this dark hour, and the church would be packed. To get a seat, we had to arrive at least an hour before the start of the mass, which I happily did, having, even then, enough things to ponder ... I don't know whether the others were equally patient.

I cannot say much about Christmas Day. It was pleasant but not really important. We would sleep longer. It was a spacious day on which everybody could do what he liked, but there were no special ceremonies. We could read and enjoy our presents, go for walks in the snow, talk, sing, make music. There was no obligation to go to church again, since the midnight mass of Christmas Eve counted for Christmas Day (25 December). However, I would often go again, on my own bat, for each mass is different.

At the time, there were three masses prescribed for Christmas Day, each with its own gospel and prayers. The first was the Missa in nocte, the mass at night-time, which provided the skeleton for 'midnight mass' (carol mass), and its gospel (Luke 2:1-14) told the story of Mary and Joseph having to travel to Bethlehem to be registered for the census, the birth of the baby in the stable and of the angels appearing to the shepherds, ending with the Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all men, blessed by his kindness.

The second mass was the Missa in aurora, the mass to be said at dawn, whose gospel (Luke 2:15-20) tells of the shepherds visiting the child in the stable.

The third mass was the Missa in die, the mass to be said in full daylight, whose gospel (John 1:1-14) (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, ... full of grace and truth) tells of the 'spiritual' significance of Christ.

This custom has now sadly been replaced by something shorter, simpler and more popular. But going to church several times a day was not necessarily boring then, no less boring than going to the cinema several times or watching, for the n-th time, several

well-known television films (The African Queen, The Guns of Navarrone, Casablanca, and the like) in succession, part of the more modern ritual of Christmas nostalgia.

A special attraction of Christmas Day would have been the music. In many churches in the Roman Catholic Rhineland and in Bavaria, high mass (Hochamt, solemn sung mass) will be celebrated with great pomp and incorporate not only Gregorian chant and à capella masses by Palestrina (c.1525-1594), Tomas Luis de Victoria (c.1548-1611), Josquin des Prez (1445-1521), Orlando di Lasso (1530-1594), ..., but also performances of large orchestral masses by Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Bruckner, Bach, in which a large orchestra was employed, with kettle drums and trumpets, and professional soloists.

While a spoken Gloria might take just over 45 seconds without becoming undignified, the simplest Gregorian sung Gloria just over 90 seconds, the Gloria of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis 17, that of the **Petite** Messe Solennelle by Rossini 30 and that of Bach's b-minor mass 40 minutes, during all of which time the priests have to sit patiently on their red velvet-lined stools by the side of the altar to let the musicians finish their version. Such a mass, including a rather cursory sermon (as is the Catholic tradition) might take as long as two hours or more. That was a great attraction provided free of charge by God at the expense of the church.

#### NEW YEAR

New Year, in our house, was never a big affair, since it has no religious significance. On this day the Church celebrates the circumcision and naming ceremony for little Jesus, but this is considered a minor matter, and, after all, we have attended church so enthusiastically during the preceding days and weeks, that we do perhaps deserve a break.

The year of the church begins on the first Sunday of Advent, and that's when we should pray for the year passed and the year coming. The secular New Year is a merely administrative matter, required by the State, and since the separation of church and state, the Catholic church no longer dominates the state. What the state does is therefore neither relevant nor is there any of the romance and emotion attached to it which only religion with its deep, ancient and irrational roots can supply. Religion does this in the story I tell, and it can easily continue to do so, even for so-called unbelievers. But they have to find ways of understanding not only religious traditions but also the nature of their own disbelief or scepticism. More clarity on both issues can enable them to drink from the religious sources with as much right and pleasure as any believer. That's what I learnt much later in life.

The Protestants have for historical reasons, since the time of the Reformation, subjected themselves to the (German) state or

states in their need to get support in the fight against Rome. They take state occasions much more seriously and superimpose religious significance onto them. For them New Year is important and special services are held on New Year's Eve praying for God's blessing during the coming year and thanking him for the past. (In more recent years, the Roman Catholic Church has followed suite, and it now provides New Year services of its own.)

1. Nun laßt uns gehn und treten Mit Singen und mit Beten Zum Herrn, der unserm Leben Bis hierher Kraft gegeben.	Now let us come before Him, With song and prayer adore Him, Who to our life hath given All needed strength from heaven.
2. Wir gehn dahin und wandern Von einem Jahr zum andern, Wir leben und gedeihen Vom alten zu dem neuen.	The stream of years is flowing, And we are onward going, From old to new surviving And by His mercy thriving.
3. Durch so viel Angst und Plagen, Durch Zittern und durch Zagen, Durch Krieg und große Schrecken, Die alle Welt bedecken.	In woe we often languish And pass through times of anguish, Of wars and trepidation Alarming every nation.

I can best give a flavour of the Lutheran New Year sentiments, to which I became closely attached later in life, by quoting Paul Gerhardt's (1607-1676) New Year chorale, which will inevitably be sung at Lutheran New Year services.

4. Denn wie von treuen Müttern In schweren Ungewittern Die Kindlein hier auf Erden Mit Fleiß bewahret werden:	As mothers watch are keeping O'er children who are sleeping, Their fear and grief assuaging When angry storms are raging:
5. Also auch und nicht minder Läßt Gott sich seine Kinder, Wenn Not und Trübsal blitzten, In seinem Schoße sitzen.	So God His own is shielding And help to them is yielding. When need and woe distress them, His loving arms caress them.

#### **LUTHERAN MEMORIES**

In later years, I absorbed the Lutheran cultural, poetic, musical and religious tradition so profoundly that I am now able to respond to it as, or even more, instinctively as to my earlier childhood memories. This tradition is, of course, at least as typically German, if not specifically more so, than the German version of Roman Catholicism, and no description of what Christmas means in Germany as a whole can be complete without it.

But this memoir has my childhood family celebrations at its core, whereas my Lutheran memories, impressions and loves stem from families other than my own, but even more so from the churches, from singing in Lutheran church choirs, from choir get-togethers during holiday periods, usually in the company of very skilled musical youngsters, close friends, associated with first loves, good instrumentalists and singers, some of them professionals, fond especially of the baroque and pre-baroque music and of what was then called 'modern music'.

'Modern' Protestant church music has remained virtually unchanged over 70 years. It was the musical language of young composers (some neo-baroque) who were, between 1912 and 1930 and beyond, reacting against the 'romantic music' of the preceding century. Most prominent among them, and much sung by us, were Ernst Pepping (1901-1981), Hans Friedrich Micheelsen (1902-1973), Hugo Distler (1908-1942; he committed suicide distressed by the Nazi activities), Kurt Hessenberg (1908-1994), Albert Thate (1903-1982, composer of the canon 'Herr, bleibe bei uns', which has become accepted as a folksong: 'nobody' knows that the composer is Albert Thate).

Unlike today, at that time we, like our musical teachers, despised the rich harmonies (chromaticism, crescendi and decrescendi reeking of 'sentimentality') of 'romantic' music, of Mendelssohn, Bruckner, and Brahms. The old men of that time, our musical leaders, who have survived are outraged and disgusted when they witness us singing now also romantic motets with gusto. Our tastes have become more catholic and tolerant.

No reader who has not been soaked in that tradition could respond to my reeling off lists of composers, like Isaac (c.1450-1517), Eccard (1553-1611), Sweelinck (1562-1621), Schütz (1585-1672), Scheidt (1587-1654), Buxtehude (1637-1707), etc etc etc, well-known to us singers but unknown by name to everybody else, to pieces like Eccard's 'Übers Gebirg Maria geht / zu ihrer Bas' 'Elisabeth' (Mary wanders over the mountains to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who calls her Mother of the Lord...), or Bach's 'Uns ist ein Kindlein heut geborn' or Sweelinck's 'Hodie, hodie, Christus natus est, noël, noël', or Bach's 'Virga Jesse floruit', etc etc etc., and the whole Christmas section of the Lutheran hymn book. I remember also taking part in performances of Bach's Christmas Oratorio, his Christmas Magnificat in E-flat major and Christmas cantatas by Schütz and by Buxtehude.

6. Ach Hüter unsers Lebens, Fürwahr, es ist vergebens Mit unserm Tun und Machen, Wo nicht dein' Augen wachen.	O Thou who dost not slumber, Remove what would encumber Our work, which prospers never Unless Thou bless it ever.
7. Laß ferner dich erbitten, O Vater, und bleib mitten In unserm Kreuz und Leiden Ein Brunnen unsrer Freuden.	O God of Mercy, hear us; Our Father, be Thou near us; Mid crosses and in sadness Be Thou our Fount of gladness.
8. Gib mir und allen denen, Die sich von Herzen sehnen Nach dir und deiner Hulde, Ein Herz, das sich gedulde!	To all who bow before Thee And for Thy grace implore Thee, Oh, grant Thy benediction And patience in affliction.

All these experiences also have left their traces. They are 'indescribable', because they are not attached to the visible, 'spectacular', childhood drama and ritual, and reside only in their music and in their texts, such as they are. Today for me they are even stronger and more alive than my Roman Catholic memories, which form the bulk of this story. This goes to show that profound impressions can, exceptionally, still be acquired after the age of ten (or whatever), if there is enough desire and dedication.

9. Sei der Verlaßnen Vater, Der Irrenden Berater, Der Unversorgten Gabe, Der Armen Gut und Habe!	Be Thou a Helper speedy To all the poor and needy, To all forlorn a Father; Thy erring children gather.
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### CHRISTMAS STORIES

I return to our Catholic family at the time when I was not much older than ten. In the evenings of the Christmas period, our family would assemble again round the Christmas tree and the crib, less solemnly of course than on Christmas Eve, to sing carols, or just to sit and read or talk. On these occasions only the thick candles of the crib and a few of the candles on the tree would be lit.

Gradually the sweets on our dishes would be finished. Begging Mother for a few more might or might not be successful. The apples adorning the Christmas tree were usually safest. They shrivelled as days went by and became increasingly less tempting -- almost human. But mysteriously the sweets and biscuits hanging from the tree would become fewer, even though there were no storms to shake them to the ground, and the 'invisible' rear of

the tree was disproportionately affected by the gradual thinning out. Did our parents not notice, or were they too wise or compassionate to say?

There are many romantic stories, legends and poems which go with German Christmas, but there is a Russian one which was a treasure specific to our family, and I am not aware of anyone else knowing it. This was Nikolai Lesskow's (Ljeskov's) novella 'Das Tier' (The Beast), a favourite of our Father's (who had all nine volumes of Lesskow's collected works in German in his library) and of all the family.

I am not sure if 'The Beast' was ever read aloud to us. I think with its 7,000 words it was too long for that. But I must have read it frequently during the Christmas period for it to have left its indelible impression. Lesskow is now so little known, and the story was so important for us that I must give here at least a synopsis.

#### **THE BEAST: DAS TIER: SYNOPSIS**

Five-year-old Nikolai Lesskow spends Christmas without his parents on the large estate of his uncle, who is renowned for his cruelty, the harsh punishments he inflicts on his serfs and the fact that he has never ever forgiven any transgressions.

It is the custom that captured bear pups are raised on the estate, looked after by 25-year-old Ferapont, who has a close relationship with them. At any one time one of the bear pups, selected because he seems easiest to teach and is the best behaved, is allowed to live outside the cage and move freely in the farmyard and the park, his special task being to stand guard at the entrance of the farm. He keeps this privilege as long as his animal nature does not appear, i.e. as long as he does not harm any of the animals or humans who live on the estate. As soon as he commits a transgression, he is irretrievably condemned to death, through an elaborately designed hunt procedure from which he cannot possibly escape.

The condemned bear will be kept in a den until the day of execution, which is to provide entertainment for the estate owner ('Uncle') and his guests. On this day, a strong beam will be lowered at an angle into the den, and the bear will immediately come out of his prison. He will then be set upon by young bloodhounds, trained to cling to the bear like leeches and not to let go as long as they are alive. If the bear manages to escape the bloodhounds in training, two hunters with experienced hounds will attack him. If he manages to survive these as well and is about to get away into the forest, a marksman is waiting for him. No bear has ever managed to overcome all these dangers, and should it ever happen, the persons responsible will meet with a terrible punishment.

The bear currently enjoying these privileges is Sganarell, and surprisingly he has already lived in this freedom for five years without committing a transgression. He has become a huge animal, very strong, beautiful, intelligent and dexterous. He can walk on his hindlegs, put on a paper hat, and parade like a soldier. A very close friendship has developed between him and Ferapont.

Just before the arrival of the boy, Sganarell had committed several misdemeanours, torn off the wing of a goose, put his paw on the back of a foal and broken his spine, and rolled a blind beggar and his guide in the snow, badly bruising their limbs in the process. Now he is in the

den waiting for his execution, which will be the entertainment Uncle plans to offer his guests on Christmas Day (6 January: Epiphany, in the Russian Orthodox church). Uncle hears that Ferapont, who suffers for his imprisoned friend Sganarell and dreads his impending cruel fate, has said to his sister: 'Thank God, it is not me who has to shoot him if he escapes. I'd rather suffer the cruellest punishment than carry out such an order.' Uncle hears about this remark and immediately orders that Ferapont, his serf, be positioned in a hideout opposite that where the marksman of last resort waits and that he be ordered to shoot Sganarell before the marksman backs him up, if necessary.

At 2 p.m. on Christmas Day, all the spectators are lined up in their sledges in sight of the den, the bloodhounds, hunters and the marksmen are ready. Elaborate preparations have been made. The beam is lowered into the den, but the bear refuses to come out. Snowballs are thrown into the den, he is poked with lances, burning straw is thrown into the den, blank shots are fired into it: the bear roars loudly, in anger, fear and pain, he has been singed but has flattened himself on the ground, pressed against the wall away from the fire and refuses to budge. They fetch Ferapont. He must lead his friend to the execution. He tightly ties a strong rope to the top end of the beam and climbs into the den. The bear can be seen to embrace Ferapont and to lick his face. After a while, Ferapont re-emerges in tight embrace with the bear, Sganarell's paw resting on Ferapont's shoulder. Ferapont is driven back to his hideout, the bear left outside the den. One end of the rope with whose aid Ferapont climbed into the den has accidentally formed a loop round Sganarell's paw. As Sganarell tries desperately to pull his paw out of the loop which becomes ever tighter, the beam at the other end of the rope jumps out of the den and circles like a centrifuge round Sganarell, threatening to kill and destroy anything that enters its orbit. The bear keeps up the centrifugal motion. Two bloodhounds have already attacked Sganarell, and he has killed them with his paws. The beam shatters a whole pack of hounds at a blow. Turning slowly around himself, Sganarell walks on his hind legs, towards the forest where Ferapont and the marksmen are hidden, all the time circling the beam around him, and nobody can attack him. All spectators are in grave danger: if the rope should break or Sganarell should let go of it and send the beam in their direction, anyone in its path would be killed. The spectators and the huntsmen with their dogs race away in panic. Sganarell is now between the two snow walls behind which Ferapont and the marksmen are waiting, the rope breaks, the beam flies off, demolishes the marksman's snow wall and the wooden support for his heavy rifle before it comes to rest in the snow far behind the marksman. Sganarell tumbles backwards, makes several somersaults, and lands behind the other snow wall, where Ferapont is hiding. He licks Ferapont's face and embraces him. Ferapont is expected to kill his friend with his hunting knife but fails to do so, a grave offence. The marksman shoots without support for his rifle, only grazes the bear but hits Ferapont in his arm, Ferapont faints, Sganarell escapes into the forest, it is too dark to pursue him.

The guests and the children in the dining hall are waiting for the entry of Uncle and are discussing the terrible fate that will inevitably meet Ferapont for having failed to kill the bear, and hope against hope that Uncle will spare him, something which he has never done before. At this moment Uncle enters, there is embarrassed silence in the hall, which surely will make the distrustful man even angrier and even more cruel. To break the silence, the old village priest Alexej asks the children, who surround him, if they understand the deeper meaning of the Christmas hymn "Christ is born". Neither the children, nor the adults for that matter, really understand. The priest explains the deeper meaning of the words 'praise him' and 'lift up your hearts' and as he does so **his** own heart is lifted by the spirit, and everybody understands that while appearing to talk to all, it is really **one** heart he is trying to reach, and all pray silently that he may succeed. It was not only in ancient times that the wise men brought their gifts to the child in the manger

but even today even the poorest man can bring a gift which is greater than those of the wise men, namely his own heart purified by the teaching that we should love, and forgive, and do good to all, friends as well as enemies.

Uncle is moved by these words, he drops his stick, which is the symbol of the cruelty with which his suffering and embittered heart defends itself against 'the world', which he can see only as his enemy. Now a message of love has reached his ear, he has seen a selfless person, Ferapont, showing love towards the beast, he sees that love is possible and that he too can expect love from others and that it is therefore not dangerous to love them, that he no longer needs to protect himself. He forgives Ferapont and sets him free, offers him money so that he can go away whenever he wishes. Ferapont accepts his freedom, but refuses to leave his master. He wants to continue to serve him as a free man with even more dedication than before as a serf. They become close friends, and the uncle nicknames him 'The Tamer of the Beast'.

The Uncle is not a converted sinner who has learned that it is his duty to do good rather than evil, but his heart has been melted, he has seen that the world is not essentially hostile and that he therefore need not defend himself through cruelty, but that he can afford to follow his natural, i.e. loving, inclinations.

This is not a case of conversion (sinner to saint) but a case of liberation (cure) from suffering (which induces fear and anger). Once suffering has come to an end, the works of love, deeply buried permanent instincts, flow on their own accord. Like Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Tony Blair, George Bush, Ian Paisley and the Pope (aka The Anti-Christ), i.e. like all of us, Uncle was not "evil" (there is no such thing): he has been 'good' all along but he has not been able, has not dared, to show it.

It is not a conversion, but a resolution of his grudging and embittered soul.

#### **EPIPHANY: ERSCHEINUNG DES HERRN**

In the church calendar, the Christmas period ends 40 days after the birth of Jesus, on the second day of February, with the feast of the "Purification of the Virgin Mary" (Mariä Lichtmess, the Churching of Mary). That is the day when the Christmas tree and the crib are removed from the churches, and Mary returns to her normal rights and duties as a housewife.

But the domestic Christmas period ends earlier, on Twelfth Night, i.e. on the sixth of January, the feast of Epiphany, or of the three kings, or of the three wise men, the magi, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, when Jesus 'came out', manifested himself as a future king and ruler, to the world at large (his first state visit, or rather, official audience, so to speak) and was recognised by the three kings who pledged their loyalty and brought him presents on behalf of the world.

<p>Ab Oriente venerunt Magi in Bethleem adorare Dominum, et apertis thesauris suis pretiosa munera obtulerunt, <b>aurum</b> sicut Regi magno, <b>tus</b> sicut Deo vero, <b>myrrham</b> sepulturi eius, alleluia.</p>	<p>Wise men from the East came to Bethlehem in order to worship the Lord, and having opened their treasures, they brought him precious gifts, <b>gold</b> as to a great king, <b>incense</b> as to the true God, and <b>myrrh</b> for his burial, alleluia.</p>
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This ancient antiphon and its interpretation of the gifts is reflected in the English carol 'We three kings of Orient are':

- **Gold** we bring to crown Him again; ...
- **Incense** owns a Deity nigh; ...
- **Myrrh** is mine; its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Seal'd in the stone-cold tomb.

Since Father, being better informed than the faithful masses, not blindly followed accepted customs, was conservative and therefore liked things Spanish, he did not respect the traditional German Christmas quite as much as it might appear to be. He knew that 25 December was not in any way a historical date for the birth of Jesus (which is quite unknown, even if it ever took place) but was assigned to Jesus as his "official birthday" comparatively late in the history of the church (5th century?), to combat pagan worship of the sun god associated with that day of solstice.

He argued that the really important festival of the season was Epiphany (as it still is in the Eastern Orthodox Church), that Christ's manifestation to the world is more important than his physical birth (which more sentimental minds prefer to worship).

Therefore he preferred the festival of Reyes (Kings) as the Spaniards call Epiphany. This is when Spanish children get their presents. It makes more theological sense, Father argued, since it commemorates the presents brought by the Magi, which were 'real' presents, whereas Christ can only in a very extended sense be called the 'present' that God gives to mankind, however often the formula may be repeated in German Christmas poetry.

As far as presents were concerned, we stuck with established popular German custom (24 December), but official Epiphany was also greatly honoured.

This compromise showed that Father was not a fanatic and did not want to isolate us, in spite of his superior historical knowledge, from the society in which we lived. His was realpolitik. In this respect he was different from the typical sectarian, for example the Jehovah's Witnesses, who also know that Christmas is not a very ancient festival but who crossly refuse to acknowledge it in any way and make a virtue of not celebrating it, as if it were idolatry. I appreciate the common sense and tolerance which I learnt through such examples. Tolerance does not require ignorance or indifference.

Epiphany was the last day of our celebrations. A full set of fresh candles was put on the Christmas tree, and the sweets that had strangely disappeared from it, were, I think, tacitly replaced.

All candles would be lit, and once more the tree would appear in its **full** glory. Carols would be sung including at least one suitable one of this day: "Es führt drei König Gottes Hand" (God's hand was leading three kings through a star in the orient to the Christ Child near Jerusalem). There was a pair of scissors, and after each carol one child or each child was allowed to cut a thread and take one sweet or one apple off the tree. That was called "den Baum plündern", plundering (ransacking) the tree. When the tree was empty, we would wait for the candles to burn down, and then for the very last candle to die away.

Thus Christmas has quietly come to an end, and next day when we return from school, the tree, the crib and all the decorations will have gone.

--- End of Part 1: Christmas at Home ---

## ^Part Two

### AND ABROAD

I have since spent Christmas in many countries and the occasions have often felt distant, alienated, cold or melancholic: I have not grown up with the traditions, tunes and texts of those countries.

If texts are to appeal to the emotions, they have to be **exactly** those that have been anchored in memory. 'Hört' will not do in place of 'Höret', 'Herr' not in place of 'Lieber Herre Gott', just as it will not do to omit a beat or a bar of a piece by Mozart. The exactness of a phrase is more important than its 'meaning'. I do not want a paraphrase, I want 'the text'. The foreign texts 'mean' (in the sense of irrational response to exactness) something to the natives of those countries but not to me, however well I may translate.

The meaning may be meaningless anyway, but the text will always be the text and no less. The text **is** the meaning, even if it is meaningless or I no longer believe in what the text asserts. Even the assertion is only a symbol or a metaphor, so I must at least stick with the text.

### ENGLAND

I have experienced many Christmases in England and heard the English carols on the radio and in the shops. That did not teach me the texts, but the tunes now speak to me of Christmas, even though they were usually only background music. But I have never "believed in English". Therefore they do not speak as strongly and 'truly' as the countless German chorales, the Catholic ones which I learned as a child or the Lutheran ones which I acquired as a teenager and which now are equally or even more strongly rooted in me.

I have never spent Christmas in an English **family**, and the very thought embarrasses me because I fear to witness customs with which I am expected to sympathise while being emotionally unable to do so: it is too late.

### GIVING CHILDREN A CHOICE

I am grateful to my parents for having been so firm, straight and single-minded in their convictions, so that I could associate myself with these sub-rational traditions, which can still give me pleasure today because they were so early and firmly implanted.

If I had been brought up with doubt before it forced itself upon me, if I had been given merely information **about** religion or religions from which to choose later on, there would be nothing to cling on to now (and also nothing that I could have so strongly rejected as an adult): there would be merely ignorance and indifference and superior rationality which can teach us nothing that is really important.

Paradoxically, in religion, I consider excessive and unsubtle reliance on reason as simple-minded, naïve and self-destructive: Reason (and its twin sister, belief) miss the essence. All discussions based on reason are a waste of time. Religion is not something to be discussed but something to be practised.

This applies to those who want to accept and follow a religion as well as to those who reject it.

I prefer what I have: a deeply rooted memory, something I once strongly believed in, that I could later reject with good reason, and that is still, in a strange way, very important to me.

Without the teaching I received from my parents, I would have nothing but a cold set of assertions about God and man which may be declared as true and false, believed or not believed, and which often pass for religion in simple-minded people. This includes the intelligentsia and most Christian theologians. Such assertions must of necessity be rejected by people (our future atheists) because they mistake religion for a set of beliefs or assertions which may be true or false and, the way they are formulated, must needs turn out to be false.

In this theology of clever simpletons, God is proudly presented (like a toddler presents his potty) as a person and as a transcendent creator (and our missionaries swarm into all the world to propagate this great discovery). His love and power are praised and considered an essential feature of God.

But **must** God be thought of in such childish, rationalist terms? Must he be so anthropomorphic? God = Superman? Is there no possible concept of God that is more elemental, more powerful, more pervasive? Is the Christian God the only God one can reject (or accept)? If we have rejected the Christian God, have we rejected God? Are they the same?

The short-coming of the 'Western atheist' is that he bases his denial of God on the Christian concept of God, which is the most untenable concept imaginable, as if there were not entirely different approaches to religion, different concepts of God available for consideration and rejection.

Such is the pernicious and destructive influence of Christianity in the world that its naïve and worldly categories of thinking are considered fundamental, inescapable properties of the human mind. Therefore even non-Christians (atheists and members of other religions) have been contaminated by Christian thought and

feel compelled to think, and pose their questions, in these terms. Christian atheism therefore also drives members of more subtle religions into atheism! Christianity being mistaken for the paradigm of religion destroys religiosity as such and thereby all other religions.

The religious formulae are important whatever they are supposed to mean, they are great and real comforters, and we need them. They must be implanted in early childhood when we are still capable of responding with curiosity and affection to anything we hear for the first time.

Giving a child **information** about a religion is giving him nothing. What we all need, once in a lifetime, atheists and believers alike, is **experience** of religion. This can be had with no more than one religion at a time. This time is childhood.

Parents should not give their children information about several different religions so that they can choose later. There are good arguments for that policy, but for that very reason they are naïve. They mistake the very nature of religion. One religion is sufficient. The child can reject that religion when he is older if he wishes. He can easily pick up another when he wishes, provided he has once understood in simple unambiguous terms what it means to practise a religion.

A religion is not something we should learn about or talk about, but something we may practise and should enjoy. Comparative religion is not for children. Once the child has 'learnt' one religion and the principles of religious practice through that one religion, he can easily learn what he wishes to learn about another when the time comes. If it is too late for him to become happy with the new religion, still no harm is done. He can stick with his maternal religion (for if he is not strong enough to reject it, it cannot be all that bad for him), or he can abandon religion altogether. None of these possibilities will do him any serious harm.

Parents should not be too eager to give their children options. Children who are, as young adults, so intellectually weak that they depend on being given options rather than taking them anyway, do not deserve the options and are no asset for any other religious community. Converts are usually not worth having anyway.

This year I was given a modern book of Christmas tales for children. I expected some nostalgic pleasure. Most texts were by modern authors. They were written in plain and simple German. They should have spoken to me since I do not mind reading children's stories. But they didn't, they left me cold, for I had no previous association with them and was no longer as open as a child who is fascinated by anything new that is presented to him. The child demands and enjoys repetition and after a while enjoys the text or the tune regardless of the fact that he already knows what it says, or does not understand it at all. Modern German

children who grow up with this book and these stories will probably be able to associate pleasant memories with them, but I cannot. It is too late.

Audiatur et advocatus diaboli: I do not agree with his conclusions because he too treats religion (like most of the simple-minded and pseudo-learned supporters of Christianity) as a set of propositions which can be verified. But he makes his point so brilliantly that it is worth listening to him, for the sake of 'his text'. This is from Arno Schmid: 'Aus dem Leben eines Fauns' (From the life of a faun), first published in 1953, Part 3, p 131 f; Fischer Taschenbuch, Frankfurt/Main; Publisher note: This passage may still be Copyright! ???). The scene is set in 1944 (Nazi period).

<p>Ein Kinderhörchen sagte brav auf:</p> <p>"Händä falltänn. Köpfchänn sänkänn: / Imma an dehn Führer dänkänn!/ Dea uns giebt unsa Täglischbrot.: / Unt uns befrat: aus Allanoht!";</p> <p>und ich konnte nicht anders, ich mußte hin zur Hecke, und besah mir die fünfjährigen Wesen, in bib and tucker, wie sie da auf den dünnen Holzbänkchen saßen. Die Schwester (die die verruchten Verse vorgesprochen hatte), gab Jedem einen kleinen gläsernen Bonbon ins blecherne Henkeltöpfchen, und da drehten sie ihn mit den Löffeln, und &lt;kochten&gt; ihn tüchtig: was ist das für ein Regime, das dergleichen aussintt?! (Aber mir fiel sofort ein, daß ich damals ja auch als erstes Liedel gelernt hatte</p> <p>"Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann (sic!):/ er wohnet in Berlien";</p> <p>und das ist dann also scheinbar überall die unvermeidliche Art, &lt;Bürgerkunde&gt; zu betreiben!: Oh, die Schweine Alle!! In die wehrlosen, zart-unwissenden Wesen solche Wortjauchen zu pumpen! Oder das gleich sinnlose Geleier von "Christi Blut"!: bis zu 17/18 Jahren müßten Kinder in vollkommener geistiger Neutralität aufwachsen, und dann ein paar tüchtige Lehrgänge! Könnt ihnen ja dann abwechselnd die Wunderwippchen von der "Heiligen Dreieinigkeit" und den Lieben Männern in Berlin vorlegen, und zum Vergleich Filosofie und Naturwissenschaften: da würdet Ihr Dunkelmänner Euch ganz schön umsehen!).</p>	<p>A chorus of children recited sagely:</p> <p>"Hände falten, Köpfchen senken: / Immer an den Führer denken!/ Der uns gibt unser täglich Brot / Und uns befreit aus aller Not!"</p> <p>(Fold your hands, / lower your little heads:/ always think of the fuhrer / who gives us our daily bread:/ and puts an end to all our woes!);</p> <p>and I couldn't help it, I had to go to the hedge, and I inspected the five-year-old creatures, in bib and tucker, how they were sitting there on their thin little wooden benches. The kindergarten teacher (who had recited the pernicious verses for them) put a little glass imitation sweet into the little tin pots which each of them had, and the children were turning it with their spoons and were &lt;boiling&gt; it thoroughly: what sort of regime is this which can think up such games?! (But I remembered straightaway that when I was that age, the first cheerful song I had learned was</p> <p>"Our Emperor is a lovely man (sic!):/ and he lives in Berlin";</p> <p>so this seems to be everywhere the unavoidable way to teach &lt;civics&gt;!: oh, those pigs, all of them!! To pump such verbal sewage into the defenceless, tenderly ignorant creatures! Or the equally meaningless bla-bla of "Christ's blood"!: until children are 17 or 18 they should grow up in perfect intellectual neutrality, and then a few thorough courses! Then you present them in turn with the miracle frauds of the "Holy Trinity" and of the Lovely Men in Berlin, and for comparison filosofie and science: then you obscurantists can be sure of a surprise!).</p>
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**THE FULL TEXT OF'  
DER KAISER IST EIN LIEBER MANN@**

Tune: Üb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit, or:  
Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen, from Mozart's Magic Flute

Lied "Der Kaiser", dessen Text in den preußischen Schulfibeln um 1900 abgedruckt wurde:

Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann,  
er wohnet in Berlin,  
und wär' das nicht so weit von hier'  
dann ging' ich heut noch hin.

Und was ich bei dem Kaiser wollt'?  
Ich gäb' ihm meine Hand  
und reicht' die schönsten Blumen ihm,  
die ich im Garten fand.

Und sagte dann: "In treuer Lieb'  
bring' ich die Blumen dir!"  
Und dann lief' ich geschwinde fort  
und wär' gleich wieder hier.

**FRANCE, PORTUGAL, JAMAICA AND SPAIN**

I have spent some Christmases in France with an adult clan, but without religious associations, without chanting and without going to church. For me, something was missing. These were cheerful pleasant occasions, socially interesting too, because my hosts were charming and belonged to a big conservative and interesting family, but they remained secular and did not move me. The same happened during a Portuguese Christmas when I did not even sample a church and Portuguese singing and organ playing. The only French Christmas music I can respond to is Marc-Antoine Charpentier's 'Messe de minuit pour noel', which is based on ancient French carols, and this year (2000) at midnight mass in Tréguier Cathedral, I was fortunate to hear parts of it again and be reminded of pleasant times. However, the choir was out of tune and at times went off like a run-away train or rather a stampeding herd (completely in unison with itself though), much to the consternation of the conductor, and of the organist, who did not know whether to yield and jump to catch up, or to insist on his score, which would have resulted in a cacophony right through to the final solution, also known as 'cadence' or 'Twilight of God'). No English cathedral choir would have put on such a shambles, nor would it have happened in even medium-sized churches in Germany.

How much discomfort a single unbeliever can cause the church even in modern times is demonstrated by the emotions (and continuing pranks) surrounding a statue that stands outside Tréguier Cathedral.

Tréguier is the birthplace of Ernest Renan (1823-1892), who became famous for his excellent French prose and infamous for his book about the life of Jesus (which is still in print as a paperback), in which he asserted (like Albert Schweitzer) that Jesus was the son of man, completely the son of man, and nothing but the son of man, which convinced the clerics of the time that Renan was the son of a bitch, completely the son of a bitch, and nothing but the son of a bitch. The cathedral square (la place du Martray) belongs to the liberal (i.e. anti-clerical, Don Camillo and Peppone) City Council. The cathedral chapter could therefore not prevent the Council from erecting, in 1903, a colossal statue of a sedentary Renan outside the cathedral so that every church goer has to pass it. They put three then provocative quotes from Renan's works on the monument:

1 On ne fait de grandes choses qu'avec la science et la vertu.	Great things cannot be done except through science and virtue (courage?).
2 La foi qu'on a eue ne doit jamais être une chaîne.	The faith which one has had must never be a chain.
3 L'homme fait la beauté de ce qu'il aime et la sainteté de ce qu'il croit.	It is man who infuses with beauty that which he loves and with holiness that in which he believes.

The council ordered that every churchgoer has to raise his hat when he passes the statue. The chapter countered with introducing a preparatory rite to all its masses. The faithful now arrive hatless and, as they pass Renan, they spit out, that the scripture might be fulfilled which sayeth: 'And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads' (Matthew 27:39). For many years, the clergy refused to take the Holy Sacrament to the deathbed of people who lived in the 'rue Renan'.

In 1904, the church got its own back by buying a tiny piece of land on the river promenade, just on the stretch where the atheists most love to walk and take counsel together against the LORD and against his anointed. On 19 May 1904, in the presence of Cardinal Labouré, they erected a 'calvaire' (crucifixion group), officially known as 'Calvaire de Réparation', 'commandé par les catholiques en signe de protestation contre l'érection de la statue d'Ernest Renan sur la place du Martray' (as a plaque for tourists says), ordered by the Catholics in protest against the erection of the statue of Ernest Renan, and equipped it with a tablet which says, in Latin, Breton and French:

'Truly this man was the Son of God.'

<b>VERE HIC HOMO FILIUS DEI ERAT</b>
<b>E GWIRIONEZ AN DEN-MAN A OA MAB DA ZOUE</b>
<b>CET HOMME ÉTAIT VRAIMENT LE FILS DE DIEU</b>
<b>(MARC 15:39)</b>

Here too people spit, of course. So the church provided spittoons. During Holy Week, however, (its date is the only thing the liberals want to know about Christianity), the liberals erect a kiosk on the promenade where they sell vinegar, sponges and bamboo canes, and Coca-Cola-Registered-Trademark.

When I visited Tréguier cathedral on Christmas Eve, someone had surrounded the Renan statue with grave lights: a posthumous conversion of the old bugger, an attempt to draw him willy-nilly into the Christian community, an indication that the next Popess is planning to canonise him...? Who knows? Pranks on the statue continue to this day. Some time ago, somebody had draped the statue in toilet paper, and when I visited Tréguier again to copy the quotations on the Calvaire, someone had stuck the branch of a tree under his arm.

And so the disgrace continues.

I spent one Christmas on a Jamaican beach and felt lonely and outcast because of the personal circumstances which had brought me to the island.

I was lucky in Spain because I had learnt and enjoyed some villancicos, had learnt them so thoroughly, that they spoke to me.

<p>1. Hacia Belén va un borrico,  Yo me remendaba, yo me remendé,  cargado de chocolate.  Lleva su chocolatera,  Yo me remendaba, yo me remendé,  Yo m'eché un remiendo,  yo me lo quité,  su molinillo y su anatre.  Maria, Maria,  ven acá corriendo,  que al chocolatillo se lo están comiendo.</p>	<p>1. Towards Bethlehem goes a donkey,  I remember, I remember,  laden with chocolate.  It carries its chocolate-pot  I remember, I remember,  I remember, yet I forget,  its chocolate mill and its stove.  Mary, Mary,  come here running,  because they are eating up all the chocolate.</p>
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This is, of course, a far cry from our German oh so theological tradition. I spent that Christmas in the warmth of a family in which the mother was pious, whereas the two adult children and the father were atheists. I could not sample church since I did not wish to make a point of it. I like to visit the catacombs secretly so that I have to share my experiences neither with eager believers nor with naive outsiders. I prefer to look, listen and absorb without comment and without a companion. The heroic father followed the will of his wife and, for sixteen years, he went to church without fail and without faith every Sunday with her and the children, until **they** refused to go any longer. On that day, the father resolutely stopped too. He had only been waiting for that moment, had gone merely to keep up appearances for the sake of the children. From now on the wife went alone.

#### MUNICH AND CAPRI

I spent one lonely, snowy Christmas in a cheap and cold boarding house in an industrial suburb of Munich where I had a holiday job with a transport company while studying at Innsbruck University. I spent most of the time in pubs in order to keep warm, reading books and writing settings of Christmas carols and drinking mulled wine, while listening to the jukebox and the pop songs of the day.

This was a perversely attractive time, enjoyable loneliness combined with the alien social environment, so much time to think about so many things which I do not remember, and so much time to observe new things. I often think back with nostalgia to the hardest and most unpleasant times in my life, such as my very first years in London, as a young man. Perhaps it is these harsh environments which are also (luckily for me) rare and unusual, and therefore interesting.

I tend to be disappointed when I go to services in foreign churches, presumably because I do not know the music, the texts

or the ritual. Yet I keep going, religiously (sit venia verbo), in the vain hope to experience a pleasant surprise. Presumably it will happen on the last Sunday before my ascent to heaven (Eternity Sunday). Until then I will keep trying.

I spent a strangely lonely Christmas in Capri while my girlfriend and her daughter in Naples, just a mile away across the sea, was for some reason unable to have me, or had **\*\*\* I \*\*\*** demanded to be alone in Capri at Christmas? I was the only guest in the little house in which Erika Mann stayed regularly in summer. There are no winter tourists on Capri. I walked to the little church by the Piazza above the harbour and went to midnight mass. I was unable to get involved. My fault.

### FUSIO

#### IN THE COLD

High in the Mountains above Locarno, in the Ticino, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, on the Mediterranean side of the Alps, is the hamlet of Fusio, where I spent a memorable Christmas with Pilar.

Fusio had been dear to me for many years, and whenever I needed a refuge, a few totally free days, undisturbed even by my own thoughts, I would go to Fusio. On several occasions, I had spent three days there to systematically brush up my Italian before joining business battle in Milan, Bologna and Naples.

To get there, one takes a coach of the aptly named regional transport company "Ferrovie ed Autolinee Regionali Ticinesi", whose logo, FART, is prominently displayed on the rear of all its vehicles. I had known Fusio only in spring and summer. There were a few inns and hardly any tourists. Fusio is the highest inhabited point of a small side valley, and there is no through traffic.

On that memorable Christmas Eve, we had spent most of the day sightseeing in the spring-like climate of Locarno, and had paid our respects to the Madonna del Sasso, before taking the last of the three daily coaches for the two-hour trip to Fusio. For about an hour, the coach runs on a large level road alongside a river in a wide valley, then branches off into a side valley. The road begins to rise and becomes ever steeper until, in yet another side valley, the bus has to climb up the hillside through serpentines and narrow hairpin curves, which it takes at dizzying speeds. Pilar was terrified when she looked into what appeared to be an abyss and saw deep down below her a stretch of road we had traversed only a few minutes ago.

When we arrived in Fusio, three natives and us, the natives went home, the bus turned back not to return till tomorrow lunchtime, and we were left with our suitcases in the deep snow and silent darkness. I left Pilar with the luggage and went scouting. All

inns were closed: no strangers are expected in winter. On a hillock, slightly raised above the village and surrounded by tall fir trees was the hotel which I knew from previous visits: the hotel was closed but its lounge was warm and open. There were rooms at this inn, but they were not "on offer", for they were not, and could not be, heated, the water in the taps was frozen -- but we could have one. I negotiated a discount: I never miss such a chance.

I am reminded of the mother of a German girlfriend, who went to Genova for a dirt-cheap holiday when the town had been struck by a cholera epidemic, was shunned by tourists, and 80% discounts were offered by the desperate hoteliers. "These are offers," she said, "too good to refuse!" By God's grace she survived, proof yet again for the existence of a loving father in heaven.

Pilar usually insists on certain minimum comforts and is not fond of backpacker hotels, for which she has coined the term "hotel romantique". But she had no choice: accept this room, stay in the snow, or go begging for a stable and a manger.

We carried our cases up the hillock and entered the lounge. Six curious faces on the bar stools, five men and one woman (there is always just one sad and lonely woman out on Christmas Eve to brighten the bars), turned towards us. It was warm and smelt of smoke, beer and wine.

We stayed in that warm room until closing time, Pilar drank mulled wine and I had hot chocolate. Then we put on layers over layers of clothes; we used all we had: several pairs of socks, underpants, vests, tracksuit and jeans, pullovers, scarves, an anorak, a knitted cap, gloves (gloves in bed!), and thus chastely overdressed, a Christmas Eve and a Christmas Adam, we lifted the frozen quilt (which immediately snapped in two places), climbed into bed, huddled together, chastely kept apart by the five inches of clothing that separated us, and comforted each other by breathing into each other's faces.

If Pilar, who comes from the Philippines, had been less plucky, less willing to fight to overcome her own fear and prejudice, she would have insisted that we catch the one coach at lunchtime on Christmas Day to return to warm and sunny Locarno, where a young Italian-Swiss lad had tried to chat her up by saying, in his incomparable English: "Hi, Chinatown, want to join me for a drink?" However, when she had seen Fusio in daylight, the snow-covered mountain tops surrounding us, sensed the prospect of an afternoon walk up to the reservoir a mile above the village, had breathed the crisp air, seen the fir trees, heard the silence, she decided not to bail out but to explore and enjoy this God-given place for another twenty-four hours and put up with sleeping again "fully overdressed" in our unheatable room.

### THE LOGOS

It was Christmas Day. We walked through the village to look for the church. Every house had a small presepio standing on the snow-covered sill outside the window. We arrived well in time and sat among the congregation of 50 which just about filled the church. The priest was white-haired and kind. The third mass, the Missa in die, was being said.

The main gospel of the Missa in die is the beginning of St John's Gospel, "In principio erat verbum, in the beginning was the Logos," a gospel which is so important that, at that time, it had to be read at every mass throughout the year as the final, the closing, gospel, but therefore also was never chosen as the text for a homily. It was part of the furniture, no longer noticed. Luckily so for the priests, for it is not easy, and it is risky to preach about this gnostic gospel for agnostics, this atheist gospel that has managed to slip undetected into the canon of the theists. But today our plucky priest had chosen to talk about this text to a village congregation, a congregation of simple believers.

He spoke about the Logos, the pure spirit, pure consciousness that existed in the beginning, unmanifested, that was uncreated, without beginning, eternal, that was therefore "existence" as such and for whose existence, therefore, no cause or explanation needs to be sought. That Logos did not create the manifested world, it is not a "she" or a "he" that is apart from her creation. Everything that came into existence, like us, came into existence "through that Logos" (omnia per ipsum facta sunt), but was not "made by that Logos": "Et verbum caro factum est, the Logos became flesh", it became manifested in the visible world.

That event of manifestation is what people popularly call "the creation of the world", but since the manifested world is not a creation outside the Logos but a transformation, a manifestation, of the Logos, we all are the Logos. The Logos has become flesh in us.

The child in the manger symbolises the fact that the unbounded spirit, the Logos, God, who is nothing but conscious existence and has no form manifests as visible, material, limited and therefore "humble" form.

When we are called "brothers of Jesus" or "children of God", this is only another way of saying that we are God, the Logos, which is the only thing that really and immutably exists: whatever we see in the world is merely his reflection and manifestation.

We need not believe in that God, and we need not doubt his existence. The question does not arise. Nothing else exists. We do exist and are aware of it: our awareness of existence is His consciousness in us, and that consciousness is the only thing that is permanent. We cannot believe in our own existence and

deny the existence of God, the Logos: for we and the Logos are the same; only the names are different: the Logos as such is unmanifested: in us and in all the so-called "creation" the Logos is manifested. The Logos does not exist outside his "creation". If the creation ceased to exist (as opposed to becoming unmanifested), God would cease to exist. But nothing that "exists" in that sense can cease to "exist".

We cannot conceive the non-existence of the material world. Therefore we cannot conceive the non-existence of God.

**We** are the child in the manger, and it teaches us that "We and the Logos are one", as Jesus said later: "I and the father are one". That insight means the end of fear, the end of real suffering, it means immortality and victory over death. "And the word became flesh," said the old priest and bent the knee, "Amen".

During the holiest part of the mass, there was an interruption: The old priest observed something on the steps of the altar, tried to suppress a giggle, in vain, and soon was shaking with laughter. He explained something to the congregation which made them laugh but which I did not understand: all I can guess is that the altar boys had played some prank on him. A truly merry Christmas, I thought, and in Italian the true nature of God is easier to understand than his jokes.

I continued reflecting on the sermon, repeating to myself what I had heard and spinning out its implications. Perhaps it was a good thing that neither the Pope, nor the Bishop, nor the learned Fathers Of The Church, nor Torquemada, nor any Jesuit or any Dominican, nor any member of any theological faculty was in that mountain church. None of the people capable of understanding the old priest were in that church, which was filled only by people who, like the shepherds, would mainly remember the prank and the priest's uncontrollable laughter, who would take comfort from his words without understanding them, from the message which is so simple that no more books on God have to be written, no more disputes can arise, and all theological faculties can be closed.

Therefore there is no need to distinguish between atheists and believers or for one to convert the other, for the Logos exists whether we believe in it or not. Atheists and believers, each with his own religion, are both fools, each in his own way. Belief in God presupposes that we are distinct from God, that we are the subject (the ones who believe) and he is the object (the one who is perceived through faith). But since only God is, God is the only perceiver, the only observer, and all he can perceive is "himself". He has no parts (unlike I who have my eye which can see my hand), and nothing but him exists. Therefore for him "perceiving" can be nothing but "being conscious". He is therefore "calm", nothing can ruffle his "equanimity". This infinite calmness is called "bliss". The Logos is existence, is consciousness, is bliss. The more we learn to perceive our identity with that Logos, the greater our calmness and bliss will

become. A good religion will lead us nearer that insight if we co-operate. But no religion can simply **give** us that insight. Obtaining it is a matter of effort, time and grace.

This God has no attributes and does not talk. That is the reason why there is so little to be said about him.

The Logos does not listen to us. If we need a confidant to talk to, daily or in extremis, e.g. when we are in the dentist's chair, in ecstasy or the depths of despair, we can invent God in any form we like, in our imagination, our words, our speculations, or as a graven image. Graven images are best, especially as some rationalist smart-ass has so gravely forbidden them. The Logos will manifest in the form in which his devotees prefer him: a traffic surveillance camera, as a baby, a young hippy, a criminal on the cross, with balls or with boobs, as a piece of bread, as a golden calf, a pigeon, a sheep, or as a vacuum in the sky.

Even the vacuum is a God, the reverse side of a coin, so to speak, the Logos who is "existence per se" is also "non-existence", but the vacuum is, perhaps, not the most comforting God to talk to. If so, why not choose another? There are plenty on offer and we can invent more. And they shall be called 'designer gods'.

#### EXIT FATHER ERASMI

After mass was over, I waited for the priest, to thank him for his sermon. He was delighted, introduced himself as Dr Erasmi and invited us for Christmas lunch. It turned out that he spoke English fluently.

He was born in the centenary year of 1900 and was seventy when I met him. He had studied in Oxford, Marburg, Göttingen and Freiburg (Breisgau), met Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) and Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) personally and heard their lectures. He had read (Friedrich) Max Müller (1823-1900) and dipped into the Upanishads and, at the beginning of the century, sympathised with the Modernists, with George Tyrrell (1861-1909), Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), and he had visited Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925) in his Hampstead villa shortly before he died.

Modernism is, of course, never dead but rises from the dead, like the plague (Camus), when the Pope least expects it, currently in the guise of Küng and Drewermann (was hat man dir, du armer Papst, getan, weißt du es wohl?) and their supporters. It is the yeast that keeps the church alive.

Vor der Kathedrale steht ein Drewermann, Hört nicht auf den Bischof, drewert, was er kann.	Outside the cathedral Drewermann's in sight, Challenges the bishop, drewers with all his might.
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This ditty was inspired by:

Drüben hinterm Dorfe steht ein Leiermann  
 Und mit starren Fingern dreht er, was er kann.  
 Barfuß auf dem Eise wankt er hin und her  
 Und sein kleiner Teller bleibt ihm immer leer.

The source of "Weit du es wohl" (above) is Goethe's "Kennst du das Land".

### IS CHRIST INDISPENSABLE?

Father Erasmi admired Friedrich Heiler for his tolerant understanding of both the catholic and the evangelical form of religiosity. Heiler had, as a young man, converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism, motivated by exceptionally strong sentiments, by profound love for Christianity in the form he considered ideal. Instead of becoming an aggressive opponent of the Catholic Church, as 'apostates' so easily do, Heiler continued to work for mutual understanding of the two denominations and showed much sympathy with Catholicism. Father Erasmi appreciated that but chided Heiler for his belief that it was vital to make up for the 'inadequacies' of Hinduism by sending Christian missionaries to India. "Heiler's brain was obstinately set in Christian ruts of thinking."

"How important is Christ to you? Are you a Christian?" asked Father Erasmi.

"No."

"And yet you came to church. Why?"

"Wherever I am, I will follow the religion and the customs of my hosts as best I can -- if they let me. Therefore on high festivals I like to go to church. And if I pass a church and have the time, I will enter it for a minute or two. But I prefer to do it secretly. I can never call myself a Christian because I would be ashamed for anyone to think I belong to that crowd."

"That is strong language. You sound convinced. Why?"

"Because a Christian, good Christian or bad Christian, conservative or progressive, liberal or orthodox, believes that Christ is absolutely essential for any religious practice worth its name. Even Christians who are unhappy with their churches, or with the Pope's views on birth control, or with certain dogmas (e.g. papal infallibility; bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven), etc., believe that. In spite of their dissent with their churches, or the doctrines which have been superimposed on his person, they feel they have to salvage at least the original Jesus, or Christ, if they want to salvage a religion worth having, since, on no account, do they want to become atheists or heathens."

"I know many dissenting theologians like that," said the priest.

"So do I. And some years ago I met a woman, very intelligent in her profession, also lonely and introspective, and therefore drawn to "new-ageism" or what not, even more ridiculously called "esoterics", i.e. a syncretistic show-off religion for sick and idle women, whose sitting-room and kitchen was full of strange oriental books, symbols, images and names (one would have thought that she had converted to some non-Christian religion!), but again and again, the name Christ cropped up in her museum of religious names / concepts. "Ohne Jesus läuft bei mir nichts," she declared, in a rather flippant, slightly aggressive, German idiom, when I expressed my surprise. ("Without Jesus, I won't do any business"; i.e. none of my religious practices are valid if Jesus is not involved.)

I intensely dislike that notion. Christianity can be made effective (practised intelligently) without reference to other religions. This is what she can try to do. Or, if she doesn't like Christianity and if another religion makes her happy, she should turn to that religion and practise it properly as its "native" followers do, without excesses, no better, no worse: in which case she doesn't need Jesus: he is not indispensable, except in Christianity."

"What do you think of the historical Jesus? Doesn't he set a good example for the world?" suggested Father Erasmi.

"I will not make a desperate effort to salvage Jesus, the teacher, or Christ, the Saviour, for a doubting world," I replied. "He was not the best teacher of ethics and he was not a saviour in any meaningful sense of the word. The world, and especially the followers of other religions, can manage perfectly well, and better, without him and should do so. There is no point in trying to restore the "real Jesus" by freeing Christianity of all the doctrines, customs and superstitions, of all the interpreters, priests and power structures that have, over two millennia, accrued around Jesus.

I often have reason to think about Christianity. I then make the effort of showing a more relaxed approach towards Jesus and Christianity not because I think Jesus is in any way "essential" in absolute terms, but because we are now saddled with him and Christianity, our minds and modes of thinking are conditioned by it, and we cannot possibly universally adopt a more rational religion. Therefore we might as well make the best of what we have got, rather than casting out religion altogether (which many people, especially the ill-informed young, are doing now) or trying to introduce another one, which we can never do with universal success. It is important that the larger part of a community have the same religion in common, e.g. have the same notions of right and wrong, the same stories to refer to, the same ideals. Even a bad religion is better than no religion at all."

"You are saying some daring things which it is better even for me not to think and even less to say."

Father Erasmi had once been destined for a prominent career in the church but had fallen out with the authorities because of his unorthodox views, and been banished to Siberia, so to speak, the end of the world, to this little village where people would not take him seriously and where therefore he could do no harm. His confratres called him 'Dr Con Fusio', to which he replied: "Thank God they don't know French, and they don't even know all letters of the alphabet: Can't they at least grant me a 'z'?".

I told him about my upbringing: "Without the strict and straight way in which our parents taught, lived and nourished religion, I would not be as open-minded and perceptive towards other religions (including the great religion called 'atheism') as I am now. They developed my sense of what Rudolf Otto called 'das Heilige', 'The Idea of the Holy', which is even more important for the perception of reality than so-called belief in God itself."

This reference excited the old priest and he showed me proudly a copy of Rudolf Otto's 'The Idea of the Holy' (Das Heilige) (1917), with a dedication by Rudolf Otto himself. Two passages were marked in red:

- "The numinous, the awe-inspiring element of religious experience, evades precise formulation in words. Like the beauty of a musical composition, it is non-rational and eludes complete conceptual analysis; hence it must be discussed in symbolic terms."
- "We are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, mysterium tremendum... The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane,' non-religious mood of everyday experience... It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of -- whom or what? In the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures."

Father Erasmi told me about a visit to Kendal (Lake District, England) where he had spent two weeks with a Quaker family. His host had once told him:

"We, like most other people, know in broad outline, what is good, and we try to behave accordingly: we should help and not hurt others, not steal or kill, not go to war, not quarrel unnecessarily, not cheat the taxman, not be greedy (therefore we do not gamble), help anyone who is in trouble (that's why our ancestors in America sheltered fugitive slaves)... The bible

cannot make us do things which we believe are wrong (e.g. to stone unbelievers, heretics, adulterers, blasphemers, witches, apostates, homosexuals, girls who have pre-marital sex and persistently disobedient children [Leviticus 20:27, 24:16; Numbers 15,35; Deuteronomy 13:11, 17:5, 21:21, 22:21, 22:24]) nor give us excuses to indulge into our vices after clever interpretation (casuistry). The bible is neither our tyrant nor our alibi. We do not do things "because the bible says so". The bible is not God's word, but it says many inspiring or comforting things. If we find a sentence inspiring, we take it to help us in our efforts. If we find the bible unhelpful or wicked, we simply ignore it, as we do when we see a believer, in any religion, break its or our ideals. Our task is to become better and happier people, not to 'assess' scriptures, other people or other religions. We follow our religion in our pursuit of happiness. We avoid that which makes us unhappy .

We listen in silence and try to perceive the spirit of God. We allow the bible to inspire us but not to rule us. We take what encourages us in our efforts or what comforts us in our need; we ignore what is useless or contrary to the spirit. Religion is a toolbox for people who try to live well and be content. We choose the tools we need."

Father Erasmi had been to the headquarters of the Salvation Army in Camberwell too. I told him about my admiration for them: "They do not hold to dogma and feel that doing charitable works is a better way of honouring Christ than holding the correct beliefs about him. When they collect money, they always get a contribution from me. When I was a young and inexperienced man in England and my daughter Lisl was on her way, I found out that I had forgotten to book a hospital bed for my wife sufficiently in advance. The doctor told us, my wife could not be accommodated anywhere in the National Health System. Someone told us about the Salvation Army's 'Mothers' Hospital' in Clapton (East London) and they gave us a bed. My wife, Gloria (in excelsis Deo; nomen est omen), was suffering from high blood pressure; she was in a dangerous condition. To save her life a premature birth had to be induced. Lisl spent the first weeks of her life in an incubator. Both mother and daughter survived. I owe that to the Salvation Army. They did me a good turn, and I will never forget it."

I told Father Erasmi about the simple lessons of Lesskow's 'The Beast'. He knew Lesskow and had an Italian translation of his works.

"It is not dogma or belief that matters but only the works that result," I said. "If the atmosphere and environment of Christmas, be it in Church or at home, makes a person receptive for the message of 'Das Tier', to give just one example, or any other message that is 'useful' today, then

- it is quite irrelevant whether Jesus was or was not the son of god, as Albert Schweitzer and Ernest Renan argued, or whether he, as George Wells more convincingly demonstrates,

never existed at all and is as legendary as Little Red Riding Hood, as the Christmas story of St Luke and the childhood stories of the apocryphal gospels,

- it is quite irrelevant what the official Christmas prayers or texts actually say or mean (as long as they are faithfully recited, preserved, kept alive and handed down, by believers and unbelievers alike),
- it is quite irrelevant whether the birth of Jesus or his existence 'in heaven' makes any real difference in the world and whether he can or can not hear our prayers,
- and it is quite irrelevant what the priest actually says in his perhaps poetic but probably confused and not quite convincing sermon, but he must say 'Hoc est enim corpus meum' and not 'Hocus porcus fidelibus'
- it is irrelevant whether we believe that a graven image **is** God or that it **represents** God, even though, of course, it **is** God
- it is irrelevant whether we have the right belief or the wrong belief as long as we act right
- it is irrelevant whether he lived sub Pontio Pilato and whether the Holy Ghost procedit filioque or not

Nothing matters, as long as the result of all this is something good that happens in the individual, even though it cannot really be predicted or caused by the words and the rituals.

This also means that it is pointless to argue about truth and falsity in different religions or between believers and non-believers, to say nothing of trying to convince or convert anybody or, even worse, exercise any form of pressure as happened during the times of the inquisition, during the Calvinist regime in Geneva, and in many other far too clever religions and denominations all over the world."

"It is nice to talk to someone for a change who does not treat me as Dr Confusio," said the old man with a trembling voice. "It can get lonely up here, in these spiritual heights. I have been banished to the end of the world, -- well not for much longer."

"I agree with much of what you say," said the priest. "It does not follow, of course, from the fact that many believers are bigots and hypocrites, that every atheist or humanist is automatically a saint or a superior moral human being. But you did not want to say that, did you? I think a religious education can help to instil a desire for virtue and self-improvement in young people that may remain even if later on they turn into non-believers. Therefore the effort in childhood has not been in vain."

I let myself go during my sermon today, talking more to myself than to my congregation. But sometimes one has to articulate one's thoughts, and it helps to have a listener, even if the listener does not understand. It can get terribly lonely. Anyway, it was my sermon that brought you along and made you wait for me, quite unexpectedly, so my words were not completely wasted, not even for me.

I know that talking isn't really important. I can just help and encourage my parishioners from time to time, help them not to sin too much and cope with their guilt, and listen to their worries. And sometimes my stories, my Christian stories, help me to do that."

He fetched Lesskow's story 'At the World's End': A young and inexperienced bishop is keen to convert the nomadic people in Siberia who at present are Buddhists or Shamanists to Christianity. After having visited a tribe, he realises that conversion is pointless. People have their religion, it works, and they should be left alone with it. Ours is not superior. These people will not understand the Christian doctrine, even if they understood it, it would be irrelevant, and their notions of right and wrong, and their behaviour, are better than those of the Christians. He has nothing to teach them. The old monk Kiriak, who has known this all along, says to the bishop: "You cling to words like a lawyer. What for? Every word is a lie. I condemn nothing. Consider what makes me so rich: it is love and not hatred. Be patient. You and I have been baptised, that's like receiving a printed invitation for a big party. We attend because we know we have been invited, we have our ticket. Then we see someone without a ticket going to the same house. We think: 'Look at the fool, he's wasting his time, for he won't be admitted. When he arrives, the security guards will get rid of him.' As we arrive, we see the security guard is about to chase him away, but the host sees it and lets him enter, saying: 'What do I care whether he has a ticket. I know him personally. Please, come in, my friend, I am so happy to see you.' He leads him into the house and treats him better than those who came with a ticket.' "

(Chapter 5)

"God does not need believers even though he has to put up with them," I said. "If he has any sense, he will prefer atheists (especially those who hate him with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind, who are not lukewarm like the believers, whom he will spue out of his mouth) for they tend to be more sincere, and God, being pure existence and consciousness, does, unlike us, not depend on the presence of an observer or admirer. He can do as well without us as we can without him."

"Revelation 3:16," smiled the old priest, "I wouldn't go so far as to encourage people to hate God, that would really get me into trouble with Rome, but I can see your point. You cannot hate God unless you fervently believe in him; thus a person who hates God is very close to him. Atheists and unbelievers do not hate **God**."

If they hate anything, they hate bigots, unpleasant believers, the church, its doctrines, its rituals, the hierarchy, its representatives. You can "love" God without believing in him because, in the church, "loving God" is the done thing, so it is easy to go through the motions of loving God without even really believing in him. People who commit crimes do not do so because they hate God but because they are greedy, want to satisfy some desire or other. Only those who hate God are sure to hate with conviction, and they are therefore very rare; I have never met one."

Father Erasmi opened Max Müller's autobiography and found a typed piece of paper which he gave me to read:

"I read Gita 3:11, on the interdependence of gods and men. Idea: gods and whatever is said about them, ditto rituals, prasad, sacrifices, vibrations, nadis, karma, etc, are not descriptions of reality but MODELS (like those of physics, psychology, mathematics, cybernetics) which help us to get through life without too much pain or confusion, and to make sense of the world, of the events we observe. Blessed are those who take these models as literal truth. They may have their way (i.e. we may leave them alone) provided they do not abuse these models (their limited understanding) by deriving (as if by irrefutable logic) other "facts" from them or deriving "laws" and norms of behaviour from them which they try to impose on the rest of mankind. If they merely do their own thing, they deserve to be protected and supported.

"Those who are misled by the modes of nature get attached to the works produced by them. But let no one who knows the whole unsettle the minds of the ignorant who know only a part." [cf Gita 3:29]"

"This allows," said Father Erasmi, "for literal believers and 'enlightened' believers to co-habit in the same religion: why not in the same church. It requires tolerance of those 'enlightened' souls who know better. They must keep their 'superior' knowledge to themselves."

"Yes," I said, "but it also requires constraint by the naïve believers. They cannot have it entirely their own way, as at present they often do. If they try to gather followers for their narrow views or throw their weight about, they should be mercilessly ridiculed by those who know better. We all must permit and accept ambiguity or uncertainty. This is not the same as declaring nonsense to be literally or historically true and then defending the truth of the unjustifiable nonsense by declaring it to be a divine mystery and particularly adorable (valuable) at that. The "quia absurdum" is an absurd creed."

"I cannot quarrel with that," said Father Erasmi, "even though you are challenging a Father of the Church."

"Jews, Christians and Muslims are not the only monotheists. Jews: One God. Christians: One God, three persons. Muslims: One God, one person. Hindus: One God (Brahman), 999 persons ± one million -- nobody has seen any point in counting yet. What a happy people, what a cheerful approach to God," said the old priest.

The priest had a harmonium and I played a few chorales for him. I ended with variations on the New Year chorale.

10. Hilf gnädig allen Kranken, Gib fröhliche Gedanken Den hochbetrübten Seelen, Die sich mit Schwermut quälen!	Be with the sick and ailing, Their Comforter unfailing; Dispelling grief and sadness, Oh, give them joy and gladness!
---	--

#### TOWARDS ANOTHER NEW YEAR

On the Feast of Stephen, Pilar and I sat in our coach to return from the extraordinary world of the spirit to the plains of our daily work. I had much to think about. The tune of the New Year chorale kept turning in my head.

"We, the atheists," I thought, "need the believers and the priests to keep the churches warm, the organs sounding and God alive. They need us to stop them from becoming too confident and overbearing. It is a symbiotic relationship. I thank God every day that not everybody is as smart as me. Otherwise who would pray for me, just in case? A God who is not worshipped dies, as happened to the gods of Egypt, Greece and Rome, who were once as real as God Father Son And Holy Ghost. A God-forsaken church building, however artistic, without prayers, music and incense becomes a sight, and a pretty sad one too."

11. Und endlich, was das meiste, Füll uns mit deinem Geiste, Der uns hier herrlich ziere Und dort zum Himmel führe!	Above all else, Lord, send us Thy Spirit to attend us, Within our hearts abiding, To heaven our footsteps guiding.
12. Das alles woll'st du geben, O meines Lebens Leben, Mir und der Christenshare Zum sel'gen neuen Jahre!	All this Thy hand bestoweth, Thou Life, whence our life floweth. To all Thy name confessing Grant, Lord, Thy New Year's blessing.
Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)	Translation: John Kelly (1833-1890)

+ Here endeth this story +

## ^(2) Klaus Bung: And peace on earth

### Impressum

Klaus Bung: And peace on earth

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### EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Two neighbours, Kevin and Shahabuddin, have a long-standing feud. After a public slanging match, Shahabuddin writes a masterly letter of complaint to the police. They resolve the dispute on Christmas Eve.

## Klaus Bung: And peace on earth



**The brave traveller** who tries to make his way across the hills which mercifully separate Darwen from Blackburn and keep the thieves of Darwen away from the burglars of Blackburn, and vice versa, may haply come across the obscure village of Rossenham, hidden in a narrow valley, with its picturesque church, its ancient pub ('The Cock and Bull'), a barber, a grocer's, no post office, and only one long line of terrace houses, inhabited by the families of 79 goras (1), 18 Muslims, 1 Bajan (2), 1 Nigerian prince, 3 Hindus, 2 Sikhs and 1 militant atheist, who spends his weekends in the pub, holding forth in front of a crowd of 78 goras and 1 renegade Muslim that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem (3) (not the least among the cities of Juda) and that in fact he wasn't born anywhere at all and is as legendary or historical as Little Red Riding Hood, and threatens with

eternal damnation all who do not accept this as gospel truth.
---

One of the sights of Rossenham, a relic from the times when it was still a thriving mill-town and even once produced a poet ('The Rossenham Poet', as she is known to the world), is its police station, still manned by 7 officers, 8 more than this sleepy village needs, for all its citizens live very peacefully side by side and don't care much about what Usama gets up to or what happens in Haiti, or in Kashmir, or in Sri Lanka, or Northern Ireland, or Sudan, or Rwanda, or Palestine, or Bosnia, or Ukraine, or London ('Where is that?'), or at whose fireplace the Home Secretary (Whatsisname?) warms himself from October to April. They keep themselves to themselves, love or hate their neighbours wherever they come from (like their Father which is in heaven and maketh his sun to rise (4) on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain, in Blackburn and Rossenham especially rain, on the just and on the unjust alike) and duly ignore whatever spiteful things their respective gods tell them in their holy scriptures.

'We ain't here to serve God,' one of them declared, 'God is here to serve us, and if he does the job he is paid for, we will have peace.'



Now the thing with the overstaffed police station of Rossenham was this. The Home Secretary had been so busy for many years, what with his private life and spreading joy, and with computer systems breaking down or never starting to work in the first place, and an avalanche of passport applications, and armies of bogus asylum seekers and benefit scroungers invading this country ('a menace greater than Hitler', the man, blinded by prejudice, is rumoured to have said), and to crown it all Mrs Sadam Hussain and Mrs Usama bint Laden applying for political asylum, - he had simply forgotten to close down Rossenham Police Station when he axed so many others in the country side, and the people of Rossenham had seen no reason to remind him.

When our weary traveller arrives in the Cock and Bull, he will first be questioned for news from the outside world. Then he will hear the story of the quarrel between Kevin and his neighbour, Sheikh Shahabuddin.



Shahabuddin lives in a small terrace house, where he runs a Social Club for elderly Muslims. One day Kevin bought a caravan, which he uses for only two weeks in the year, during which he goes holidaying in Padiham.

Shahabuddin is not a literary man, he is a bit greedy, a bit stupid, his English is rudimentary (except that he understands swearing when he hears it and can give as good as he gets), and he is not good at writing letters or filling in application forms.

So he employs a part-time assistant, Aisha, to do his paperwork. Aisha does not hold him in high regard. She doesn't call him a bit stupid, she just calls him stupid, she thinks he is lazy ('Why does he have to sit in front of my face from morning to night? Hasn't he got anything better to do?'), and she strongly suspects him of fiddling his accounts and the charitable funds for which she has to apply on his behalf.

On her good days she calls him an IBM, which is Egyptian for 'Idiot Bastard Mummyfucker' - 'cos he is dead boring', as she explains with an apologetic smile as if butter couldn't melt in her mouth.

When the neighbour started parking his caravan outside Shahabuddin's bay window, completely blocking his view, she had to write innumerable useless letters: to the police, to the council, to half a dozen solicitors, to the mosque, to the church, to the newspapers, etc.

Then he had this street brawl with Kevin. He called the police. The police arrived at 12.00 noon the following day. Shahabuddin sent them away. 'You were supposed to come at 10, now it is 12, you have to learn to be punctual. We said 10 o'clock English time, not 10 o'clock Indian time. I am too busy to wait for you all day long, go home and make another appointment', he told them and sat down to continue staring at Aisha for the rest of the afternoon.

He was furious: 'Write a letter of complaint to the police.'

Aisha felt that he was in the wrong and wrote a constrained letter requesting another appointment.

'That letter is no good: I want you to write an angry letter, real angry, English angry. Tell them how lazy and useless they are.'



'You don't want to start jihad because of one ignorant kafir (5): Have a sip of Qibla Cola (6) and think of something holy and peaceful, that will make you feel better. Is it not written ...,' said she, but Shahabuddin let fly a profanity which was so unholy that it would make even a Spaniard blush (8), or so Aisha thought.

She phoned a friend for advice.

'If you write an angry letter, he will get into trouble.'

'I want him to get into trouble.'

So Aisha wrote an angry letter. 'That's what he wants, so that's what he gets.'

'This is a very important letter,' she said to Shahabuddin. 'It must be perfect. Otherwise the police won't see how angry you are and how much they have hurt you. I must take it home and get it checked by a native English speaker to make sure it is really angry. Tomorrow you can sign it and post it.'

So it came to pass that this letter was written, Shahabuddin knew that it had been double-checked, read it, approved of it and signed it, and it was posted.

It is now one of the prized possessions of Rossenham's police.

Our traveller is taken from the pub to the old police station, where the seven officers sit, talk, smoke, drink tea, play darts and watch the porn channel on the telly, and there on the south wall, under glass, is the letter, the only letter ever received by this station.

## CSACI

Centre for the Support of the Aged, the Crippled and the Insane  
786 Corporation Street, Rossenham, Lancashire, BB13 8SU

Dear Mister Policeman,

I have this neighbour and he parks his caravan permanently outside my window so that I cannot get any sunlight. Then he harasses me and our clients. Yesterday he even came and started swearing at us.

7 December 2004

Dear Mister Policeman,

I have this neighbour and he parks his caravan permanently outside my window so that I cannot get any sunlight. Then he harasses me and our clients. Yesterday he even came and started swearing at us.

This is very upsetting for me and my elderly clients, because they aren't used to swearing and don't even swear when they pour boiling water over their hands or hit their thumb with a hammer or drop the baby; and the baby wouldn't swear either, not even when it is dead: it is too stupid for swearing. But the old people don't swear because God don't like it.

And English swearing is much worse than Urdu swearing and has only

four letters to do it with, and our old people don't like to hear such language at all. They get enough of it from their own children, so why should my neighbour add to their distress? You tell me that!

They are all very upset and deeply offended, and I am upset and angry too. I could strangle this here neighbour, but I won't do it because it's against the law. So you have to do it for me, that's what you are there for.

So yesterday I phoned the police station, and you promised to send someone over here and sort him out good and proper, but you didn't, did you? That makes me even more angry.

Where is your sense of responsibility? You don't want any murder or ethnic cleansing to start in this street. It is the English who do the cleansing because it mustn't be ethnic.

I want you to come over here and swear at him for me, because if I swear he doesn't understand it so it doesn't hurt his black heart, so you have to do it for me.

This neighbour man is very wicked and needs to be stopped, and you are so powerful, you are the one to stop him.

So please hurry over here quickly and impose the Queen's law on this wicked neighbour, or else I would not be responsible for whatever happens to me.

And don't let me down a second time, otherwise I might feel like swearing at you, and you wouldn't

**like that, would you?**

**Your devoted citizen and friend,  
Sheikh Shahabuddin  
CSACI  
Ros senham**

When this letter arrived at the police station, the seven officers marched to 786 Corporation Street like one man and invited Kevin and Shahabuddin to celebrate his literary masterpiece.



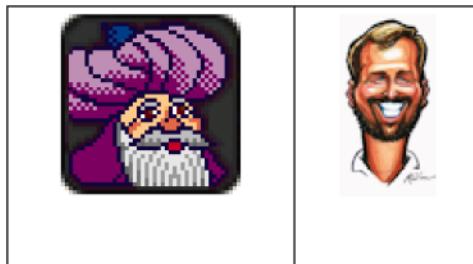
The two warring neighbours could not resist this temptation, especially at Christmas time, Kevin had a pint of Thwaites (9), but Shahabuddin, who is a god-fearing man and only fiddles the accounts when Allah is not looking, contented himself with a bottle of Mecca Cola(TM) ('Ne buvez plus idiot, buvez engagé!' (10) as it says on the bottle).

# Mecca-Cola

*Ne buvez plus idiot,  
buvez engagé*

Site en arabe

That happened on Christmas Eve. Kevin began to like his Shahabuddin, and especially enjoyed the innumerable jokes that are told about him (a drink together can work wonders, even if it isn't a Double Diamond) (11).



'Et in terra pax,' twittered the sparrows perched on top of the caravan, 'wa salam salam shalom', admonished a voice from heaven, and they flapped their tiny wings in adoration.

Kevin parked his caravan in front of Paddy's house across the road and now has a good old feud going with him. He doesn't like the Irish and thinks they are fair game.

Paddy is trying to get Aisha to write some letters for him, to the police, to the council, to half a dozen solicitors, to the mosque, to the church, to the newspapers, etc. He thinks she has brains. She has acquired quite a reputation in Corporation Street, for kindness, impartiality and a sense of humour. She is loved by all communities. She has had her share of joys and troubles, but loves the absurdities which life throws at her. 'Life is so funny,' she says when yet another misfortune befalls her, 'it could make you cry'.

She was never invited to the celebration at the Police Station. 'Women have no brains and no morals: they should stay at home, wear their hijab (12) and never meddle in men's affairs,' says Shahabuddin, and Kevin wishes English women too would live by these sensible maxims, 'stands to reason, dunnit?' 'Muslims are not as stupid as they look,' he said, and affectionately slapped his new-found friend Shahabuddin on the shoulder. Here was something they could agree on.

In February Shahabuddin went for a long holiday in his village in Panjab. He invited Kevin to follow him in his caravan. He has a beautiful niece who wants an English passport, and Kevin wants an obedient wife. 'You can't say no fairer than that, can ya?'

Kevin is ready to leave the moment he receives his transit visa for Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. He must be looking for trouble. (13) If not en route, he'll find it in Panjab.

'And how is the police in England?' asked Shahabuddin's brother.

'Not too bad, not bad at all,' said Shahabuddin.

'They have framed me,' he added triumphantly.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. gora: Urdu for 'white' (like English 'nigger' for 'black', Trinidadian 'coolie' for East Indian as opposed to ex-African, "He's a gora, but he's a good gora. She's a gori and as bad as they come.")
2. Bajan: native of Barbados (aka smart-ass, or 'small-islander')
3. Bethlehem: Matth. 2:6
4. maketh his sun to rise: Matth. 5:45
5. kafir: Arabic: unbeliever, infidel
6. qibla: Arabic: 'direction', and specifically 'THE direction', i.e. the direction towards Mecca which Muslims face when saying their daily prayers
7. Qibla Cola and Mecca Cola. Mecca Cola is the French product, Qibla Cola is its British 'look-alike' and rival. Background of the two companies and the Cola Wars: FINANCIAL TIMES, Thursday, 8 Jan 2004, p 13: 'New colas wage battle for hearts and minds'.

There is Ummah Cola (the Ummah is the world-wide community of believers), whose website is down, is i.a. sold in Britain and, according to the label, may be made in Egypt. [image not found]

	<p>There is also Zamzam Cola, made in Iran, and selling well there, in Saudi Arabia and in other Arab countries. It is named after Mecca's Zamzam holy spring water. Muslim tradition has it that the Zamzam was opened by the angel Jibril to save Hagar and her son Ismail from dying of thirst when they were out in the desert.</p>
	<p>SevenUp (TM) now has a rival in MuslimUp</p>
	<p>Similarly inspired by pious sentiments was Italy's brand 'Jesus Jeans' (1973), with the words 'Follow me' (Mark 1:17) or 'Chi mi ama mi segua' (If you love me, follow me) printed on juicy female bums.</p>

8. Spaniards: Everybody knows that the Spaniards hold an Olympic gold medal in creative swearing in which they abuse their mothers, their god and their saints ('todos los santos jodidos', an expression too awful to be ever translated into English).

9. Thwaites: long established Blackburn brewery
10. Ne buvez plus idiot, buvez engagé: Stop drinking like an idiot, drink with political engagement (20% of the price of Mecca Cola goes to Palestinian charities)



11. Double Diamond: a brand of beer

Advertising jingle:

A Double Diamond works wonders, works wonders,  
 A Double Diamond works wonders,  
 So get one today

12. hijab = Muslim head scarf
13. trouble and strife: domestic bliss

Cockney rhyming slang:

Trouble and strife:  
 Wife

Therefore  
 "He is looking for trouble." =  
 "He is looking for a wife."

Analogously:  
 Butcher's hook:  
 Look

Therefore:  
 She gave him a butcher's: =  
 She gave him a look.

&C

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The following products to be further explored: La Ummah Cola es la que sigue el camino de la Samsam Cola (Samsam - fuente en la Mecca cercana a Caaba), la Mecca Cola, Arab Cola, Salam Cola y Kubla Cola (dirigida a Caaba - a donde van los musulmanes a la hora de los rezos).

## ^(3) Klaus Bung: Drama at Quaggy Moor

### **Impressum**

Klaus Bung: Drama at Quaggy Moor

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### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

Quaggy Moor is a fictitious primary school in Skelmersdale near Liverpool. Janie, a pupil, describes what she recollects of the school plays they put on recently, a nativity play with some mishaps, and most memorably a play about The Pied Piper of Hamelin (den Rattenfänger von Hameln), Germany. Inevitably, her recollections soon go haywire (so is her English and her spelling) but she bravely manages to tell the whole sad tale, including a prank the children played on their unsuspecting audience.

## **Klaus Bung: DRAMA AT QUAGGY MOOR**

We have three drama productions every year. Two years ago we put on a play about Peter Pan. This is about a boy who could never grow old.

Last year we had a nativity play. Mary and Joseph started fighting and swearing at each other and baby Jesus fell out the manger. That was great fun for us, but Miss didn't like it. I think our Mums and Dads enjoyed it. They would have liked to join in the fight, but they weren't allowed to because they weren't in the play. But we were. God liked the play. It was his idea.

Last July we put on an end-of-term play about the Pied Piper of Hamelin. There were too many rats and mice in the town, and the towns-people couldn't eat them all because too much meat is bad for you. But the rats and mice ate all the food in the town, there were no more chips, and no more beefburgers, and no more nice junk food, and no more bangers, and no more nothing, only apples and tomatoes, so the people of Hamelin had to make stews

of the rats and mice (disgusting, innit?) but it got a bit boring after a while and they couldn't think of any new recipes or anything.

And then came this here ratcatcher. He was an illegal immigrant, from Poland or Aunt Arctica or somewhere, and he said watch me I have this magic flute, I bought it in a car boot sale from this popstar called wotsisname Moses or something, and when I play it the rats will follow me into the river Mersey and God will say let the waters part and when they are all in the river bed God will say drown the buggers and the water will come back and swallow them all up.

Thassa a good idea said the Mayor of Hamelin, you do that and I will give you a sack of gold.

So the Pied Piper got out his magic flute and played the music of Moses on it and all the rats and the mice of the town came marching after im, left right, left right, left right, they did, like a bloody army, and you have never seen so many rats in your life and they came running after him in order not to miss the demonstration and that's why it is called a rat race.

Some beatles also came but they are smaller and it is a different sort of music. They thought they were going to a submarine, but they weren't, they were just going to this river to meet their maker, which is a fate worse than death. And there was no arc on the river and no Noah and nothing and the submarine was under water and they couldn't get to it, and so they all had to die an orrible death. Served them right, dinnit?

And then when the rats and mice and beatles and everything except the Church of England people of Hamelin had died, the Pied Piper of Hamelin went to the Mayor and said, I have done what we agreed, there is not a single mouse left alive in Hamelin, and no rat, and no beatle, so now you give me my money.

But the Mayor said, a sack of gold is too much money for what you did, anybody can play a flute, we can get a snake charmer from India and he would have done it for ten-pence.

But the Pied Piper said: a promise is a promise, you promised a sack of gold so that's what you will give me, or else, mate.

Are you threatening me, said the Mayor, do ya want me to slap an ASBO on you, you young whipper snapper?

No, I ain't threatening you, I am only saying 'or else'.

So the Mayor tossed a handful of coins at the Pied Piper and said now get out before I have you arrested. And there were these hooddies and the Mayor winked at them and they grabbed the poor Pied Piper and chucked him out of the town hall, and he fell down the town hall steps and cut his knees and his shins, didn't he.



The Pied Piper turned livid but he didn't say anything, he didn't even curse the fat Mayor. He took out his magic flute and started playing it, and all the kids from Skelmersdale, from aged three to aged twelve, came out of their houses and started dancing after the Pied Piper and they marched through every street in Skelmersdale and marched all the way to Liverpool and into the Mersey Tunnel and never came out on the other side.

And all the Mums and Dads started howling and crying because they loved their kids, even though some of them were real terrors and this was a good way of getting rid of them. But now it was too late, they couldn't have their children back, and the dishonest Mayor was never re-elected. That taught him a lesson.

So we put on this play in the school hall. And for weeks before the performance we were going through the fields around Skelmersdale and catching every rat and mouse we could find. We put them into a plastic bin so they couldn't get out and we fed them with bird feed from the pet shop. And our Headteacher didn't know nothing about it. But we did.

And when the show was over and we came on the stage to have our mums and dads and our brothers and sisters clap and say "well done, my darling", we brought this bucket full of rats and mice and poured it into the audience. You should have seen how quickly they all got out of the school. This is called Biology. There were even three old people who were lame, and he was called Walter Wolfgang and was eighty, and they learned to walk again - just like that. It was a miracle.

The local paper wrote about it and said: "Outburst of creativity in Quaggy Moor". And now it is on our website.

**RITTEN BY JANIE**

## Notes for translators and bloody foreigners

Quaggy Moor is a fictitious school in Skelmersdale, on the outskirts of Liverpool. The Mersey Tunnel passes underneath the river Mersey and connects Liverpool to Wirral.

Some of the children who never came out of the tunnel again were later seen fighting in Iraq. But that surely is legend. Nobody knows how they got there, what they were doing there, and who sent them there.

Mozart wrote an opera called 'The Magic Flute' (Die Zauberflöte), and Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land.

The Israelites were pursued by the Egyptian army under General Sadam Hussein. But G\*d threw dust into the eyes of the Egyptian army so that they lost sight of the Israelites for a while. Meanwhile, with a gigantic blower, he parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they stood like two walls and all the Israelites could walk through without getting their feet wet. The Red Army followed them but when they were all nicely in the blower-corridor, whereas the Israelites had already reached the other side, G\*d gave an almighty cough, and the Egyptian horses panicked, and the wheels of their chariots broke, and there was a pile-up. That's when G\*d spake the immortal words: 'Sic pereant omnes Bulgari' (Let the buggers drown) (Exodus 14:26), and it was so.

The beetles were once human but underwent a Kafkaesque transformation after they had called Blackburn 'a shithole' ('A Day in the Life'). They wanted to evade the Council Tax (formerly known as Poll Tax) and therefore lived in a blue submarine. They taunted the Council by crowing about it in a song ('We all live in a yellow submarine'), naming the wrong colour so they couldn't be found.



Walter Wolfgang (wolf's gait), who, on an earlier occasion, had been unable to get out of the Labour Party conference fast enough (28 Sep 2005) after threatening a straw man, came to Quaggy Moor to be cured of his lameness, and so he was.

[Straw man: Jack Straw]

Quote: Walter Jakob Wolfgang (23 June 1923 – 28 May 2019) was a German-born British socialist and peace activist. Up to the time of his death, he was Vice-President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Vice Chair of Labour CND, a caucus of CND members who are also members of the Labour Party. He was also a supporter of the Stop the War Coalition. Walter became better known to the general public after cameras recorded him being forcibly ejected from the annual Labour Party Conference in Brighton on 28 September 2005, aged 82, for shouting "nonsense" during Jack Straw's speech in which the then Foreign Secretary extolled the virtues of the government's role in the Iraq War. The eviction of Walter Wolfgang provoked much media comment and embarrassed the Labour leadership. The following morning he was re-admitted to conference to a standing ovation and an apology from the chair of the session.

In August 2006, Wolfgang succeeded in his bid to become a member of Labour's National Executive Committee. He died in May 2019 at the age of 95. (Source: Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_Wolfgang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Wolfgang) – Retrieved 2025-04-24)

An ASBO is a legal instrument used to combat minor offences (Anti-Social Behaviour Order, i.e. a Behaviour Order which is Anti-Social, since it is directed against the proletariat).

## ^(4) Klaus Bung: Baba God Rules OK

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### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

Because of the tube strike, an organist, who normally travels to church by underground, makes a detour and finds himself at London Bridge Mainline Station. At the ticket office, he not only learns how to continue his journey, but also receives a blessing from the two Nigerian clerks. On his way to the underground, he passes the famous pipe organ of London Bridge Station. He bumps into Nigerian gospel singer **Peter Olagunju**. They impromptu play and sing hymns which the organist knows by heart and are joined by a Nigerian woman who happens to pass. Verily, I say unto you: Baba God rules OK, even at London Bridge.

Five Nigerians have enabled God to take over London Bridge Station on this beautiful Sunday morning. Praise the Lord? Alleluia!

## **Klaus Bung: Baba God Rules OK**

### **THE ROUTE**

Sunday, 14 September 2025. London Underground is on strike. Klaus, organist at the Moravian Church in Hornsey, North London, has to try an unfamiliar route and finds himself at London Bridge Mainline Station. How to continue from there? He will ask at the ticket office, which usually is crowded. It is 8.30 a.m.

### **THE TICKET OFFICE**

The ticket office is empty. Not a passenger in sight.

Two adjacent counters are manned, one by a woman, the other by a man.

"Have you been waiting for me? Am I your first customer?" Klaus beams at both of them while approaching the woman.

Klaus exchanges some banter with the woman. He tries his little bit of Naija (Nigerian English-based patois) and soon establishes that both are from Nigeria. Warmth develops between all three. And when two or three are together, there is someone else in the middle (Matthew 18:20).

The clerks explain that Klaus can use the Northern Line and the Victoria Line to get to Finsbury Park. Both will be running.

As Klaus turns away from the counters, he notices that the man has been making a gesture behind his back. Using two fingers. A rude gesture? No, he is making the sign of the cross over Klaus. Is he a Roman Catholic priest in disguise? A wolf in sheep's clothing?

Klaus gives him a radiant and grateful smile. "Praise the Lord?" Klaus sings out. "Alleluia," both respond. All three are in harmony.

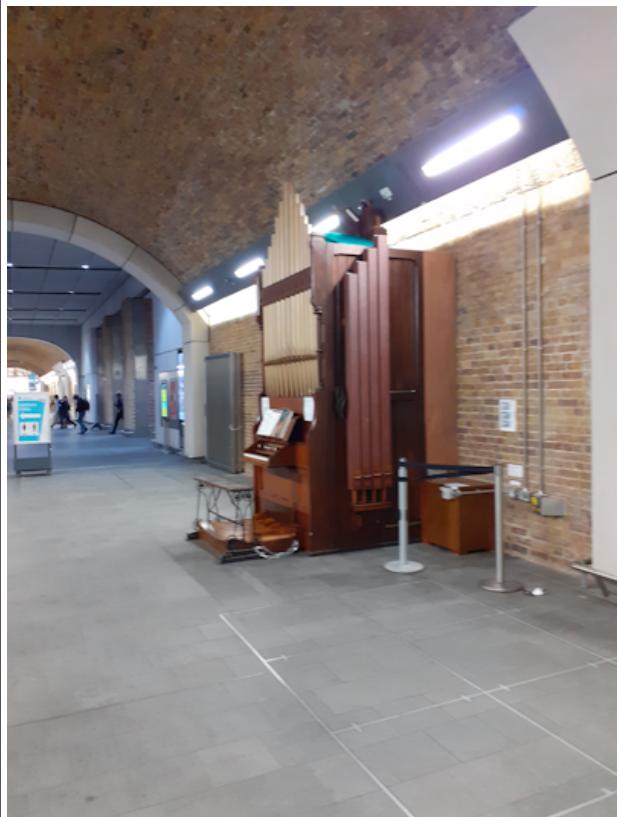
Klaus came for travel information and, as a bonus, received a blessing. What a wonderful start to his Sunday! Collateral benefit of a tube strike. Every cloud has a silver lining, every strike comes with a blessing, cotton wool.

### THE PIPE ORGAN

On his way to the underground, Klaus passes the pipe organ (popularly known as Henry) which was installed at London Bridge in 2022 and is open for anyone, talented or not, to play.

Klaus always stops there and plays a tune or two when nobody else is playing with Henry or abusing him. That is his way of paying his respects to the instrument, and of making sure Henry doesn't get too lonely and to offset the ghastly noises some people elicit when they torture him.

As he approaches the organ, he sees that a young man has focussed a camera on a tripod on the instrument preparing to take a picture.

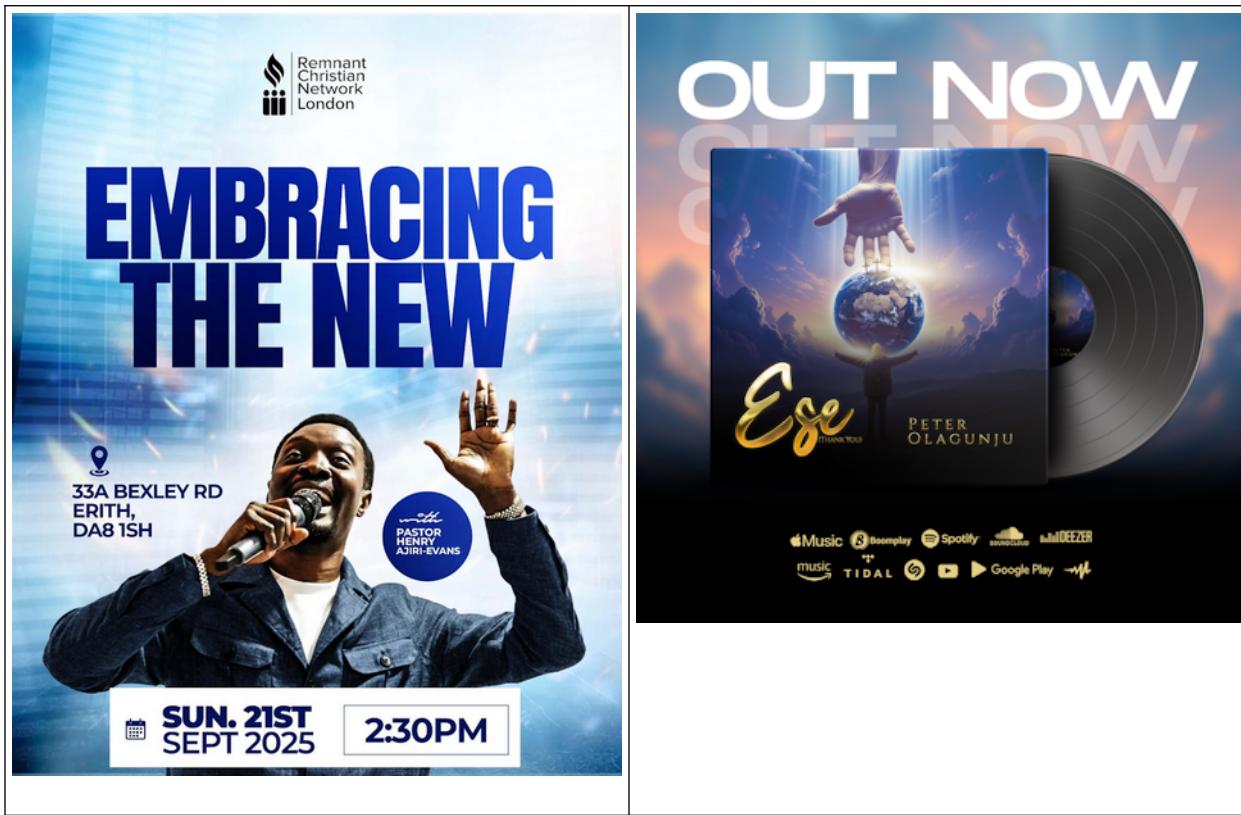


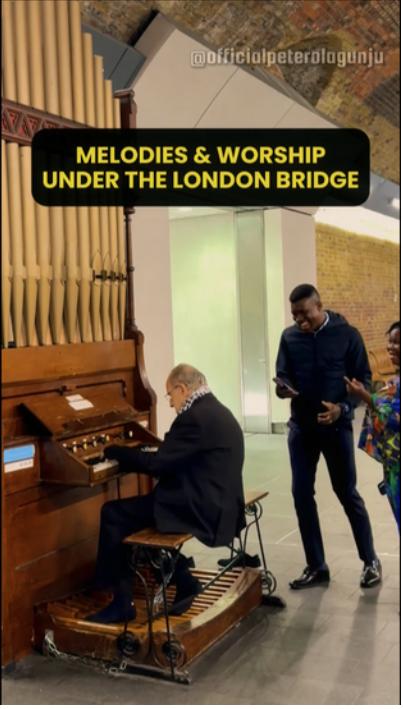
Klaus thinks the picture would be more authentic and informative if one could hear the organ as well.

"Do you want me to play something?" he offers. The young man, a Nigerian again, agrees. The camera starts running, Klaus starts playing, the young man comes over and stands next to the organ, and while Klaus plays, he sings with a bright tenor voice.

This young man later turns out to be **Peter Olagunju**, a professional singer, whose recordings can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.submithub.com/link/peter-olagunju-ese>  
He is lead singer in a Pentecostal Church in Erith.



Now thank we all our God	What a friend we have in Jesus	Amazing grace
		
To access this sound file, copy and paste the following link into your browser:  <a href="https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_09_14_now_thank_we_all_our_god.mp4">https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_09_14_now_thank_we_all_our_god.mp4</a>	To access this sound file, copy and paste the following link into your browser:  <a href="https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_09_14_what_a_friend_we_have_in_jesus.mp4">https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_09_14_what_a_friend_we_have_in_jesus.mp4</a>	To access this sound file, copy and paste the following link into your browser:  <a href="https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_09_14_amazing_grace.mp4">https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_09_14_amazing_grace.mp4</a>
Peter has the lyrics of the hymns on his phone. He tells Klaus which hymns he wants to sing, and Klaus, if he knows them by heart, plays them, and Peter sings, all verses, however many, like we used to do in the olden days.	A black woman with a shopping bag has been hovering in the background for a while watching the proceedings, and now she comes over and joins in.	Now we are, again, three together in His name. Praise the Lord? Alleluia! God rules OK. Even at London Bridge. And thus, in these desolate times, black Nigeria brings God back to this benighted white country.  Baba God go bless you, welu welu and yanfu yanfu.

**E-MAIL**

A few days later, Klaus receives an e-mail from Peter Olagunju:

**Subject:**  
London Bridge Supernatural Meetup

Dear Klaus, It was truly a privilege and honor to meet you at London Bridge last Sunday as you played the organ and I sang alongside you. Our first supernatural encounter felt nothing short of divine. ... I sincerely look forward to meeting you again. ... Kind regards, Peter Olagunju



**HENRY'S 'UMBLE HORIGINS**

Some visitors to this site did not believe that this organ has been baptised and has a Christian name. However, Wikipedia confirms that Henry's name is Henry, and Wikipedia does not lie. Nor does the Holy Bible: "et postulans pugillarem scripsit dicens Henricus est nomen eius et mirati sunt universi" (Luke 1:63) (and [his father] asked for a tablet and wrote, "Call 'im 'enry", and everybody was greatly astonished) (as will be my readers).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_Bridge\\_station\\_organ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Bridge_station_organ)

When Henry was born, Henry was a sucker as all babies are.

Then Henry grew steel teeth, called "organ pipes", was told to stop sucking and became a blower.



## ^(5) Klaus Bung: Two Nigerian Nurses

### **Impressum**

Klaus Bung: Two Nigerian Nurses: The Human Face of the NHS

Length: 943 words = 5,512 characters  
= approx 3 pp A4 single-spaced

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Date: 2025-08-02, Mk1.4

### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

When Klaus Bung had to spend 48 hours waiting with a seriously ill friend in the Accident and Emergency department of a hospital in London, two Nigerian Nurses treated him and his suffering friend with what was for him "extraordinary care" but which, on reflection, turns out to be wide-spread care and compassion given by overseas nurses, for which, Klaus Bung feels, all British citizens should be grateful. That's why he did not only send the two nurses of that particular night a glowing testimonial but also decided to publish it on this website.

**Other publications (Nursing Times, local newspapers (Woolwich, London), nursing organisations, Nigerian organisations) are welcome to reprint this story or use its contents.**

**\* All names have been anonymised.**

## **Klaus Bung: Two Nigerian Nurses: The Human Face of the NHS**

A Testimonial

from: Dr Klaus Bung (PhD, Cambridge, UK)

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Date: 2025-08-02

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Fumilayo Seun\*

e: [Fumilayo\\_Seun@nhs.net](mailto:Fumilayo_Seun@nhs.net)

### **TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:**

I am a friend of Pilar Gato\* who, in July and August 2025, had to be admitted twice to Asclepius Hospital\* in London, in relation to her ovarian cancer, incontinence, low electrolyte values, lack of appetite, slight confusion and profound drowsiness.

On the second of these occasions, the days and nights from 31 July to 2 August, I spent 48 hours with Pilar in Accident and Emergency, waiting anxiously for Pilar to be assigned a bed in one of the regular wards and watching with profound admiration how Nigerian Nurses Yemisi Adeleke\* and Fumilayo Seun\* were taking care of Pilar (and the other patients, but I had my eye especially on Pilar because I had been worried that things might go wrong with her welfare).

Yemisi and Fumilayo had the unpleasant duties of helping Pilar to use the commode or coax her into going, with their assistance, to the toilet to practise some independence. They gave her her complicated medication at the many prescribed times, succeeding in fishing the correct packs out of the huge plastic bag with pills which Pilar had been given (together with a multi-page discharge sheet) when she was discharged from her previous hospital (HH in central London).

When Pilar's food was delivered, which she tended to ignore (leading to loss of weight and low blood sugar values &c), they, with angelic patience coaxed her, spoon by spoon, into eating at least something. They encouraged her to drink from the water, which was in plentiful supply but which she, in her drowsiness, tended not to touch. So the list might go on.

But now comes their crowning achievement, a wonderful (perhaps typically Nigerian) show of compassion.

I was determined to hang around Pilar until she was moved to a proper ward, to help carry her bags and help her settle in. Only once she was properly and happily settled would I go home. That meant I had to spend two days and two nights waiting with Pilar in Accident and Emergency. During the first of these nights, I was in a different part of A/E, and other Nigerian (!) nurses took care of me.

During the second night I was in the area of Yemisi and Fumilayo. I did not want them to know how I was surviving and therefore closed the curtain around Pilar's bed and lay down on the floor, using my rucksack as a head pillow, a useful survival skill in which I have been trained, and something, of course, which, in many third world countries, is the best bedding that many people ever have.

After an hour or so, Yemisi and Fumilayo must have discovered me sleeping on the floor. They felt compassion, even though, me being not a patient, they were not in the slightest responsible for my well-being. So, in this overburdened hospital, they started, unbeknown to me in my sleep, scouting for a solution.

At about 3.00 a.m., I was shaken out of my sleep: "We need access," they said. I thought they were about to send me packing and moved my rucksack and face cover out of their way. Then I saw them bring in an air mattress, placed a head pillow on it, even covered it with a fresh sheet (what luxury when I was prepared to sleep on the bare floor!), made me lie down and put a couple of NHS blankets on top of me. It was all unspeakably kind!

What more can I say except PRAISE THE LORD, and Baba God go bless you welu welu and yanfu yanfu.

I hope they will send a copy of this to the Head Nurse at the Asclepius Hospital.

I wish them all the best for their future careers, and may God reward them richly for their kindness.

I must also use this opportunity to express my thanks to the innumerable nurses who come from overseas countries riddled by poverty and uncountable social problems. They are helping us, who (having the NHS, Social Service and various benefits payments) are so much better off than they, to have our illnesses cured, our wounds healed, &c. Yemisi and Fumilayo have demonstrated once again how grateful we in England must be to all of them.

Signed:  
Dr Klaus Bung (PhD, Cambridge, UK)

## ^(6) Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

### **Impressum**

Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

Length: 2,614 words = 15,976 characters = 10 pp A4 approx

e: klaus.bung@rochdalewriters.org.uk

© 2024 Klaus Bung

Date: 2024-12-11, Mk2.15

Compiled by Klaus Bung from ancient sources

### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

In this contribution, Klaus Bung presents five eminently useful rules of life which he has compiled from ancient sources and carefully formulated and tabulated. They are not designed to make God happy but to help us avoid thoughts, words and deeds which, in the long run, lead to misery for ourselves and others, and a list of their positive counterparts which are conducive to happiness for the giver and the receiver. Provocatively, he calls them "The Five Commandments", analyses their underlying ethics, and compares them with the traditional Ten Commandments. Whereas the Ten Commandments are, as their name says, orders given by a god, his "Five Commandments" are not really commandments (orders given by someone) but resolutions which individuals or society can take if they want to have less troublesome and more contented (or happy) lives.

### **CONTENTS**

1. The Five Commandments tabulated, and their interactions
2. Three dangerous emotions: desire, fear and anger
3. Precept #1: A beautiful rendering
4. Underlying principle:  
Work for the benefit not of self but of others
5. Who are Others
6. Jews, Israel and Palestine: A Bundist approach
7. The Holocaust
8. The current growth of anti-Semitism
9. Comparison: The Five Commandments vs The Ten Commandments
10. Conclusion
11. Further reading
12. More comprehensive books on the Bundists

## Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

### 1. THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS TABULATED, AND THEIR INTERACTIONS

THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS		
Prohibitions	Recommendations	Beneficiaries
1. No violence	Acts of kindness	Others
2. No theft	Generous giving	Others
3. No sexual misconduct	Treating the body of others with kindness	Others
4. No sins of speech	Helping others through good use of speech	Others
5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)	Consuming healthy foods and drinks as necessary for the welfare of the body	Self: Improves Self-control & Mindfulness

All these apply cogitatione, verbo et opere,  
in thought, words and deeds.

Failing on #5 causes failure in #1, #3 and #4.

Most of the ills that befall individuals and society and are reported daily in the news can be traced back to offending against one of these five precepts. Heeding them and propagating them can help us to avoid such troubles.

### 2. THREE DANGEROUS EMOTIONS: DESIRE, FEAR AND ANGER

In addition, there are three dangerous emotions (traditionally known) of whose pernicious effects we should be aware and which we should try to subdue:

#### **desire, fear and anger**

- Desire causes us to offend against #2 and #3, above.
- Fear can cause us to offend against #1 and take unnecessary and counterproductive precautions.
- Anger causes us to offend against #1 and #4

### 3. PRECEPT #1: A BEAUTIFUL RENDERING

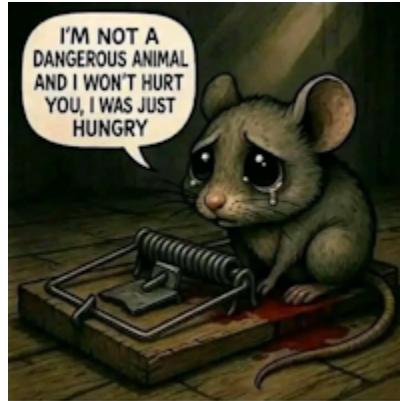
In Utting am Ammersee (Bavaria, Germany), I saw a hoarding (billboard) which says:

In diesem Reiche gilt als oberstes Gesetz:  
 'Was lebt und atmet sollst du gütig schützen!'  
 Drum schon' auch das Insekt  
 Und pflück' die Blume nicht, die dich erfreut:  
 Auch deinem Heil wird's nützen.'

In this reign there is a supreme law:  
 'Whatever lives and breathes thou shalt lovingly protect!'  
 Thus you should even spare the insect's life,  
 And do not pluck the flower which makes you smile:  
 This will be good for your salvation too.

(translated by Klaus Bung)

\*\*\*



\*\*\*

### 4. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE: WORK FOR THE BENEFIT NOT OF SELF BUT OF OTHERS

Measure your success and your happiness not in terms of

1. whether **you** have become more successful, gained more money, a better job, more recognition and fame, a better house, a greater salary, but in terms of
2. whether you have given **others** some relief, a moment of happiness, solved one of their problems, rescued them from a difficult situation.

Justification: Even the poorest, most unsuccessful, person will have many chances to do (2). There are always other people who have problems which you can easily solve, whereas "your own" problems may be insurmountable.

These other people can benefit from **your** help, however much of a failure you may be otherwise and however unhappy you may be because of your perceived "failure". Therefore (2) is a recipe for success and happiness: there are dozens of tasks which are easy for you. Choose those which you can manage.

But if you seek your happiness in terms of (1), you may be faced with so many obstacles (lack of skills or money or opportunities or connections) that you are bound to fail and therefore become unhappy (aka "mentally ill" in today's popular parlance) because you regard this as failure. It's your perception that matters!

## 5. WHO ARE OTHERS

When seeking to help "others", everybody should be keen to focus on people who are "most different" (who differ most) and who are traditionally least well treated, namely strangers, people of different origin, sex, race, colour, nationality, religion, political party, minorities (the smaller, the more deserving), people who in traditional notions of charity tend to be neglected. This could be called "goodwill to all".

If everybody tackled the problems of life in terms of (2), most conflicts between nations and individuals would disappear, war would disappear, social exploitation and comparative poverty (i.e. excessive riches vs excessive poverty) would disappear, and happiness of all would increase. Everybody would seek his happiness by helping others. It would not have to be imposed by campaigns of political correctness or by authoritarian governments.

## 6. JEWS, ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: A BUNDIST APPROACH

Specifically **Jews**, who have traditionally suffered most from racial prejudice, discrimination and genocide, and some of whom (the "Zionists") are at present vainly (and criminally) trying to create happiness for Jews, not all over the world, but in a state intended only for Jews, at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs, who have to be exterminated in order to create a safe haven "for Jews and only for Jews",

they, and all of us, should take to heart a principle enunciated by Bundist intellectual Dr Emanuel Scherer (1901-1971). This principle invalidates the genocidal objectives of the state of Israel (Jews seeking happiness by passing on to Muslims the genocide they have suffered in the past). Instead, we should seek

**"Rights and justice for Jews everywhere  
without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere."**

**Emanuel Scherer, 1901-1971**

The same principle could be usefully extended to cover people of all races and religions. It could be intensified by saying that we should seek "the well-being of people everywhere".

**7. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS  
HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PREVENT  
THE HOLOCAUST**

If, in the popular conception of ethics (decent behaviour), #1 were the most important commandment (which in Judaism, Christianity and Islam it isn't), then despising, insulting, hurting or killing a single Jew for being a Jew would be a despicable behaviour. The Holocaust could not have happened: too many decent non-Jews would have been instinctively appalled and would have resisted.

If we were admonished (and trained) to be kind to animals (even to insects), how much more should we be kind and respectful to another human being!

**8. THE CURRENT GROWTH OF ANTI-SEMITISM**

Since the members of "The Jewish Workers' Bund" (aka "The Bund", members known as "Bundists") have, for over a century, opposed the plans and attempts of the Zionist Jews to remove the indigenous Palestinians (Arab Muslims and Christians) from their land (by expelling or killing them), it is extremely important that non-Jews (potential anti-Semites) should know about the Bund and its values and activities.

Such knowledge would reduce the current (2023-2025) global growth of anti-Semitism (in thoughts, words and physical attacks: "cogitatione, verbo et opere") which mistakenly targets **all** Jews whereas it should be focussed on, and confined to, the criminal activities and aims of Israeli politicians, settlers and army.

I therefore provide below, to the best of my ability, a sadly incomplete list of books on the Bund. If readers will send me additional titles, I will gladly add them.

**9. COMPARISON:  
THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS VS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

A comparison of "The Five Commandments" and the traditional "Ten Commandments" is not easy to make since, contrary to traditional belief, the Ten Commandments are not unchangeably cut into stone but there are several different groupings and numberings in existence. For a good summary of these, see Wikipedia. In the Bible they appear in Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21, and Exodus 34:11-26.

To make visible whether the Five Commandments contain any injunctions which are missing in the Ten, and which injunctions of the Ten are missing in the Five, I will display here only two typical numberings, the Heidelberg Catechism (Calvinist) of 1563 and the numbering which Luther (Little Catechism of 1529) and Roman Catholic catechisms (e.g. "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (1992) have in common.

I will use grossly simplified descriptions for each injunction. The interpretation in each catechism will greatly enrich each injunction.

Roman Catholic and Luther	Heidelberg Catechism	The Five Commandments
1 No other gods	1 No other gods	
	2 No images of God	
2 No swearing	3 No swearing	
3 Keep the Sabbath	4 Keep the Sabbath	
4 Honour your parents	5 Honour your parents	
5 Do not kill, do not harm other people in any way	6 Do not kill, do not harm other people in any way	1 No violence
6 Do not commit adultery	7 Do not commit adultery	3 No sexual misconduct
7 Do not steal	8 Do not steal	2 No theft
8 Do not give false witness	9 Do not give false witness	4 No sins of speech
9 Do not desire inanimate possessions of other people		2 No theft (in thought, words and deeds)
10 Do not desire animate possessions of other people	10 Do not desire other people's possessions	2 No theft (in thought, words and deeds)
		5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)

1. The Ten Commandments (henceforth TC) are believed to be valid because they are ordered by God.  
The Five Commandments (FC) should be practised because they obviously benefit man and society.
2. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches (Question 5 and 114), we are unable to satisfy all TC with perfection, we are therefore all sinners and condemned to hell and depend for our salvation utterly on God's mercy and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As a result the bulk of Christian teaching and preaching is that Jesus loves us, helps us and saves us and that we should love Jesus, and turn to him in all our needs.
3. Because of the importance placed on (2), improving our behaviour is in Christian churches less important than the fact that our sins can be forgiven: God's justice is tempered by mercy. Eastern religions put more emphasis on the fact that we must, with infinite patience, learn to

improve our behaviour (and our ability and desire to behave well) so that we can, eventually, pass the examination in a "divine court of law", without the need for mercy.

In Christian churches, teaching how we should improve our behaviour is somewhat neglected. Significantly, Luther did not like the letter of James, which emphasises good behaviour ("works"), and called it "a letter of straw" ("eine stroherne Epistel").

4. TC then derive their power from belief in God, FC derive their power from their obvious usefulness in society.

Many people today do not believe that God exists and even if He existed cannot be sure that texts written or preached by humans actually are the word of God, are true or are infallible: there is always space for some doubt. Arguments and injunctions of this type are therefore comparatively weak.

5. Even though most of the ills of modern society are addressed by TC 5 to 10, they are weakened in their effectiveness because, by their position in the second half of the list and their neglect in teaching and preaching, they are considered relatively unimportant or "matters of course" (not requiring much preaching). It is really secular law which punishes offences against TC 5 to 10, therefore the churches have to be less concerned with them; they can take their validity for granted.
6. TC 4 or 5, Honour your parents, can obviously be expanded to "Respect your **teachers** and treat them with gratitude and affection and do everything in your power to be helpful to them" (as is emphasised in some Eastern traditions). It would be eminently useful in today's society and its schools if this were inculcated into all children from an early age. They owe their bodily life to their parents. To their teachers they owe their mental life, the attitudes and skills they need to be happy and content throughout life. This important injunction is missing in FC.
7. The omission of FC 5 (No drugs, no alcohol &c) in TC is a serious weakness of the TC list.
8. FC are anchored entirely in their obvious benefits for individuals and society. They do not require leaps of faith but merely observing life. They can therefore also benefit the many non-believers in our society.
9. All FC address issues which are daily in the news when usually an "important", famous and successful person, has offended against them (drugs and often resulting deaths, alcohol-based offences, sexual offences, road rage and

anger, knife crimes, theft and burglaries resulting from greed, suicides resulting from inability to deal with the problems of life resulting from not practising FC).

10. Teaching at home and in churches does **not systematically** address these issues. Especially FC #1 (non-violence) is not made the most basic issue and hammered in every week. FC #5 (no drugs) is not included in TC and is therefore not considered a religious issue and therefore not taught, even though it is the cause of so many (and perhaps most) other offences and troubles.

#### 10. CONCLUSION

Churches (and mosques &c), parents and secular educators should hammer in the FC, from early childhood onward, so that these become second nature to society and are considered the standard rules of **decent behaviour**. Doing this would not conflict with respect for TC.

Precept #1, non-violence, must be the starting point, and Precept #5 must be of the highest importance (as it is for Muslims) because neglecting it leads to loss of self-control and stupid (or criminal) behaviour in respect of the other four commandments. If this were consistently and patiently practised, there would be less mental "illness", less crime and less unhappiness in our society.

-----

## 11. FURTHER READING

- Jewish Socialists' Group (2023): *The Jewish Workers' Bund: Past, Present and Future*. 27 pp. BM 3725, London WC1N-3XX, [jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk](mailto:jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk), <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/other>
- Han, Byung-Chul (2018): "The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today". Polity, Cambridge, UK, 100pp

## 12. MORE COMPREHENSIVE BOOKS ON THE BUNDISTS

Brossat, Alain, and Klingberg, Sylvia (2016): "Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism", 273 pp. Verso, London, GB

Goldstein, Bernard (2016): "Jewish Life, Struggle, and Politics in Interwar Poland: Twenty Years with the Jewish Labor Bund in Warsaw (1919–1939). A memoir of interwar Poland" (**Introduction by Dr Emanuel Sherer [Scherer]**), 486 pp. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA

Jacobs, Jack (2009): "Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland", 201 pp. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, USA

Katz, Daniel (2013): "All Together Different – Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism", 306 pp. New York University Press, New York, USA

Olson, Jess (2013): "Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy", 409 pp. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, USA

Slucki, David (2012): "The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History", 284 pp. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, USA

## **^(7) Ashutosh Vardhana: The Birth of Lord Krishna (Version 2)**

### **Impressum**

Ashutosh Vardhana:

The birth of Lord Krishna (Krishna Janmashtami)  
(Version 2)

Length: 1410 words = 7944 characters = 8 pp A4 single-spaced

e: ashutosh.vardhana@rochdalewriters.org.uk

© 2002 Ashutosh Vardhana

Date: 31 August 2002

Mk2.1

### **TECHNICAL NOTE**

There are three versions of this article:

- Version 1, length 422 words, which explains the story underlying this festival and its theology (divine incarnations).
- Version 2, length 1410 words, which consists of version 1 plus information of festival customs at home and in temples, the significance of Lord Krishna for Hindus, and comparisons with Christian beliefs (childhood of Jesus). Additional illustrations can be found in Version 2.
- Version 3, length 921 words, same as version 1, plus information on customs and rituals, but omitting similarities between Krishna and young Jesus. For greater choice of illustrations see Version 2.

### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:**

On 31 August this year (2002), Hindus celebrate the festival of Krishna Janmashtami, the birth of Lord Krishna. Ashutosh Vardhana explains the significance of this festival, which has many similarities with Christmas.

## **Ashutosh Vardhana:**

### **The birth of Lord Krishna (Version 2)**

#### **GOD BORN AS MAN**

Hindus believe that the one invisible GOD THE ABSOLUTE, manifests in the shape of many personal gods and appears in material form from time to time to reduce evil, to support the good and to renew his teaching for mankind.

One of the most beloved of the Lord's ten incarnations was when he came in the form of Lord Krishna, whose birth we celebrate on the day of Krishna Janmashtami (31 August this year).



Kámsa about to slay his sister Dévaki, Vasudéva intercedes  
© ISKCON

In the city of Mathura, there was an evil king, Kamsa. He was told that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him. He put her and her husband into prison and killed most of her children.

Kamsa is about to slay his sister Devaki. Vasudeva intercedes. Her life is spared but she has to live in prison instead.



Vasudéva carries Baby Krishna across the Yamúna  
© ISKCON

Vasudeva carries Baby Krishna across the river Yamuna

When Krishna was born at midnight, the prison warders fell asleep, the gates miraculously opened and Devaki's husband Vasudeva carried the child through the stormy night and across the river Yamuna to the village of Gokula. A many-hooded serpent protected the child like an umbrella against the rain. Vasudeva exchanged baby Krishna for a baby girl (the goddess Durga) that had just been born in Gokula and took her back into his prison.



Dúrga warns King Kámsa  
© ISKCON

Durga warns King Kamsa

When King Kamsa came and flung the baby Durga against the wall to kill her, she slipped out of his hands, flew up into the air and turned into a fearsome woman: 'Wicked man, you cannot escape your fate. The child that will kill you lives safely in Gokula.' With that she disappeared.

#### KRISHNA GROWS UP

The King was frightened to death. During the next twelve years, while Krishna grew up as a cowherd, King Kamsa sent out one demon after another to find and kill Krishna. They all failed.

Krishna was strong and intelligent beyond his years and gradually revealed to the people around him that he was God in human form. When he was twelve, he killed King Kamsa.

He later became a nobleman and took part in the great battle of Kurukshetra, a battle of good against evil. This battle is symbolic for the battle of life (jihad) which takes place within us and in which we try to overcome our lower desires.



Immediately before this battle, Krishna preached to the soldier Arjuna the wisdom that is contained in our holy book, the Gita. It teaches us how we should combine the duties of everyday life with our spiritual goals.

Krishna teaches Arjuna the wisdom of how to conduct the battle of life (written down in the Gita).

### CUSTOMS

The customs of Janmashtami vary in different parts of India and outside India. Communities outside India have to adapt to different work patterns and the societies in which they live. What people do also varies greatly from one person to another.

There are many **similarities** between the stories of **Janmashtami** and of **Christmas**.

Like Jesus, Krishna was born at midnight. People fast for 24 hours preceding that auspicious moment. While working they fill their mind with the presence of the Lord by doing japa, i.e. they murmur the Sanskrit mantra (prayer) 'Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya' (Praise be to Lord Krishna), similar to the continuous repetition of the 'Jesus prayer' (Lord Jesus Christ,

Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) which is popular in the Russian Orthodox church.

We clean and adorn our homes. We prepare delicacies, especially milk-based sweets (butter and cream were Krishna's favourites). They are taken to temple as an offering to God.

Families mark the passage from their front door to their meditation room with a child's footprints (made of flour and water), symbolising the entry of Baby Krishna.

When the work is done, we bathe and put on fresh clothes, the usual preparation for prayer and meditation. Some people read the entire Gita (18 chapters), the 'New Testament' of the Hindus, in their native language or listen to its being chanted in Sanskrit.

At sunset people assemble in temple where they sit for hours and chant bhajans (devotional songs). The image of Baby Krishna will be hidden behind a curtain. Only the priest has access.

At the stroke of midnight, the curtain will be opened, and the image of Baby Krishna be revealed sitting in a swing which is suspended from a horizontal pole and can be rocked by pulling a string. Devotees will ring bells (the size of ships' bells), blow conch shells, strike gongs and shout their welcome for the newborn saviour (cf 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise' [Psalm 98:4]). The greater the noise the better. This will continue for several minutes.

The image will be bathed in milk and honey and rinsed, a token of love and respect.

As people file out of the temple, they will each pull the cord of the swing a few times and rock the baby, thus expressing their love for the Lord in the form of a child.

They will receive from the priest prasad (food that has been offered to God and thereby been sanctified) and will now break their fast and go home for a joyful and sumptuous family meal at about one or two in the morning.

I remember an occasion about thirty years ago when I was a visitor to New Delhi and stayed in a hotel overlooking a savannah. I did not know where to find a temple. Deep in thought, I went for a walk at about 11 p.m. and heard chanting come across the dark savannah. I walked towards it and found myself outside a tiny, open-air temple, surrounded by a crowd of about 200 worshippers. A model of the town of Mathura (similar to a Christian belen/crib) had been built.

In the crowd was the hotel's manager who recognised and invited me, the lonely visitor, to share the Janmashtami meal with his family. I will never forget that.

### KRISHNA AND CHRIST

The town of Mathura is to us what Bethlehem is to Christians. King Kamsa was afraid of being killed by Krishna. Therefore (like King Herod in the Christian tradition) he sent out his minions to kill all newly born children in Gokula. Krishna managed to escape.

Krishna was first worshipped by cowherds (as Jesus was worshipped by shepherds) and he grew up in their company.



Krishna with his beloved Radha, image of God and the human soul

Many of his youthful deeds and misdeeds are similar to those told in the gospel of St Luke and in the apocryphal gospels about infant Jesus. He was adored especially by the young women in his village and is often depicted in their company, especially that of his favourite Radha. Their tender relationship symbolises that between the human soul and God.



Krishna with his flute. He breathes the divine life into us.

Krishna is often seen playing a flute (murli), with which he breathes life, the human soul, which is one with God, into us. His worship is very much based on bhakti, devotional love, rather than rational analysis (theology or philosophy), commandments and laws, and fear of punishment. We believe that everybody will come to him in the end, in this life or another.

Krishna taught us to see God in everything that surrounds us, especially in all living creatures, not only humans, but the earth, plants, all animals, and, of course, all human beings, however lowly, or even 'wicked'.

Respect for all life, as opposed to exploitation of nature, is inculcated into us through our worship of (respect for) the cow, who is symbolically our mother, since we drink her milk. We treat her as sacred so that she can remind us that \*\*\*all\*\*\* nature is sacred. On paintings Krishna is therefore often seen in the company of cows.

Jesus was twelve years old when he displayed his wisdom in the temple of Jerusalem. Krishna was twelve when he accomplished the first great task for which he had been born, namely when he killed King Kamsa.

The Gita, which contains his teaching to mankind, is to Hindus what the New Testament is to Christians. It teaches us to pursue happiness by doing our duty without hankering after reward, and let God take care of the reward (if any).

\* \* \*

## ^(8) Klaus Bung: Goa Constrictor

### **Impressum**

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### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

The author comes across a holiday brochure trying to attract Westerners to India (Goa in particular) and is appalled by the primitive and un-Indian mentality and expectations to which it is trying to appeal. He responds by writing a story which quotes strikingly silly phrases from the brochure.

## **Klaus Bung: Goa Constrictor**

### **On reading a travel brochure for India**

If there is anything sure to turn me off from wanting to travel, it is travel brochures. They depict the hotels in which I do not want to stay. They attract and assemble the people to whom I do not want to talk and in whose company I do not want to be seen by "the natives", for whose sake I would want to travel, whom I would want to meet and associate with. I do not want to share my experiences with my compatriots (whose function is to reinforce my cultural prejudices) and I do not want to have experiences together with them. Let me be seen with such "friends" and the "natives" will always remain natives, and I will never be their friend.

Such an off-putting place is the Hotel La Dolce Vita, "located in the heart of the village of Calangute" (Goa, India) and causing the thrombosis and angina pectoris of that village. Natives do

not enter that hotel except as servants. That also applies to the Manager, Afonso Pereira, who to me stands in the relation of servant, not of equal or of friend. "As your apartment is cool and spacious, there's room to invite friends before dinner for a drink or two." These friends will not be "natives" but uncomprehending tourists together with whom I will gape at the spectacle that "local country folk" will provide to me by their ordinary exotic existence. I will be marked as an outsider, even if I go patronisingly to the "local market" ("local market" sounds so much more exotic than simply "market"!), where "bartering for colourful local souvenirs is great fun" (yes, let's go slumming and play-acting; in England, bartering is ill-mannered). For the natives, both buyers and sellers, it is a matter of survival.

Outside the hotel gates, left and right of the driveway, two beggars have their pitch. On my day of departure I found that I had bought so many souvenirs that I would have had to pay for excess baggage if I had not left my worn-out jeans and a few other items behind. They were worth less than that excess charge. I decided to give them to one of the beggars with whom I had learnt to exchange a daily greeting. He was reluctant to accept them. I could not understand why. A passer-by helped by translating his concerns into English. The beggar was afraid of being accused of theft by the police, who would never believe that he could have obtained my worn-out jeans, far too good by his standards, by honest means. As he requested, I wrote him a note in English confirming that I had given him my jeans as a present and without duress. Now he had "Certified Jeans".

A few streets from the hotel is the wooden, neo-gothic structure of St Thomas's church, daily filled with dhoti-clad men and sari-clad women, offering their devotions to the saints who replaced their deities when the Portuguese colonised this part of India and converted it from a profound mystic religion to the naïvely arrogant hotchpotch of Judaic, Greek and Roman theological, philosophical and legal notions which is called Christianity, of which we are all so proud, and which has brought so much fighting, destruction and divinely ordained misery into this world. I am still looking for the Hindu mandir (1) - there must be one somewhere, for the few wise people who did not convert, who did not become rice-Christians, who could not be bribed by rice, jobs and status.



© BBC News

"Afterwards you might want to stroll into the village for some entertainment or wander down to the beach to watch the sun set over the Arabian Sea. ... The nearest beach is one kilometre away." I have not made it to the beach yet since this afternoon I discovered, in the hotel bookshop, a tattered paperback published 20 years ago (1974), which has kept me in its thrall: "Hippie Dharma", by Captain F D Colaabavala, Published by Hind Pocket Books in Delhi. It describes the shocking life the Hippies brought to the beaches of Goa, seeking to shed the hang-ups of their social and religious background. It starts its section of photographs with the picture of a 20-year-old American girl in full-frontal nudity, stunningly beautiful in her sexual openness and innocence: "Look!", says the Captain, "And look again! A lissom lass dancing a voluptuous nautch (2) around a man who stands bewildered and helpless!" I prefer to stay in my hotel room reading rather than go to the beach from which these scenes have surely by now disappeared. I do not want to watch the sunset among the Ohs and Ahs of my compatriots.

Foreign places do not exist to be "consumed", even by the eyes, the brain or the heart. You can experience them only if you give up your own identity and prejudices, not if you reinforce them by the hotels you live in, and the friends with whom you come to digest, interpret and classify what you see.

I go to the beach after all. I pass a sari-clad woman, facing the blood-red sky, the setting sun, absorbed, saying her evening prayers with folded hands. I hear Sanskrit snatches of her evening prayer: "May we meditate on the supreme light. From it the whole universe has issued. It exists in the hearts of all and unto it will all go back. It is the intelligence in all beings. It is the guide of all intelligence. In it do we take refuge."

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. mandir: temple
2. nautch: dance

## ^(9) Klaus Bung: Chromaticism

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Klaus Bung: Chromaticism

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## Klaus Bung: Chromaticism

*A surrealist tale  
set in the landscape of the European cultural heritage  
and beset with anachronisms*

On my travels by train and tram, I sometimes see students who mark their books and lecture notes and underline virtually everything in them. That testifies to the quality of the lecture notes or the credulity of the students. They follow Mephistopheles' advice to the pupil in Goethe's Faust (01):

Doch Euch des Schreibens ja befleißt  
Als diktiert' Euch der Heilig' Geist.

And take down every single word  
As if the Holy Ghost were dictating to you.

However, handled like this, the underlining becomes meaningless since the underlined words are no longer conspicuous and therefore can no longer be found. Therefore the underlining now can at best mean: 'I have read this far' or 'I am in total agreement with this'. This is good for the manufacturers of luminous marker pens but bad for the students.

The archetype of the student addicted to luminous markers is Daudet's Uncle Baptiste (02), who had the 'passion du coloriage' (03) and had been wasting his money for the last forty years in order to buy illustrated magazines for the sole purpose of colouring them:

"Quand la tante lui refusait de l'argent pour acheter des journaux à images, il arrivait à mon oncle de colorier des livres. Ceci est historique: j'ai tenu dans mes mains une grammaire espagnole que mon oncle avait mis en couleurs d'un bout à l'autre, les adjectifs en bleu, les substantifs en rose, etc." (Daudet: Le petit chose)

When my aunt stopped giving him money for buying illustrated magazines, my uncle fell on the idea of colouring books. That's a historical fact: I have held in my own hands a Spanish grammar which my uncle had coloured from cover to cover, the adjectives blue, the nouns pink, etc. (translated by Klaus Bung)

I can vouch for the truth of this story because I have known Uncle Baptiste personally. He became famous later in life because he was the first to put the Rimbaud Code (04) into practice by colouring letter by letter first Rimbaud's Collected Works (which thank Rimbaud are not extensive) and later, in advanced age, Sartre's novels.

The Rimbaud Code is a model of brevity:

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu  
(04)

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue

The electricians were inspired by this poetic idea when they invented the colour code for electric resistors.

0	black	5	green
1	brown	6	blue
2	red	7	violet
3	orange	8	grey
4	yellow	9	white

But they did not dare to publish this list and call it a poem. That is the difference between poetics and electrical engineering.

Uncle Baptiste, who, like Apollinaire, was very open to technical advances, responded artistically to this code by using it to colour the national railway timetable of the SNCF (05). In the process of this work, he discovered that on certain routes the colours were symmetrical in various respects, and that one could therefore read the colours from right to left, left to right, top to bottom and vice versa. His favourite pastime was reading them vice versa. He called these patterns 'reflections', 'crab colours' and the like. He published his master piece under the modest title: 'Some Coloric Variations on the Folksong "From distant countries have I come"' (06) and thereupon was admitted to the reputed 'Academy of Colorists'.

The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris has eight boxes of Uncle Baptiste's correspondence with French National Railways in which he tried to persuade them to issue their timetable entirely in colour and to make do without the digits. He found considerable support for his idea on the Company's Board but in the end it failed to be realised because of the then prohibitive cost of colour printing. However, this splendid idea never died entirely. The cost argument, which prevented its realisation in France, has become invalid because of modern printing techniques. The idea of printing a railway timetable in colour code and without digits was recently revived in Belgium and will be realised as part of the great national transport reform which will take place in the year 2001. This is also the year in which Belgium will relieve its overcrowded roads by letting lorries drive on the left; private cars will continue to drive on the right as before. The system will be tried for one year. If it works, left-hand driving will be made compulsory for private cars as well: at present it is optional.

Uncle Baptiste had two daughters, Katharina-the-lip and Maribel. Katharina and her mother Blanche were the bane of his life. To rid himself of outspoken Katharina, for whom no suitors were forthcoming and whom he could not marry to a tree (07), he put an embargo on Maribel until her suitors had found a husband for Katharina. In this he followed the second and third Cartesian principle (08), dividing his objectives into manageable parts and trying to achieve them in a specific order. I was present when he declared, not in his usual colourful language but in the blank verse he used when he wanted to show that he was coolly determined and that not one jot or one tittle (09) should pass from his words:

Gentlemen, importune me no farther,  
For how I firmly am resolved you know;  
That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter  
Before I have a husband for the elder. (10)

A terrible row ensued during which Tante Blanche was gripped by the "rage du coloriage" and beat her husband "0 and 6" (11), as he later noted in his diary, or "alpha and omega", as his brother, the Abbé, preferred to say. She disregarded his mild protests and pointed out that his hide could be recycled whereas the magazines and books which he "soiled" could not, and that parchment was better than paper for producing works of art, and that if he refused to provide parchment, then she would produce pulp. She then started calling herself a "performance artist".

Eventually Uncle Baptiste managed to calm her down by explaining to her George David Birkhoff's theory of "the aesthetic measure". This is the American equivalent of the ancient Greek "μηδὲν ἄγαν" (12) (Don't overdo it, mate!). It demonstrates that the word "fuck" is most effective if it is used in 37% (magick number, plus or minus 2) (13) of all sentences. 30% is not enough ("Could do better"), 40% is deafening and no longer noticed: Never open the watergates, Birkhoff counselled.

Aunt Blanche was enthralled and tried to think of domestic applications.

"Hear the sledges with the ~~be~~lls, silver ~~be~~lls!", fluted Uncle Baptiste, "What a world of ~~me~~rriment their ~~me~~lody fore~~be~~lls!". (14)

"I can't hear nuffink", retorted down-to-earth Aunt Blanche.

"35%!" urged Uncle Baptiste, "the sound /e/ occurs in 35% of its syllables!"

As long as Aunt Blanche was listening, she could not pound him. Uncle Baptiste felt like Sheherazade. Aunt Blanche doubted that George David ever existed and told her husband to birk off. Uncle Baptiste knew Birkhoff's dates by heart, 1884–1944, and pointed out that, on his deathbed, Birkhoff had advised that no more than 37% each of Dresden and of Hiroshima should be (and needed to be) flattened – any more was a waste of bombs and fuel, as the Germans had found over Coventry. Uncle Baptiste got some respite by sending Aunt Blanche to the Internet to read Birkhoff's biography:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_David\\_Birkhoff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_David_Birkhoff)

They listened to Bach's "Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D-Minor for Organ" and counted its colours and to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto in D-major and counted the number of syncopated bars: 36%. They downloaded Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" and let PaintShop calculate the percentage of yellow or near-yellow pixels: 38%. Aunt Blanche pointed out that a husband must nag his wife for no more than 6 hours of the 16 hour waking day, otherwise she will get used to it and continue to love him. He has to catch her by surprise, ever so often, but neither too often nor too rarely.

Uncle Baptiste argued that a wife must beat her husband on no more than 37 percent of the occasions when she thinks he deserves it (which is always). Otherwise he will develop a thick skin.

This is, in fact, how Tante Blanche, instinctively, had dealt with Uncle Baptiste throughout their married life, and yet she could not stop the great man on his road to immortality. That is the difference between the responses of an ordinary man and those of a genius. The genius cannot be kept down.

Uncle Baptiste produced a climax by giving her the Birkhoff theory in a nutshell, superimposed onto it one of Norbert Wiener's equations and Maxwell's Second Law of Thermodynamics, and heedlessly observed that "variety is the spice of life". Thereupon she called him a Berkshire hunt (15) (to which he responded by calling her Moby (16), a Nietzschean inversion of all values in this family!). In a flash of genius, she made an intellectual quantum leap (tiny, but a leap nonetheless) and cooked his dinner with 37.8% (in weight) of salt. He meekly

remarked, in his characteristic fashion, that this was not "cordon bleu", but thenceforth he never again argued with her about mathematics. After all, he consoled himself, she was a woman and obviously did not know how to work out percentages.

When I investigated the papers of Uncle Baptiste at the Bibliothèque Nationale, I found the following cryptic note written in his inimitable copperplate handwriting (voir Boîte IV, Div. 13.6.2): "My nephew is not "Un petit chose", "chose c'est féminine". Bugger Daudet! "Voyelles" are the spice of life. Among J S Bach's last works were 'The Art of Fugue' and 'Canonic Variations on "Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her"'. (17) This German Christmas carol uses the tune of a 15th century pop-song 'Aus fernen Landen komm ich her'. Bach submitted his Canonic Variations to L C Mizler's 'Korrespondierende Sozietät der Musicalischen Wissenschaften' (18) in Leipzig to prove his mastery of counterpoint and qualify for membership. This exclusive society had, throughout its existence, only nineteen members since in 1755 Leopold Mozart declined an invitation to become the twentieth."

Uncle Baptiste died when he had almost completed his Magnum Opus, so to speak his 'Chromatic Art of Fugue', the coloration of the entire Paris Telephone Directory, 13 volumes, in accordance with his code. Only two volumes remained to be done.

#### NOTES

1. Goethe: Faust: Studierzimmer: Schülerszene
2. Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897): Le Petit Chose, Première Partie, Ch. 14
3. passion du coloriage: was obsessed with colouring
4. Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891): Voyelles
5. SNCF: the French National Railway Company
6. Aus fernen Landen: I have arrived from distant lands
7. In the Bengali film "Sati", the unwanted eldest girl, dumb, was married to a tree so that her younger brothers and sisters could get married.
8. Cartesian principles: "The second, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution. - The third, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order even to those objects which in their own nature do not stand

in a relation of antecedence and sequence." (Descartes: Discourse on Method, chapter 2)

9. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (Matthew 5:18)
10. Shakespeare also reports the incident, in his play "The Taming of a Shrew" (1:1), where he slightly misspells my uncle's name. Shakespeare calls him "Baptista" instead of "Baptiste".
11. "0 and 6" = "black and blue" in the electricians' colour code
12. μηδὲν ἄγαν = nothing too much
13. George A Miller (1956): "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information". In: Psychological Review
14. Hear the sledges: Edgar Allan Poe: The Bells.
15. Berkshire hunt: Rhyming slang for "cunt". She could also have called him simply "a berk", which has the same meaning. When she told him to "birk off", she wanted him to "fuck off".
16. Herman Melville: Moby Dick
17. Luther's chorale "Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her" (I come to you from heaven above) is based on a secular song of the time starting "Aus fernen Landen komm. ich her" (I come to you from distant lands)
18. Korrespondierende Sozietät: Corresponding Society of Musical Sciences

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Klaus Bung is of multi-national European extraction and has spent most of his life in England, contemplating his suggestive name and his navel. His passion is the chromatic music of Gesualdo, Bach and Tristan. During his saner hours he begets, by e-male, together with Teresa Schlitts, the surrea-erotic novel "Poker", an Anglo-Swiss copro-duction.

**Note for printers: Do not remove the hyphen in "copro-duction"**

## ^(10) Klaus Bung: Morningale

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### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

This prose poem describes the rude awakening of a masterful woman in a Latin country. 'But that, surely, is blasphemy!'

## **Klaus Bung:**

## **Morningale**

An extravaganza

Laura! Laura! She is not a witch, but she always goes to bed with a broomstick. That is neither her husband nor her lover. She uses it to silence her battery of alarms. But last night she had broken it on her husband's back. That had silenced him, too. He is now a battered husband and, mercifully, an absent one.

As the starlings start their car alarm dawn chorus, chasing all car owners of the quarter out of 'the rank sweat of their enseamed beds'(1)^, her eighteen alarm clocks go off one by one, starting fortissimo, several minutes apart, then overlapping and continuing into a great crescendo, to ffff, with different sounds and radio stations on each. She has carefully placed them at precise angles in all parts of her room. They must force her out of bed, however short or lively her night may have been. This is her morning concert. She lets it go on for several minutes before she furies out of bed, races from one to the next, dives under the bed from various angles, jumps to the ceiling where three systems are suspended and tries to shut them all up before they start again. She does not succeed and lets her systems have

their way. Music, as she keeps saying, plays an important part in her life.

She drops back into bed. Here struggle giants like Luigi Nono with dwarfs like Albi Noni, Mo Zart with Boulez Bruital, Master Singers with Bloody Beginners, Hinde Mith with Herda Mith, Wegda Mith and Hinde Ohne. It was she who commissioned Beethoven to write his atrocious Battle Symphony. In her quarters, Malbrough s'en va en guerre against A jolly good fellow. Beethoven called her his heroic a'. Bach listening to her morning concert suffered there, in her bedroom, his Sin Matthew Passion. His Sleepers-wake was wilfully ignored. No wise virgins in this house, no bloody virgin at all, but a smart woman, thank Devil. No oil neither, but plenty of vaseline.

In her bedroom, Edgar Varèse derridas Foucault. Gustav Mahler's children died of her vibrations, while his penguin clamoured for aunt Arctica. Here her cock Thomas Mann witnessed the morning cacophony, which inspired him to write Dr Faustus (Adrian's solitary pleasures): This 'durch fünfzig Takte hinfegende, mit dem Gekicher einer Einzelstimme beginnende und rapide um sich greifende, Chor und Orchester erfassende, unter rhythmischen Umstürzen und Konterkarierungen zum Tutti-Fortissimo grauenhaft anschwellende, überbordende, sardonische Gaudium Gehennas, dieser aus Johlen, Kläffen, Kreischen, Meckern, Röhren, Heulen und Wiehern schauderhaft gemischten Salve (Regina) von Hohn- und Triumphgelächter der Hölle' (Thomas Mann, Doktor Faustus, S. 502)

She does not jump out of bed when the concert restarts. A battery of cuckoo clocks joins in the racket. She hugs her lover more tightly and cocks a snook at her absent husband. She calls him 'Der gehörnte Siegfried'. Sirens go off, flapping their wings. Somebody rings storm on the doorbell. Neighbours bang on walls, floor and ceiling to complain. She is oblivious to it all.

The cacophony has now been going on for two hours. Her cat and her canary have both died. Battle-wary, some of her alarms have packed up. She has a standing order with a catalogue firm and three new alarms are sent to her every week, at a quantity discount. Every Christmas, that company, having grown big through her custom and her recommendations among the Portuguese aristocracy, sends her a cuckoo clock from Germany. The cuckoos have been programmed to rock 'around-the-clock'. She calls them 'my jolly good Rockefellows'. She likes cocks and cuckoos.

Such are her weekday mornings. Only on Sunday does she become piously erudite and superimposes the disk with her Latin Rock Christmas Oratorio (it used to be spelt 'roque') on the general mêlée. She has installed a quadrophonic loudspeaker system, each set the size of a fridge, the sound makes you stagger when it hits you, and from all sides the ancient calls attack her, incessantly, fugato, and randomly repeated: 'puella, tibi dico: surge', 'surge et ingredere civitatem', 'surgens vade in vicum', 'surge et sterne tibi'. Half an hour passes, she ignores the divine commands (this is called Latin culture), and at last he,

the fucking believer, to add insult to injury, jeers: 'exsurge baptizare et ablue' (Arise, and be baptized and get washed), and, fearing that he might baptize her in her slumber, a form of child abuse practised on babies by paedobaptists and the fate worse than death for adult heathens, she gets up. 'Even a bad fuck is better than a good baptism any day,' she mutters. But that, surely, is blasphemy.

#### NOTES

The author has not inserted reference numbers to notes into the text because there might have been too many notes and they would inhibit the stormy flow of the text. Instead the notes, below, have been provided in the sequence in which the notes-needing words, names, and allusions, occur in the text.

1. 'the rank sweat of their enseamëd beds':  
Shakespeare: Hamlet 3:4
2. Luigi Nono with dwarfs like Albi Noni:  
Luigi Nono (1924-1990), Italian composer of avant-garde music  
Tomaso Albinoni (1671-1751), Italian composer
3. Mo Zart with Boulez Bruital:  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Composer  
German "zart" = tender  
  
Pierre Boulez (1925-2016): French composer  
brutal = brutal, French "bruit" = noise
4. Master Singers with Bloody Beginners:  
"The Master Singers" (Die Meistersinger):  
opera by Richard Wagner (1813-1883)
5. Hinde Mith with Herda Mith, Wegda Mith and Hinde Ohne:  
Paul Hindemith (1895-1963): German composer, during his lifetime often ridiculed by addicts of "classical music" because of his "modern" style with many dissonances.  
Among music lovers, German puns on his name abounded:  
  
"Hin damit" (Throw it there) (cf Hindemith)  
"Her damit" (Give it, fast)  
"Weg damit" (Rubbish, chuck it in the bin; bin it)  
  
Hinde-mith: with Hinde (mit = with)  
Hinde-ohne: without Hinde (ohne = without)
6. Beethoven to write his atrocious Battle Symphony:  
Beethoven wrote an orchestral piece called "Wellington's Victory", also known as "The Battle Symphony" even though it is not a symphony, but a medley in which he combined (rather primitively, as some people think) several popular tunes to characterise the nationalities

participating in the Battle of Vitoria. The tunes are:

"Rule Britannia"

"Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre"  
(Malbrough goes to war)  
(sung today in England to the text  
"For He's a Jolly Good Fellow"

"God Save the King"

Quote: "In their book 'Men of Music', Wallace Brockway and Herbert Weinstock termed the piece an 'atrocious potboiler'." (Wikipedia)

Malbrough s'en va en guerre against A jolly good fellow:  
"Malbrough goes to war" against A jolly good fellow.

7. Beethoven called her his heroic a':  
Beethoven's Symphony 3 is popularly known as the Eroica.
8. Sin Matthew Passion:  
Bach's "Saint Matthew Passion" depicts the suffering and death of Jesus in poetic and musical terms.
9. His Sleepers-wake: Bach wrote a cantata 'Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme' (Sleepers, wake, a voice is calling)
10. No wise virgins: In the gospel of St Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus tells the story of the wise virgins who were always prepared for the unannounced arrival of the Bridegroom, in the middle of the night, or whenever, and therefore always had oil in their lamps - as opposed to the foolish virgins who did not prepare for such contingencies.  
Bach's cantata "Sleepers wake" reflects on this story.
11. Edgar Varèse derridas Foucault:  
Edgar Varèse (1883-1965): French composer  
Jacques Derrida (1930-2004): French philosopher  
Michel Foucault (1926-1984): French philosopher
12. Gustav Mahler's children: Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) wrote a song cycle "Kindertotenlieder" (Songs on the Death of Dead Children) based on poems by Friedrich Rückert.
13. Thomas Mann ... write Dr Faustus (Adrian's solitary pleasures): Thomas Mann's novel "Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn" (Dr Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn) does **not** describe Adrian's "solitary pleasures", but German "Faust" means "fist".

<p>(14) 'durch fünfzig Takte hinfegende, mit dem Gekicher einer Einzelstimme beginnende und rapide um sich greifende, Chor und Orchester erfassende, unter rhythmischen Umstürzen und Konterkarierungen zum Tutti-Fortissimo grauenhaft anschwellende, überbordende, sardonische Gaudium Gehennas, dieser aus Johlen, Kläffen, Kreischen, Meckern, Röhren, Heulen und Wiehern schauderhaft gemischten <b>Salve</b> (Regina) von Hohn- und Triumphgelächter der Hölle'</p> <p>(Thomas Mann, Doktor Faustus, S. 502)</p>	<p>(14) These overboarding, sardonic highjinks of hell, sweeping through fifty bars, starting with the giggling of a single voice, rapidly spreading, catching hold of choir and orchestra, with rhythmical overturns and counter-attacks horribly swelling into a tutti fortissimo; this <b>salvo</b> (Regina) of hell's laughter of scorn and triumph, a horrific mixture of hooting, barking, screeching, nannying, belling, howling and neighing.</p> <p>([mis-] translated by Klaus Bung)</p>
<p>The word "(Regina)" has viciously been added by a diabolic copyist.</p>	

15. **Salve (Regina):**

Thomas Mann wrote "Salve" (a round of shots, or a sudden outburst of noise, like a round of shots). He did not write "Salvo" and he did not write "Regina". There is a famous Latin hymn in honour of the Virgin Mary, often sung in Roman Catholic Churches. It starts with the words "Salve Regina" (Be greeted, o Queen).

German "die Salve" = English "the salvo"

Latin: "Salve Regina": Canticle

16. 'Der gehörnte Siegfried' (The Horned Siegfried): This refers to a popular German story from the 15th century, related to the sagas associated with the Nibelungenlied (Song of the Nibelungs) and Wagner's cycle of operas ("The Ring of the Nibelung"). Siegfried has acquired a layer of skin which is as hard as horn, and he can therefore not be wounded. But it can also mean that horns have been put on his head, that he has been cuckolded, i.e. his wife has been unfaithful to him.

17. **Sirens go off, flapping their wings:** Sirens are mechanical alarm systems, e.g. warning of air raids or other imminent danger. These are the sirens which "go off". But the Sirens are also magic creatures of Greek mythology, and they can fly, i.e. "flap their wings".

18. **rock 'around-the-clock'.** She calls them 'my jolly good Rockefellers': The **Rockefeller** family is an influential family in American business and politics. She refers the song "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow".

19. Latin Rock Christmas Oratorio (it used to be spelt 'roque'): Bach's Christmas Oratorio was composed during the musical Baroque period.
20. 'puella, tibi dico: surge':  
Damsel, I say unto thee, arise (Mark 5:41)  
  
'surge et ingredere civitatem':  
Arise, and go into the city (Acts 9:6)  
  
'surgens vade in vicum':  
Arise, and go into the street (Acts 9:11),  
  
'surge et sterne tibi':  
Arise, and make thy bed (Acts 9:34).  
  
'exsurge baptizare et ablue':  
Arise, and be baptized and get washed (Acts 22:16)
21. paedobaptists: Paedobaptists are not paedophiles, but churches, like most main stream western churches (e.g. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran) who baptise children (paido-). Paedobaptism (infant baptism) is the opposite of credobaptism (believers' baptism, baptism of adults), which presupposes that the person to be baptised must understand the doctrines of the Christian faith. Baptists and Pentecostals practise credobaptism.

## ^(11) Klaus Bung: The Conversion

### **Impressum**

Klaus Bung: The Conversion

Length, English version with Footnotes:

1,775 words = 10,502 characters  
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### **^EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

On 18 January 2002, the then Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that Muslims should read the Bible and Christians should read the Koran. This was not necessarily an inspired idea. Klaus Bung's story 'The Conversion' has some bearing on this question. In this story, one of two Muslim twin brothers from Bradford becomes a Christian. Some years later the two meet in order to decide once and for all which is the true faith. (Based on a German story by Johann Peter Hebel, 1760-1826.)

A fool-proof way of determining the true faith is shown in the story which "Wise Nathan" tells Sultan Saladin (1137-1193) in 12th century Jerusalem. It is part of a play by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), translated by Klaus Bung, and can be read in Rochdale Writers No 50.

## **^Klaus Bung: The Conversion**

(with apologies to Johann Peter Hebel)

Two twin brothers, Yasin and Ali, lived in Bradford (1) and worked in their father's business in peace and harmony for many years, until Ali became a Christian and Yasin remained a Muslim. From that day onward they tormented each other as much as they could and their father's house was no more a house of peace (2). Eventually the father could not stand the bickering any longer, and he sent Ali to Liverpool where a business friend had offered him a job.

For many years there was no contact between Ali and Yasin, and Ali did not feel like coming home even for Eid (3), for he had now embraced the true faith, and he thought it was better to fast during Lent (4) than during Ramadan (5) and to celebrate Easter (6) rather than Eid.

But Ali felt lonely in the big city and especially away from his brother, even though he now had the true faith and worshipped the right God. So eventually he wrote a letter:

'Bhai, (7) I have been thinking how sad it is that we don't have the same religion and will not go to the same paradise, and perhaps to none. If you can make me into a Muslim again, I will be content, and if I can turn you into a Christian, that will be even better.'

Since Ali had to go to London on business and Yasin to Birmingham, they agreed to meet in Manchester, which was on the crossroads. 'That's where we will decide the issue.'

For several days they did not make any progress at all and might as well have been in Stormont (8) or Jerusalem (9). If Yasin said, 'God doesn't have a son, that's blasphemy', (10) Ali said, 'your Prophet had too many wives, and he was an impostor'. If Ali quoted Saint Paul (11), Yasin said, 'I have nothing against him but he wasn't Jesus and he wasn't one of the companions (12) of the Holy Prophet, so what does he know!'



But come Thursday, Yasin was sharing his brother's bacon (13). 'Brother,' he said, 'Denmark (14) is not as wicked as I thought'. On Friday Ali joined his brother in the Central Mosque for Namaaz-e-Juma'ah (15). 'Brother,' he said, 'your Imam (16) doesn't chant so badly after all.'

A photograph of Manchester Cathedral, a large Gothic-style church with a tall spire, set against a city skyline.	A photograph of The King's Head, a traditional English pub with a dark, ornate facade and a balcony.
<b>Manchester Cathedral</b>	<b>The King's Head</b>

On Sunday they decided to go together first to the cathedral for Sung Eucharist (17) and then to Mosque for their namas (18). Then they would return home, listen to the voice of God, and whatever He would tell them, they would do.

But when they returned to their hotel from Evensong (19) and The King's Head (20), God admonished them, but they did not realise it.



The Bishop of Rochester,  
Michael Nazir-Ali,  
© BBC News 2002

Ali found an angry letter from his boss. 'This very instant you continue your trip to London. I am not paying your wages so that you can attend the World Parliament of Religions (21). You are not the Bishop of Durham (22) and even less the Bishop of Rochester (23). If you want to serve God, show our samples to our customers and do not talk semantics.' (24)

Yasin found a letter from his father: 'Bachá, (25) come home as fast as you can. Your mother is in hospital, I need your help in our shop, and they are asking for you at Mosque.'

So they parted the same evening without having settled the matter and each of them pondered what he had heard from the other.

Six weeks later Yasin wrote a letter to his brother: 'Dear Brother, your arguments have convinced me. Now I am a Christian like you. Mother doesn't mind, but Father is so angry that he never wants to see me again.'

Then Ali, overcome by pain and anger, rent his shirt and sent his brother an e-mail: 'Oh you vessel of divine wrath, (26) are you determined to race towards damnation by renouncing the true faith? Yesterday I returned to Islam.'

So it was that the Christian converted the Muslim, and the Muslim converted the Christian; and everything went on as before except that their resentment was greater.

'Vohi gadha, vohi palang', said the Imam and stroked his white beard: 'Same old donkey, same old saddle'.

Remember: Do not brood and speculate about religion, lest you lose the strength of your faith. Do not argue with people of different religions, least of all with people who know as little about it as you, and even less with scholars, for they try to overpower you by their learning and the artifice of their words and not by touching your heart. Instead live by your faith and do not make simple things complicated -- unless your conscience drives you to change.

Note: This story is based on, and partly translated from, the German story 'Die Bekehrung' (The conversion) by Johann Peter Hebel (1760-1826)

#### FOOTNOTES

- (01) Bradford, town in Yorkshire (England) with a large Muslim population
- (02) house of peace: Dar-as-Salaam
- (03) Eid: major Muslim festival celebrated at the end of Ramadan
- (04) Lent: the Christian forty days of 'fasting'
- (05) Ramadan: the Muslim month of fasting
- (06) Easter: the highest-ranking Christian festival, preceded by Lent, the period of fasting
- (07) Bhai: 'brother' (Urdu)
- (08) Stormont: seat of Parliament in Northern Ireland, for years the scene of much bitter quibbling and unsuccessful negotiations between Catholic and Protestant parties
- (09) Jerusalem ('town of peace'): the scene of many intractable conflicts and negotiations between Jews (Israelis) and Muslims (Palestinians)
- (10) blasphemy: The Koran condemns the Christian teaching that Jesus is the 'son of God' as a blasphemy:  
 '... admonish those who say that Allah has begotten a son. Surely of this they could have no knowledge, neither they nor their fathers: a monstrous blasphemy is that which they utter.' (Surah 18)  
 'Such was Jesus, the son of Mary. That is the whole truth, which they are unwilling to accept. Allah forbid that He Himself should beget a son!' (Surah 19: 90)  
 This is based on a literalist interpretation of the word 'son': to beget a son, the father must have sexual organs and must have used them in the traditional way. To imagine God engaged in such a vulgar activity is what is blasphemous in the notion that Jesus is the son of God. This interpretation ignores the fact that nowhere in the New Testament, nor anywhere else in Christian theology, is it suggested that God had sexual intercourse with the Virgin Mary, who, it is asserted, remained a virgin even after giving birth to Jesus. This latter doctrine shows

clearly that the word 'son' does not have the usual anatomical implications.

- (11) Saint Paul: author of the oldest parts of the New Testament, and most successful proselytiser for Christianity.
- (12) companions: The companions of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H.) were the first converts to Islam, who saw the Holy Prophet in the flesh. The most famous of these were Abu Bakr, the first Khalif, and Umar (Omar), the second Khalif. Their status is similar to that of the 12 Apostles in Christianity.
- (13) bacon: Muslims are not allowed to eat pork. As a result of a long tradition even the thought of it fills them with genuine disgust, even more so than imagining somebody breaking the prohibition of drinking alcohol.
- (14) Denmark: Much of the bacon consumed in England comes from Denmark.
- (15) Namaas-e-Juma'ah: Namas = 'prayer' (Urdu), juma'ah = 'Friday' (Urdu). Namaas-e-Juma'ah are the Friday Prayers, the most important prayers of the week. Friday is the Muslim holy day.
- (16) Imam: The Imam leads the prayers at mosque.
- (17) Sung Eucharist: Solemn Sunday service in the Anglican church.
- (18) namas: 'prayers' (Urdu) = 'salat' (Arabic)
- (19) Evensong: evening prayers in the Anglican church
- (20) The King's Head: popular name for English pubs, where alcohol is consumed (a corresponding German name is 'Der grüne Baum' [the green tree]).
- (21) World Parliament of Religions: a series of international assemblies of representatives of many religions begun in Chicago in 1893, whose purpose it was to create greater understanding among different religions.
- (22) Bishop of Durham: Dr David Jenkins (1925-2016), one-time Bishop of Durham (1984-1994), became famous (or infamous) for many of his learned and unorthodox views which interpreted Christian doctrine in a non-literalist way.

On the Virgin Birth he said: "I wouldn't put it past God to arrange a virgin birth if he wanted. But I don't think he did."

On the resurrection of Christ, he said: "The resurrection was not a single event, but a series of experiences that

gradually convinced people that Jesus's life, power, purpose and personality were actually continuing." (BBC obituary, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37093551>, retrieved 2024-12-02)

Once he used the words "bloody" and "damn" in a sermon and was banned from preaching in two of his own churches after complaints from members of the congregation. Source: "Bishop banned from pulpit for swearing", The Sunday Times, 2006-08-27 – <https://web.archive.org/web/20110604110530/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article620772.ece> – Retrieved 2024-12-02

- (23) Bishop of Rochester: Michael Nazir-Ali (1949–), Anglican bishop of Rochester from 1994 to 2009. He was born in Pakistan to parents who converted from Islam to Roman Catholicism. As a teenager he became an Anglican. In 1994 he became Anglican Bishop of Rochester. In 2021 he converted to Roman Catholicism. Unlike David Jenkins he is conservative in his theological outlook (e.g. sexual morality, family attitudes).
- (24) semantics: academic discipline concerned with the meaning of words and language; popularly used in the sense of 'splitting hairs'
- (25) Bachá: 'my son' (Urdu)
- (26) vessel of divine wrath: (Bible, New Testament, letter of Paul to the Romans 9:22), a person predestined for eternal damnation

**^The German original of this story**

## **Johann Peter Hebel: Die Bekehrung**

Zwei Brüder im Westfäliger Land lebten miteinander in Frieden und Liebe, bis einmal der jüngere lutherisch blieb und der ältere katholisch wurde. Als der jüngere lutherisch blieb und der ältere katholisch wurde, taten sie sich alles Herzeleid an. Zuletzt schickte der Vater den katholischen als Ladendiener in die Fremde. Erst nach einigen Jahren schrieb er zum ersten Mal an seinen Bruder. "Bruder", schrieb er, "es geht mir doch im Kopf herum, daß wir nicht einen Glauben haben und nicht in den nämlichen Himmel kommen sollen, vielleicht in gar keinen. Kannst du mich wieder lutherisch machen, wohl und gut, kann ich dich katholisch machen, desto besser." Also beschied er ihn in den "Roten Adler" nach Neuwied, wo er wegen einem Geschäft durchreiste. "Dort wollen wirs ausmachen." In den ersten Tagen

kamen sie nicht weit miteinander. Schalt der Lutherische: "Der Papst ist der Antichrist", schalt der Katholische: "Luther ist der Widerchrist." Berief sich der Katholische auf den heiligen Augustin, sagte der Lutherische: "Ich hab nichts gegen ihn, er mag ein gelehrter Herr gewesen sein, aber beim ersten Pfingstfest zu Jerusalem war er nicht dabei." Aber am Samstag aß schon der Lutherische mit seinem Bruder Fastenspeise. "Bruder", sagte er, "der Stockfisch schmeckt nicht giftig zu den durchgeschlagenen Erbsen"; und abends ging schon der Katholische mit seinem Bruder in die lutherische Vesper. "Bruder", sagt er, "euer Schulmeister singt keinen schlechten Tremulant." Den andern Tag wollten sie miteinander zuerst in die Frühmesse, danach in die lutherische Predigt und was sie alsdann bis heut über acht Tage der liebe Gott vermahnt, das wollten sie tun. Als sie aber aus der Vesper und aus dem "Grünen Baum" nach Hause kamen, ermahnte sie Gott, aber sie verstanden es nicht. Denn der Ladendiener fand einen zornigen Brief von seinem Herrn. "Augenblicklich setzt Eure Reise fort! Hab ich Euch auf eine Tridenter Kirchenversammlung nach Neuwied geschickt, oder sollt Ihr nicht vielmehr die Musterkarte reiten?" Und der andere fand einen Brief von seinem Vater: "Lieber Sohn, komm heim, sobald du kannst, du mußt spielen." Also gingen sie noch den nämlichen Abend unverrichteter Sachen auseinander und dachten jeder für sich nach, was er von dem andern gehört hatte. Nach sechs Wochen schreibt der jüngere dem Ladendiener einen Brief: "Bruder, deine Gründe haben mich unterdessen vollkommen überzeugt. Ich bin jetzt auch katholisch. Den Eltern ist es insofern recht. Aber dem Vater darf ich nimmer unter die Augen kommen." Da ergriff der Bruder voll Schmerz und Unwillen die Feder. "Du Kind des Zorns und der Ungnade, willst du denn mit Gewalt in die Verdammnis rennen, daß du die seligmachende Religion verleugnest? Gestrigs Tags bin ich wieder lutherisch worden." Also hat der katholische Bruder den lutherischen bekehrt, und der lutherische hat den katholischen bekehrt; und war nachher wieder wie vorher, höchstens ein wenig schlimmer.

**Merke:** Du sollst nicht über die Religion grübeln und tüfteln, damit du nicht deines Glaubens Kraft verlierst. Auch sollst du nicht mit Andersdenkenden darüber disputieren, am wenigsten mit solchen, die es ebensowenig verstehen als du, noch weniger mit Gelehrten, denn die besiegen dich durch ihre Gelehrsamkeit und Kunst, nicht durch deine Überzeugung. Sondern du sollst deines Glaubens leben und, was gerade ist, nicht krumm machen. Es sei dann, daß dich dein Gewissen selber treibt zu schanschieren.

^eof

## ^(12) Klaus Bung: A Simple Cure

### **Impressum**

Klaus Bung: A Simple Cure  
(Story, adapted from J P Hebel)

Length: see Contents below

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Date: 2024-09-06, Mk2.2

### **CONTENTS**

- Klaus Bung:  
A Simple Cure  
Length: 1,125 words = 6,023 characters  
= 5 pp A4 single-spaced
- Johann Peter Hebel (1760-1826):  
Der geheilte Patient  
Length: 899 words = 5,202 characters
- Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895):  
The Bishop and the Gynaecologist  
Length: 1,935 words = 10,716 characters

**EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

While the Palestinians in Gaza and the people of Northern Ethiopia are dying of hunger, many citizens of the UK and the USA are suffering from too much food. "Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States."

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK554571/>)

Fat-shaming is so popular that it had to be banned. A massive defence movement with the slogan "Fat is Beautiful" is on the march. Klaus Bung's story 'A Simple Cure' is a cautionary tale which has some bearing on this situation. A rich and fat patient from the South of England is cured by a wise doctor in the North. If fat is beautiful, then the cure has made him ugly.

See below to read Hebel's original story.

This is followed by a story by Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895) dealing with constipation as an occupational disease of high-ranking clerics in the Russian church of his time.

## Klaus Bung: A Simple Cure

With apologies to Johann Peter Hebel (1760-1826)

In spite of all their money, rich people have to bear burdens and illnesses of which the poor man, thank God, has never heard, for there are illnesses which do not come from the air but from the full platters and glistening glasses and comfortable armchairs and silk covered beds. A millionaire from Windsor knows this only too well.

He spent all morning in his armchair smoking (if he wasn't too lazy for that) or looking out of the window. Then he devoured his lunch as if he had been working in a coal mine, and the neighbours sometimes said, "Listen to the storm out there, or is it the neighbour wheezing so hard?"

He spent all afternoon eating and drinking, something cold, or something warm, without hunger and appetite, just out of boredom, till evening, and one could never quite tell whether his lunch had ended or his dinner had started.

After supper, he went to bed exhausted as if he had spent all day unloading stones or splitting wood.

So he became fat and was as clumsy as a sack. He no longer enjoyed eating or sleeping, and for a long time he was neither really healthy nor really ill. But when he himself described it, he had 365 illnesses, a different one for each day of the year.

He consulted all the doctors in Harley Street. He swallowed buckets of mixtures and shovels of powders, and pills as big as ducks' eggs. In the end, people thought it so funny that they called him the two-legged pharmacy.

But all the doctoring did him no good, for he didn't do what the doctors ordered but said: "What's the point of being rich if I am to live like a dog and the doctor refuses to make me healthy for my money?"



## Newcastle upon Tyne Infirmary in 1786

One day he heard of a doctor at the famous Newcastle Infirmary, which is one hundred or five hundred miles from Windsor. This doctor, he heard, was so skilled that people got cured if he just gave them a stare, and wherever he showed up, the Grim Reaper got scared and hid behind the nearest barn.

Our man started trusting this doctor and sent him an e-mail describing his problems.

The doctor soon realised that this patient did not need medication but moderation and exercise, and said to himself: "Just wait. I'll soon have you fixed."

So he sent him an e-mail: "My dear friend, you are in grave danger, but you can be saved if you follow my instructions carefully.

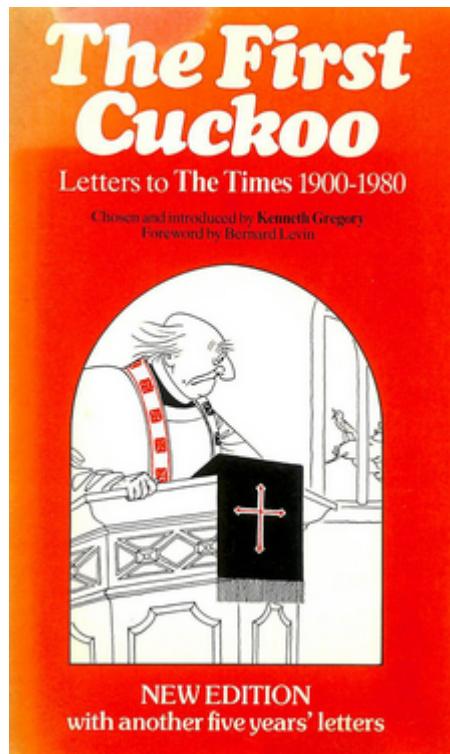
You have a dangerous animal in your belly, a snake with seven heads and mouths. I must have a face-to-face talk with this beast and therefore you have to visit me.

But, firstly, you must not come in your limousine, or by train, or even on horseback, but you must walk, like the apostles (Peace be upon them), otherwise you'll shake the snake and she'll get angry and will bite off your guts, seven intestines, all with one bite.

Secondly, you must not eat more than a plate of vegetables twice a day. For lunch you can add a banger, and for dinner a boiled egg, and in the morning you can have a little beef tea with some chopped chives.

If you eat more than that, it will make the snake bigger, and she'll squeeze on your liver, which is very painful and can eventually kill you, and next time you have your measurements taken it won't be your tailor but a carpenter.

This is my advice, and if you don't follow it, you will not hear the first cuckoo next spring or read about it in The Times. Now it's up to you."



When the patient heard this sort of talk, he immediately had his boots greased, and the following morning he started walking as the doctor had ordered.

On the first day, he was so slow that a snail could have been his forerunner, and if somebody said Hello, he replied with a curse, and where a little worm was crawling across his path, he would crush it.

But on the second and third morning he felt that the birds had not sung so beautifully for a long time and the dew was so fresh and the corncockles in the fields so red, and all the people he met looked so friendly - and so did he.

Every morning when he left his hostel, the world was more beautiful, and he walked along more lightly and more cheerfully.

And when, after eighteen days, he reached Newcastle upon Tyne and got up the following morning, he felt so well that he thought: "I couldn't have got cured on a worse day than today when I am supposed to see the doctor. I wish I were a bit breathless and had cramps in my stomach or an insect bite."

He arrived at the doctor's, and the doctor took his hand and said: "Now tell me again very thoroughly what is wrong with you."

The patient said: "Thank God, nothing is wrong with me, and if you are as healthy as me, I shall be very happy."

The doctor said: "It was a good spirit that advised you to follow my instructions. The mother snake is now dead. But you still have her eggs in your body. Therefore you must go home on foot, and at home you must saw logs for firewood every day, and not eat more than hunger demands, to make sure the eggs do not hatch. If you do that," he said with a smile, "you can live to a ripe old age."

The rich stranger said: "Doctor, you are a subtle bird. I know what you mean."

He followed the doctor's advice and lived for eighty-seven years and four months and ten days healthy like a fish in water, and every New Year's Day, he sent the doctor twenty gold sovereigns as a greeting.

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**THE GERMAN ORIGINAL OF THIS STORY****Johann Peter Hebel (1760-1826):  
Der geheilte Patient**

Reiche Leute haben trotz ihrer gelben Vögel doch manchmal auch allerlei Lasten und Krankheiten auszustehen, von denen gottlob der arme Mann nichts weiß, denn es gibt Krankheiten, die nicht in der Luft stecken, sondern in den vollen Schüsseln und Gläsern und in den weichen Sesseln und seidenen Betten, wie jener reiche Amsterdamer ein Wort davon reden kann.

Den ganzen Vormittag saß er im Lehnsessel und rauchte Tabak, wenn er nicht zu faul war, oder hatte Maulaffen feil zum Fenster hinaus, aß aber zu Mittag doch wie ein Drescher, und die Nachbarn sagten manchmal: "Windet's draußen oder schnauft der Nachbar so?"

Den ganzen Nachmittag aß und trank er ebenfalls bald etwas Kaltes, bald etwas Warmes, ohne Hunger und ohne Appetit, aus lauter Langeweile bis an den Abend, so daß man bei ihm nie recht sagen konnte, wo das Mittagessen aufhörte und wo das Nachtessen anfing.

Nach dem Nachtessen legte er sich ins Bett und war so müd, als wenn er den ganzen Tag Steine abgeladen oder Holz gespalten hätte.

Davon bekam er zuletzt einen dicken Leib, der so unbeholfen war wie ein Sack. Essen und Schlaf wollten ihm nimmer schmecken, und er war lange Zeit, wie es manchmal geht, nicht recht gesund und nicht recht krank; wenn man aber ihn selber hörte, so hatte er 365 Krankheiten, nämlich alle Tage eine andere.

Alle Ärzte, die in Amsterdam sind, mußten ihm raten. Er verschluckte ganze Feuereimer voll Mixturen und ganze Schaufeln voll Pulver und Pillen wie Enteneier so groß, und man nannte ihn zuletzt scherhaft nur die zweibeinige Apotheke.

Aber alles Doktern half ihm nichts, denn er befolgte nicht, was ihm die Ärzte befahlen, sondern sagte: "Wofür bin ich ein reicher Mann, wenn ich leben soll wie ein Hund, und der Doktor will mich nicht gesund machen für mein Geld?"

Endlich hörte er von einem Arzt, der hundert Stunden weit weg wohnte, der sei so geschickt, daß die Kranken gesund würden, wenn er sie nur recht anschauet, und der Tod geh' ihm aus dem Wege, wo er sich sehen lasse. Zu dem Arzt faßte der Mann ein Zutrauen und schrieb ihm seinen Umstand.

Der Arzt merkte bald, was ihm fehlte, nämlich nicht Arznei, sondern Mäßigkeit und Bewegung, und sagte: "Wart', dich will ich bald kuriert haben."

Deswegen schrieb er ihm ein Brieflein folgenden Inhalts: "Guter Freund, Ihr habt einen schlimmen Umstand, doch wird Euch zu helfen sein, wenn Ihr folgen wollt. Ihr habt ein böses Tier im Bauch, einen Lindwurm mit sieben Mäulern. Mit dem Lindwurm muß ich selber reden, und Ihr müßt zu mir kommen. Aber für's erste, so dürft Ihr nicht fahren oder auf dem Rößlein reiten, sondern auf des Schuhmachers Rappen, sonst schüttelt Ihr den Lindwurm, und er beißt Euch die Eingeweide ab, sieben Därme auf einmal ganz entzwei. Fürs andere dürft Ihr nicht mehr essen als zweimal des Tages einen Teller voll Gemüs, mittags ein Bratwürstlein dazu, und nachts ein Ei, und am Morgen ein Fleischsüpplein mit Schnittlauch drauf. Was Ihr mehr esset, davon wird nur der Lindwurm größer, so daß er Euch die Leber verdrückt, und der Schneider hat Euch nimmer viel anzumessen, aber der Schreiner. Dies ist mein Rat, und wenn Ihr mir nicht folgt, so hört Ihr im anderen Frühjahr den Kuckuck nimmer schreien. Tut, was Ihr wollt!"

Als der Patient so mit sich reden hörte, ließ er sich sogleich den anderen Morgen die Stiefel salben und machte sich auf den Weg, wie ihm der Doktor befohlen hatte.

Den ersten Tag ging es so langsam, daß eine Schnecke hätte können sein Vorreiter sein, und wer ihn grüßte, dem dankte er nicht, und wo ein Würmlein auf der Erde kroch, das zertrat er. Aber schon am zweiten und am dritten Morgen kam es ihm vor, als wenn die Vögel schon lange nimmer so lieblich gesungen hätten, und der Tau schien ihm so frisch und die Kornrosen im Felde so rot, und alle Leute, die ihm begegneten, sahen so freundlich aus, und er auch; und alle Morgen, wenn er aus der Herberge ausging, war's schöner, und er ging leichter und munterer dahin, und als er am achtzehnten Tage in der Stadt des Arztes ankam und den anderen Morgen aufstand, war es ihm so wohl, daß er sagte: "Ich hätte zu keiner ungeschickteren Zeit können gesund werden als jetzt, wo ich zum Doktor soll. Wenn's mir doch nur ein wenig in den Ohren brauste, oder das Herzwasser lief' mir."

Als er zum Doktor kam, nahm ihn der Doktor bei der Hand und sagte ihm: "Jetzt erzählt mir denn noch einmal von Grund aus, was Euch fehlt."

Da sagte er: "Herr Doktor, mir fehlt gottlob nichts, und wenn Ihr so gesund seid wie ich, so soll's mich freuen."

Der Doktor sagte: "Das hat Euch. ein guter Geist geraten, daß Ihr meinem Rat gefolgt habt. Der Lindwurm ist jetzt abgestanden. Aber Ihr habt noch Eier im Leib, deswegen müßt Ihr wieder zu Fuß heimgehen und daheim fleißig Holz sägen und nicht mehr essen, als Euch der Hunger ermahnt, damit die Eier nicht ausschlupfen, so könnt Ihr ein alter Mann werden", und lächelte dazu.

Aber der reiche Fremdling sagte: "Herr Doktor, Ihr seid ein feiner Kauz, und ich versteh Euch wohl', und hat nachher dem Rat gefolgt und siebenundachtzig Jahre, vier Monate, zehn Tage

gelebt, wie ein Fisch im Wasser so gesund, und hat alle Neujahr dem Arzt zwanzig Dublonen zum Gruß geschickt."

**A STORY BY NIKOLAI LESKOV**

A similar sentiment is expressed in a story which Nikolai Leskov published between 1878 and 1880 in a Russian newspaper. This story and related ones appeared under the title "Tidbits from the Lives of Bishops". Klaus Bung translated the extract which follows from German into English.

## Nikolai Leskov

### The Bishop and the Gynaecologist

<p>Mein Bruder, ein recht bekannter Arzt, er ist Facharzt für Frauenkrankheiten, wohnt in Kiew in einem eigenen Haus unmittelbar neben dem Michailowkloster, wo der örtliche Vikarbischof seine Residenz hat. Als Geburtshelfer hat mein Bruder keinerlei Beziehungen zu den Schwarzkutten in der Nachbarschaft und hatte auch nie damit gerechnet, seine Praxis jemals bei ihnen ausüben zu müssen; einmal aber, in einer dunklen Herbstnacht (es liegt einige Jahre zurück), läutet doch an seiner Tür ein Mönch und bittet ihn, um jeden Preis Seiner Eminenz Porfiri zu Hilfe zu eilen.</p>	<p>My brother, a well-known gynaecologist lives in Kiev in his own house, which is adjacent to the Michailov monastery [St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery], where the local suffragan bishop resides. Since he is an gynaecologist, my brother has no relations to the pious brothers next door and had not expected ever to have to use his skills in their midst. But once, in a dark autumn night (some years ago), a monk rings his door bell and asks him to come urgently to assist his Eminence Profiri.</p>
<p>Der Doktor glaubte, der Mönch habe sich in der Tür geirrt, und befahl seinem Diener, ihm zu erläutern, er sei Geburtshelfer und für den Bischof nicht der richtige Mann.</p>	<p>The doctor thought the monk had mistaken the door and told his servant to explain to the monk that he was an obstetrician and therefore not qualified to help the bishop.</p>
<p>Doch der Diener, der dem Mönch diese Antwort überbrachte, kehrte zurück und sagte, der Mönch habe sich nicht geirrt, er sei ausdrücklich zu meinem Bruder geschickt worden, und der Bischof lasse ihn bitten, so schnell wie möglich zu kommen, denn es ginge ihm sehr schlecht.</p>	<p>The servant, however, who had taken this reply to the monk, returned and said the monk had not been mistaken; he had been sent expressly to my brother and the bishop requested him to come as quickly as possible because he was very ill.</p>
<p>"Was hat er denn?" fragte der Doktor.</p>	<p>"What is wrong with him," asked the doctor.</p>

<p>"Es geht ihm sehr schlecht, behauptet er: Im Leib ist irgendwas geplatzt."</p>	<p>"He is in a terrible state, he says: something in his body has exploded."</p>
<p>Na, dachte der Geburtshelfer, wenn es sich um den Leib handelt, dann liegt es ja nicht gar zu weit ab von meinem Fachgebiet, und er machte sich auf den Weg, wobei er, wie immer bei Krankenbesuchen, die Tasche mit seinen Geburtshilfeinstrumenten und -geräten mitnahm. Wir wollten ihn davon abbringen, diese Atmosphäre ins Kloster einzuschleppen, aber er hörte nicht auf uns.</p>	<p>Well, thought the obstetrician, if it has to do with his body, it is not too far from my speciality, and left the house. As was his habit at all his patient visits, he carried the bag with his obstetric instruments. We wanted to stop him from carrying this atmosphere into the monastery, but he wouldn't listen.</p>
<p>"Ich brauche die Instrumente", sagte er, "ohne sie bin ich wie ohne Hände."</p> <p>Und er hatte sehr gut daran getan, daß er darauf bestand.</p>	<p>"I need the instruments," he said, "without them I feel as if I had no hands."</p> <p>And, indeed, it turned out that this was a wise decision.</p>
<p>Kurz vor Morgengrauen kam er wieder nach Hause, eine aromatische Zigarette zwischen den Zähnen, und lachte.</p> <p>Wir fragten ihn, wo er gewesen sei.</p>	<p>Shortly before day-break he returned, had an aromatic cigar between his teeth, and laughed.</p> <p>We asked where he had been.</p>
<p>"Ich bin tatsächlich beim Bischof gewesen", antwortete er.</p> <p>"Und wem hast du dort beigestanden?"</p> <p>"Ihm selbst."</p> <p>"Und hast du deine Instrumente tatsächlich nicht umsonst mitgenommen?" fragten wir.</p> <p>"Eins davon habe ich brauchen können", sagte er und erzählte nun folgendes.</p> <p>"Ich komme ins Schlafgemach",</p>	<p>"I did indeed visit the bishop," he replied.</p> <p>"And whom did you assist there?"</p> <p>"The bishop himself."</p> <p>"And did you actually need your instruments?" we asked.</p> <p>"One of them I have been able to use," he said and told us the following.</p> <p>"I enter the bedroom", he</p>

<p>sagte er, "und der Bischof liegt da und stöhnt:</p> <p>'O Gott, Doktor! Wie spät Sie kommen ... Es geht mir schlecht.'</p>	<p>said, "and the bishop lies there and moans:</p> <p>'O my God, doctor! You have taken so long ... I am in a terrible state.'</p>
<p>Ich antwortete ihm: 'Entschuldigen Sie, Eminenz, ich bin ja Geburtshelfer und behandle an sich ausschließlich Frauen.'</p>	<p>I replied: 'Forgive me, your Eminence, I am an obstetrician and only treat women.'</p>
<p>Aber er sagte:</p> <p>'Ach, lassen Sie doch, ich bitte Sie: Als ob das jetzt eine Rolle spielte - außerdem habe ich vielleicht sogar ein Frauenleiden.'</p> <p>'Was fehlt Ihnen denn?'</p> <p>'Mein Bauch ist ganz aufgetrieben - ich kriege überhaupt keine Luft mehr.'</p>	<p>But he said:</p> <p>'Oh, I beg you, that doesn't matter, and perhaps I have indeed a female illness.'</p> <p>'Well, what is wrong with you?'</p> <p>'My belly is bloated - I can't breathe.'</p>
<p>Und tatsächlich", erzählte der Doktor, "fiel ihm das Atmen so schwer, daß er ganz rot angelaufen war und die Augen verdrehte; und überall, wo ich klopfte, war sein Bauch fürchterlich aufgebläht.</p>	<p>And indeed", related the doctor, "breathing was so difficult for him that his face was flushed red and he was rolling his eyes; and wherever I knocked, his belly was terribly distended.</p>
<p>'Das ist alles voller Gase', sagte ich, 'weiter nichts.'</p> <p>'Ich habe schon selbst gedacht', antwortete er, 'Sie würden mich keines anderen Vergehens überführen können, aber helfen Sie mir, ich bitte Sie.'</p>	<p>'That's nothing,' I said, 'just full of gases.'</p> <p>'Yes, I was thinking already you would not be able to convict me of any worse transgression, but please help me, I beg you.'</p>
<p>'Wir müssen schnellstens den Magen entleeren', sagte der Doktor.</p> <p>'Da brauchen Sie sich keine Mühe zu geben, es schlägt nichts an: alles knochenhart, und nichts herauszubekommen.'</p>	<p>'We have to empty your stomach as quickly as possible,' the doctor said.</p> <p>'You needn't even try that, nothing works: everything is as hard as bones and refuses to come out.'</p>

<p>Und der Bischof nannte mir die allerstärksten Abführmittel, die er (selbst nicht schlecht bewandert in der Medizin) schon gebraucht hatte, aber alles sei umsonst gewesen.</p>	<p>And the bishop listed the strongest laxatives, which he (himself well informed about medicine) had tried, but everything had been in vain.</p>
<p>'Schlimm', bemerkte der Geburtshelfer.</p> <p>'Ja, mein Verehrtester', gab der Bischof zur Antwort, 'meinen Verdauungsapparat habe ich mir verdorben. Und wenn man auch gar nichts ißt und trinkt, bei diesem unmenschlichen Leben kann man ihn einfach nicht in Schuß halten. Jetzt aber ... ich flehe Sie an ... gebrauchen Sie meinetwegen irgendeins von Ihren Instrumenten, wenn es nur Erleichterung schafft.'</p>	<p>'That's bad', observed the obstetrician.</p> <p>'So it is, my dear Sir', replied the bishop, 'I have ruined my digestive system. Even if one eats and drinks absolutely nothing, in this inhuman lifestyle one simply cannot keep it in good shape. But now ... I implore you ... just use one of your instruments if only it gives me some relief.'</p>
<p>Da erwies sich nun ein Instrument aus dem Geburtshelferridikül als sehr brauchbar, und nachdem er rasch Erleichterung gebracht hatte, kam es zu einer netten Unterhaltung,</p>	<p>Now one of the instruments from the obstetrics tool kit turned out to be very useful and, after the doctor had quickly provided relief, a pleasant conversation started.</p>
<p>die damit anfing, daß der Arzt dem erleichterten Oberhirten sagte, er werde ihm nichts verschreiben, denn seine Krankheit käme nicht von gelegentlicher Unmäßigkeit, sondern von Mangel an Luft und Bewegung, doch sei der dadurch herbeigeführte Zustand sehr ernst und lebensgefährlich.</p>	<p>The doctor told the relieved bishop: 'I shall not prescribe any medicine for you; for your complaints are not caused by occasional overindulgence, but by lack of fresh air and exercise, but the state of the body caused by this lack is very serious and, in fact, can lead to death.'</p>
<p>'Ach, ich stimme Ihnen ja völlig zu', antwortete Eminenz Porfiri. 'Aber was raten Sie mir denn?'</p> <p>'Mehr an die frische Luft gehen, besonders in den Bergen, wir haben ja genug.'</p>	<p>'Oh, I completely agree with you,' replied his Eminence Porfiri. 'But what should I do?'</p> <p>'Spend more time in the open air, especially in the mountains, after all, we have many of them.'</p>

<p>'Freilich, freilich ... vortrefflich; und vielleicht noch täglich anderthalb Stündchen reiten?'</p> <p>'Das wäre sehr nützlich.'</p> <p>'Lieber Nachbar, setzen Sie sich schleunigst an meinen Tisch und schreiben Sie mir das alles auf, nach der alten Formel, mit dem cum deo.'</p>	<p>'Indeed, indeed ... excellent; and perhaps also spend ninety minutes on horseback every day?'</p> <p>'That would be very useful.'</p> <p>'Dear Neighbour, please sit down quickly at my desk and write all this down for me, in accordance with the old formula, with the "cum deo".'</p> <p>[Note: cum deo: with God, in the name of God]</p>
<p>'Wozu soll ich das aufschreiben, ich habe es Ihnen doch deutlich genug gesagt.'</p>	<p>'Why should I write it down, I have said it to you clearly enough.'</p>
<p>'Mit Sagen ist da nicht viel getan, das alles weiß ich auch ohne Sie. Nein, schreiben Sie mir das mal auf, ich will ein Gesuch an den Synod schicken, und Ihr Rezept lege ich bei:</p>	<p>'Saying doesn't help much, I know all these things without you. No, write it down. I shall send a request to the Synod and attach your prescription:</p>
<p>Ob man mir nicht doch genehmigt, wenigstens um mir das Leben zu retten, täglich zwei Stunden zu Fuß durch die Straßen zu laufen? Aber nein, ich will Sie nicht unnütz bemühen, lassen Sie das Schreiben. Der Heilige Synod billigt mir ein solches Vorrecht sowieso nicht zu, außerdem würden mich die frommen Leute gar nicht zu Fuß gehen lassen: würden alle meinen Segen wollen. Etwas anderes wäre es mit dem Reiten, das liebe ich, bin früher im Orient viel geritten, und damals habe ich keine solchen Anfälle gekannt, aber im Orient ist unsereiner besser dran, dort unter den Türken lebt man einfacher und kann sich freier bewegen.'</p>	<p>I shall ask for permission, in order to save my life, to walk for two hours a day through the streets. But no, I do not want to waste your time, forget about writing anything. The Holy Synod will not grant me such a privilege anyway, and moreover the pious people would not let me walk anyway: they would all want my blessing. Riding would be a different matter, I love it and used to ride a lot in the Orient in the past. I had no such problems at that time. But in the Orient people like me are better off, there, amongst the Turks, one can live more simply and move about with fewer restrictions.</p>

<p>'Sie könnten sich doch irgendwie bei sich zu Hause Bewegung verschaffen', sagte der Doktor.</p>	<p>'But somehow you could get some exercise at home,' said the doctor.</p>
<p>'Im Sommer, wenn der Garten geöffnet ist, gehe ich im Garten spazieren. Es ist zwar langweilig, immer auf ein und derselben Stelle herumzutreten, aber ich tu's. Sobald aber der Herbst mit seinem Regen kommt, sitze ich fest. Wohin soll man denn in diesem Morast gehen? Und wenn ich draußen die gepflasterten Wege gehe, dann werde ich wieder wegen des Segens behelligt. So bleibe ich im Zimmer.</p>	<p>'In summer, when the garden is open, I go for a walk in the garden. Of course, it is boring to keep stepping about on the same spot, but I do it. But as soon as autumn with its rains arrives, I am stuck. Where could one possibly go in this morass? And if I use the paved paths on the outside, I will be pestered for my blessings. So I stay in my room.</p>
<p>Im Winter Tag für Tag zu Hause und das ganze zeitige Frühjahr gleichfalls. Nun rechnen Sie mal nach, ob ein Bischof viel an die Luft gehen kann.'</p>	<p>In winter spend every day at home and in early spring as well. Now you can calculate whether a bishop can spend much time in the open air.</p>
<p>'Gibt es im Winter auf dem Klosterhof keine Wege?'</p> <p>'Natürlich; ich darf sie nur nicht benutzen.'</p> <p>'Warum denn nicht?'</p>	<p>'Aren't there any footpaths in the courtyard during winter?'</p> <p>'Of course; but I am not allowed to use them.'</p> <p>'Why not?'</p>
<p>'Mein Rang ist zu hoch; die Mönche würden sich gehemmt fühlen, mit mir zusammen spazierenzugehen, außerdem würde man sagen, es zieme sich nicht für mich, auf so vertraulichem Fuße mit ihnen zu verkehren; und wenn dann die frommen Leute Wind davon bekommen, daß der Bischof draußen herumläuft, überfallen sie einen wieder wegen des Segens. Nichts als Unruhe würde es geben: Sogar mein Klosterkranich und der Ziegenbock im Pferdestall, die jetzt das Privileg vor mir genießen, auf diesem Weg</p>	<p>'My rank is too high; the monks would feel inhibited to take a walk together with me. Moreover people would say it was not appropriate for me to fraternise with them. And if the pious people find out that the bishop is walking about outside, they would molest me again for the blessing. There would be nothing but noise: Even my monastery crane and the goat in the horse stable, who, at present, have the right, denied to me, to walk about on this path, would feel inhibited if I turned up in</p>

<p>umherzuspazieren, würden sich gehemmt fühlen, wenn ich an der frischen Luft auftauchte. Was für eine andere, beweglichere Lebensweise können Sie mir nun nennen?'</p>	<p>the fresh air. Now, what other, more mobile, life style can you recommend to me?'</p>
<p>Der Arzt zuckte die Achseln und antwortete:</p> <p>'Keine.'</p> <p>'Eben, &gt;keine&lt;. Ich sage schon lange, wir Bischöfe sind vielleicht die hilfsbedürftigsten Menschen auf der Welt, und wenn die Medizin nichts für uns tut, sind wir überhaupt verloren.'</p>	<p>The doctor shrugged his shoulders and replied:</p> <p>'None.'</p> <p>'Exactly, &gt;None&lt;. I have been saying for a long time, we bishops are perhaps the most helpless people on earth, and if medical science does not do anything for us, we are simply lost.'</p>
<p>'Die Medizin?' wiederholte der Arzt. 'Nun, Eure Eminenz, das dürften Sie kaum von uns erwarten.'</p> <p>'Und warum nicht?'</p> <p>'Wir gehören doch nicht zu den Frommen ... da sollen mal erst die frommen Leute etwas für Sie tun.'</p>	<p>'Medical science?' repeated the doctor. 'Now, Your Eminence, you could not really expect that from us.'</p> <p>'And why not?'</p> <p>'We are not part of the pious population ... so the pious people are the ones who should do something for you.'</p>
<p>'So ist' s recht! Weit gefehlt! Die frommen Leute sind es ja gerade, die uns zugrunde richten. Wenn in deren Gegenwart der Bischof einmal rülpst, weil ihm dieses Jammerleben bis zum Halse steht, dann fassen sie das als Zeichen der Gnade auf, meinen, &gt;die Seele hält Zwiesprache mit Gott&lt;, wo sie doch mit gar niemandem spricht, sondern einfach raus will, weil ihr zu eng ist! Nein, die Medizin, Verehrtester, allein die Medizin kann uns retten, und sie würde sich dabei gar nichts vergeben. Die Medizin muß sich nicht unsretwegen und nicht wegen der Frömmigkeit mit uns befassen, sondern um</p>	<p>'Well spoken! But you are wrong! It is the pious people who ruin us. If in their presence the bishop happens to belch because he is sick and tired of this miserable life, then they interpret this as a sign of divine grace, believe that &gt;my soul is in dialogue with God&lt; even though it is not talking to anyone, but simply wants to get out, because it is too tight in the windpipe! No, medical science, my respected Sir, only medical science can save us, and you would not have to feel embarrassed when doing so. Medical science has to tackle our health problem not for our sake and not out of piety, but</p>

die Wissenschaft zu bereichern.'	in order to enrich science.
'Welchen Nutzen könnte es der Medizin bringen, sich mit den Bischöfen zu befassen? Das ist eine sehr interessante Frage.'	'How could medical science benefit from studying bishops? That is a very interesting question.'
'Eine sehr interessante Frage, Verehrtester! Die Medizin könnte die Wissenschaft durch uns mit neuen Erkenntnissen bereichern. Sehen Sie, in all den Jahren, seit ich an meinen Darmbeschwerden leide, habe ich aufmerksam alle neuen medizinischen Dissertationen verfolgt und bin immer wieder von neuem darüber erstaunt, was für unnütze und uninteressante Themen gewählt werden!'	'A very interesting question, respected Sir! With our help medical science could enrich The Sciences with new insights. Look, in all the years during which I have suffered from my intestinal problems I have carefully followed all new medical dissertations and have been surprised again and again how useless and uninteresting are the subjects which are chosen.'
Da schreibt einer über das Strahlenepithel, ein anderer über die Nachgeburt, also immer über Dinge, die ausgespien und ausgeschieden werden, aber keiner schreibt beispielsweise einmal eine Dissertation >Über bischöfliche Verstopfungen<. Und das wäre doch neu, originell, durchaus zeitgemäß und auch für die Menschheit von Nutzen, denn wenn wir uns frischer fühlten, würden wir auch menschenfreundlicher ...	One doctoral candidate writes about "Strahlenepithel" [epithelium, protective layer of organs], another about Afterbirth, i.e. always about things which are spat out or discharged, but nobody writes for instance a dissertation <b>&gt;About Episcopal Constipations&lt;</b> . But that would be new, original, very topical and also of benefit for mankind, for, if we felt more fresh and energetic, we would also be more humane ...
Es brauchte nur einmal irgendwo in der Zeitung darauf hingewiesen zu werden, bestimmt fände sich ein gescheiter Mediziner, der das aufgriffe. Und was für ein erlesenes geistliches Publikum würde sich zu seiner Doktordisputation einfinden und was für eine einträgliche Praxis würde er sich schaffen, wenn er sich auf diesen Gegenstand spezialisierte.	All that is necessary is for a newspaper to point this out, and I am sure a clever medic would turn up and pursue this question. And imagine what a select spiritual public would attend his doctoral disputation and what a profitable practice he could create by specialising in this topic.

<p>Und wenn unsere höchsten Stellen aus dieser Abhandlung ersehen würden, weshalb die Spezies der Eminenzen so sehr leidet und immer mehr zusammenschmilzt, dann würden sie sich vielleicht erbarmen und uns gestatten, zu Fuß durch die Straßen zu laufen. Und dann würden sich vielleicht auch die Menschen mehr an uns gewöhnen, und es könnten andere Beziehungen entstehen, nicht solche wie heute, die mit dem Erteilen des Segens enden. So ist es doch.</p>	<p>And if our highest officials could learn from this dissertation why the species of eminences is suffering so much and are ever decreasing in numbers, then perhaps they would have mercy and permit us to walk (on foot) through the streets. And then perhaps the people would get more used to us and different relationships could develop, not such as today which end when the blessing has been given. That's what it is like today, isn't it?</p>
<p>Ich oder ein anderer Bischof könnte, wenn er sich unter den Menschen bewegt, vielleicht jemanden etwas Gutes lehren, ihn von etwas zurückhalten oder ihm einen Rat geben.</p>	<p>I or another bishop could, when he is moving about among people, perhaps teach something good to a person, stop him from doing something bad or give him some helpful advice.</p>
<p>Aber so, wem bringen wir schon Nutzen? Bitte, Doktor, schlagen Sie aus uns Nutzen für die Wissenschaft und legen Sie unter Ihren Fachkollegen ein Wort für uns Hartleibige ein.'</p>	<p>But as it is now, for whom are we doing anything beneficial? Please, Doctor, take advantage of us for the benefit of science, and among your colleagues put in a word for us "Hard-bodied people" '.</p>
<p>Nach diesen Scherzreden waren der Kranke und der Doktor in aufgeräumter Stimmung voneinander geschieden.</p>	<p>After these light-hearted exchanges, the patient and the doctor had parted in a cheerful mood.</p>
<p>Der Leser aber möge sich einmal überlegen, wieviel Bitterkeit in diesen Scherzworten steckt, mit denen ein sehr kluger russischer Mensch geistlichen Standes seinem Ärger Luft machte, wieviel Sinnlosigkeit in den Verhältnissen, über die er spottete, Sinnlosigkeit, die das Leben belastet und erschwert durch unerträgliche Forderungen, welche nur deswegen nahezu</p>	<p>My readers should consider how much anguish is buried in these jocular words in which a very clever Russian man of clerical rank lets off steam, how much nonsense is in the circumstances about which he joked, nonsense which burdens life and makes it difficult because of unbearable demands. These demands continue to persist unmoveably only because nobody understands that they are a burden, and</p>

<p>jahrhundertelang unverrückbar fortbestehen, weil niemand begreift, daß sie eine Bürde darstellen, und den Menschen die "drückende und schwer zu tragende Last" abnehmen will ...</p>	<p>nobody wants to free people of this "oppressive and unbearable burden" ...</p>
<p>Zugegeben, wir dürfen unsere gottbegnadete Geistlichkeit nicht auf eine Stufe mit dem ersten besten, absolut unbegnadeten protestantischen Pastor stellen, der überall herumläuft, wo ein Privatmann herumlaufen kann; aber selbst wenn wir die Lage unserer Bischöfe mit der eines Geistlichen von entsprechendem Rang in der römischen Kirche vergleichen, ... dann zeigt sich, wieviel freier sogar ein römischer Bischof in seinen gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen ist. Er kann nicht nur ohne Glockengeläut und in schlichter Mietskutsche zu einem Bekannten aus dem Laienstande fahren, er besucht sogar ohne Schaden für sich selbst und für die Kirche Museen, Ausstellungen und Konzerte, geht selber seine Bücher kaufen, und mit einem von ihnen, dem Bischof G-m, einem großen Liebhaber antiker Kunst, bin ich sogar mehrfach in den Antiquariaten auf dem Petersburger Apraksin-Dwor gewesen, und all das hat weder dem Rang des Bischofs geschadet noch seinem guten Ruf, noch der römischen Kirche.</p>	<p>I admit, we may not put our divinely inspired clergy on the same level as any-old absolutely uninspired protestant pastor, who can walk wherever a private person can walk; but even if we compare the situation of our bishops with that of a cleric of similar rank in the Roman church, ... then we see how much more free even a Roman bishop is in his social relations. Not only can he, without ringing of bells and in a simply hackney carriage go to visit a lay acquaintance, he can even, without causing embarrassment for himself or his church, visit museums, exhibitions and concerts, go himself to buy his books, and with one of them, Bishop G-m, a great lover of antique art, I have repeatedly visited the second-hand bookshops at the Petersburg Apraksin-Dwor, and this did not harm the rank of the bishop or his reputation, or the Roman church.</p>
	<p>Translated by Klaus Bung Date: 2025-04-24 © 2025 Klaus Bung</p>

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## **^(13) Klaus Bung: Wedding Wishes**

### **Impressum**

Klaus Bung: Wedding Wishes

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### **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

The author has a friend in Calcutta whose son is about to get married. The author sends his good wishes to the son.

Motto:

And these few precepts in thy memory  
Look thou character  
(Polonius to Hamlet)

## Klaus Bung: Wedding Wishes

Dear E,

Salma and I are writing to wish you and your bride Ishvara's blessing for your wedding and for a long, happy and successful marriage.

There is an ancient Sanskrit saying, which is a recipe for a happy and successful life:

- Treat your parents like God
- Treat your teacher like God
- Treat your guest like God
- Treat your husband like God

to which we should add, since we live in the 21st century and since Hinduism is a living and developing religion:

- Treat your wife like the Devi

This last dictum is the most important of these, for a man, and surely a recipe for happiness in marriage, since you can never control how your wife treats you, but you can control how you treat your wife. And if you are lucky, and Ishvara anugraha (with God's grace), she will respond in kind.

This expectation is better than demands, which never lead to anything but can generate ill-feeling, however reasonable they may be.

Another useful attitude rooted in Hinduism, and sadly neglected in the West, is that each of us concentrates on doing his own duty rather than clamouring for his rights (= the duties of somebody else), since it is easier to do the former (do our duty) than to enforce the latter (other people doing their duty). The outcome, as the Gita teaches, is in God's hands and may sometimes, but not always, be positive. But having done our duty we will at least have done the thing which is most likely to be successful and contribute to happiness for us and for others.

If each partner's main concern is for the happiness and success of the other rather than hoping to get from the partner as much as possible, he/she is less likely to be disappointed, and happiness results as a by-product.

Finally I would like to add a thought from a Western author, one that criticises the Western tradition of celebrating a wedding with much rejoicing, even though so many Western marriages these days break down very quickly, something that I would not wish on you.

This comes from the German poet Goethe in his novel "Wilhelm Meister":

<p>Eigentlich aber konnte man bei dieser Gelegenheit die Bemerkung recht wahr finden, daß man keinen Zustand, der länger dauern, ja der eigentlich ein Beruf, eine Lebensweise werden soll, mit einer Feierlichkeit anfangen dürfe. Man feire nur, was glücklich vollendet ist; alle Zeremonien zum Anfange erschöpfen Lust und Kräfte, die das Streben hervorbringen und uns bei einer fortgesetzten Mühe beistehen sollen. Unter allen Festen ist das Hochzeitsfest das unschicklichste; keines sollte mehr in Stille, Demut und Hoffnung begangen werden als dieses.</p>	<p>On this occasion one could note the truth of the observation that one should not begin with a celebration any state which is intended to last, and which is meant to become a profession, a way of life. One should celebrate only what has been successfully concluded; all ceremonies at the beginning exhaust the desire and the strength which produce the striving which we need to assist us during continued efforts. Of all feasts the traditional wedding feast is the most inappropriate. No occasion demands more than a wedding day that it be spent in quietness, humility and hope.</p>
<p>Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Book 5, Ch 13, Hbg Ausg., Vol 7, p 329</p>	<p>Translated by Klaus Bung</p>

To Goethe's "quietness, humility, hope" one might add "and prayer".

As Hindu doctrine says, no action is purely good, or purely bad, or purely beneficial to all people (in brief: every silver lining has a cloud). Whatever we do for the benefit of one person will cause at least some sadness or disappointment in another.

I am aware of this. But if we insisted on avoiding absolutely any negative effects in our actions, we could never act at all. So all we can hope for and pray for, even at the beginning of a marriage (as a commentator on the Gita says) is that the good we do may outweigh the bad, the happiness that results for us and for others may be more than the unhappiness and sadness we inevitably cause.

In this spirit Salma and I are sending our good wishes and prayers to you and your wife and to both your families. Insha Allah, one day we will get to know you personally.

^eof

## ^(14) Klaus Bung: Sleepers Wake

### Impressum

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The new millennium  
truly arrived  
with the Manhattan terrorists  
on 11 September 2001.

## Klaus Bung: Sleepers Wake

[see Footnote (1)]

### 1: The Last Supper

[see Footnote (2) and (3)]

31 December 1999. Michael is not in love with the millennium and, indeed, had started a "Keep the Millennium out" campaign, not a popular enterprise, but he had his supporters, and there they stood, a thin red line (4) of heroes with the motto "Ave, Anne, morituri te salutant" (5), preferring to die with honour rather than to live in shame. Sad to say the millennium was unstoppable, and Michael could not altogether escape shame.

He spent the last afternoon of the year in the delightful company of the Countess of O (Viscondessa do P, Baronesa da Q), with a long walk along the river Douro towards the Ribeira, the ancient quarter of Porto. They sat on the deck of a boat restaurant sipping little cups of strong coffee, watched a seagull eating a fish on a jetty, saw the venerable names of Sandeman, Burmester, Cockburn (no, we do not say "cock") (6), Offley, Dow, Croft and Ferreira (7) across the river and felt secure in this ancient untroubled world, watched the sun sink for the last time into the Atlantic, observed the slowly changing colours in the sky and

their reflections on the water, the half-hourly ferry going to the little fishing village south of the river.

They saw, as the Countess pointed out, how in Portugal all strata of society manage to live cheek by jowl, the high-fashion shop, the rare-books shop and the goldsmith mingling with the iron-monger, the fish-monger and the green-grocer, the fishermen squatters living inside and outside their cargo-containers on the river bank, unmolested by the authorities and unconcerned with promenaders wending their way across their territory, next to expensive villas and high-rise flats with unaffordable rents -- the lawyer's stately home, floodlit, with its private footpath to the Domus Justitiae (8) half a mile away, overlooking it all.

They were content in this orderly and yet homely world. The streets were oddly silent, eerie almost: no cars, no boisterous pedestrians: were people sleeping now in order to be awake at the great moment? There was no sign that anything special was about to happen. The millennium was approaching on tiptoe.

At 7.30 they felt cold and hungry, the Countess selected a cosy family-owned and -run restaurant with four or five small dining rooms. They could stay till 9.30, when staff and owners would go to their own millennium celebrations.

They were the first couple to occupy their table in the first-floor dining room. Next to their table for two, a long table for thirteen had been laid. A middle aged woman with the face of a schoolmarm (9) and round spectacles on a pointed nose stepped (10) in. She had a large print of Leonardo's famous painting, to which the caption AMOR DAVINCIT OMNIA (11) (12) had been added. She pinned it up above the table, giving the setting a sacramental air. She, obviously the organiser or hostess, rearranged the large table fastidiously, laid a little present, carefully wrapped, on each plate, so homely, so worthy, prudent, so well-thought-out. "How lovingly she is preparing for her guests!" Michael thought, "a picture of the petty bourgeoisie of Portugal". Michael, the bachelor, would never have managed that.

The other tables in their small dining room had by now been occupied: a group of young Frenchmen and women, a large Portuguese family with a sweet, innocent-looking 10-year-old boy, two Italian intellectuals, and a dignified man with greying hair and a mastery of English and French and his stunning young African girlfriend, who spoke English.

Gradually the guests of the table next to theirs, the Leonardo table, arrived, all eleven of them women, from 20 to 55, all dressed up to the nines, all of them had done the best they could, yet their skirts were somewhat too short, their blouses too tight, their hair fiercely dyed, their make-up had been laid on with a trowel. They embraced one another with loud shrieks of joy and filled the whole room with their overwhelming uninhibited presence. "You know what they are?", whispered the Countess, "Hollow women!" (13)

"Hollow women?"

"Working girls!" (14)

The Countess, not without embarrassment at having to spend New Year's Eve in such company, notwithstanding Portugal's famed mutual tolerance among races, classes, professions and views, explained that the language of their neighbours, while not breaking the rules of taboo, was getting close to the threshold of the vulgar, was not very elegant, the very opposite of what is "done" in aristocratic circles. Their little table seemed like an appendix to the loud Leonardo party, a little Kuwait beside a bubbling Iraq, ready to be swallowed up. (15)

"Why do we not ask if we can join them?" Michael thought, "We can cheer them on, instead of having them impede our whispered communications, they will surely welcome us with open arms!", but he knew better than to speak.

"They haven't drunk anything yet, imagine what they will be like once they have had a few bottles of wine!" warned the Countess. She was right. The din from the neighbouring table increased steadily. Every remark was received with hoots of laughter and ripples of giggles. The women opened their little parcels and noisily admired the content of each: a comb, a bangle, a bottle of perfume, a toothbrush, a garden gnome, a packet of handkerchiefs, a photoframe...

They were feeling warm. To shouts of "Tira, tira, strip, strip", up they stood, and off came their coats in unison, and they stretched their limbs and showed their vitality through their tight skirts and blouses. Nothing further happened. Here was a group of colleagues who like everyone else wanted to be conventional and celebrate the unstoppable millennium and, as the posters all over town had reminded us, the 2000th birthday of our Saviour. The thirteenth chair at the centre of the tarts' table was kept free throughout the evening, for we know neither the day nor the hour when the boss man comes, gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners (16), ready to receive all to his bosom.

The other guests had long ago noticed that there was something special about this party, they craned their necks in order to catch a glimpse of what was going on, were as curious as Michael and tried, at the same time, to be discreet. It would not do to stare.

Michael's conversation with the Countess could not develop: He was distracted, wanted to understand what was happening at the Last Supper table and needed help in doing so. So they were talking more about the whores than each other, and the "Psallite, jubilate, resonet in laudibus, omnis mundus iucundetur!" (17) which arose from there made it difficult for the two to communicate across their little table.

The most interesting things are often impossible to ask about or find out. Many people all over the world refused to work on New Year's Eve because they did not want to miss the celebrations; those who did work demanded extortionate payment. What would our neighbours do after their dinner? Continue celebrating and abstain from work (other people's pleasure is their work)? Go on night-duty? Would they try to double and quadruple their charges, and would they find customers at such rates? Is it even thinkable that a man wants so badly to bore a whore at this millennial turning point that he does not consider the cost?

The Countess smiled: "Nothing is so stupid that a man will not do it."

Today women are the equals of men even in sexual matters. Michael has an advertisement from a contact column in his pocket and shows it to the Countess: "Very raunchy gang-bang girl, legs wide open, wants to see the new millennium in with a real big bang. Wants to be fucked senseless and endlessly by any cocks in double figures. Two for starters, then working upwards. Blow your minds with this explosive nympho and celebrate in style. Undraped photo. All letters answered. Berkshire."

"Jesus Christ!" exclaims the Countess, "where on earth did you find that?"

Michael shows her the reverse side of the clipping: "'Desire. Erotic Inspiration for Women and Men', Issue 29, 1999, London, p 109". The Countess sighs and Michael feels her knee press against his.

When Michael and the Countess left two hours later, the Belles de Nuit (18) were still noisily celebrating. If anyone was carefree and happy that evening, they were.

In Portugal it is customary to say Good-bye to other guests in a restaurant, at least to those sitting at adjoining tables. Etiquette has to be observed. Michael had made eye contact even earlier. Michael and his companion bowed to them with "Boa noite, Senhoras! Bom Ano Novo!" (Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night!), which was accepted and reciprocated with loud applause, as if it had come from the Prince of Denmark and his love.

The youngest of the women raised up an anti-AIDS poster which had been prominently displayed all over Porto and sadly had given the Pope an attack of migraine (19) which lasted for five months and prevented him from coming to Fatima on 13 May 2000. The text was "Feliz Ano 2000" (Merry Year 2000), with a small SIDA-message (20) in the bottom right corner. The "Feliz Ano 2000" was repeated all over the poster, always slightly out of alignment to avoid the formation of columns, in many cheerful colours. The innumerable zeros, however, were made of condones (21). You cannot imagine a merrier year 2000.

They walked back to the car, a long walk, the streets were still very quiet. If there are any millennium parties taking place, they are certainly very discreet. They made love in the car, its windows misted, the erect lighthouse of Foz (22) faintly visible in the distance, raced back to the Countess's apartment, switched on the lights, opened the windows just in time to let the victorious millennium in before it shattered them, while all the factory sirens went off to a man (23), the dogs started barking, and some fireworks shot up in the distance.

This is the way the millennium came (24)  
With seven bangs and a whimper.

## 2: Judgement Day

[see Footnote (25)]

Michael thought then that this was the end of the story. Or the deadpan beginning of the millennium. However, it was a false dawn. Stories seldom end where they end.

In the morning of Monday, 10 September 2001 (26), the Countess gave a lecture on 'Baudrillard and the Reality Gulf' (27) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (28). She pulled out all the stops. Her interpretive community (29) was jubilant. She and Michael made it to Boston just before the Registry Office closed. Pledges were given, rings and kisses exchanged, for better or worse until death us do part. They had not planned a honeymoon. Los Angeles was a spontaneous decision. An instinct. Hers. The airline promotion posters said: WE FLY YOU STRAIGHT TO YOUR DESK. That was intended to attract business travellers. 'We fly you straight to your death', Michael had quipped. A modern man, he was no respecter of taboos and superstitions.

On Tuesday morning, they boarded Flight 175 (30). Their last breakfast was served on plastic trays. They were joined by the millennium, which was on its way to Manhattan and determined to get there. It arrived twenty months late, a trifle in percentage terms (31). Two horsemen (32) were sitting on the wings of the plane. The third rode on its neck. He held its reins with his left and a scythe (33) in his right hand. The fourth rode on its tail. The sun rising above the clouds shone through the skeleton of the plane. A cloud of millennium bugs (34) was following from the horizon.

The millennium arrived with a bang. It was over in a flash. The victims did not even have time to whimper. They knew neither the day nor the hour. (35)

## ^FOOTNOTES

1. **Sleepers wake:** The title and the last sentence of the story ('They knew neither the day nor the hour.') allude to Jesus's parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, some of whom are prepared at all times to meet the bridegroom, who will arrive when he is least expected, and some are not (Matthew 25:1-13). The parable ends with the admonition: 'Watch (be awake) therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.'

The German Lutheran pastor Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608) wrote the words and the tune of a chorale interpreting this parable: 'Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme', sung in English churches as 'Sleepers wake, a voice is calling'. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) wrote a cantata and a chorale prelude based on this tune and text, and thus it became internationally known.

The title has a terrifying ambiguity: Who are the sleepers who are brutally woken up by the Manhattan incident: the world, the western world, America, the victims in the planes or in the World Trade Center, who are about to be catapulted into 'the other world', complacent people in general? Or the terrorists who have been planted in our midst to lead seemingly innocent and inactive lives (so-called 'sleepers') until the call goes out to them to swing into action?

2. Part 1, *The Last Supper*, is set in Porto (Oporto), Portugal. The second part, *Judgement Day*, in Boston, Mass., and Washington, DC.
3. **The Last Supper:** Meal that Jesus had with his disciples before his trial and execution, described in the Gospels. Famous painting of that scene by Italian painter Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519)
4. 'the thin red line': an expression of heroic resistance, or heroic battle, a few soldiers in red uniforms, so few that they can form only a thin line, fighting against the enemy. - A dictionary says: 'The old 93rd Highlanders were so described at the battle of Balaclava by Dr. W. H. Russell, because they did not take the trouble to form into square. "Balaclava" is one of the honour names on their colours, and their regimental magazine is named The Thin Red Line.'
5. **Ave, Anne, morituri te salutant :** Welcome, oh year, we who are doomed to die greet you. The original expression is: 'Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant' = 'We salute you, Caesar, we who are about to die'. This is how the gladiators would greet the emperor before the public

sword fighting spectacles in which one of each pair had to die.

6. Cockburn (no, we do not say "cock"): In a famous TV advertisement for Cockburn a foreigner is told that the 'ck' in the name is not pronounced. We say 'co-burn'.
7. Sandeman, Burmester, Cockburn, Offley, Dow, Croft, Ferreira: famous brands of port wine. They have their warehouses on the left bank of the river Douro in Porto, Portugal.
8. Domus Justitiae : High Court
9. schoolmarm = 'school madam'; somebody with all the negative attributes of a female school teacher, pedantic, boring, old-fashioned, prim, prudish, strictly adhering to arbitrary rules
10. steppled: not a standard English word. Here it means: came in with many small steps, walked with mincing gait
11. AMOR VINCIT OMNIA : Love conquers everything. Latin proverb. 'Omnia vincit amor, et nos cedamus amori' (Love conquers everything, therefore we too should surrender to love). Virgil (70-19 BC): Eclogues X, 69.
12. DAVINCIT: means nothing in Latin. Pun on the name of Leonardo Davinci.
13. Hollow women: T S Eliot wrote a poem called 'The Hollow Men'. The poem ends:

This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.
14. 'Working girls': English euphemism for 'prostitutes'.
15. Kuwait, Iraq: reference to Gulf War of 1991
16. glutton, winebibber (drunkard): Matthew 11:19: 'The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.'
17. Psallite...: From medieval Christmas carols: Sing, chant, praise, may the heavens resound in praises, may all the world be joyful.
18. Belles de Nuit = beauties of the night; Title of a 1952 film directed by René Clair

19. On the Pope's attack of migraine, See *Osservatore Romano*, 20 Dec. 1999, p 666, Col 2 (Spoof note!) - In the event the Pope did visit Fatima on 13 May 2000.
20. SIDA = AIDS
21. Condones: this misspelling is deliberate! Pun.  
to condone = to forgive;  
condom = French: préservatif
22. Foz: suburb of Porto
23. 'went off to a man'; deliberate linguistic contortion.  
'went off to a man' = all of them, without a single exception, went off. This is what a translation must say if it cannot imitate the English joke. - Distortion: sirens are not men. In Greek mythology they are bewitching females singing irresistibly. (Then they became alarm machines.) Therefore they cannot really go off 'to a man'.
24. This is the way the millennium came: see note on 'Hollow women', above.
25. 'the last trumpet': Traditionally understood to be the divine signal for the end of the world and God's last judgement, doomsday. Source: 'Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.' (Bible, New Testament, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52)
26. 10 Sep 2001: The next day, 11 Sep 2001, was the date on which the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York, and the Pentagon in Washington were attacked by terrorist planes.
27. 'Baudrillard and the Reality Gulf': Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), French philosopher, wrote an infamous article in which he claimed that the Gulf War of 1991 (Kuwait, Iraq, USA) did not take place and that it did not matter whether it did or not ('The reality gulf', in: *The Guardian*, London, 11 January 1991, p 25). All the war preparations were nothing but a media circus. We could not tell the library pictures on television from recordings of real events. Nobody could be sure whether the actual war had started. Therefore there was no war and there would be no war. There were only television pictures, which bore no relation to reality. Modern wars are fought on TV screens, not on the battle field: they are propaganda wars. Baudrillard did not mean this as a joke, he was serious about it. His arguments have been analysed by Christopher Norris in his book: 'Uncritical Theory'.

By the same token one might argue today (6 Oct 2001, still prior to American military action) that everything relating to the terrorist attacks in America, the blowing up of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, the destruction, the scenes of bereavement, the anti-terrorist measures, war preparations, shuttle diplomacy, arrests of suspected terrorists, ..., all the news and discussion broadcasts, are nothing but a soap opera, a MULTI-media show, ingeniously, put on by the media in such a way that they all report, without a single exception about the same 'fictitious reality' (the same script), even though from different angles. The novelty being that ALL the media, TV, newspapers, radio, in every country of the world, are participating in the conspiracy. No diverging (true) information can be had from anywhere. Even the divergent political opinions and debates are part of the same script.

I (Klaus Bung) do, of course, strongly disagree with the validity of Baudrillard's ridiculous conclusions, i.e. that there is no longer any distinction between fiction and reality. For me this does not cogently follow from the true observation that sometimes or often it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from deception, and that sometimes it is impossible.

28. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Boston, Mass., is not far from there.
29. 'interpretive community': term invented or popularised by literature guru Stanley Fish, who claims that meaning is not inherent in a text, that there is no 'true interpretation' of a text, but 'true' (about a text) is what is accepted among a group of like-minded people (interpretive community), and that all interpretations are equally valid, no matter how far apart they are from each other or 'from the text'. Fish, like Baudrillard, therefore denies the existence of 'truth' or the usefulness of the concept of 'truth'.
30. Flight 175, intended to fly from Boston, Mass., to Los Angeles, was diverted by the hijackers and crashed into the World Trade Center in New York.
31. a trifle: less than 2 years in 1000 years, i.e. less than 0.2%
32. the horsemen: the four horsemen of the apocalypse (New Testament, Book of Revelation (Offb.), ch. 6). They bring war, famine and pestilence. Famous woodcut by German painter Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).

33. scythe: symbol of death. Death cuts people down like a mower.
34. millennium bug: The term was originally used to describe the computer failures which people feared would occur on 1 January 2000, if computers could not cope with dates greater than 1999. These nightmares never came true. - 'bug' means originally an insect, a beetle, a small organism. The word was then also used for errors in computer programs which cause the programs to malfunction. - The millennium bugs in the story are agents used in biological warfare: bacteria, viruses, spores, ... anthrax... Around 7 Oct 2001 two incidents of anthrax in humans (so far one death) were already being investigated by the FBI.
35. They knew neither the day nor the hour. (Matth. 25:13)

#### **^ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Klaus Bung was born in Germany but has spent most of his life in England. He studied at Cambridge (England) University. He is widely travelled (all over Europe; USA, Canada, Philippines, Iraq, Kenya) and speaks many Western European languages. He now devotes himself to writing fiction and poetry. Apart from over eighty academic publications, he has published 'creative' work in DIPPIKA (London), SCAVENGER (Osage City, Kansas, USA), WRITERS' FORUM (Bournemouth, UK), THE WORLD OF ENGLISH (Peking), PPHOO Magazine (Calcutta), to name but a few. He has been a member of the Society of Authors (London) since 1967.

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