

An Eastertide Meditation

John McLuckie

How the valley awakes. At two-fifteen in the morning there are no sounds except in the monastery: the bells ring, the office begins. Outside, nothing, except perhaps a bullfrog saying 'Om' in the creek or in the guesthouse pond. Some nights he is in Samadhi; there is not even 'Om'. The first chirps of the waking day birds mark the 'point vierge' of the dawn under a sky as yet without real light, a moment of awe and inexpressible innocence, when the Father in perfect silence opens their eyes. Their condition asks if it is time for them to 'be'. He answers 'yes'. Then, they one by one wake up, and become birds. They manifest themselves as birds, beginning to sing. Presently they will be fully themselves, and will even fly. Meanwhile, the most wonderful moment of the day is that when creation in its innocence asks permission to 'be' once again, as it did on the first morning that ever was. All wisdom seeks to collect and manifest itself at that blind sweet point.

Merton's reflection on dawn from his hermitage is a beautiful example of his cosmic vision of a renewed creation, a recovery of pristine simplicity and harmony prophetically declared by God's innocent creatures as they rise from sleep each new day. It is hard not to see this as a profoundly *paschal* insight. The dawn Merton greets is at the same time the first day of creation and the eighth day, the endless day of new creation. The garden of paradise is the garden of the resurrection and each is the garden of the world's innocence, never lost but sadly hidden.

What does it take to uncover this innocent simplicity, to reveal that *point vierge*? It takes an *awakening*.

Paradigmatically, the resurrection is an awakening. The One who was dead, slain by human fear and ignorance, awakens once more to life, a life of unbounded love drawing all things to unity. It is an awakening that overcomes the deathly sleep of ignorance and fear by an unflinching, wide-eyed gaze that looks upon all that lives with utter compassion.

Here is an unspeakable secret: paradise is all around us and we do not understand. It is wide open. The sword is taken away, but we do not know it: we are off 'one to his farm and another to his merchandise.' Lights on. Clocks ticking. Thermostats working. Stoves cooking. Electric shavers filling radios with static. 'Wisdom', cries the dawn deacon, but we do not attend.

To live with resurrection faith, then, is to attend! It is to be alert to all that summons us to see that 'paradise is wide open'. Christ's rising, his awakening, saves us from our ignorance and fear by revealing to us what is always there: the gift of life lived simply, openly and fully. We thought it had died, but, behold, it is alive for evermore, alive with the life of One who has awakened from the dead.

The quotations are from the start of the section 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air' in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.

John McLuckie is an Episcopalian Priest working at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh. He also teaches Spirituality to students of the Scottish Episcopal Institute and is currently researching a PhD at Edinburgh University on Thomas Merton and William Johnston, with a focus on the influences of Zen Buddhism on their understanding of Christian contemplation.