

Two accounts both complex one from Kings and one from Revelation. One rather opaque because of metaphorical language redolent with apocryphal imagery – the other with names which would never make the Times most popular names for babies list. How can these readings make sense for us in 2005 – and is there any relationship with our lives.

Well yes but the translation wont be straight line – such is the mistake of biblical literalists, and those who fail to bring the second and third leg of the interpretative leg on the stool –

which is acceptable reason and the conversion of tradition as the divine Richard Hooker reminds us to do.

I would like to suggest that the reading from revelation can be used by us to pay attention to the fundamental relational values which lie at th heart of the Christian discipline. Here is St John probably in exile on Patmos – during one of the many purges of Christianity by the Roman empire, writing to seven

churches around the Mediterranean.
John is told by 'the Lord – the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end of history – to write to some of the central churches of that time – a message – forged in the isolation of exile – which would enable them to live more honestly and powerfully their Christian vocation. And what is revealed to John? A scroll, some heavenly tablets as revealed to Moses. No he has a direct revelation of the Lord – the Ancient of Days and the

Son of Man – with hair white as snow, eyes blazing with fire, feet like burnished bronze – this was some revelation – not just a morning wake up call.

There is authority, bottom line truth here. No discussion about whether this is just John's view – or some ancient text – it is a clear dynamic revelation of the Lord – spiritual authority – direct line engagement. It is the sort of encounter with God that

many people demand before they will admit that there might be a God. Paul undoubtedly experienced something of the order of John's experience on the Damascus Road – others through history have had similar extraordinary apocalyptic style encounters. Most of us have more mundane journeys which mark our encounter and current Christian discipleship. But the message is the same – relationship with God as the dynamic author and completer of the universe is seen as

the way in which Christian discipleship is to be experienced and lived. The message to the churches to wake up – shake up their ideas, and realise just who they are supposed to be serving – and not self serving is the core message – no matter how the package is delivered.

To comfort those of us who find the language of Revelation several bridges too far and the mode of revelation somewhat off our radar

screen – lets turn our attention to the passage from Kings. There is a book which John cleese wrote a few years back – families and how to survive them – which could have been written not just about our own families but that of King David. I don't know how aware you are as to just how dysfunctional his family set was – but if I give you a quick index of the key points of disaster,

A raped sister by her step brother – the case of Tamar recorded in 2 Samuel

The murder of the rapist by his half brother – The case of Absalom and Amnon in 2 Samuel

An attempted coup – in oedipal mode by Absalom of his father David's throne

The Use of the military field of engagement to kill Absalom

Lust Lingerie and Shower feste – with Adultery with Bathseeba – the

beautiful wife of a military
commander Uzziah in Samuel – and
again the use of warfare to see off the
King's rival through military mission
which was bound to fail.

The subsequent death of Bathsheeba
and David's first child – still born
And finally the birth of a son
Solomon through their marriage who
was announced as the king's favourite
much to the annoyance and
understandable jealousy of siblings.

I don't know where you have any
moments of commonality with this
catalogue of very human and very
problematic history. We know with
the numbers reported now in a recent
survey on Violence against Women –
numbers reporting abuse either in
Rape, Sexual harassment, Domestic
Violence or Incest on women
interviewed between 20 and 60 years
of age is as high as 1 in 4. 1 in 4
staggering numbers – this history of

David's family is not that far away
from many of us sitting here today.

And the point of this very
disappointing – very scarred history?
The point is that Solomon the son of a
relationship which cost the life of
Bathsheeba's husband because of
David's complete misuse/abuse of
power – murdered for the desire of his
wife – the son of that relationship
which you might have been forgiven
to think God had no time whatsoever

for – that second surviving Son
Solomon becomes the one whom the
Prophet Nathan supports, Zadok the
priest anoints and all the people
acclaim as KING – and we read that
God's favour was on him. What an
extraordinary reversal of history –
what a disappointment for Adonijah,
the fourth son of David who thought
that the throne was his. Not in this
history – not in the line of descent to
the birth of Jesus – full of mistakes,
abuse, people with shady histories –

of asylum seekers, economic migrants, adulterers, liars cheats murderers – a genealogical tree of some diversity and concern. But it is the genealogical tree which Jesus emerges from – this same Jesus whom the seer John is addressed by as he writes to the churches from Patmos.

Now what does this all mean – that God works with very flawed material

and brings through it the means for transformation and healing?

This week-end I have just been visiting in my capacity as CEO of CHASTE a young woman who was trafficked from Nigeria into the United Kingdom . Lets call her Mary. Her parents died in a motor car accident when she was 9 years old. She was taken in by a grandmother – but at 16 she was brought to Lagos by a woman – lets call her Ann – who kept her as a domestic servant to look

after her children. When her children were grown into teenagers Ann saw the potential of Mary for work as a prostitute. First a visit to a local traditional religionist who cut her body with a razor and uttered curses over her naked body which would ensure her full compliance to the wishes of Ann. Mary was supplied with a false passport, a courier to bring her into Britain, a secured house with three rooms for her to work out of with two other young women

trafficked from Nigeria. She started work with 5-6 clients a day – 20mins to 2 hours a session depending on how much they paid – except she saw none of the money. This all went to Ann. If each was paying on average £50 a session that is a clear profit of £1,500 a week on Mary's sexual labour done under conditions of servitude and bondage. For the 8 months which she was working in these conditions she did not leave the house once! Only when she became

pregnant through one of the punters who said he would marry her if she had unprotected sex with him did she achieve freedom by this man facilitating her escape.

The daughter – a beautiful little baby will be christened next week – she is 6 months old. Mary awaits the verdict of a High Court Judge to see if she can stay in Britain as a survivor of multiple violence but specifically of trafficking. Problem – Britain has not

signed up to the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking of Human Beings. Work needs to be done to bring Parliament to insist that we do sign up to these good practices so people like Mary can feel safe and secure so that their testimony and their experiences may cry out against their abusers. But of course the abusers are not just those who trafficked Mary – and the men who forged the false passports for the removal of the girls from Nigeria – or

the local priest who cut their bodies so that they live in terror of the curses uttered over them. Also bearing responsibility are those who came to use the body of Mary and her two colleagues. 15 – 18 men a day through that one house. Potentially 108 men a week – for one house – It is estimated that there are at least 4,000 young women in trafficked prostitution – we have no idea as to the total number in prostitution in sex parlours, and in street prostitution in

Britain – all suffering a level of coercion.

It is CHASTE's task to wake up the faith communities to this abuse, and to address the wider community, our legislators, our voters our politicians as to the immense abuse taking place in this opaque world of prostitution and international trafficking for sexual exploitation. We are working individually with women like Mary to ensure lawyers work for her to keep

her safe, police investigations to be informed and moved forward, safe housing to be generated where young women coming out of this trade can be looked after. What happened to TAMAR - she was sent away – and forgotten – that is what could have happened to the women from CUDDLES had not NGOs like CHASTE intervened in number to insist on their stories being properly heard by police after time for recovery. It would be great if St Johns

wanted to be part of this work both in giving, praying and letter writing – our next postcard campaign will be out at the beginning of next term – and we would love to be in touch about that. To influence government and to offer new opportunities to others like Mary.

The Son of Man spoke to John out of the midst of pulsating stars, gleaming lampstands with feet of burnished brass. This Son of Man knows about

our shady and damaged histories. This Son of Man is the one who declares enough! Announces another way – a way of justice, peace, respect, transformation. What are we doing to follow this man. CHASTE is doing its part in resisting the forces of commercialisation which normalise the abuse which is occurring on women's and young mens bodies in the sex industry. We are constantly being woken up to do more. What is your wake up call in relationship with

this Son of Man – who calls each one of us on a journey of love of God and love of neighbour in the midst of the mess of our history. Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts – the Son of Man calls throughout history to each one of us – in our particular place and issues – may God give you the grace to listen and follow.