

Denial ain't just a river in Egypt

– Rap song

Here we are again offering evidence of the destruction of our God-given planet (pp.4-7, 15); offering ways of resistance and struggle (pp.10,11 and 14, the centre pages, p.18); offering ways of strengthening our resolve (pp.8 and 9), offering the celebration of lives dedicated to hope (p.19) and resources to inspire and inform (pp.20-22). What is it all for? Jonathon Porritt suggests that it is to oppose the hedonistic spiral, that is, addictive economic growth (p.5). In this particular task we can all see the speck in others' eyes. But are we still defending the plank in our own?

When I am criticising the powerful and the apathetic for being in denial about the destruction of the planet, maybe it is time to interrogate myself again to discern whether I too am, quietly, in denial. In denial, that is, about the harsh facts of life; the increasing size of the global population, the rapidity of the destruction of the rain forest, and the rising temperature of the planet, the numbers of babies dying, the numbers of child slaves, the numbers who live below the line of poverty, the

At the Bottom of the Dark

At the bottom of the dark
I woke to hear the rustling of the curtains of the rain
and a bird singing

Kay Smith (Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1971)

destruction of species and habitats. Sometimes denial, even about my own death. Is it some condition in human beings, assisted by the politics of oppression, which allows this not-knowing to persist? Am I deceiving myself when I say this is about other people?

When I don't speak what I know of the consequences of this hedonistic spiral, I simply grow old and leave a grossly depleted earth to the next generation. When I give the poor and starving no voice and quietly forget them, the next generation is being prepared for the next famine. 'If we deny our animalness, our shit and death, if

we refuse to see the cruelties and abuse by the (multi-nationals), presidents, (fossil fuels) and sexual abusers, it means we have turned our backs on life. If we have turned our backs on life, don't be surprised if we kill the poor, the homeless, ourselves and the earth' (Robert Bly, in *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

Getting rid of denial will mean getting used to the bottom of the dark where the voice of the torn earth roars and weeps from below. It will mean listening to the tears inside nature itself. Sadness is a holy thing. I need to find the holy stair right to the bottom of the dark, to feel the sadness in the animals and in the rain forests moving from private grief to the sorrow of the planet. This is not the non-biblical 'bright, shiny hope' but 'that darker form of hope' described by Paul Bodenham (see p.7). It is a hope that makes a hole in my denial. It has a certain tone; it is dark but not pulled down by evil, it is intense but not hysterical; it feels weighty and there is something dark in it, as if we are fighting against great resistance. When I hope like this it feels precarious. And it is. Precarious is an old word which means 'full of prayers'.

There is a continual white-noise background to our planet, the non-stop chatter of justification and explanation. Am I still a part of this? Does this issue of *Green Christian* hold enough of the planet's chorus of laments, rages, warnings, cries and prayers. Ultimately I must speak the truth, even when no-one listens, or lose my soul.

To hope means to turn and face life - the dark and the light. This is the hope which makes a very big hole in denial. ■

Chris Walton

*O God, whose heart is broken
by the violence in the human race,
forgive us that we have lacked
the imagination and collective will
to create a warless and sustainable world.*

*Forgive us for breaking faith
with those who give their lives
for the unconscionable gap between rich and poor,
for corruption and deceit in high places
for the profit gained by destroying other species
for learning so little from the clear signs
of planetary grief and darkness.*

*In you alone is hope
which can purify the human heart
and set our feet on the path of honesty.
You can do great things in willing hearts.
Break, then, our hardened hearts.
Break them with grief, with tears and memory
in the name of the Prince of Hope.*

(inspired by a prayer by Bruce Sanguin)