

Counter –intuitive Christianity.

*Come with me to the busy streets of Rome,
When, on the day of his triumph, following some
great success, the triumphant Roman general
wearing regalia that identified him as near-divine or
near-kingly, - a laurel wreath s held above his head
as he rides in a chariot among the cheering crowds-
in procession -with his army and the spoils of his
war.*

*At Jupiter's temple on the Capitoline Hill he offers
sacrifice and the tokens of his victory to the god.
Thereafter he had the right to be described as *vir
triumphalis* ("man of triumph", later known as
triumphator) for the rest of his life.*

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The carpenter's son rides into the city on a donkey –
with a ramshackle cluster of enthusiasts cheering
him on...

and clip-clops his way into the city where he will
die...

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The contrast is telling.

We might wonder whom we admire more...

Which procession we would choose to join...

The one that represents the familiar world...

the world we know and understand with a grim
familiarity –

of raw strength on display and muscles being flexed
and glory being flaunted...the world of power and
prestige...

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Or a new kind of world...a different way

His new kind of world...his way that is so different
that the teacher, Jesus, seems to bring...

to make present...to embody...

by his actions and his life...

a world of humility, gentleness and sacrifice.

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I remember the first time I heard the
word....*counter-intuitive*...

It was our former assistant Kristine Aragon Bruce
who introduced me to it...

I'll admit, I was impressed.

I didn't know what it meant...but I liked the sound of
it...

and I thought I'd better learn what it

meant...because, clearly,

it was here to stay.

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It means, I think, *not what you'd expect*...

No, that's what it means...

Not what you'd expect...

or

not what we've come to expect..

Something that *goes against the grain*...

A break with the usual

An idea that challenges or undermines the prevailing
culture...

Something you have a bit of a struggle getting your
head round

Because it so contradicts, or seems to,

what people usually think,

or do...or say...

counter-intuitive...

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Who were important in the kingdom?

... the weak, the vulnerable...

the humble and the broken...

When the kingdom comes...they will know safety
and honour...

So different, so much better...it is claimed...

last first, first last...

God's priorities established –

God's agenda fully in place.

That sounds good...

Nice! I'll have some of that....

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And then it begins to emerge...

that this glorious new way, new world

was inseparably tied up with the one who

announced it...

who made it present and possible!

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it turns out that you find this "glorious leader..."

with the losers and the lepers and the lost

and the ugly and the sad and the weak and the

pathetic...

You find him on his knees, washing feet...

You find him insisting that love for God be at the

heart of our living...

obligations to our neighbour will be an inescapable

costly consequence of being a citizen of the

Kingdom...

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And, worst of all, most unsavoury of all,

you find, if you follow him...this great leader...this

builder of the brave new world order,

, if you follow him

his road will lead to a place outside the city walls -

a dreadful place of pain and shame called

Golgotha...

Listening to his words...following his truth...doing his

will

this was the way into the possibility of something

new and radical

The only way...

And while that might have seemed alright...fair

enough,

The manifesto he stood on...

Blessed are the poor

Blessed are the persecuted...

Blessed are the meek...

Was pretty *counter-intuitive*...

Went against the grain...

Made people scratch their head and wonder..

What is going on here?

Who is this man...and what is his message...his

point...??

What is he asking us to think differently about...?

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The German philosopher Nietzsche apparently

found religion in general,

and Christianity in particular, pretty loathsome.

He called churches

"the tombs and sepulchres of God..."

He railed against

*"the conceptual cobweb- spinning of religion that
has so impoverished our lives.."*

And he considered the idea of God..

*"a failure of the intellect - and our most enduring
lie..."*

So, no holding back there, Friedrich!!

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What particularly bothered him about *Christianity*,

Was that it was so unashamedly

Counter-intuitive...

was the way in which it made *virtues* out of things

he despised...

despised because he considered them to be

weaknesses and failures...

*"I condemn Christianity, "he says, "I raise against
the Christian Church the most terrible of all
accusations that any accuser ever uttered. It is to
me the highest of all conceivable corruptions...it has
turned everything of value into an un-value...every
truth into a lie...every integrity into a vileness of the
soul."*

He worries that the Christ of the gospels, and the

gospels of the Christ have brought about in human

thought

“A reversal of values, by converting the noble virtues of courage, self-confidence and intelligence into the vices of cruelty, arrogance, and pride”

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And suddenly, there dawns on us
When we listen to what Jesus says,
There dawns on us,
the realisation that actually,
this is way of Christ is not what we thought it was
going to be like...!!
We thought it would be - send him victorious, happy
and glorious!!
We imagined it would be nice...splendid, proud...
not a blood-soaked botch up!
With the bringer of his truth
Brought by his truth to become—
Friendless, alone...battered...humiliated...
No!!

This makes no sense.

Give me guns...

Give me missiles and money and the capacity to
crush my enemies

Not love them..

Build walls not bridges

Flaunt your muscles

Don't turn the other cheek...

Threaten don't forgive...

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We repudiate this alternative world, they said:

This new thing he brings – let's be rid of it...

Get rid of him

And leave the world to the powerbrokers

And the heartbreakers

And the men who will bring trouble and rubble...

And fear and loathing...

Not healing and hope...

Healing and hope are for losers...

Christ Almighty...hardly!

The idea of the humble Christ
in humility and vulnerability,
coming to claim his crown of thorns
and his throne of blood-stained wood...

disgusts Neitzche

for he wants his heroes to be heroes,

his rulers to rule...

his Ubermenchen not to be Untermenchen...

and the message the world should hear

to be one of robust humanity, standing on its own

two feet – every man making of himself what he

can...every woman doing the same

and hard luck on the losers.

They are losers because they are losers.

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This is a way of thinking that has some currency in
our times...

when the heroes are super, the wimps are

wallflowers...

and the nice guys come last.

We like the strong medicine of robust self-made

men and women who do it their way...

The kind of man who

*says the words he truly feels and not the words of
one who kneels...*

That sort of thing.

The precise opposite of the servant role encouraged
by Christ

as the role-model for his followers...

the feet washing...self-giving follower- who seeks

the fruits of the Spirit,

which are gentleness and kindness and

compassion...

with no mention there for

- One-upmanship,
- looking after number one...
- winning at all costs...

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Nietzsche - and the thinking that has developed out of his ideology -

is interested in strength...

the self-made man who worships his maker...

and is impatient with - and incredulous of - a way of life

that celebrates the meek

and allows them to believe the delusion that

they will inherit the earth...

presumes to encourage people to turn the other cheek,

as if that will make the world better,

and imagines that loving our enemies is a notion that has

the remotest worth

in the real world.

Rather, the choice that is presented to individuals

as to how to live their life

is to stand tall

take responsibility for their own choices...

and not to submit, surrender or capitulate -

to God, to Jesus, or to any imagined spiritual reality

...

Doing that will only make them weak, and cowardly,

afraid to take real responsibility for themselves

and to make their own way in the world.

So,

Follow no one!!

Follow only your own decisions - made without

reference to any imagined divine interference...

and don't hide behind the skirts of some imaginary deity,

with his imaginary rights over your life!!

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The appeal of this to the present times is pretty strong.

People want triumphators and Terminators,

- not carpenters who ride donkeys

People respect power.

They are dismissive of those who kneel to wash the feet of others.

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Yet, there it is, the counter-intuitive gospel...

This is who we are!

We have a king who rides a donkey

And who is going to die.

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Like it or not...

This is where we are coming from...

this is who we are.

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And,

People discover that this Way, journey with him

caper

That the carpenter speaks of...and embodies...

is not about some

- social agenda for change...
- some manifesto for political renewal...

a kind of Arab Spring revolution

that moves the political furniture around...

and upgrades the systems and the structures...

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In fact – instead,

It's about him.

It's all about him.

He brings the new thing...

The different world...

His will and purpose happening in the lives of men and women...

that's the revolution.

A new way of seeing – a different way of being...

Where, what he wants

becomes the defining characteristic of our choices and decisions and priorities...

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Not some blanket philosophy - thrown over the world
in the hope of making it better...
But individuals choosing to follow him –
and letting him conquer their heart, become Lord of their life.

Lord of life we come to you...

Lord of all, our Saviour be...

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It's as personal as that...

if you want to be part of the his vision...his way...

you have to be part of *him*...

who comes to make that new possibility a reality...

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And the choice was stark and significant.

In - or out.

His - or not his.

His way - or your own way?

Nietzsche may be appalled at the statement of Christ

as he honours the Father's will...and yields to it...

Your will not mine be done.

No!

A hundred times no!

My will, my life, my priorities, my choices, my morality.my world...

my life. My life.

And definitely not how the atheistic existentialism of Nietzsche would describe the life of faith:

"Inauthenticity, infantilism, delusion and abject submission - where one cravenly cedes to God the creative power that properly belongs to men alone"

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When the mood and tone of the world we live in has that sound,
that emphasis, and that aspiration,

to go with the Nazarene teacher as he tells the people of is a very different option...

a new way of being...

a different definition of happiness and another way to find blessedness

goes against the grain...

to make that choice...is to decide

- his way is right...
- his truth is true ...
- his life is the life you want to live...

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By any definition, that is brave

And certainly counter-intuitive.

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And we are here -his church...

because it is the choice we are happy to make.

LET US PRAY