



A moving and dramatic Passion

On Palm Sunday a large congregation at St Leonard's, Streatham, experienced a powerful introduction to Holy Week in the form of a fine liturgical performance of Bach's St John Passion.

Not surprisingly, this vividly dramatic work has been performed as an opera; but those present were privileged to hear the work as it was first performed in 1724 at St Nicholas's, Leipzig, on the first Good Friday after Bach was appointed Cantor there and at St Thomas's. The City Fathers did not deserve the greatness with which they were blessed: we read that one Councillor Platz observed that since they could not get the best man

(Telemann) they would have to make do with a mediocrity.

There is nothing mediocre about this great work, which in recent years has emerged from the shadow of its great, and longer, successor based on Matthew's Gospel. Nor was there anything mediocre about the heartfelt performance, which drew the congregation into the violent and the meditative moods of the piece, and not only the five congregational chorales in which we all joined.

Passionate impetus was provided by Ben Johnson's outstanding Evangelist, whose rendering of the story included every nuance which the text offers. Michael Bundy's rich

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bass gave us a massively dignified and authoritative Christ. The demands of each part are great indeed; yet without any loss of form these fine soloists moved across the stage to deliver the tenor and bass arias, which form a vital part of the meditations on the drama as it unfolds.

The soprano and alto arias were effectively delivered by Pamela Hall, a member of St Leonard's choir, and Simon Baker.

St Leonard's choir was further represented among the soloists. Tony Nunn (bass) as Peter did not buckle under cross-examination by Sarah Parry's Maid and Andrew Johnson's Servant; and he was equal also to the considerable demands of the role of Pilate, whose weakness under pressure is most fully exposed in this Gospel.

Michael Emery, who in a short time has enriched the musical contribution to the worship at St Leonard's, had assembled a fine orchestra led by Caroline Tait. Jonathan Bloxham (cello) and Bernard Robertson (chamber organ) provided a polished and secure continuo; Peter Jones (lute)

and Liam Byrne (viola da gamba) made telling contributions to two of the arias; and Martin Wolf commuted between the basses in the chorus and the organ gallery to provide weight to the congregational chorales.

The chorus included members of the regular St Leonard's choir, including those mentioned, and also a number of occasional singers, who to this ear at least were equal throughout to the considerable demands which Bach makes on the chorus.

At the centre of this liturgical performance was a short homily from the Rector, the Rev. Mandy Hodgson, who succinctly illuminated the contrast, in the Passion and in our lives, between gross injustice and violence and beauty and goodness.

This moving act of worship ended appropriately without applause; but Michael Emery and all those who contributed to it under his leadership must know that there was silent and grateful applause in our hearts for their achievement.

(Judge) Charles Gibson

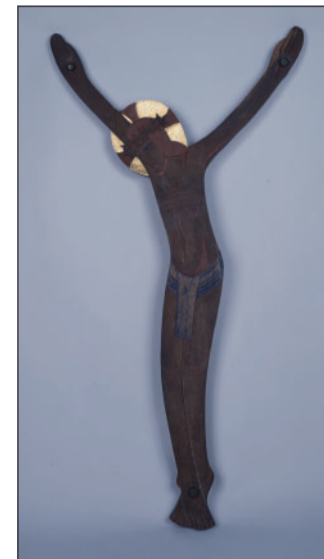
Cross Purposes: Shock and Contemplation in Images of the Crucifixion

Mascalls Gallery, Maidstone Road, Paddock Wood, Kent
Monday to Saturday until May 29 2010

The grounds of a secondary school might seem an unlikely place for a gallery that has held international shows since opening in 2006. But Mascalls is a specialist school for the visual arts. Exhibitions of the photographs of Lee Miller, the works of Graham Sutherland and most recently of the sculptures of Ana Pacheco and paintings by Alfred Wallis and John Piper now give way to an extraordinarily powerful display of the cross in twentieth century art.

The zealous young director, Nathaniel Hepburn, who has curated the show, is anything but timid. Having secured the loan of the Chagall sketches for the east window of nearby parish church of All Saints' Tudeley from the Centre Pompidou, which have previously never been seen outside France, he was overjoyed when I first met him to have gained a newly found Chagall painting of the crucifixion, *Apocalypse in lilas*. This dates to 1945 and was intended to shame the indifference if not outright anti-semitism of Western Europeans who refused to acknowledge the Holocaust. For John Paul II, Auschwitz was a 'modern Golgotha'.

Hepburn says that he first wanted to run a gallery when as a small boy he used to stick pictures all over the wall paper of his bedroom and charge his aunt to come to see them. There is even something domestic in scale about the design winning bunker gallery on the campus at Mascalls. But apart from Tracey Emin's *The Disposition* (1989), a *tour de force* monoprnt, there is



nothing remotely childish in any of the two dozen works on display alongside the Chagalls. Horrifying images of carnage come in telling detail from Robert Henderson Blyth's *In the image of man*, a reminder that his native Edinburgh was badly bombed in the war and in FN Souza's controversial work. More contemplative are the wood carving by Eric Gill (above) and a David Jones gouache, *Sanctus Christus d Capel-y-ffin*.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth, an Assistant Bishop in our Diocese, has written the Foreword to the catalogue, fittingly marrying his own interests in the Passion in Art and in Christian Jewish dialogue.

The exhibition can also be seen at Ben Uri The London Jewish Museum of Art (15 June – 19 September).

Rev. Dr Nicholas Cranfield

Best feet forward for Cruse

Over 100 people – including many from local churches – joined Cruse volunteers in Richmond Park on Sunday 28 March to walk in memory of loved ones who have died and to raise money to support Cruse's work. At the end of the walk a flock of biodegradable balloons was released over the Thames. Cruse hopes the springtime Memory Walks will become an annual national remembrance and fundraising event.



Gatton Encounters launched

October sees the launch of Gatton Encounters, a new series of one day conferences organised by the Team Ministry of Merstham and Gatton on all aspects of spirituality, designed to be accessible both in terms of cost and location.

The first Encounter at Gatton Park on 23 October will be with the inspirational speaker David Runcorn, author of *Touchwood*, who will lead a day on the theme 'Where the Wild Things Are – Seeking a theology for uncertain times.'

Gatton Park is just off junction 8 of the M25. In the future it is hoped that two conferences a year will be held led by speakers with national reputations.

To register your interest, tel: 07526 316272 or email: enquiries@gattonencounters.co.uk. Further details from www.gattonencounters.co.uk

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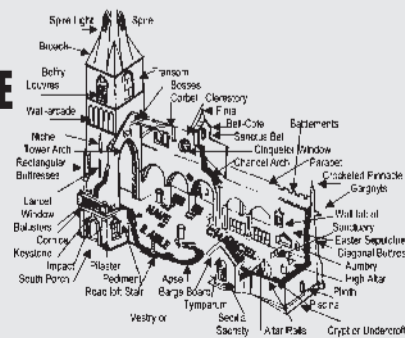


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