

But do we must. We cannot settle for an over-spiritualisation of Jesus' words, or Mary's. Let us not dress up timidity as prudence. Let us be willing to sing in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'the passionate, wild and revolutionary song of Mary' as it should be sung, with full voice, exulting in God, reckless in the knowledge that we are loved, committed to the total ongoing personal and communal conversion required by the Gospel, and to act from the stance of joyful but weeping disciples.

My soul proclaims your greatness, O my God  
and my spirit exults in you, my Saviour,  
for your regard has blessed me,  
poor, and a serving woman.

From this day all generations will call me  
blessed,  
for you who are mighty have made me great.  
Most holy be your name.  
Your mercy is on those who fear you throughout  
all generations.  
You have shown strength with your arm,  
You have scattered the proud in their hearts'  
fantasy.  
You have put down the mighty from their seat,  
And have lifted up the powerless.  
You have filled the hungry with good things,  
and have sent the rich away empty.  
You, remembering your mercy, have helped your  
people Israel,  
As you promised Abraham and Sarah  
mercy to their children forever.

#### NOTES

1. Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary*. Retrieved from <http://www.uscatholic.org/2003/12/cov0312.htm> on 21.10.2004
2. <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/5th-december-2009/20/what-is-it-about-mary>
3. <http://www spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=5746>
4. Quote from 'The Mystery of Holy Night' a

- compilation of Bonhoeffer's sermons and writings on Christmas.
5. [http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/07/08/pope\\_on\\_lampedusa\\_%80%9CC\\_the\\_globalization\\_of\\_indifference%20%80%9D/en1-708541](http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/07/08/pope_on_lampedusa_%80%9CC_the_globalization_of_indifference%20%80%9D/en1-708541)
  6. Metaxas, Eric. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010, p. 249.

## RESPONSE

### KRISH MATHAVAN MSC

**W**E HAVE HEARD the Magnificat as the subversive song of Mary who far from being a gentle, passive and helpless voice, expressed herself (in the words of Bonhoeffer) wildly and passionately in the spirit of the OT prophets regarding the power of God acting on behalf of the powerless. This was her experience as a woman in an oppressed society and yet still favoured by God. Therefore the Magnificat read and listened to in the right spirit challenges us primarily because it presents a different world-view of reversal, of

collapsing thrones and humbled lords, of God favouring and rescuing the poor and oppressed. Yet it is not a prayer of wishful thinking but a prayer of faith by Mary in the reality of God's love and mercy having the last word.

But more than just words to recite, or a spiritualization of worldly issues, the Magnificat calls forth and stirs us into action to be God's instruments to help bring about what is promised. In this sense it anticipates the program of Jesus who heralds the coming of God's reign on earth here and now. Susan

has mentioned two active ways we can bring this about which stand out for me, so let me reflect with you on their implications.

One is a duty to ridicule, which is a consequence of being able to see clearly with faith the plight of the poor in their concrete suffering experiences, and how God has acted and will act in reversing their situations. Such a ridicule can be directed at those in public office in Church or State when these leaders choose to neglect or worse still persecute the weak and vulnerable whom they are supposed to protect. Perhaps we have seen this best in the widespread outcry to the budget proposed by the government, who demanded cuts that would have undermined the welfare of the young, the sick and the unemployed.

Another way of bringing about God's reign on earth is through weeping. A program to weep can be timely in situations where we are helpless to make an immediate difference, for example in response to the brutalization and dehumanization of asylum seekers in off-shore processing centres. Weeping is an expression of shared humanity and suffering with the pain of others, as well as a nonviolent protest against injustice. In the words of Joan Chittister, 'it is tears alone that stop us where we stand in life and demand that we assess it one more time with the sort of reflection that sees more than anyone can see'. I believe this was the motivation for different Christian leaders to come together and stage a recent sit-in at the offices of the immigration and foreign ministers in protest against the harsh policies against asylum seekers. Such gestures and the like are not optional extras to be carried out by a passionate few, but surely a moral obligation for all who are serious and creative in living the Magnificat and the Gospel.

So the Magnificat suggests our faith is not one of individual piety but one with social implications on the national and world stage. As Susan points out, there are always the poor and powerless to exalt and the rich and powerful to unseat, and to be able to see this and



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act on it through ridicule or tears requires one to go down the narrow path of conversion individually and communally.

It is not about fixing things and people as we sometimes wish we could, but about being present prophetically to God's saving action and grace in the world as Mary was. Central to living the Magnificat is the need to be converted from our self-centred ways in an ongoing manner so that we can truly identify with the poor and be 'in touch with their wounds'. This can mean looking hard at what is proud and mighty and rich in us that can get in the way of what we truly hunger for, and what makes us powerless. Only then can we truly follow Jesus and go against the grain of society, exult in God amid our lowly state, and actively commit to God's vision for humanity even when the reality shows otherwise. This requires courage and perseverance, and one can end up being very alone in one's stance of ridicule and weeping.

In this we can look to the apt example given of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. During the Second World War, Bonhoeffer showed staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to Hitler's euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews, resulting in him being imprisoned in a concentration camp and later executed. Yet Bonhoeffer in his nonviolent resistance would leave behind a legacy that would inspire Christians across all denominations in subsequent ages, such as Martin Luther King Jr and the civil rights movement in America, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

We do not start from scratch in this work for justice. God's spirit already moves within and continues to spur us on in what we need to say and do. The Magnificat does not call us to withdraw or be indifferent but it really emboldens us to engage because it recognizes it is all God's work and we just respond like Mary to 'live inside God's imagination'. In fact one of the most striking points Susan alluded to and we keep returning to was how we are called to listen, to listen to and through the signs and even evils of our times, and respond ever more faithfully to the subtle voice of the Spirit as we seek to build the reign of God here on earth.

At this time of much turmoil in the world, I couldn't help but reflect on the two current global issues that have caused much angst and sadness in me. One is the increasingly obvious impact and growing awareness of climate change in the world, in contrast with the continuing indifference showed by the current government; and the other is the emerging extremism of Islam in the Middle East in the form of terrorist groups that have caused

worldwide paranoia and provoked military retaliation, with ramifications on the Muslim community and how they are increasingly perceived. There is now a lot of hatred and vitriol in public discourse based on fear and ignorance, and I wonder how we as individuals and as Church can and should respond to these issues in the nonviolent spirit of the Magnificat. Perhaps it will take an international ridicule of our political leaders before they start to take climate change seriously, and perhaps it will require us to walk and weep with our Muslim brothers and sisters and wait on God to lift us up together from our powerlessness.

Whatever the case I have realized the revolution must start first of all in us, at which point we can then sing wildly and passionately with Mary about how our souls cannot but proclaim the greatness of God. In this way the Magnificat can become for us a manifesto of both individual and social transformation. Its content is definitely worth our reading and re-reading, and a continual reflecting of it in our lives.

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*Today in our situation the authenticity of the people of God goes by way of poverty and justice: they are the touchstone of the truth of the faith that is professed and of the genuineness of life as it is lived out:*

— *poverty, which involves incarnating all our efforts and incarnating ourselves in the reality of the oppressed majorities, and that will necessarily entail a voluntary impoverishment and abnegation on the part of those who wield power;*

— *justice, which involves giving to the people what belongs to the people and struggling to uproot injustice and exploitation, and to establish a new earth, wherein the life of the new human may be possible.*

—**Ignacio Ellacuría SJ, martyred in El Salvador 1989**