

**A POET'S PROFESSION OF FAITH
FOR THE YEAR OF FAITH
PSALM 104**

by Canon Jim Foley

Our Christian churches are well-accustomed to the recitation of Professions of Faith and Creeds and we have also come to accept that these are the product of long years of heated debate among theologians. Every phrase that has found its way into a Creed has had to fight for its place. Such documents carry the stamp of doctrinal authority and that is what is expected of them. Even when set to music, the sound of battle is never far away.

During this Year of Faith I would draw attention to an equally venerable but totally different kind of profession of faith that comes to us from the pen of a poet. It is cherished by the Synagogue, where it began life more than two thousand years ago, and is equally cherished by all the Christian Churches who give it pride of place on the major Feast of Pentecost each year. Jews and Christians alike raise our voices to proclaim our faith in God the Creator of the universe in the inspired words of Psalm 104. This year we make this poet's Act of Faith our own.

The poem is a tapestry of exceeding beauty with the Creator at the head of creation 'wrapped in light as in a robe' (v1). The creation is called to witness and to respond in a profound act of adoration. The tapestry unfolds to reveal the wonders of the created universe and to solicit a response of faith in a providential God who not only brings all things into being but whose Spirit constantly 'renews the face of the earth' (v30).

The entire poem is framed between two identical responses of faith: 'Bless the Lord my soul' (vv 1 and 35).

The images throughout are both visual and aural. Sight and sound combine to enrich this act of faith in a way which is not possible in the conventional creeds. Apart from the splendid fertile landscapes, eleven classes of creatures and their habitats are specifically named. Man finds his own place among them in a deceptively modest image:



Man goes forth to his work,
to labour till evening falls (v23).

It is given to man to care for the created world and to share in the work of creation and preservation. He too is called to 'renew the face of the earth' (v30).

Having celebrated the vast panorama of life on earth, our poet takes a step back to contemplate the gift of life itself and, likewise, the fragility of life and the prospect of death:

You hide your face, they are dismayed;
you take back your spirit, they die,
returning to the dust from which they came. (v29)

To speak of the wonder of life on earth without recognising its fragility and confronting the prospect of death would be remiss. Our poet is not blind to the fact that life is transitory, yet the consequences of this lie beyond his immediate vision. He is satisfied with the life he celebrates and simply professes his faith that both life and death are in the hands of the Creator. Christians will look to the New Testament for the prospect of an even fuller life after

death under the guidance of the Good Shepherd. 'I came that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10, 10). For St Paul this involves not only humanity but the whole of creation: 'Creation itself will be set free from the bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Romans 8.21).

Our poetic Act of Faith ends with a resounding: Alleluia.

AN INVITATION TO YOUNG ARTISTS

Young artists (S 5/6) are invited to illustrate the images or any aspect of this poetic act of faith as an exercise in discovering the inexhaustible riches of the Word of God and possibly in rediscovering their own place in this year's tapestry of faith. Any artistic medium may be used, including photography. The best of the illustrations will be published in a later edition of this web page on Pentecost Sunday, 19 May 2013. To participate contact Canon Jim Foley at the above contact address.