

The epiphany
by Godfrey Rust

A stable's a good place for revelations.
Some of the most profound discoveries
are made in back rooms, half by accident,
by people half-exhausted, looking for
something else.
Just as we felt like giving up,
when the whole thing had become ridiculous
and had gone on much too long, and we
were blaming
everybody else for our mistakes,
we came upon the unexpected answer
in the most unlikely place:
a speechless, thoughtless, helpless child
who just lay there, needing to be loved.
In this defiance of all natural things
was born the enabling power of sacrifice—
a being whose ambition was to seek
its own destruction and then call upon
his followers to do nothing else.
What kind of way was this to rule a world?
He just lay there, needing to be loved.
It would be stopped. Each Herod would
conspire
for its destruction, when they cannot tempt it
with possessions nor subdue it with pain
nor lull it to sleep with alcohol or television.
Here was something we could not buy or
cure,
digitise, transplant, promote, update, invest
in,
analyse or write a business plan for.
He had no army, text-book, voters' mandate
or computer markup language
with which to implement this great design:
he just lay there, needing to be loved.
It was the most implausible demand.
Anything else we might negotiate
but not this secret life secured through death:
grace, born out of deprivation,
grace born of the endurance of the
oppressed,
grace born of the hardships of the poor,
grace born of the forgiveness of the
intolerable,
grace borne in the dignity of silence, grace
born

from incomprehensible submission
to the absolute abuse of power.
In the strength of his weakness
he just lay there, needing to be loved.
Aeons after energy exploded into matter
here in this stable was let loose
a yet more potent power:
shedding the fabric of his former life
like an old coat, reckless that the truth
would prove for all he knew fatal
to everything to which he had thus far clung.
Our gifts were tokens. There was nothing
more to do
but leave the child to his own terrible story,
and return by different routes
to our own countries, strangers to us now,
yet seeing them as if for the first time,
how they just lie there, needing to be loved.