



from Garth...

Pope Francis affirms Ernesto Cardinal



Garth with Ernesto Cardinal

On our trips to Nicaragua one of the people we have met is priest and poet Ernesto Cardinal. He's an extraordinary man – one of the world's leading poets, and he was in the original Sandinista government. But Pope John Paul II banned him from celebrating mass for refusing to leave the Sandinista government.

There is a famous finger-wagging picture as you can see below - when Pope John Paul II told him off.

But now Pope Francis has cancelled the sanctions against him and he is allowed once again to celebrate the Mass.

It was very good to meet up with him – I remember Chris Rose (now Director of Amos Trust) was also with us on that visit. Ernesto was a little grumpy at first with our questions but when he realised we were involved and supportive of music and the arts he was delighted



Pope John Paul II telling off Ernesto Cardinal

and started to show us his art and sculptures as well.

Ernesto has talked about his vocation and the influence of Thomas Merton: "I was ordained a priest to come and establish the community here at Solentiname (a group of three islands towards the southern end of Lake Nicaragua). It was Thomas Merton who gave me the idea."

Thomas Merton was Ernesto Cardinal's spiritual director, and said of him "He has one of the rare vocations we have had here at Gethsemani (monastery in Kentucky) who certainly and manifestly combined the gifts of a contemplative with those of an artist."

Ernesto says, "Thomas Merton had been a monk for twenty years and had written a great deal about that life ... and he wanted to found a different type of contemplative community outside the US."

On one of our other trips we were able to go and spend some time in Solentiname.

Ernesto is now 94 and not very well, but it was a joy to meet him and be inspired both by him and the community of Solentiname – it is encouraging that Pope Francis has affirmed him. Several of his poetry books have been translated including the extraordinary "Cosmic Canticle".

We asked Ernesto if he liked the term "liberation theology" and he said, "I prefer 'a theology of revolution'", which we thought was probably a suitable description of the Sermon on the Mount.

Poets of Nicaragua

My song **Poets of Nicaragua** was written on a quiet day in Solentiname (a quiet day for me - the others were off doing energetic activities!) The song starts off with the words *In the silence of Solentiname accompanied by birdsong, where artists keep painting and poets keep writing* - this is a reference to the Community of Solentiname, who had been using folk art and creativity following the inspiration of Ernesto after his arrival there.

I go on to refer to some of the history of the island and then some other people in Nicaragua, poets and artists, and in particular Carlos Godoy, probably Nicaragua's leading musician. I mention this was where Ernesto Cardinal built the church of liberation and where Carlos Godoy wrote the **Misa Campesino**, which was a tremendous influence right across Nicaragua, and he performed it first in the church in Solentiname.

The fact that Carlos Godoy has recently had to flee the country, to Costa Rica,

indicates that all is not well in Nicaragua at the moment. Even way back when we were talking with Ernesto he told us that he was forming another party because he wasn't happy with where the Sandinista government was going. **So our thoughts and prayers are very much with our friends and partners in Nicaragua.** It is a delight that Damaris Albuquerque and Gilbert Aguirre of **CEPAD** (a council of churches development programme particularly working in the rural communities of Nicaragua) will be visiting Amos Trust later this year for **Amos Day** and events around that time.

Poets Of Nicaragua

In the silence of Solentiname - accompanied by bird song
Where artists keep painting and poets keep writing
And faith has been framed by the blood of the martyrs
From Isla Mancarron to Isla San Fernando
From Isla La Venada - breathtaking beauty
Also named to remember Elvis Chavarria
And Felipe Pena and Donald Guevara
Who laid down their lives in the struggle for freedom
Where Ernesto Cardenal built the Church of liberation
Where Carlos Godoy wrote the Misa Campesino
So I raise a glass for songwriters and artists
And the poets - of Nicaragua.

Standing on the roof of the Cathedral at Leon
With the line of volcanoes stretching before you
Volcanoes and poets erupting with passion
Like Ruben Dario and Alfonso Cortes
In a land on a journey to remove the oppression
Where Bartoleme de las Casas appealed for the people
Where Dora Maria went on a hunger strike
On behalf of the poor - on behalf of the nation
Where planting and health bring hope to campesinos
So I raise a glass for teachers and doctors
And liberation priests and community workers
And the poets - of Nicaragua.

In the silence of Solentiname - interpreted by bird song
Where dignity was born from the womb of simplicity
And justice will come as the fruit of humanity
And daily survival arrives with creativity
With painting on canvas and crafts full of colour
By Rodolfo Arellano & Rosa Pineda
Eneyda Castillo and Elba Jimenez
And we take our lesson from the voices that echo

From a country that listens to the words of its poets
And the songs that are born in the heart of its singers
From Luis Enrique to Katia Cardenal
And the poets - of Nicaragua.

**Where Ernesto Cardenal built the church of liberation
Where Carlos Godoy wrote the Misa Campesino
So I raise a glass for songwriters and artists
And the poets - of Nicaragua.**

Lent with the Generous God of Mercy

As I write this (Shrove Tuesday) we are about to enter Lent. On 'Thought for the Day' this morning Canon Lucy Winkett talked of the significance of Shrove Tuesday – Lucy, who is a previous Chair of Amos Trust, is the Rector of St James Piccadilly, which regularly hosts

Amos events. [This links you to The Today Programme on Shrove Tuesday at the 1.48.30 point where Lucy is introduced](#)

It's worth having a listen - it will be available on this link for about another three weeks.

This Lent it looks as if we will be leaving the European Union and maybe it's good that we should approach this event in a penitential spirit because whatever our views on this, there is no doubt that it looks as if we are cutting off many relationships and pulling up the drawbridge. It is sad that the hostile environment which has been fostered internally in Britain seems now to be reaching further. I'm sure that many of us in our church communities will find ways to reach out to show an attitude of friendship and acceptance particularly to asylum seekers and refugees.

I'm grateful that Gill and I are able to worship in a church which welcomes diversity in all shapes and forms, and constantly refreshes our understanding of the generous God who affirms us and refreshes us.

I am in the process of putting together an EP (extended play – this is basically a mini-album of four or five songs!) One of the songs is called *To the God Whose Name is Mercy* and in the chorus it says

**To the God whose name is mercy
To the generous God of mercy**

We take our stand with you

In the verses I use some words sparked off by Thomas Merton

**So tell the earth to shake with marching feet
Of messengers of peace – Proclaim my way of love
To every nation and every race –
Show mercy and show love**

Tax and the Common Good



Wed, 10 April 2019

18:00 – 20:00

**St Mary-le-Bow Church,
Cheapside, London, EC2V 6AU**

One of the things that I enjoyed when I was Guild Vicar at All Hallows on the Wall was the organisation Just Share; based at

St Mary-le-Bow, it puts on regular talks and events on issues of money and justice. It is a challenging and prophetic dialogue in the City of London.

Their next meeting is Tax and the Common Good, on Wednesday 10th April 2019 at 6pm-8pm - well worth going to. One of the speakers is our very good friend David Haslam who has been committed to issues of tax justice for years and is a prophetic voice on this issue.

For several years he's been trying to get me to write a song on tax justice - in fact I think he's even written most of the lyrics! - apologies David, maybe this event will tip me over to writing it!

The other two speakers are Father Simon Cuff and Ann Fairpo - here's a [link to more details](#) and you can register to attend on there too.

The Day the Prophets came to Davos

At this year's World Economic Forum at Davos several people spoke very challengingly to the assembled billionaires. One who caught the media attention was Rutger Bregman, who spoke prophetically about the benefit of tax. It's worth following [this link](#) to see what he was saying.

Prayer for Lent

Generous God of mercy
In this season of penitence
We ask for forgiveness for our country's
espousal
Of a hostile environment to refugees and
asylum seekers

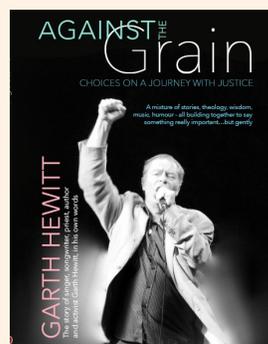
We also ask forgiveness for our commitment
to the arms trade
With all the devastation that causes
Not least in causing more refugees
Trying to escape from brutal and
unnecessary wars

May our churches be communities
That treat people with equality and dignity
Caring for all and showing love in action

May our vision be renewed this Lent
To see the great hope of the wounded God
Who walks beside us
And encourages us to become communities
That are wholistic and just
And become strong witnesses in our communities
That make a difference

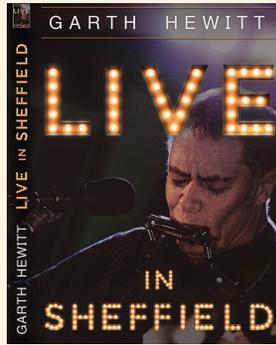


Garth Hewitt

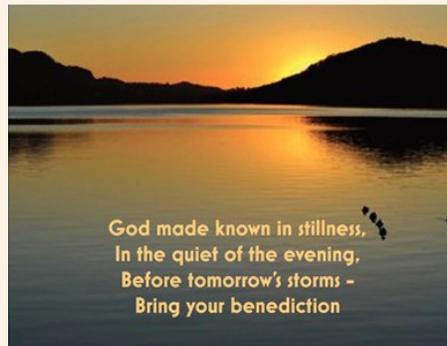


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