

LONGING FOR LIGHT

There was a film called “The Bangkok Hilton,” starring Nicole Kidman. She played the part of a young woman who has grown up on a remote and luxurious estate in Australia where her family has lived for generations. Her mother, as a young woman, was once taken to the nearest city to visit the family lawyers but she had become briefly involved with one of the firm, got pregnant and was whisked back home in disgrace, never to leave it again. This experience led her to keep her own little daughter securely within the boundaries of the estate. Nicole Kidman grew up then in a large and beautiful house, surrounded by acres of lovely gardens. She had everything she wanted and lived in comfort and total safety. You might almost have called this place The Garden of Eden: a paradise of innocence and abundance. Strangely though it did not seem to suit her as well as it might. She developed a nervous speech impediment and suffered from frequent asthma attacks. She was not particularly happy. When she was nineteen her mother died and, although there was plenty of money to keep up the estate, and no reason for her to leave this paradise, leave it she did for the big wide world.

Well you can imagine what happened when this naïve young woman left the safety of her home: complete disaster. She travelled to England, fell in love with a good looking young man about whom she knew nothing and flew back with him to Australia, unknowingly carrying drugs. When the plane stopped in Thailand she was arrested, he discreetly disappeared and she found herself in the notorious Bangkok prison, on trial for her life.

The rest of the film deals with the horrors of the prison, the risky plot to get this girl out and her hasty, rather painful journey into maturity. The question it left in my mind was this: if that girl were given the choice again, whether or not to leave her safe, luxurious home for this dangerous outside world, would she choose differently? Would she wish to remain for ever in that Garden of Eden?

Of course she would..... or would she? You see, despite the mistakes, the trauma and the suffering, this girl was really living, for the first time. She was discovering her strengths as well as her weaknesses. She was exploring the world and the human race and finding, even in prison, a lot that was worthwhile. When she finally escaped she had lost the stammer, lost the asthma and was strong enough to track down the drug-trafficking boyfriend and get him arrested.

So no, I am not sure she would have wanted to go back.

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It is a difficult question to ask of ourselves: life can be incredibly painful, dangerous, and evil but would we really want an existence of complete sweetness and light? A life in which there were no dangers and no challenges; an existence in which we had no choice but to do good and to be good? Is that what we want?

Why do so many people reject books and films that show nothing but the lighter side of life: romances in which the couple never have a quarrel, families whose house is always spotless and whose children never do anything wrong? Why do they demand dramas which bring out the darker side of human nature, the more complex side of life? Jilly Cooper wrote that whereas at one time all children wanted to be the Virgin Mary in the school nativity play, now apparently the most sought-after part is that of Herod. Are we bringing up a race of depraved monsters?

Jesus said that he was the light of the world. He promised that those who followed him would never walk in darkness. So what did he mean by this?

He was not talking about creating a race of stained-glass window saints who do nothing but look holy and keep out of trouble. Nor was he trying to draw his followers into a safe place where nothing bad would ever come. He did not promise a life in which no-one would suffer, no-one would grieve and no-one know the agony of guilt.

What Jesus brought to the world was a dynamic light, a powerful light, a life-giving, creative light. It was not something static and withdrawn from the darker side of life but a light which penetrated right into the blind alleys and the dead-ends of human existence, a light which reached the darkest corners of grief and despair, a light which showed up the secret dangers in life and in human society. It was a transforming light, a gift of God, which enabled men and women to turn weakness into strength, tragedy into triumph, mistakes into stepping-stones. It was a light which was seen to be living in the human race, leading us, guiding us, inspiring us, holding us back from being totally defeated by suffering and evil. It was a light which brought men and women through the mistakes, the dangers, the challenges of life, realising that they have the strength of God himself within them.

Jesus said *“I am the Light of the world. All who believe in me shall not walk in darkness. They shall have the light of life.”*

Christianity in a nutshell.

Longing for light, we wait in darkness,

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see.

Christ be our light, shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness

Christ be our light, shine in your church gathered today.

Amen.