

Alastair McIntosh

THE LIBERATION THEOLOGY OF PUSSY RIOT

This e-mail was sent out by Alastair McIntosh to contacts concerned with issues of socio-ecological and spiritual activism, following the 'trial' of Pussy Riot in Russia ...

Dear Folks,

Today my American colleague Chris Reed, who is President of Friends of Hudson, sent me these remarkable passages which he has extracted from the closing trial statements of Pussy Riot. I am sending them on to you, who are concerned with issues of socio-ecological and spiritual activism in today's world.

There is also a link to their full statements, and I have to say that those of Masha and Nadia in particular are quite the most exceptional and conviction-packed treatises of liberation theology that I have seen for a very long time. (I would define liberation theology as that which liberates the flow of life by liberating theology itself; specifically, Gustavo Gutiérrez emphasises that 'To liberate = to give life' and speaks of 'a radical aspiration for integral liberation'.) I note that Masha cut her teeth in ecological activism, doing a kind of Tripping Up Trump by combating the desecration of protected nature by the rich.

The spiritual courage combined with astute theological cogency of these three Russian women has hardly featured in Western media reports. These have been more concerned with the more comfortable ground of tracing their musical rather than their theological influences. I urge all of you who might be interested in spiritual activism to have a read of their full statements, and to tweet them or whatever you do.

Taken together with what has been happening with Islamic liberation theology in the Arab Spring and some of the reflection that came out of Occupy at Westminster Abbey, I am wondering if we are at last starting to see an awakening of the receptivity towards power of the Spirit in confronting the world's burning issues.

What a laugh! And these three women laughed as they were sentenced, because, as they say, they had inner freedom ...

EXTRACTS FROM PUSSY RIOT'S CLOSING STATEMENTS

Masha Alyokhina: *Speaking about Putin, we first of all mean not Vladimir Putin, but Putin as a system created by him. The vertical power structure, where all governing is being carried out almost manually. And in this vertical power structure public opinion is completely disregarded ...*

Modern education institutions teach people from childhood to live automatically, do not introduce key issues appropriate to their age, foster cruelty and intolerance to dissent. From childhood a person forsakes his liberties ...

Humility, one of Christian principal notions, is existentially understood not as a way of purification, empowerment and eventual deliverance of the human, but in contrast as a way of his enslavement ...

'It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy' (John 10:33). It's interesting that it's this verse that [the] Russian Orthodox Church uses to express its opinion about blasphemy ... Expressing this opinion [the] Russian Orthodox Church refers to it as to a static religious truth. Gospel is no longer understood as revelation, which it was initially, but as a kind of solid block which can be torn up to quotations and tuck[ed] anywhere, into any document, used for any purpose. [The] Russian Orthodox Church didn't even bother to examine the context in which the word 'blasphemy' is used, that in

this case it is applied to Jesus Christ himself ...'

Masha Alyokhina's full statement at: <http://freepussyriot.org/documents>

Nadia Tolokonnikova: *Every day more and more people realise that if this political system has ganged up to this extent against three girls for a 30-second performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, it means the system is afraid of the truth and afraid of our sincerity and directness ...*

People can sense the truth. Truth really does have some kind of ontological, existential superiority over lies and this is written in the Bible, in the Old Testament in particular ...

We are freer than the people sitting opposite us for the prosecution because we can say everything we like, and we do, but those people sitting there say only what political censorship allows them to say ...

Stasis and the search for truth are always in opposition to one another and, in this case, at this trial, we can see people who are trying to find the truth and people who are trying to enslave those who want to find the truth ...

Christ didn't associate with prostitutes for nothing. He said, 'I help those who have gone astray and forgive them' but for some reason I can't see any of that at our trial, which is taking place under the banner of Christianity. I think the prosecutor is defying Christianity.

Nadia Tolokonnikova's full statement at: <http://freepussyriot.org/documents>

Katja Samutsevich: *The fact that Christ the Savior Cathedral had become a significant symbol in the political strategy of our powers-that-be was already clear to many thinking people when Vladimir Putin's former [KGB] colleague Kirill Gundyayev took over as head of the Russian Orthodox Church. After this happened, Christ the Savior Cathedral began to be used*

openly as a flashy setting for the politics of the security services, which are the main source of power [in Russia] ...

In our performance we dared, without the Patriarch's blessing, to combine the visual image of Orthodox culture and protest culture, suggesting to smart people that Orthodox culture belongs not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch and Putin, that it might also take the side of civic rebellion and protest in Russia ...

I now have mixed feelings about this trial. On the one hand, we now expect a guilty verdict. Compared to the judicial machine, we are nobodies, and we have lost. On the other hand, we have won. Now the whole world sees that the criminal case against us has been fabricated. The system cannot conceal the repressive nature of this trial. Once again, Russia looks different in the eyes of the world from the way Putin tries to present it at daily international meetings. All the steps toward a state governed by the rule of law that he promised have obviously not been made. And his statement that the court in our case will be objective and make a fair decision is another deception of the entire country and the international community ...

Katja Samutsevich's statement at: <http://freepussyriot.org/documents>

Iona Community letter in support of Pussy Riot: At summer Community Week on Iona, members of the Iona Community composed a letter in support of Pussy Riot, and sent it to the Russian Embassy in London, the Russian and British governments, Amnesty International and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. To read the letter, go to: www.churchestogether-connect.org/profiles/blogs/iona-community-statement-on-the-pussy-riot-trial-in-moscow

Alastair McIntosh is the author of a number of books, including *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* (Aurum Press); *Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition* (Birlinn); *Rekindling Community: Connecting People, Environment and Spirituality*, *Schumacher Briefings* (Green Books); and *Love and Revolution: Poems* (Luath). He is an associate of the Iona Community.

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John M. Hull

Training ministers for a prophetic church

New understandings of mission have been developing for the past half-century. The source of mission is now seen to be the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – whose eternal decree is to be God-for-us. Whereas once mission was thought of mainly in terms of evangelisation and the conversion of individuals, now it is seen to be as wide as the love of God for all humanity and for the creation.

The five marks of mission of the Anglican Communion and other Churches reach a turning point between the third and fourth marks, the third being loving care for the community and the fourth to transform the unjust structures of society. What are unjust structures? For whom are they unjust? How does it happen that they continue to exist if they are unjust? Moreover, unjust structures are often abstract, involving large and complex issues, and are challenging for a Christian faith which during the modern period has been accustomed to think in individual and even internal forms of spirituality. It is for reasons like this that institutions preparing people for ordained ministry need to provide special training in the fourth mark of mission.

In the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham, all candidates for ordained public ministry are required to acquire experience in the social justice leadership of their future congregations. This is variously described as 'social justice', 'prophetic ministry' or 'prophetic witness'. It involves the selection of a number of public issues each year, about which students are invited to campaign. These issues have included nuclear weapons, human trafficking, fair trade, protests against the arms trade and in favour of environmentally friendly government policies, since the fifth mark invites us to care for the integrity of creation.

The selection of such issues is subject to a number of criteria, the application of which is in itself a form of theological education. We ask whether the issue has arisen from our corporate worship and whether it will feed back into worship, whether the local or international church has issued guidelines on the topic, and whether there is a history of Christian opposition in this area. We ask whether the area invites cooperation from other religious and secular groups, and whether it can be pursued by entirely peaceful means. We also ask whether we have doubts about the issue, because actions conducted without some degree of cautious doubt can easily lead to dogmatism and even fanaticism.

In recent years we have become aware of the demand for a tax on financial transactions. This is known as the Robin Hood Tax, since even a tiny tax of 0.2% would yield huge sums to be devoted to health and welfare. We were encouraged by the support for the Robin Hood Tax given by Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and by a number of European leaders.

On an action, one of our students dressed up as Robin Hood, carrying a big scroll and accompanied by two trumpeters, one on either side. Robin took up his position outside one of the high street banks, the trumpets sounded and Robin proclaimed from the scroll the demand for the rich to be taxed in favour of the poor. He concluded 'Are you with me?' and the group of thirty staff and students surrounding him responded with a shout: 'We are with you, Robin!' Robin, with a few of his Merry Men and Women, then entered the bank, gave chocolate coins to customers and staff, and distributed leaflets about the proposed tax. This action was repeated in three more high street banks. Some were friendly and amused, others were slightly nervous. As one bank manager fumbled with his keys to close the door and lock them in,