

Mother and Child Reunion

Thomas Schuhmann
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"Mother and Child Reunion" is my favorite song by Paul Simon.

My grandmother's maiden name was also Simon. Her parents owned a restaurant in Veitshöchheim, near Wuerzburg, which has a public park with lakes and waterworks, filled with hundreds of allegorical sandstone sculptures, an enchanted place for a child to roam about. My grandmother took me there when she visited her sister.

I loved to feed the fish in the pond of the Hofgarten which were majestic carp swimming lazily about in the sunshine. In the middle of the pond was a statue of a winged horse. The carps and Pegasus, the quietness of the place, the Main river nearby, the swans: it gave me a feeling what the "mother and child reunion" could be about.



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I had become a follower of my grandmother and accompanied her to our church named "The Holy Family" where she prayed the rosary in October and where she attended Mother Mary again in the month of May for devotions. I listened to the old women whispering the rosary, murmuring the holy words, in a room with a side altar. Mother Mary's statue stood there, immaculate, holding a rosary, candles burning in front of her, the smell of wax. I read much later that the Irish poet Seamus Heaney went through a similar experience, the Catholic experience, just as Bruce Springsteen did.

The lower Franconian version of Catholicism was a religion of sadness, of somber words, mysterious details, the value of suffering was constantly stressed, the confession, the holy communion, the church songs stemming mostly from the baroque era. I developed my first Top Ten by waiting for certain songs to appear again and again each Sunday. My favorite was "O Lamb of God, innocent":

*O Lamb of God, most stainless!
Who on the Cross didst languish,
Patient through all Thy sorrows.
Though mocked amid Thine anguish;
Our sins Thou bearest for us,
Else had despair reigned o'er us:
Have mercy upon us, O Jesu!
Grant us Thy peace today, O Jesu!*

The King of the world, despised! I couldn't get this paradox into my head, but singing it made these words become one with my soul and filled me with the longing to follow the misunderstood, rejected, lonely person of Jesus Christ.

I guess I concluded that the meaning of the gospel was to become the despised one, the rejected one, the suffering one, introducing into my heart the concept of a religion which Nietzsche had denounced a "slave religion," in which old women underwent suffering and enjoyed it.

As a matter of fact, my parents hated it; they wouldn't set foot inside the church except when they had to. They had enough of walking through "the vale of tears." My father's mother, a chambermaid, had become one of those lower Franconian pilgrims who had put dried peas in her shoes in order to suffer while walking. Imagine the mindset of my other grandmother, whom I never knew. My grandmothers come close to those Christians who really want to carry a wooden cross on their shoulders and go through the pain of Golgotha themselves, because life had been that miserable, sinful, with no hope inside except for the Lamb of God, who patiently suffered for us and who overcame his lower instincts to hit back, to seek for revenge.

It seems to me no one understood the pain of my grandmothers who were ridiculed by the "enlightened" ones in our family. I felt as a child that my grandmother was looking for a confidante who could understand her silence, who listened to her silence, a person who followed her regardless of the situation and never left her alone. It was me; I became the *Einfühler*, the person who empathizes with someone and

gets completely carried away by it.

Being ten years old, I listened to the Beatles topping the charts with "rock and roll music." This band saved us all from doom and gloom, from the Catholic state of affairs in my neighborhood, from the depressing weekends, from the war stories which were my father's prayer. There was only the Catholic Church, the library, soccer, and rock and roll.

I found the Beatles to be a very mother-centered band. Obviously, it was John Lennon's lifetime theme that he lost his mother quite early and when she came back into his life, she was killed in a car accident. That's why he was so bitter, resentful and didn't give a damn taking drugs, destroying his life. Yoko Ono tried to compensate for his loss, but even his bandmates didn't understand his need for "a mother superior;" they despised Yoko because she had infiltrated their money machine.

In 1980, I was in Liverpool as a German language assistant, a city intoxicated with music, soccer, religion, libraries, just like home, and it was all working class. John was assassinated Dec. 8, 1980 in New York, and, in my own way, I participated in his funeral. I bought all the obituaries, all Beatles books, all cassettes, and listened to John closing the last chapter of my Beatle experience as his true follower.

As I had been so deeply into rock and roll, I would stay up until 2 or 3 a.m. to listen to the English programming of Radio Luxembourg. I lived in a world of my own like an autistic person. My parents finally had designed a plan for me that I should live in my grandmother's house to watch over her. As nothing seemed to help any more, I was sent to Lohr am Main to live with other misfits (and rock and roll addicts!) in an institution governed by priests.

Each Wednesday I had permission to visit my aunt Walla (from Walburga), the shining light of our family, the eldest daughter of my grandmother, a teacher in a Catholic girls school, a woman who had finished her studies in mathematics with the highest grades. Needless to say I liberated her in the first Chung Pyung workshop on European ground, as she had been the one who had made the "mother and child reunion" for me a reality.

It was at the lowest point of my life that Walla took me under her wings just as Paul Simon describes. Do you have to be so low in order to find grace? Do you have to walk on dried peas to find a smile from on high? Do you have to be so forsaken in order to find a true friend? Why is it always that lonely? I only know that Heaven is where Walla is and always will be. Walla is the guarantee that goodness exists; everything else might be fake. It is because of her I went to the workshop, I felt the obligation "to die for her," to use strong language. For, although being united with a mother figure like her, Walla suffered a tragic fate; she died of cancer and it took her two years to die.

I might understand John Lennon's feelings, because I also became resentful, cynical, relying heavily on wine and cigarettes to cope with the loss. By the way, if you're from Wuerzburg, in most houses there is a statue of the Madonna, and in most streets, too, reminding you of the patron saint of Bavaria. When nothing helps any more, I pray the rosary. When time stands still at work, I might as well pray the rosary, because I believe that the woman steps on the serpent's head and destroys it -- the restored Eve, in other words, the only begotten daughter.



The Beatles performing "She Loves You" on the Swedish television show "Drop-In" on October 30, 1963.

I feel it a great privilege that "the only begotten daughter" came to save a "wretch like me" and that she truly loves me and goes her way unerringly. She gives me something to think about every day. It is the

"mother and child reunion" that comes to save me, the gentle spirit, not the boxer spirit that wants me to hit them on the head, not that masculine spirit that encourages the troglodyte in me "to smash their bloody heads." She helps me to find my original mind; my masculine nature is always out for a military solution, has no patience, but wants to retaliate.

All I long for is to ride on this wavelength, so that miracles can occur. A transformational, revolutionary change is all I want to liberate my fellow human beings from their suffering. I need a link to the substantial Holy Spirit that is moving. If you are prone to depression, you might buy Robert Burton's book *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, but it is the "mother and child reunion" that brings one out of suicidal states of mind.

At the end of Heinrich Böll's novel *The Clown*, the protagonist is left by his wife, sits alone on the stairs of the Bonn Hauptbahnhof train station and his only comfort is the Litany of Loreto, which he starts to sing:

*Mystical rose,
Tower of David,
Tower of ivory,
House of gold,
Ark of the covenant,
Gate of heaven,
Morning star,
Health of the sick,
Refuge of sinners,
Comforter of the afflicted,
Help of Christians,
Queen of Angels,
Queen of Patriarchs,
Queen of Prophets,
Queen of Apostles,
Queen of Martyrs,
Queen of Confessors,
Queen of Virgins,
Queen of all Saints,
Queen conceived without original sin,
Queen assumed into heaven,
Queen of the most holy Rosary,
Queen of families,
Queen of peace*

I joined the Unification Church in 1976, but two years later, I left the German Unification Church for which I had tried my best as a full-time missionary, because, as my Christian spirit was rather masochistic due to the influence of my grandmothers, I felt I could not go on. Needless to say I suffered from overwhelming guilt.

The same year I discovered Bruce Springsteen on German TV performing "Rosalita" like a madman, so I bought his second album and found a release in his music. "Rosalita" was the signal song of the album; probably a Latin American woman, she jumped right into my heart. When I heard "Incident on 57th Street," I found it rather peculiar for a rock and roller to sing "And the sister prays for lost souls, then breaks down in the chapel after everyone's gone." I loved him for this observation; he seemed to be a deeply religious guy full of hope in a hopeless world. Naturally, I bought all his albums and agreed with him "It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City." My favorite song became "The Price You Pay," probably the deepest song of his "River" album expressing that you cannot escape from your personal indemnity:

*Do you remember the story of the promised land
How he crossed the desert sands
And could not enter the chosen land
On the banks of the river he stayed
To face the price you pay*

The album "Darkness at the Edge of Town" probably was the best one he ever did; here are lyrics from his song "Adam Raised a Cain":

*In the summer that I was baptized
My father held me to his side
As they put me into the water
He said how on that day I cried
We were prisoners of love, a love in chains*

*He was standin' in the door,
I was standin' in the rain
With the same hot blood burning in our veins
Adam raised a Cain*

And yet, Springsteen kept his optimism in the song "Promised Land." The Messiah had chosen the USA to wage his spiritual warfare, fighting, blazing his trail, suffering in prison, but never giving up. If you love rock and roll, you love the USA; if you love the USA, you realize it was the only possible country for Rev. Moon to take a stand against the whole world, walking "Streets of Fire" (another song in that album).

That's why I had to come back and joined CARP as a university student meeting the Blue Tuna Band and an elder church member in Erlangen. He gave me an address for True Mother and told me "write her," which I did, three times. My last letter contained the busts of around 40 famous Bavarian heroes and under each picture I wrote "lonely," expressing that the whole nation of Germany is dying out of loneliness if True Mother does not come.

Well, I received a beautiful dream as a present. I dreamed I walked into our workshop center in Bavaria for lunch and all the tables were occupied, except one. I sat there all by myself. Suddenly, True Mother entered the room, looked around and sat down opposite me. You could hear a pin drop. All the time I was thinking what to say, what to ask. Then I decided not to get on her nerves, because she must be under a lot of stress.

Finally I came up with a simple question: "How many cups of coffee do you drink in the course of a day?" She said, "Sometimes nine cups!" I felt God's love showering upon me.

In 1987, I was matched in New York with a sister from Brazil. My Rosalita.

Thomas Schuhmann joined the German Unification Church in 1976 and served as a full-time missionary. Later he studied English and German language and literature and joined CARP. He lives in Freising, Bavaria, and is blessed with a Brazilian; they have three children. He wrote this article hoping it may be seen by True Mother and she may say, "I love this guy. He's hip!"