

syndicalism, ownership and control by those working in these industries, is far preferable to state-ownership, although state ownership will be necessary for some enterprises (the army and armaments for instance supposing they still exist). Gill allows, reluctantly, that state-ownership may be necessary as a transitional phase between capitalism and syndicalism. As for compensating the expropriated capitalists – ‘they’ve had their whack’. With an echo almost of the 1909 essay with which I started, he writes:

Who am I to say that people shouldn’t have railways and telephones and cinemas, if they want them?

What I have the right to say and do say is that it is for the workers to decide – and that they can’t decide until they own.

Gill’s discovery of anarchism within catholicism was a highly personal development. As a controversialist he widened the boundaries of permissible catholic debate in the 1930s, and his direct influence on the stance of *Pax* and the war time land settlements of conscientious objectors was considerable. In all, his was a lonely voice, but it continues to have a powerful and disturbing resonance. As his friend, Philip Haggren summed up the case, there is not one way to earn your living and another to save your soul.

Eric Gill and the Contemporary

Michael Kelly

When I was an undergraduate in the early 1950s Eric Gill was a minor cult figure among Catholics whom I knew. As an apologist, a social, political and aesthetic theoretician rather than anything else. Gill’s lettering in stone was something I had learnt to admire at Ampleforth where Dom Patrick Barry was at that time active in calligraphy and lettering in stone himself. I liked Father Patrick’s work a lot and he introduced me to Gill’s. There was a certain general keenness about Gill at Ampleforth then but I only got to his *Letters* and *Autobiography* as an undergraduate. In those days

Gill and Maritain and St Thomas and Belloc and Chesterton were good company. In a dilettante, amateur way I enjoyed myself among them. As far as Gill was concerned I was particularly pleased with him and myself for discovering him in his *First Nudes* and *25 Nudes*. I had liked Gill's apologia in his *Autobiography* for sensuality in giving proper appreciation to God for His ways in His creation, and I liked his nudes. For all their occasional clumsiness and maladroitness of balance and proportion, I still do. I find it particularly a matter of regret that Gill's deliberate erotic work is still under so much prurient lock and key at the Victoria and Albert and the British museums. When will the English grow up?

Gill's more steamy and obsessive side, his sexy nudes and exultance in sensual experience and joys, appealed more to me than to some of my Catholic friends, and than much of his polemic argumentativeness. Some of the more arty side of my family were enthusiasts for Gill's way of life via personal acquaintanceship with David Jones and I found that rather tedious. Gill began to smack of affectation and moral-art snobbery at about the time I stopped being an undergraduate and went into National Service.

However, I still liked Gill's lettering, his carving, his illustrations to books, his portraits, his nudes. When it came out in 1969 I bought Donald Attwater's book on Gill, *A Cell of Good Living*, having missed Robert Speaight's *Life of Eric Gill* deliberately, fearing it would be superficial, "literary", gushing in a potboiling way. I did not read the Attwater at that time. I saw Gill's statue *Mankind* for the first time at the Tate and was very struck.

A year or so ago I picked up the Attwater thinking it might after all do me good to read it while working in Africa. One wants contrast material I find when extendedly in Africa: Trollope, Austen, Bloomsbury; why not Gill? I thought I could forget the aggressions and affectations, the irritations of my family's corner in Gillian orthodoxy, the datedness of Gilliana among socio-ethico-aesthetic enthusiasms, and enjoy a good read about a talented person who also tried to be good. And bugger the sacristy Gillites and the psychoanalyst Gill-demeaners. A friend saw me with the book in my hand and did a particularly ribald chortle. "You don't mean to say you're still with Gill and communes and distributism and the plain man as artist and all that thirties' posing, do you?" he asked. If anything this biased me in favour of reading the book but somehow I never got around to it on that trip to Africa.

In 1979 I reacted in a spirit of pietas for old time's sake, mixed with a minor strand of enduring pleasure in Gill's figurative work, and went to the Piccadilly Gallery's exhibition of Gill's "Drawings and some other works" (15 March – 21 April 1979). Rather an off puttingly fustian mannered title, but still. I was so delighted

that I have gone on to Gill's *Engraved Work* (H M S O for the Victoria and Albert Museum, ed. of 1977), Attwater's *Life*, Roy Brewer's *Eric Gill: The Man who loved Letters* (Muller, 1973) and Robert Harling's *The Letter Forms and Type Designs of Eric Gill* (Eva Svensson, ed. of 1978).

All this roundabout footnoting of my intellectual autobiography vis a vis Gill is an introduction to my thesis: it may be time for a reevaluation of Gill (among others from the formative period of my education in youth). I have found it so. He has not disappointed me in the approaches I have followed. Perhaps others may agree. I find remeeting many friends of my generation that many good enthusiasms and convictions have been put into abeyance while careers and ambitions have been activated. In the mid-life crisis, the latter are proving so many ashes. The aggressive cult of youth nowadays seems to have sapped the confidence of many of my generation in the value of their own identities as well as of their own values. (Among many other sapping features of survival . . .) I think it may be about high time to try to draw attention to some of the better pieces of unfinished business from our formative years.

Just now micro-solutions to our predicament as human beings in contemporary society seem to have as little plausibility as macro-solutions. It is refreshing to read Gill's modest aim as he put it on the last page of his autobiography:

. . . the work which I have chiefly tried to do in my life is this; to make a cell of good living in the chaos of our world. That sort of ambition appeals strongly. It is in no way trendy, pseydu, false humble nor high-mindedly totalitarian. The day of the anonymous mystic may well be on us. Certainly I have no faith in politicians, economists, technologists, to arrange or postulate personal or social hope in our time. Justice and civilisation are becoming as rapidly out of date as the idea of progress and the notion of the endless tolerance of nature /the environment/creation as man's limitless resource for despoilment. I don't look upon Gill as a systematic problems of life solver nor as a comprehensive inspiration. He remains irritating in attitude and style. But he had a creative talent for living as well as work which are untrendy, undramatic, gradually and humbly worked towards, neighbourly. This is a useable talent today. I propose to make a few notes on Gill, basing myself loosely on Attwater's life.

Gill had plenty of opinions and opinions are spiritual bad news. God preserve us from opinions. Thought and knowledge are much better. But some of Gill's opinions from one point of view perhaps encouraged by his opinionative style, are traditional virtues and aspirations. Poverty for example is hardly fashionable in

the culture of the rip-off and the quickest possible *maximum buck, the mid Atlantic cancer of the West*. It is not even recognised as a real virtue in the practice of contemporary religious. Monks like missionaries today are front men for western technology in medicine, education, parish management. Do they genuinely deceive themselves or are they hypocrites? They certainly give scandal at home as well as in Africa. Gill genuinely and sanely believed in “a decent poverty”, in his own life and “as a fundamental necessity for any renewal of western society”. (Attwater p 20). Creation is good, material things are good, but possessive preoccupation with them and wrong inclusive-exclusive concern with them are corrupt. This corruption is peculiarly characteristic of our consumer-production-exploitation-mad culture. Gill was sincerely unimpressed in his life and words. He was no fanatical ascetic but he gave praise, adoration, spiritual appreciation for the comforts and joys and sensual bonuses of this life and of the sale of his works. He did not grab them for granted, nor did he see absorbing point in them. It was characteristic of Gill at his best that he remained unbrainwashed into a success-ethic, or materialist anxiety or will to indulge, however public a figure he became and however profitable his commissions. He thought, however awkwardly, for himself, and was glad to have escaped so lightly from the formal convention-servicing of formal education. Almost all that is of serious good in a man comes out of personal interests and personal discipleship to teachers, however unofficial and unlicensed, and not from the formal school system and hoops and carrots of education. Gill left school early, “thankful that his school-masters had been too timid or too uninterested to try to coerce his mind or to mould him against his proper nature” (Attwater, p 21). He was seriously taught, after he had been fortunate enough to get out of school unscathed, by such informal mentors as Dr Codrington, a prebendary of Chichester Cathedral, such invaluable rules of thumb as that “an opinion which is in general unquestioned is not therefore necessarily right”, (Attwater, p 28). This applies to peer-group opinions as much as to the “traditional” wisdom of older generations and the “scientific knowledge” of social experts.

Gill was rare in wanting to be a doer, a maker, a direct worker in creation, or even rarer in having the obstinacy to become what he said he wanted to be. Such rareness can be an inspiration. His courage and persistence and careful application to the techniques of the work he chose can be reflected upon, and followed. We mainly stop ourselves from doing what we want, what we really believe in. We do not even want to find out too much what we really want in case we upset ourselves by finding out how possible it is to achieve. We talk and think about these things but not en-

ough to change ourselves or do anything. Gill was always, awkwardly, working out what he wanted and finding out how to do it and learning how to and getting on with it. From lettering to figurative work to articles and lectures to typography, Gill thought and felt his way to what he wanted to do, what he felt he had to do within the limits of responsible provision for his family, materials, working tools. He never let up. He sometime appeared inconsistent in changes of working direction, the pursuit of new interests, new media, but there was a generous streak in him that was the opposite of the apparent doctrinaireness of his verbal pronouncements. He tried more than he said, which is again rare among articulate arty types, and for which we can be grateful rather than censorious. Puritan critics are as bad for creation as tramline, easily labelled artists or craftsmen. Gill had in him something of the jobbing artisan who is fascinated by a new technique and will have a bash and will get into it with respect and seriousness. Having practised it to within distance of mastery, if not self-satisfaction, he then annoys the purists in ideology and technique by mixing new skills and interests with old. How dare he do nudes with so little life class training? How dare he design a Greek alphabet when he was no classicist? But then, contrary to idealists and aesthetes, the sensibility of art, to paraphrase Wolfflin, starts and endures in technique. The sort of "crudity", earthy, vulgar, that Gill liked. Sometimes to the point of exaggeration and the suspicion of posing.

As he was a character, in irritations of style and manner as well as in more substantial attributes, Gill has collected anecdotes and legends. Some do not help us to admire him or take him seriously. But the best do. He was, without being cantankerous even if he was occasionally provocative, his own man. It is one of the paradoxes of our culture where permissiveness is so much claimed or castigated, where extravagant self indulgence is so sensationally reported in the media, that real individualism is so feared by authority and community. Secret individualism persists. Every now and then one gets a glimpse behind the net curtains or beyond the idiot blink of the telly to the almost limitless eccentricities and interests of individuals in our society. But why are these so shameful, so hidden, so secretive? Why are norms of convention and of rebellion so uniform, so impersonal? Immaturity explains punk and hairy, neo-square and skinhead generational norms of stultifying conformism among the young, but why are adult people so fearful of being themselves? Gill is an example of an unsensationalist grown up who gave at least as much encouragement as he did offence by being shamelessly himself and getting on with his own life and his own life's work in his own way. He should still do so.

Gill was good at friends. He was obviously a loner, a strong character without time or tolerance for opposition, dominant and ruthless about getting his own way, doing things in the way he wanted. Yet at the same time he was sociable, affectionate, a loved as well as admired master to his apprentices, leader to his colleagues, friend as well as guru. If you have something to do and say and work it out continually on the job and get on with it seriously and continually it is not relevant that the label self-willed is attached to you. Nor need it be more than a matter for ribaldry that de-meaners may queue to ascribe inadequacies, compensations, ungenerous explanations to you and your self-presentation and your way of working socially and technically. The eagerness to dismiss Gill as dated, colourful but irrelevant, is a boomerang it seems to me. It denigrates Gill for many but I come increasingly to believe that it is more diminishing for its perpetrators and accepters. Gill may not be a great artist but he is a sound one, and a sound liver and a sound example. There is a lot to be examined in him and his work, without ignoring imperfections but without assuming any safe scholarly irrelevance in them. In a loaded way, Roy Brewer puts the question well in his study of Gill as a typographer:

“Is Eric Gill now just a figure from the immediate past, of interest to art historians, typophiles and similar eclectics but of little importance to the everyday world of print?”

(*Eric Gill*, p 12).

I have a lot of time for several of Gill's typefaces (Perpetua, Perpetua Greek, Gill Sans, Joanna, Joanna Italic, Aries – to name but several) but I do not think Gill is to be confined in lasting interest to the world of print. His life will stand a lot of examination. He is admirable and imitable in many respects. His published views, in words, may be due for more selective continued concern. I shall have to re-read his *Letters* and *Autobiography* and read at least some of his essays. His lettering is enduringly beautiful, encouraging, as model and guide. His decorative and figurative work in illustration, engraving, carving in relief and sculpture, is overdue for positive publicisation and evaluation. It is vigorous, robust, exciting and satisfying and too little disseminated and too little known. It is time for a renewal of interest and of using it to learn from and to develop on. I should particularly like to become familiar with his full work in the Victoria and Albert and British Museums. The H M S O Picture Book is tantalisingly selective. Further selections should accumulate. And I should particularly welcome, in fairness to Gill's serious concerns and to our culture's crying need for unsensationalist frankness in the area, a full exhibition and illustrated critique of his erotic work. Peter Webb (*Erotic Art*, Secker 1975 – paperback 1979) shows a couple of Gill's drawings

of a man and a woman making love. They are charming. The text is silly enough but it whets the yearning for more of Gill's erotic work and for a serious discussion of it in the open. Gill was rightly insistent that such subject matter should be treated by a religious artist. I do not think the samples have the "feeling of coldness" which Mr Webb finds. They are not frivolous or reserved or inhibited in reference to God. In that they are right about sex and their art. Not only perennially healthy and relevant; particularly needed in our times. Gill is not an enthusiasm to apologise for. He and his work are alive, to be recognised, truly valued and learnt from in life and creative practice.

"Is the Church Licensed to Kill?"

Judith Pinnington

Postscript to a Challenge

In an article published in this journal in December 1980¹ I sought to draw out some of the moral and theological implications of a punitive attitude on the part of the Church towards a kind of minority which it could not comprehend and by which it felt challenged. Since that time it has been borne in upon me, both through experience and through discursive reasoning that the implications are far deeper and more terrible than I had thought. For that reason I beg the indulgence of readers for a further exploration. I am aware that such a fusion of introspection and exospection is spiritually dangerous, since the subjective and objective can only coincide in one who is pure in heart. Nonetheless, I feel that the effort is worth the risk.

I should perhaps explain at the outset that my own theology is rapidly developing in a radical 'materialist' direction; that is to say, my understanding of both the Gospel kerygma and Tradition is confirming my intuition that the material, and in particular our being-in-body, has normative spiritual value. I am not at all shocked by Bishop John Robinson's suggestion in the famous *Lady Chatterly* trial that sexual intercourse has precise sacramental signification. Those who cannot go along with this perspective will not