

18th November 2021

Cradling

“An evil cradling.”

Brian Keenan, Book Title

A year ago, I referred to a book by Brian Keenan, a Northern Irish writer who spent four and a half years as a hostage in Beirut, from April 1986 to August 1990. The book, *An Evil Cradling*, published in 1991, tells his story, and that of fellow hostage John McCarthy, in graphic and honest detail.

It is significant, I think, that Keenan chose to take the title of his book from a verse in the Koran, from *Sura 2*, which reads:

*Say to unbelievers, “You shall be overthrown,
and mustered into Gehenna – an evil cradling.”*

I won't attempt an exegesis of that, nor try to interpret Keenan's choice of his book's title. You can read the book and make up your own mind on such things. But I do want to reflect a little on the word “cradling”.

When the word “cradle” is used as a verb, the dictionary tells us that it means “To hold gently and protectively.” I was reflecting with a friend recently, as we were swapping stories about our early years, what the concept of “at-homeness” might mean. We decided it's about familiarity, being surrounded by comfortable, evocative things, letting go of the “personae” of our lives and truly being ourselves. When I go “back home” to Fort William, for example, and find myself in the hollow of the Scottish hills, I am being cradled again, held, gently protected, loved for who and what I am. That's “at-homeness”, a cradling for me. But then I think of Brian Keenan's “evil cradling”. And my mind sees people who have no “at-homeness”, and whose upbringing, the formative time which should have been about nurture, gentleness and protection, was for them “an evil cradling” which caused them damage and led to problems and hardships.

So today, when I give thanks for my cradling and at-homeness, wherever, whenever and however I find them, I renew my commitment to understand those who yearn for such things, who know nothing *but* “an evil cradling” and have to live with the consequences of that.

A prayer for today

Lord, where there is evil, let me offer love. Where this is a lack of cradling, let me offer the gentleness of my compassion. Where there is brokenness, let me embrace the pain, and believe that healing and renewal is always possible. Amen