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THE MARTYRED MOTHER

Andrew Lansdown¹
Perth, Australia

i.m. Hashimoto Tecla and her children, Kyoto, 1619 AD

I speak not of the other four children
who were condemned with her, nor even of
the newest child in her womb, but only
of the smallest one bound to her bosom.

One might have imagined the rope would burn
through fast so the baby's body would fall
away from hers—slump free from the torso
to which it was tied as if to a stake.

And yet it seems the persecutors' cord
bore the flames better than the martyrs' flesh.
Perhaps they had soaked that rope in water
before they wrapped it around their victims?

Still, hemp's surely coarser, tougher than flesh.
How long would it take for flames to fray it?
Longer, I guess, than it would take to melt
fat in an infant's cheek, a woman's breast.

1. Andrew Lansdown is a poet, living in Perth, who has published thirteen collections. He is a former Baptist pastor, who has won the John Bray Poetry Award and twice won the Western Australia Premier's Book Award. Les Murray has called him Australia's greatest Christian poet. Lansdown's most recent collection is *Kyoto Sakura Tanka* (Rhiza Press, 2016).

Whether wet or dry, thick or thin, that rope
held out long enough for the flames to fuse
the child to its mother's chest, meld the two
into one greasy charred misshapen lump.

On the fumie² the faithful won't trample
the carved Madonna clasps the destined Child—
in like manner, but with bound and burned arms,
the martyred mother held her infant fast.

And in this embrace both she and the babe
defied the Shogun and exposed his shame.
Their souls rode up in palanquins of smoke,
up to their Sovereign, who wept as they came.

SAKURA HAIKU

Andrew Lansdown
Perth, Australia

with my wife in Kyoto in Spring

The falling petals—
almost they make us forget
we are immortals.

2. Fumie were small plaques with images of Jesus or Mary and were used to identify Christians during the Tokugawa Shogunate: people who refused to tread on them revealed themselves as Christians and were tortured and (unless they apostatised) executed.

BRAVERY

Andrew Lansdown
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When I face the grave
Jesus will not deplore me
if I am not brave.
After all, it was hardly
a strong man he came to save.