

For Lent I gave up chocolate and alcohol. (The latter was a mistake!) I suppose chocolate is the intuitive thing to go without during that time, with the reward of an Easter egg on Easter Day.

What isn't so intuitive, however, is the mixing of chocolate with chilli powder, ground cumin, garlic, cinnamon and salsa - then using the mixture to cook a pork chop in. The first time I ever tried it was because I was drawn to the impossibility of it being able to work. Yet my tastebuds communicated to my brain an experience of rich, velvety smoothness, full of the zest of life, transforming the substance of the meat into something quite new, yet at the same time, familiar. A metaphor for... what?

Charles Ives, an American composer in the first half of the 20th century, wrote a piece, "The Unanswered Question." To quote a commentator on a You Tube upload of it, the music is "haunting and exhilarating... relaxing and disturbing, both reassuring and unsettling... brief yet oddly satisfying." It is a soundscape of ostensibly contradictory sounds that nonetheless relate to one another: the trumpet asking "the perennial question of existence," the woodwind trying to give "the invisible answer," although it is the string quartet that is left to answer the question with stillness and eventually silence. Have a go at listening to it yourself.

Holy Week and Easter is the bitter-sweet time of the Christian year. We place ourselves at the event of Jesus' death, scarcely believing that there could be anything else. Yet, for those of us willing to taste the effect of this counter-intuitive mixture of losing one's life to gain its fulness, there is the inexplicable answer: life does have meaning, although not life as we could possibly explain it; it is life that is partly now but mostly next; or, as another description of "The Unanswered Question" puts it, "A work at once timeless and revolutionary, spiritual and concrete, comic and cosmic." (*Jan Swafford, Ives' biographer*) Or as scripture has it, "The Lord has risen!" - and we, tastebuds tingling, give the eternal answer, "He has risen indeed! Hallelujah!"