

sfia

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Whose is the Kingdom?

sofia

down to Earth

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Sofia does not think wisdom is dispensed supernaturally from on high, but that it can only be sought by humans at home on Earth, and is inseparable from human kindness.

Sofia regards religion as a human creation and, in rejecting the supernatural, is for humanity with its questing imagination and enabling dreams.

Sofia is for diggers and seekers in its own native radical tradition and everywhere.

The Kingdom, the Power, the Glory ... and the Morning Star

‘The Kingdom of God’, the core of Jesus’ preaching, sounds strange to us today (indeed, one of my editorial predecessors, David Boulton, found the term so alienating that he changed it to the ‘republic of heaven’). So what does the ‘Kingdom of God’ mean? Can it still have any relevance for us? To whom does it belong? This issue of *Sofia* explores some of the richness and tensions in this central Christian myth.

Satan is called ‘the prince of this world’ and Jesus speaks of ‘my kingdom’. In the Bible both Satan and Christ are called the Morning Star (‘Lucifer’). In our first article Don Cupitt looks at the contrasts and curious parallels between them. Cupitt notes that themes of rebelling against the Power of the Father have accrued to Lucifer as Satan, whereas Jesus is ‘obedient unto death’. He mentions the quandary Milton found himself in when writing *Paradise Lost* ‘to justify the ways of God to man’, that, as a republican who had supported King Charles’ execution, he was ‘of the Devil’s party without knowing it’. Cupitt points to the ongoing connection of these ‘rebellious elements’ (manifested in the English Revolution of 1649) with the growth of struggles for democracy. ‘Lucifer’ is an entry in Cupitt’s theological dictionary *Turns of Phrase: Radical Theology from A-Z*, reprinted here with his permission; the book is reviewed in this *Sofia* by Ian Stubbs.

In my article ‘Whose is the Kingdom?’ I turn to some New Testament texts in which Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God, which he has come to bring on Earth. It is a good society – a ‘utopia’ – where peace and justice reign. It belongs first to the poor, the humble, the ‘little ones’. Then I consider two historical ‘translations’ of this theme. First, its translation into the idea of God as a supreme ruler *backing* and *legitimising* the authority of an earthly ruler in Christendom. Second, I look at its possible translation into humanist, non-supernatural terms, with Jesus Christ as the mythical hero and figurehead of a transformed humanity in a kind society. This is a society we can only struggle to create ourselves, as it still has not (as Jesus expected) irrupted with supernatural power into this world.

The notion that the Kingdom belongs first to the poor and the little continues to be as scandalous as it was in Jesus’ time. Today we are still ruled by ‘thrones, dominations, principalities and powers’, such as the Market, Mammon, giant multi-national corporations, the 1%, even if we do elect our government. Throughout history the rich and powerful – emperors, kings

and popes – have claimed ‘the kingdom, the power and the glory’ in God’s name. In our next article ‘The Wisdom of Lord Acton’, David Lee discusses the case of papal infallibility. Acton was the one who coined the phrase: ‘All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ Moreover, he said, ‘Every act of infallible judgement is an exercise in absolute power’.

In his editorial introduction to the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* in 2005, ‘The Sense of Being Glared At’, Anthony Freeman speaks of the accusation of heresy being associated with a ‘paradigm shift’. As we know, Anthony Freeman, another distinguished former editor of this magazine, was accused of heresy and sacked from his job when he published *God in Us: The Case for Christian Humanism*. But he argues, and I would agree with him, that the ‘translation’ of the Christian story into non-supernatural, humanist terms, is much less startling than some previous ‘translations’ (he gives the example of Thomas Aquinas translating from neo-platonic into Aristotelian terms and being accused of heresy for it; my example, given above, was ‘Christendom’). In this issue of *Sofia* Dominic Kirkham also considers a ‘paradigm shift’ in the field of science, in his review of *The Science Delusion* by Rupert Sheldrake

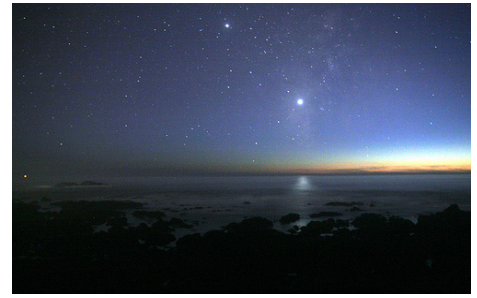
On the final pages we recall a parallel to Christ as the Morning Star in another culture – Quetzalcóatl – the ancient Toltec mythical god-king, driven out of the city for forbidding human sacrifice. He went down into the sea and rose again as the Morning Star, promising to return and restore a just kingdom. As Ernesto Cardenal points out in his poem *Quetzalcóatl*, Venus, which shines as the Evening Star then disappears and returns some days later as the Morning Star, is an image of the descent into hell, the underworld, followed by resurrection. So we conclude this issue of *Sofia* with some lines from the *Exultet*, the great Praise Song to the Pascal Candle sung at the Easter vigil, which ends:

Let the Morning Star find its flame still burning.
I mean that Morning Star which knows no setting,
Christ your son,
who came back from the underworld
and shone serenely on the human race.

Lastly, please see the advertisement for the SOF Summer Conference *Work and Worth* on page 6. You should find some insert fliers with further information and a booking form. It looks as if it will be an interesting event and we hope you can come.

Lucifer

Both Christ and Satan are called Lucifer – the Morning Star. Don Cupitt looks at the contrasts and curious parallels between them.



Lucifer is, in Latin, ‘the light-bringer’. In Greek the equivalent word is Phosphoros, the name of an element so unstable that it glows in the dark and ignites spontaneously. Being so unstable, and therefore a ‘base’ element, makes Phosphoros a good name for Satan.

Behind the name Lucifer is a long and curious story. The planet Venus, being so much closer to the Sun than Earth is, often rises in the East just before dawn and appears in the West just as the Sun is setting. In pre-scientific times the morning appearance of Venus was named Lucifer, the Morning Star, and its evening appearance was called Hesperus, the Evening Star. In the Bible, not only the Morning Star, but a number of other stars too, might appear just before sun-up. Collectively, they may be thought of as ‘the morning stars’, or even as the ‘sons of God’, for example in Job 38:7 God asks:

Where were you on the first morning of creation
When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Thus the rising Sun and its attendant stars were a natural symbol of God, surrounded by his heavenly court of ‘ministers’ or ‘angels’. Around these phenomena grew up a very potent myth referred to by the prophet Isaiah (14:12–15):

How are you fallen from heaven
O Day Star, son of Dawn! ...
You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
Above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high; ...
But you are brought down to Sheol
To the depths of the Pit.

Here is the origin of at least the first episodes in the fully developed Myth of Satan. He had begun life as the first and greatest of God’s creatures. But the best and brightest of the Sons of the Morning had rebelled against the divine order. In his vanity he had tried to usurp the place of God, and a number of other angels had joined him. But when God arose in his full strength Lucifer and his allies were quickly eclipsed and cast down from Heaven. By this stupendous fall a new world came into being, namely Hell, the permanent domain of Satan and the rest of his band of rebel angels. They were fixed at the opposite pole of the Universe from God, but had some power to visit Earth in order to test and to tempt humans. They entered us via the imagination, the faculty in us that can be troubled by sinful thoughts.

Lucifer began as a very beautiful, golden-haired, heavenly being who looked like a Greek god; but the fallen Lucifer, Satan, was usually portrayed as a hideous monster until the late Middle Ages when, in the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry, he is first portrayed as a beautiful man, crowned and robed, in his glorious aspect. This seems to be the beginning of a long process of rehabilitation, especially when the gradual rise of modern democratic politics begins to make Satan a more sympathetic figure.

In all the seven or so primary civilisations, it seems that power and authority came down from the gods through those who ruled on their behalf. Some form of monarchy was the norm. Even as late as Victorian times, children learnt that there were animal, vegetable and mineral ‘kingdoms’. There were – I think, still *are* – ‘noble’ and ‘base’ metals and gases. The lion was the king of beasts,

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the eagle of birds and the oak of trees. The entire universe in every part of it exhibited a divine order, and you were instructed to know and to keep to your 'place' or 'station' within it. To rebel against it was the greatest sin of all. There were, of course, some popular uprisings in the later Middle Ages, but they did not have a complete alternative world-view to offer. All they could do was to appeal from the bad king to the good king, and they failed. Even Luther was still so embedded in the old hierarchical world-view that he did not for a moment endorse the politics of the more radical reformers. On the contrary, he supported their savage repression.

John Milton was in a more personally embarrassing position. By his time the Reformation had gone somewhat further. Milton had supported the Parliamentarians: he had been an apologist for regicide. Wasn't he *himself* a rebel against the divine order of things? And yet, in the 1660s, he is dictating the greatest Christian epic poem since Dante, *Paradise Lost*, and he is going to tell the story of the Fall of the Rebel Angels, of the Creation of Man and of the Fall of Man, all in such a way as to *confirm* the divine order and justify the ways of God with Man. To do this he must write epic lines in which he must make Lucifer's revolt against God intelligible, without appearing to be *himself* in the least sympathetic to Lucifer's cause.

You don't need to be Derrida to be able to spot Milton's difficulties. They were obvious enough to William Empson and indeed to William Blake, who pronounced very sagely that Milton 'was of the Devil's party without knowing it'. But Blake is *himself* in the same position! His Lucifer is iconographically indistinguishable from the figure of the risen and ascended Christ, who in Revelation proclaims *himself* 'the bright morning star' (22:16). Odder, Jesus also promises to 'give the morning star' to the one who chooses and stays with the right side in the controversies at Thyatira (Rev 2:28). This suggests that the modern difficulties about the relations between God, Christ and Satan, although they have been exposed by political change, have an origin that goes back deep into the New Testament itself. We need first a brief summary of the strange pattern of resemblances, reversals and contrasts that links the two great and closely inter-twined figures of Christ and Satan:



Lucifer chained. By Guillaume Geefs in the cathedral of St Paul de Liège

1. Christ is the (only-begotten and eternal) Son of God, whereas Lucifer is the greatest of the (created) Sons of God.
2. Christ in his glorious aspect looks just like Lucifer in his glorious aspect.
3. Both Christ and Lucifer are the Morning Star.
4. Christ in his humiliated and lowly aspect is always fully human; whereas the humiliated Lucifer is for long a hideous monster and begins to look more human again only in early-modern times. Eventually, he is even a gentleman.
5. Both come down from the Heavens to Earth like a bolt of lightning. Jesus 'will baptise you with fire', and he came 'to cast fire upon the earth', lightning having long been seen as a major sign from heaven. Jesus himself declares that in a vision he saw 'Satan fall like lightning from Heaven' (Luke 10:18).
6. Jesus (in the developed theology) is always the seriously tempted but *obedient* Son of God; whereas Satan is always the *rebellious* Son of God. Satan cannot be thought of as changing sides until modern Universalism comes along.
7. Satan is the present ruler of this world, and Jesus the Messiah-designate is the future ruler of this world.
8. Both Satan and Jesus must bear a heavy punishment for the sin of rebellion against God. Indeed Calvin thought they bore the *same* dreadful

damnation; but Satan bore it on his own account, whereas Jesus bore it for us.

9. During his earthly ministry Jesus is regularly charged with blasphemy and with being able to cast out devils only because he is personally in league with the greatest of them all, Beelzebub.
10. Both Lucifer and Jesus have visited all three cosmic realms, Heaven, Earth and Hell, whether as living there by right, or as visiting for business purposes.

This whole story, in its developed Western form, is a great myth of the long war between good and evil. But from the first it has contrary undercurrents which suggest that it's a cover-up job. The original Jesus, an ethical teacher standing at the end of the world who pictured a new moral order based *not* on the Law of the Father, but on pure love, seemed to be announcing the end of the Divine Order in the cosmos and the end of the government of human life by divine Law. This was too much for his contemporaries to accept. The 'bad', rebellious and radical-humanist side of Jesus, whose enemies correctly described him as a blasphemer who had prophesied against the Temple and who would destroy the Law, was split off and ascribed to Lucifer. From what was left, a new obedient Jesus was constructed, an ecclesiastical Jesus who was a model of passive submission to the will of the Father. Thus God could remain undisturbed in heaven for many centuries.

Out of the very complex materials available, the Christian Fathers gradually assembled the Latin Grand Narrative which tells of a long cosmic battle between good and evil – a story that worked pretty well until early-modern times, when the rise of a new democratic sentiment and of a longing for human autonomy began to blow it apart. A partial humanisation and even rehabilitation of figures like Lucifer and Judas began, while at the same time there has also long been a desire for a less weak, passive and effeminate image of Jesus himself. I am not suggesting that the disobedient Son of God and the obedient should simply change places, but rather that the received ecclesiastical Jesus is far too weak a figure to have been the author of the best teaching accredited to him. Meanwhile we must await the theologian who can attempt a major deconstruction of the entire Latin Christian Grand Narrative.

This is an article from Don Cupitt's *Turns of Phrase. Radical Theology from A-Z*, SCM Press (London 2011). The book is reviewed on page 18.

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Whose is the Kingdom?

What and whose is the Kingdom of God? Dinah Livingstone explores.

In this article I look briefly at some New Testament texts about the Kingdom of God – what is its nature? to whom does it belong or who belongs to it? when is it coming? who is the king? Then I consider two ‘translations’ of this theme. First, the translation of ‘the Kingdom of God’ into the idea of God as a supreme ruler *backing* and *legitimising* the authority of an earthly ruler, emperor or king. Second, I look at its possible translation into humanist, non-supernatural terms, with Jesus Christ as the mythical hero and figurehead of a transformed humanity in a kind society. I argue that this second translation is more faithful to the spirit of the original than the first translation into the ‘divine right’ of emperors and kings.

Jesus begins his ministry by announcing the Kingdom: ‘Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news from God and saying: “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news” (Mk 1: 14). He says the Kingdom belongs first to the poor: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God’ (Lk 6:20) and to those who are persecuted for the sake of justice (Mt 5:10). The Kingdom belongs to the little ones, (Mt 19:14); the humble (Mt 18:4). The Kingdom is very difficult for the rich to enter; it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom (Mt 19:23). Jesus went about healing the sick and telling parables of the Kingdom, which often had a surprising twist. John the Baptist in prison sent to Jesus asking if he was ‘the one who is to come’. Jesus replies: ‘Go and tell John what you have heard and seen: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear... the poor have the good news preached to them (Lk 7: 22). These are signs that the kingdom is ‘at hand’. In order to enter the kingdom we must be ‘born anew’: ‘Jesus answered him (Nicodemus): “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born anew” (Jn 3: 3: one of the few uses of the term ‘kingdom of God’ in John’s gospel). We speak of the vegetable and animal ‘kingdom’. Here it is as if humanity must evolve further into this divine kingdom – almost like becoming a new species, with Christ as the ‘first man’ in it, the

‘new Adam’. For there cannot be a kind society on Earth unless human beings become kinder, a ‘new humanity’.

The Kingdom will be a time of social joy *on Earth* (‘thy Kingdom come on Earth’: Lord’s prayer, Mt 6:10) and Jesus expected it to come shortly in its fullness. ‘There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom’ (Mt 16:28). Jesus’ preaching and healing were signs of the Kingdom, it was ‘at hand’: he inaugurated it. But it would be fulfilled in the future. At the Last Supper he says: ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you I will never eat it again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.’ And: ‘From now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes’ (Lk 22:16-18). The future coming of God’s Kingdom on Earth is portrayed as a meal – a feast, a ‘messianic banquet’. Jesus says: ‘When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind’ (Lk 14: 13) and when someone exclaims: ‘Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God’, he replies with his parable of the Great Feast, in which the owner tells servant to go out into the streets and bring in all these disadvantaged people.

The kingdom belonging to ‘such as these’ is called the Kingdom of *God*. That is, the Kingdom belongs to God the Father. God is ‘Our Father’ and the doxology at the end of the Lord’s prayer says: ‘For thine is the Kingdom the power and the glory’. Jesus speaks of ‘my Father’s Kingdom’ (Mt 26: 29) but also claims the Kingdom as his own. He speaks of ‘my Kingdom’ (Lk 22:30: to his disciples and Jn 18:36: to Pilate). There is a tension here, not only between Father and Son, but in the Son himself, which is the basis for the later developed theology of the Trinity and of Christ as one person with two natures. The tension between Father and Son is illustrated in the difference between the angel Gabriel’s words to Mary announcing the forthcoming birth of her son: ‘Of his kingdom there will be no end’ (Lk 1:13: repeated later in the Nicene Creed with reference to Christ), and the Letter to the Corinthians in which Paul says:

‘Then comes the end when he [Christ] hands over the Kingdom to God the Father’ (1 Cor 15:24).

Of course, this is not what usually happens when a son inherits from a father; he usually *supersedes* him. In the ‘high’ christology of John’s gospel, from chapter 1 verse 1, Jesus is the Word who has been ‘with’ (or ‘about’) God from the beginning: he is God. So then the ‘Kingdom of God’ would belong both to the Father and to Jesus as God. But elsewhere when Jesus speaks of himself as the ‘Son of Man’ e.g. ‘the Son of Man coming in his kingdom’ (Mt 16:28), then the Kingdom has been *conferred* on him by the Father. At the Last Supper he says: ‘I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father conferred one on me’ (Lk 22:30). In the great *kenosis* poem in Philippians (thought to be an early Christian – possibly baptismal – hymn *quoted* by Paul here (Ph 2:6), because Jesus was obedient to the point of death, therefore:

God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend
in heaven and on earth and under the earth
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is above all ‘thrones, dominations, principalities, powers’ (Col. 1:16). And just as the Kingdom is *conferred* on Jesus – he inherits it – so too ‘we are heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ’ (Rom 8:17). ‘God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom (Jas 2:5). (And we may just note that when anyone inherits from a parent, it is usually from one who has died. In that case, while God the patriarchal Father was alive, the heirs would be under him, but when he was dead they would come into their inheritance.)

In a startling translation of the Christian epic, when the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed that the Christian God had granted him victory in battle in 313 (his troops had borne the Christian *Chi Rho* symbol on their shields), Christianity eventually became the official religion of the Empire and from then on for centuries emperors, popes and later European kings claimed the Christian God’s authority for their rule. They were his regent or vicar on Earth and they fought bitterly among themselves in their struggle for

‘divinely-sanctioned’ power. These imperial, papal and royal thrones belonged to the rich and powerful; this was Christendom. They appealed for their authority to God the Father as the supreme ruler, or if they thought of it as Christ’s kingdom, it was a glorified Christ with the stress on his divinity.

In England this ‘divine right of kings’, claimed by King Charles I, was challenged and he was executed in 1649. But I witnessed a twentieth century example of such a claim to divine authority during a ‘gap year’ in Franco’s Spain. It was on the feast of Our Lady of El Pilar, who had appeared on a pillar to the apostle St James when he was discouraged in his attempt to convert Spain. I attended a Mass in Guernica (which Franco had bombed), for which the authorities had sent in a priest, and civil guards to stand in the sanctuary. In his sermon the priest said, just as Our Lady had come and encouraged St James to save Spain, so too had Franco saved Spain. At the consecration the civil guards in the sanctuary presented arms.

Another possible translation of the Christian epic focuses on Christ’s humanity, (or as Blake would put it, ‘divine humanity’). It reads the epic as the story of Christ as the eponymous hero and figurehead of a new kinder humanity. In the story Christ is divine as well as human, but this translation sees all supernatural elements as fictional or symbolic, ‘poetic tales’. This new humanity – ‘in Christ’ – is one body all sharing the same bread. The Kingdom of God still has not come by divine intervention but it is a vision of a good society, which we humans must try to create for ourselves on Earth.

‘In Christ,’ not only means being kinder human individuals, but the body of Christ is seen as a kinder body politic – a society which is good news for the poor. Being kinder means the kingdom of God will be more democratic and egalitarian, a society where everyone counts, including, as Jesus put it, ‘the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind’. If we look at who are the ‘thrones, dominations, principalities, powers’ – *archai* and *exousiai* – today, what immediately spring to mind are the Market, Mammon, giant multinational corporations, the ‘1%’, who have so much power over our governments – even when they are elected – and our lives. The epic story of Christ as the representative of humanity being raised above all these massive forces can be

translated as the struggle for *humanity* (in every sense) to control and prevail over these powers, who are indeed somewhat like angels, that ‘post o’er land and ocean without rest’, often invisibly.

In this translation, as in the original gospel, the Kingdom of God is both now and not yet. We can see signs of the kingdom in the utopian elements in

our society – for example, the universal free national health service (today seriously threatened) and free public libraries (also in peril). The full realisation of the kingdom is something that may or may not happen. That is up to us. The first sure sign of the Kingdom is that it is good news for the poor. So the planned cap on housing benefit, which will see many families having to move out of London, even if they have lived here for decades and their children are at school – is not only bad news for these people, it is bad news for London. (The high rent for which the housing benefit is needed does not go to the unfortunate tenants but to the landlord.) London is a city whose poets have seen its visionary transformation into the kingdom, the New Jerusalem. And indeed even now London has some wonderful aspects to it that can be called signs of the kingdom. For example, the term ‘proper London’ is used to refer to a street or a primary school which includes all different kinds of people, who are treated with equal respect – the very opposite of a ‘gated community’. A city that excludes the poor not only makes them suffer, but also cannot show even the first sign of the kingdom and is in danger of damnation.

In his editorial introduction to the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* in 2005, ‘The Sense of Being Glared At’, Anthony Freeman speaks of the accusation of heresy being associated with a ‘paradigm shift’. He gives the example of St



Local people campaign to save their public library. London 2011.

Thomas Aquinas, ‘for centuries past the touchstone of Catholic orthodoxy’, who ‘in his lifetime came within a whisker of being condemned for heresy ... because the main thrust of his work was to reinterpret Christian doctrine into the then recently rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle.’ This shift from the current neoplatonist interpretation was regarded as a betrayal. Likewise, Freeman says, his own presentation of Christian teaching in ‘non-realist’ categories was deemed by the Church authorities as a betrayal rather than a good translation.

The Christ epic translated into non-supernatural terms remains a powerful force for human transformation – salvation. Both the translations described above can be called ‘paradigm shifts’ – a new way of thinking about the gospel in a new social context. However, I think it is obvious that the second translation into a humanist version is much closer to the spirit of the original gospel than is the former translation into the ‘divine right’ of rulers. The seeds of humanism are planted deep in the Christ epic, which can come to full flowering only when we value the supernatural elements in the story as ‘poetic tales’ and know we have to do it ourselves.

Dinah Livingstone’s book *Poetic Tales: Logosofia Down to Earth* was published by Katabasis in 2010.

The Wisdom of Lord Acton

David Lee discusses the case of papal infallibility.

Sir John Acton¹ was born in 1834 a scion of the Whig aristocracy with a country house in Shropshire, yet he was not a typical English gentleman. He was born in Naples and had a host of continental forebears, many of whom were of noble blood; he was fluent in German, French, Italian and English. In those days because he was a Roman Catholic he could not attend Oxford University. He was educated in Germany under the tutelage of Döllinger² and he became one of the leading scholars of his day, ending his career as the Regius Professor of Modern History in Cambridge University. He is remembered as one of the most illustrious holders of that office.

**All power tends to corrupt
and absolute power
corrupts absolutely.**

In the General Election of 1869 he lost his seat as a Liberal Member of Parliament. Within days the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, wrote to offer him a peerage and he became Lord Acton. His remit was that he would go to Rome and represent informally the interests of the British government to the bishops attending the Vatican Council. In the years following the Risorgimento³ and the fall of the Papal States it dawned on Pope Pius IX that he could no longer be a worldly monarch, and in order to establish his unchallengeable rule of the Catholic Church he planned that the Vatican Council of 1870 would proclaim the dogma of Papal Infallibility. Gladstone's intention was that while Acton would not be able to prevent the proclamation, at least he would be able to raise awareness of the possible political consequences.

A number of liberal Catholics left the Church as a result of the proclamation, including Döllinger, who helped to found the Old Catholic

Church. Acton remained a faithful Catholic to the end of his life. While he did not dispute the right of the Pope and the Council to declare the dogma of Infallibility, he pointed out that there were two areas of concern about the possible political consequences. The one that troubled his friend Gladstone was that Papal Infallibility might result in Roman Catholics in Great Britain being obliged to forswear their oaths of obedience and loyalty to the British Crown. This, of course, had happened during the reign of Elizabeth I, when Catholics were urged to betray the state and assassinate the Queen. In the years since the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 the Liberals had tried hard to remove the impediments to Roman Catholics so that they could take a full part in British society. Gladstone's fear was that all this would be undermined by the proclamation of Papal Infallibility. It was, in part, due to Acton that this outcome was avoided; however it earned him Cardinal Manning's undying hostility.

The second point was the possible retrospective application of Infallibility to legitimate the behaviour of, for example, the Borgia Popes. Such a possibility impelled Acton to question the moral basis of the policies and actions of the Catholic Church. It was an issue affecting thinking not only in the Catholic Church. For example Mandell Creighton, one of the leading scholars of the Church of England, who later became the Bishop of London, had published a three-volume study of the Renaissance popes, in which he appeared to suggest that because of their great office and heavy responsibilities they should be judged less harshly for their moral imperfections. It was in response to this that Acton wrote a letter to Creighton⁴ containing what was to become his most famous dictum.

I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption, it is the other way, against the holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to

make up for the want of legal responsibility. **All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.** Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or certainty of corruption by full authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.

(April 3rd, 1887)

To Lord Acton upholding the truth was the paramount moral imperative. The idea that it was justifiable to distort the truth, to condone unjust actions and decisions, in order to save the Church from scandal or disrepute, was totally unacceptable.

We should not make the mistake of supposing that this is an issue of the 19th century only. In recent times we have seen the same problem in relation to such things as the attempted justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the M.P.s expenses scandal in 2010 and the covering up of the crimes of paedophilic priests. In each of these cases the inference was that we should judge these decisions less harshly because of the position and responsibilities of the offenders. This is exactly the thing that Lord Acton teaches us to resist.

Every act of infallible judgement is an exercise in absolute power.

Papal Infallibility is the quintessential example of naive realism. It apparently rests on belief in the objective existence of a God who is Lord of all knowledge and all wisdom, with whom the Pope, and the Pope alone, has a direct relationship. Every act of infallible judgement is an exercise in absolute power. Failure to examine and reject the notion of such a God results in moral blindness. As I pointed out in a previous article⁵ such belief carries with it the conviction that the judgements made are absolute and unchallengeable.



Lord Acton

NOTES

1. **John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton**, 1st Baron Acton, KCVO, DL (10 January 1834 – 19 June 1902), known as Sir John Dalberg-Acton, 8th Baronet from 1837 to 1869 and usually referred to simply as Lord Acton.
2. **Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger** (February 28, 1799 – January 14, 1890) was a German theologian, Catholic priest and church historian who in 1870 rejected the dogma of papal infallibility.
3. **Italian unification** (Italian: *il Risorgimento*, or 'The Resurgence') was the political and social movement that agglomerated different states of the Italian peninsula into the single state of Italy in the 19th century.
4. **Mandell Creighton** (5 July 1843 – 14 January 1901) was an English historian and a bishop of the Church of England. A scholar of the Renaissance papacy, Creighton was the first occupant of the Dixie Chair of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Cambridge, a professorship that was established around the time that the study of history was emerging as an independent academic discipline
5. See 'The Spyglass' in edition No.98 of *Sofia*.

The Venerable David S Lee was the Archdeacon of Llandaff until his retirement in 1997.

Part of a Pilgrimage 4

Final extract from Anne Ashworth's Journal

July 1993

Reading David Hay on the Alister Hardy Research Centre, I ask myself how I would reply if selected for questioning about 'religious experiences', as studied by the Centre. Looking back with what honesty I can muster, I list:

- The 'long grass' insight at age 9, reinforced at age 19, setting my spiritual alarm clock for age 40 (as recorded in *Annunciations*)
- The writing desk vision at (I think) ages 10 and 15 (also mentioned in *Annunciations*)
- In my 40s, a day of transcendent golden radiance, for no apparent reason, accompanied by high euphoria, on the dull road to Weeton; and a 'green shade' experience of the numinous in Woodland Garden (the latter recorded in a poem)
- Also recorded in poems, an 'encounter' that actually stopped me in my tracks at the back of my workplace, and the 'keys to the darkroom' experience in the (now outdated) dark photocopying room
- A cluster of sensations focussed on Preesall Hill, recorded in two poems
- The pulpit experience recorded in *The Preacher Learns Love*
- The occasional 'oblique light' sensations
- Other experiences less memorable but having high numinous quality including a sense of a special sort of air breathed during the state of deep prayer

Occasional 'oblique light' sensations

Could all these be added, quantified – which is absurd, for they are unquantifiable – they would amount to a fairly impressive weight of spiritual experience, though none had the quality of supreme mysticism.

How to explain them? Has that been my whole life's endeavour, ever since the awareness of what in childhood I called (for myself, having no other language) 'the lyric thrill'? I think it has. Christianity didn't provide the language I sought for, after all; and perhaps theism is unequal to it. Perhaps no language will do. But I cannot avoid the need to try and find

one.

There was of course the experience after my accident, which I interpreted at the time as religious and recorded in five poems. I now understand that there is a medical explanation (something about endorphins in the brain?) of this common post-traumatic euphoria. Which suggests the question: are there 'mere' chemical explanations for all altered states of consciousness? And would these invalidate 'spiritual' interpretations? And what about vocation? Naturally explained as self-fulfilment, is it not still an intensely transcendent *experience*?

August 1993

Written on a Quaker outing, transcribed into Journal:

I have sought sorrowing,
Mourning your death.
I have sought singing,
Breathing your breath.

Absence inscrutable
Gouged from my knowing,
Presence immutable,
Root of my growing –

You are the magnet
That pulls from within,
You are the dragnet
Fishing me in.

Force of velocity,
Stillness of stone,
Love's reciprocity
Felt when alone -

How can I know you
Or know you a lie?
Nothing can show you
And nothing deny.

Images founder,
Words lose their role,
Yet in profounder
Silence of soul,

Past each illusion
Searching and losing,
Through all confusion
You are my choosing.

May 1994

All cultures – well, many, at least – look back with nostalgia to a time when the gods talked with humankind. Later the gods withdrew, often into the sky, as people imagined. Julian Jaynes' theory, in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, accounts rather well for this, though other scholars take issue with him. Reading his book, and discussing it, I was reminded of an old African story.

A woman wanted to renew contact with the god gone up into the sky. She wove baskets and piled them high. At last she ran out of reeds, though she felt the pile was nearly high enough. All she could think of was to pull out the bottom basket and place it on top of the pile. Like the Babel builders, she failed. [I used this in a poem later.]

Relating this in a letter it occurred to me afterwards that *I am that woman!* All my life I have sought God with love and longing. Now I withdraw the bottom basket, the basic belief in God as personal or as divine purpose. Does the whole edifice collapse? What does it mean to be an atheist lover of God? Tennyson, in *In Memoriam*:

I heard a voice,
'Believe no more'...
[but] tho' my lips may breathe adieu
I cannot think the thing farewell.

November 1994

Today I was admitted into membership of the Society of Friends. Monthly Meeting began with a 'testimony' to a deceased Friend: Quaker jargon for an obituary. The record of this man's achievement with so many campaigns for peace, truth, environmental concern and for the Society was an inspiration. It was also a measuring rod, shattering my hopes of living up to my vocation as a member of the Society – for how could I be such a person? All I can be is myself, but in the context of the Society I can be myself to the utmost. I am resolved to render any service asked of me if it could conceivably be within my scope; and to seek diligently for the stirrings and gatherings-together of the Spirit, be it divine or human or both.

August 1997

The oblique light reached me again today. I first used this phrase many years ago for a wordless and perhaps ineffable experience, a sense of opening and illumination that takes place in the psyche when something that is like a beam of light enters transversely, at an angle to both reason and emotion.

Others have known it. Once, browsing in a secondhand bookshop, I opened at random a musty



Laurence Whistler. Engraved glass prism. Salisbury Cathedral.

old book, I think a translation from the Chinese, which actually mentioned the experience and used this very image of an oblique or slanting light. How I wish I had bought that book; I shall never find it again. Whistler's engraved glass entitled *The Slanting Light* is perhaps another reference to the phenomenon. In my poems on glass and keys in the *Annunciations* sequence I tried to convey the experience, but failed – as prose too must fail.

After a long period devoid of mystical experience, today it fell on me again. Near the beginning of Meeting for Worship, a pale shaft of sunlight briefly fell athwart the room and under the table, obliquely; and this was enough to trigger the psychic invasion, which lasted for perhaps a minute or a few minutes only. I am left wondering... could I write a book (a Universalist Pamphlet, perhaps?) entitled *The Oblique Light*? [I did.]

It is a moment of supreme but ineffable significance, when a light seems to strike obliquely across consciousness. Sharp as a laser beam, it cuts into, between, across assumptions and preoccupations. Powerful as a depth charge, it explodes ordinary two-dimensional

awareness, opening depths in the psyche to its invasive yet warming and healing illumination. This slanting light provides, as it were, fresh angles in the imagination. Incisive, it is nevertheless not analytic but synthetic, connecting what had seemed unrelated, offering the sense of a transcendent unity of being.

We have the light of reason and the light of love. These lights we can call on at will, we can diligently improve their brightness. It is not so with the oblique light. It does not come at our call, but always unexpectedly – and rarely.

The shaft of light, the stab of pain, the surge of joy which no biology or psychology can explain away, yet to which no religion can put a name! The world is a place of annunciations and epiphanies.

July 2000

It is long since I wrote in this spiritual journal. I keep it for moments of spiritual awareness and renewal.

A day of deep deafness. Without hearing aid, and with one ear totally blocked, I walked in the park in unwonted silence. The visual and tactile senses were heightened. Sun-warmed paths and grass were transmitting heat and life to the blood in my feet. I felt every step, as though treading warm cushions. Sun



through leaves: dappled sun-
and-shade, colours intense.
As I passed beneath trees,
they curved over me and
seemed to include me.
Movements of butterfly,
blackbird, gull, swan,
squirrel were indivisible from
stillness. Connection, oneness.

Om mani padme hum.

I meditated deeply and reverently, without distraction.

Om. The syllable of creation, the syllable of eternity, of a state without dimensions. The divine, heaven, the beyond. *Mani padme:* the jewel in the lotus, Buddha nature, that-of-God in all things, including the human heart; incarnation, pantheism; the glory of blossom above water, from stem rooted in slime. *Hum:* the earth, as in humus; the divine in earth, in all creatures, in rock, tree, grass, wildlife, in ecological interdependence. In us? Where 'only man is vile?' Yet it takes human consciousness to recognise and articulate all this. Rilke wondered whether we are here precisely to recognise and internalise it all.

The park today was beautiful, it seized and held me in the palm of its divine hand. But what is a park? A human creation. The product of human imagination and human labour. Left to itself, that land would be – like the adjacent neglected woodland garden – a tangle of rank weeds and a muddy stream.

Whence that human creativity? It's a secondary work, prompted by earth herself - how else? But a sign of grace, even in our fallen race. Buddha nature. That of God.

Postscript, July 2000

A reflection written at Woodbrook Quaker Centre but placed in my journal afterwards.

AWAKENINGS

Fifteen years half asleep. Oh, not unhappy. Enjoying life. Learning. Even giving birth. But just Half-Asleep Anne (as I put it in *The Girl Who...*).

But at length the mist began, here and there, to clear. A crust or carapace began to crack. A question rose from the depths, insistent: whatever became of Anne?

What Anne? Why, the one who was a poet. The one who had a lively spiritual dimension. The one who needed a language. In the wake of *Honest to God*, I approached Christianity. Might it after all have the words I needed, to articulate the spiritual and aesthetic depths? However inexpertly, the poems began again.

And there was more. Does life begin at forty? For me, yes. This coincided with a return to my profession, a reawakening of that side of my mind. Poetry, God, work, these three. But the greatest of these was poetry. A little later came love, real love, the love of my life so long awaited. I was dancing in a new morning.

There were negatives. Midlife crises. Later, the agony of decision, of leaving a comfortable marriage, a husband who loved and trusted me. These darknesses too were awakenings, ways into understanding.

Poetry, love, work, these three. But God?

Progressive awakening revealed to me that Christianity did not after all fulfil my need for a language of the spirit. Just as I had read my way into faith, I read my way out again. Cupitt, Hampson. Scales began to fall from the eyes I had thought were already opened. Eye-opening is not a single moment, like *Zen satori*. It is more like peeling layers from an onion - and like onion-peeling, not without tears. Tears that temporarily blind one again. This was a process, a slow slow awakening, a stripping of veils. Part of it was a real bereavement: I had lost my God.

Or rather, we had. For there were by now several of me, the products of various awakenings. AA poet, AA preacher, AA lover, AA mother, AA librarian. Such different women, yet all had at least united in one certainty: we were all lovers of God. What could it now mean to be a God-lover when God was gone?

Strangely, I didn't disintegrate. I integrated. I am no longer AA this or that, but one person even when performing many roles. And the identity, the I-ness, no longer matters. I live in a wonderful, fearful, diverse world, all so much more interesting than me.

The world is so full of a number of things
I think we should all be as happy as...
no, not kings. As butterflies.

Not as the Crow Flies. The Journal and Selected Poems of Anne Ashworth will be published by SOF launched at the annual conference in Leicester on July 14th 2012.



An Outsider in the Benedictine Cemetery at Quarr

John Cragg describes his visit..

I come to the cemetery because I don't go into the church. This graveyard is very beautiful indeed. The crosses are almost identical although some have more lichen. I look eagerly to find the most recent cross. The dates are in Latin but I can work it out.



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I've been to a monastic cemetery before when I wondered what would happen if the monastery had to close down.

It's October, a beautiful day, I almost feel ecstatic in the peace thinking about these men who spent their lives in the abbey and are buried beside their church. Of course there are few monks now. Perhaps even their monastery will close.

Suddenly I feel I shouldn't spend too long here. I notice the new graves and cannot work out if they're not for monks. Could a woman be buried here?

I walk away through the woods; a huge buzzard is flying quite close above the trees. Eventually I reach the sea where I swam almost 25 years ago. Now the tide is out. The guestmaster informed me the sea is eating away at the shore and you can see the remains of trees fallen into the mud.

John Theodore Cragg retired recently from his job as an escort on an Age Concern ambulance. He now does voluntary work preparing food parcels at St Magdalene's Centre for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Holloway Road, London

Sofia welcomes comment and debate.

Please send your letters to:

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Sofia 100

I just wanted to congratulate you on *Sofia* #100, which has lurked in my constant companion, a rucksack full of papers some of which take a while to be re-excavated. I had already read #101 but in looking for #102, which I had put in my bag the other day, I found #100 and truly enjoyed it.

I really am very ignorant of theology, and scarcely less so of poetry, but your editorial influence has been so life-giving, to the magazine and to me as a reader, I felt I must congratulate you. I hope you can sustain the effort yet longer!

*Graham Shipley (Prof.)
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Milton

Dinah Livingstone chose the wrong quotation* from Milton; it is too tame. I prefer these lines (128+) from *Lycidas* (published in 1638) and with the word 'but' as a great qualifier:

Besides what the grim Woolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,
But that two-handed engine at the door,
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

Early British imperialism was built on the success of the Elizabethan joint-stock company. Much of late Victorian philanthropy was built on a stock market able to deliver high returns for the risks taken. However, arguably British capitalism for the normal 'joint stock owner' has collapsed. Returns on the main indices since the turn of the century are profoundly negative, and likely to stay that way. This means there is no 'trickle down effect' to the rest of society, and thus no chance

whatsoever of building even half-way houses to Utopia. How has this dire situation come about?

A primary reason has been the grotesque increases in executive and middle-management pay throughout the Western world, when, as all the main indices have shown, the mega corporations are failing abjectly to deliver returns to their shareholders, who are being fleeced by overfed company managements. The World Social Forum should incite a global revolt by institutional shareholders, demanding a halving or up to a 90% reduction to of global corporate pay until a company is showing year on year increases in returns of dividends and share performance, which might lead to a 'trickle-down effect' to the world at large. Otherwise, if these grotesque inequalities continue the 168 large corporations currently said to 'rule the world' will all feel *'that two-handed engine at the door'*.

*Best regards
Christopher Truman
truman433@aol.com*

* Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw.

I don't call that tame! But the Lycidas quote is also superb. – Ed.



John Milton

SOF Sift

A column in which Network members think out loud about SOF and their own quest.

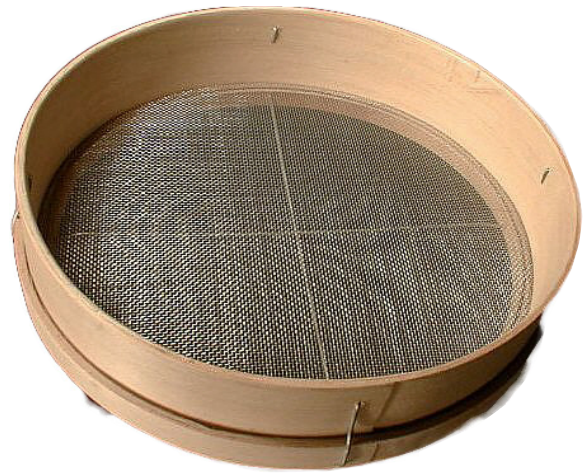
*Oliver Essame, Brackley,
Northamptonshire*

I may not be properly qualified to contribute to this column as I don't feel as though I have been on a quest, and I can't recall that I ever did. Perhaps I was discouraged by an early acquaintance with King Pellinore's tireless search for the Questing Beast, sometimes heard, occasionally glimpsed, but always just out of reach. The SOF sieve is a more arresting image. If only I could be sure about what we were supposed to be sifting and where lies the value, in what falls through, or in what is retained? A gold prospector would be hoping that when everything else has fallen away a few bright nuggets will remain. I suspect I am more like a gardener, sifting out stones in the preparation of a seedbed.

My mental sieve fills up pretty quickly and needs to be regularly shaken. First into the mix was my education. Initially, a little Sunday school and an occasional evensong. Then, two boarding schools. The first was austere and disciplined with chapel twice a day, unaccompanied plainsong and lots of exercise. The second was a traditional public school, but one that was embedded physically and spiritually in the precincts of a great cathedral. From the age of eight I had spent very little time at home, especially as my parents were doing some sifting of their own at that time and I went with them to summer schools at Combe Springs where I was introduced to the works of Gurdjieff and JG Bennett.

Nevertheless, I briefly succumbed to the charms of Anglicanism and decided to read theology at Oxford. On the way to my interview I re-read John Robinson's *Honest to God*, which was published earlier that year, and I was looking forward to being part of that discussion. But it wasn't to be. Apart from a happy term with David Jenkins as my philosophy tutor, it was all pretty dull stuff. Much of it valuable, but hardly inspirational. The sieve was already pretty full by this time, but mostly with stones. Time for a shake.

Armed with a theology degree I became a



theatre stage manager for a while, but after a chance meeting at a yoga class, I found myself teaching at a school in central India and became acquainted for the first time with the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. The life we led there was quite monastic and the discipline of doing practical work, taking on an unfamiliar role, developing one's capacity for attention and for controlled physical activity was very similar to that advocated by Gurdjieff. I found that the practical life suited me and when I came home I retrained as a furniture maker.

In my family we had talked endlessly – an almost continuous conversation with my parents about religion, philosophy, the arts, and the good life, well lived. We read many of the same books and admired the same people. In 1981, they gave me *Taking Leave of God* for my birthday. We joined the SOF conversation at the annual conference in 1995. My mother, who had become a Quaker and was then well into her 80s, was keen to go and had asked me to keep her company. Up to that point I had never been to a conference of any kind and I had managed to avoid becoming a member of any organisation, but two days later I was a member of SOF and had undertaken, with others, to form a local group. I have been to all but one of the annual conferences since then.

I need my sieve to relieve me of the accumulated debris, the mental bindweed, of a lifetime of reading, thinking and talking about religion. The good stuff falls through and, with luck, becomes fertile ground for different ideas and new ways of expressing them. Any gardener will tell you that soil will get compacted and unproductive over the years, you need to dig it over, remove the stones and weeds, give it a little nourishment and let the air in. For seventeen years SOF has been an important part of this process for me; it will be for years to come.

Ian Stubbs reviews

Turns of Phrase:

Radical Theology from A to Z

By Don Cupitt

SCM Press (London 2011). Pbk. 116 pages. £16.99.

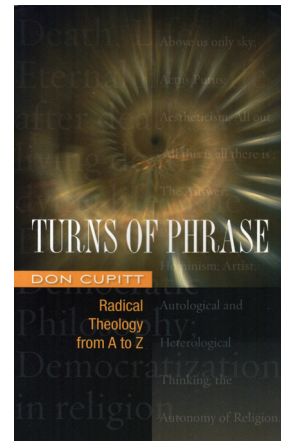
Don Cupitt is the Hadron Collider of religious thinking. His mind is like a theological, high energy particle accelerator bringing ideas from a range of disciplines into creative attraction and collision, re-writing theology and advancing our understanding of the possibilities of being religious in post-modernity. This book could be seen as a notebook of his experiments in what he terms head-on theology.

Cupitt is the only theologian, certainly in Britain, to take post-modern culture seriously enough to develop theology from within. The book title is significant because his key starting point, as followers of his work will know, is language; how we construe our world in language and in the continuous turning of conversation. He uses the poetic metaphor of the fountain to express this experience of language constantly bubbling up in our consciousness and into life-giving expression.

Cupitt traces the death of God ... as a gradual handing over of the world by God to humanity

Cupitt argues that we have no access to ‘raw’ data outside of language. Facts are already interpretations and are always open to re-interpretation. Not just in the visual arts but in the sciences and in life generally, we make and re-make the picture. There is no outside meaning; life is what we make of it. There is no absolute fixed Truth, our values are constantly being renegotiated and truth is the current consensus. Truth is now fallible but is not solipsistic or relativistic. It is not doing things ‘my way’ as some critics have tried to argue. Rather, truth has become democratised, Cupitt observes, as

hypotheses are put forward and critically tested. Truth is no longer absolute or revealed but continuously renegotiated like art or literary criticism.



The understanding, that we shape our world and give life meaning in language, leads to the notion that all our ideas, outlooks, values, including our religious ideas, are products of history. We can now write the history of God and what is now important is not that people believe in God, but what they mean by God. In the last few hundred years all areas of life can be understood without reference to an eternal and transcendent source of truth and power. God, says Cupitt, can still have meaning but in the sense of that to which we aspire, a guiding spiritual idea, a pearl of great price. In his recent thinking Cupitt describes how he has tended to take his leave even of this idea and simply to equate God with Life, observing that this is what is happening in ordinary language.

Cupitt traces the death of God not only in science and philosophy but religiously, in his reading of the Bible from Genesis to Pentecost as a gradual handing over of the world by God to humanity and of God’s progressive dispersal. After centuries of ideological capture by ecclesiastical theology the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus is at last being realised within postmodernity where life, including that of the cosmos, is constantly pouring out and passing away. Only in postmodernity, when ecclesiastical theology of the Kingdom postponed has died, are we able to fully grasp the significance of this. God is fully dispersed into humanity and our concern is with the space between people, how they let go of themselves, live generously and without jealousy, rivalry and hostility; even how they may love their enemies, and all in the only world we have.

Cupitt complains that his body of work over forty years has not had wider acceptance. He is piqued, he writes, by those who complain that he

is obscure, irrelevant, name-dropping, too philosophical etc. Hence this book is a kind of dictionary of ideas where one entry will lead you on to another and so on, painlessly through his world. His publishers have given the book a homely, commonplace title and Cupitt hopes it may be kept by the bedside, turned to when you turn in and so get under your guard.

I wonder if resistance to Cupitt will be overcome so easily. There are, of course, orthodox believers who see his atheism as the Devil's work. Cupitt was going to call his book, *The Devil's Dictionary*. But I think there are three broad groups who do understand Cupitt's ideas but remain unconvinced by his conclusions. First, there are liberal to radical religious persons who agree with his arguments regarding the death of theism but for whom the notion of God as surrounding, sacred presence continues to be meaningful.

The pantheism of Jesus Seminarian, Marcus Borg, for example, has a huge following in progressive Christian circles. A second group are those who are unclear about what forms autonomous religious practice might take, not helped by the fact that he himself has recently given up receiving communion. They see religion as not just about what you believe but about what you practise, what sustains your belief. They admire Cupitt's brilliant and innovative work on the language of everyday life which maps so well the dissemination of God into human affairs. Yet they are puzzled about what kind of religion is being explored and promoted, if any, which will provoke and sustain solar living. A third group are those, well represented in SOF, who believe that religion is merely a human creation and should itself now die along with God. They lose patience with anyone, including Cupitt, who attempts to renew religious thought.

Does Cupitt offer a viable contemporary religious thinking and practice? He argues that we cannot do that until mountains of the rubble from the ruin of traditional religious belief have been cleared away and that has been his project in a series of books as long as your arm. And I think this is Cupitt's main problem – after all the clearances, what?

Ian Stubbs is the vicar of All Saints' Parish Church, Glossop. He is a member of SOF.

A Different Look

The houses wear a different look tonight,
On the qui vive, alert. They're just the same
As yesterday, through the same window frame,
Yet in this light
Look like a bride signing a first time name.

Yes, it's the light that does it. Every day
Till now those houses crouched under a storm,
Stiffened themselves for wind, followed the form
Of winter, but today
A first evening of sun. Not that it's warm,

Only the colour strengthens on the roof,
Cream pebbledash, bright paint against the trees'
Stark jagged silhouettes: that brilliant frieze
A sudden proof
Of spring, a jolt of turning: an unease.

Spring takes us unawares, as all agree.
Formerly that was fun, rounding a bend
And finding there an unexpected friend;
Or out at sea
The shout of 'Land ahoy!' and journey's end.

This year the houses wear a different air.
The trees of course will leaf themselves and hide
Wall, roof and flashing pane by Whitsuntide
But cannot share
That rising of the sap with those who died –

Three of my friends who will not see the spring,
Though one had sea and one had hills and one
Anticipated airways to the sun.
Does April bring
Me warning through the mourning? 'Quickly, run,

Look at the twig before it turns to leaf,
Marvel how red the roof tiles and how blue
Above them. Well, what saturates the hue?
Precisely, grief.
Now do you see? And know what you must do?'

Anne Ashworth

Penny Mawdsley reviews

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

By Karen Armstrong

Bodley Head (London 2011). Pbk. 224 pages. £12.99.

Karen Armstrong, is perhaps best known outside theological circles for *Through the Narrow Gate* (1982), her book about the experience of leaving, after seven years, a religious teaching order to read English at Oxford. She is also well known to SOF members for her lectures and for her many academic publications following *A History of God* (1993). *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* is a departure from these more recent books, as it is written in a non-academic and very accessible style for a more general audience, though still managing to pass on insights and understandings gained from a long study of religious history and practice.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life struck me as a cross between a contemporary self-help book and a commentary on – or companion to – an ancient Religious Rule. Armstrong's years of serious research into the Abrahamic religions in particular – but into Buddhism and Confucianism too – have brought her to a place where she is anxious to emphasise commonalities and areas of agreement, most particularly 'The Golden Rule'. This is the basis, as she sees it, of all religions and is at the core of what she understands by 'compassion'. Armstrong encourages her readers to expand their spectrum of concern by following a graduated and ever-widening series of steps from attending to self through to loving one's enemies.

The background of this publication is an interesting one. The book came out three years after Armstrong was chosen as one of the three joint winners of the 2008 TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) Prize, better known in the USA, where the TED Conference began in 1984 as a private non-profit organisation supporting those whom it feels have 'ideas worth spreading'. It awards \$100,000 to those it judges already to have 'made a difference' but who, with its help, are thought likely to make an even greater impact. The Conference also grants them a 'wish for a better world', which the winners reveal in an 18-minute speech to those attending the prize-giving. Armstrong's speech, which is available on YouTube, has been subsequently delivered in various places, including last November at the

Liberal Synagogue in St. John's Wood where a number of SOF members came to hear an expanded version.

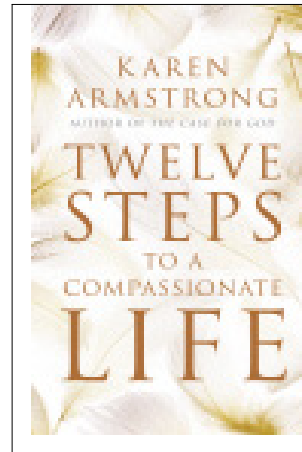
Armstrong attributes The Golden Rule to Confucian

origins. She *believes* (a word which incidentally she feels – strongly – has unfortunately strayed far from its Anglo-Saxon roots in 'love' and 'belonging') that the world urgently needs to cultivate empathy and altruism at the centre of private and public life. Further, she is convinced that this is something that can be learned, practised and taken forward by individuals and wider societies if her twelve steps are followed conscientiously. This is not to say, however, that she fails fully to acknowledge the challenge and difficulties of doing so. For Armstrong religions are essentially about *doing* and *behaving* rather than believing.

Armstrong points out where pitfalls lie at every step but she encourages perseverance towards an end-point of an all-encompassing, compassionate life which translates into acts of kindness and charity. World Compassion is no longer a mere welcome bi-product of religious practice but, in the words of Martin Luther King, 'an absolute necessity for our survival'.

I found the book both informative and generally inspiring, welcoming the way Armstrong had fed into every chapter's 'step' apposite and wise teachings from east as well as west. My main reservations lay around her optimistic – but I felt naïve – faith in the ability of individuals and society to overcome the negative forces underlying personal, social and political interaction. If only we could all reach *ekstasis*, not only recognising but going on to overcome the subtle complexity of the many factors which influence our behaviour for the worse! Armstrong encourages us to master each step in turn before proceeding to the next. I confess that I haven't yet got beyond Step One!

Penny Mawdsley is the editor of *Portholes*. She is a former Chair of SOF and currently a SOF Trustee.



reviews

Dominic Kirkham reviews

The Science Delusion

by Rupert Sheldrake

Coronet (London 2012). Hbk. 392 pages. £19.99.

Thirty years ago Rupert Sheldrake, a quietly distinguished botanist, became something of a pariah in the scientific community with the publication of his book, *A New Science of Life*. In an extremely hostile review, the editor of the prestigious science journal, *Nature*, denounced his ideas on the causative formation of life as pseudo-science and the author as a heretic whose book was only fit for burning!

Since then Sheldrake has pursued something of a solitary furrow, developing his ideas on how non-physical 'morphogenetic fields' can help to explain developmental processes in life. If this sounds so much hocus pocus bear in mind that people thought much the same when Michael Faraday proposed the idea of 'magnetic fields' to explain electrical influence at a distance. After all 'fields' are what cows graze in, aren't they?

At this point we begin to enter the rather murky world of words and concepts which underpin the whole scientific edifice. Scientists talk of 'charmed' particles, quarks and gluons (like the fantastical products of the imagination of James Joyce), of quantum 'weirdness' – 'wyrd' is a wonderful Old English word for the inexplicable, hidden force that guides our destiny. Sometimes ideas can pop into and out of existence rather like those little 'bosons': the idea of ether was popular for centuries as a kind of universal lubricant before being dismissed as fanciful last century; now it's back with another name, 'dark energy' that not only fills 70% of the universe but also a gap in our knowledge – it's merely a word for something we don't understand.

All of this is to suggest that for all its achievements, there is a great uncertainty and fluidity underpinning the scientific enterprise, which is sometimes (even often) overlooked in the context of specific issues. Over the years Sheldrake has broadened his writings to confront these larger issues; *The Science Delusion* is his latest broadside against the dogmas which surround our understanding of science.

His core contention is that the paradigm of thought by which we understand the universe has changed from being a mechanistic model to one of a living organism, which is organised by fields of energy. This moves us on from the whole reductionist view of bits of inanimate 'stuff' interacting to a more gracious view of nature being animated by 'fields', which have taken

the place of the old idea of 'soul' as an organising principle. Is this 'pseudo science' or simply a more spiritual view of science?

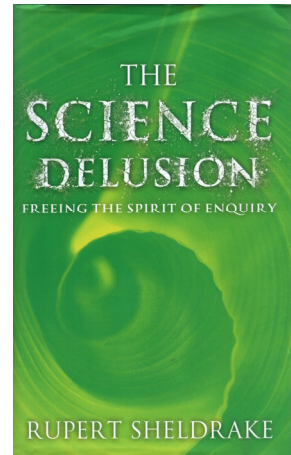
There is nothing inherently more irrational

in this than the great irrational mystery that typifies our universe. If there has been a change over the last thirty years, it is in a greater willingness to recognise this; that areas of enquiry have opened up even greater areas of ignorance. For example Paul Davies (director of the tellingly named Beyond Centre for Fundamental Concepts in Science at Arizona State University) thinks that a 'proper understanding' of dark energy 'will probably require new physics', whilst astrophysicist John Barrow thinks our inherently anthropic limits of perspective will always prevent us from comprehending the symmetries that underlie the great forces of nature. So, perhaps, this time Sheldrake will get a more sympathetic hearing.

On a slightly more personal note, I had just finishing looking over an article on this latest book of Sheldrake's, to which I had referred in an article I was writing, and opened up my email to contact Dinah about it when, to my utter amazement, the first thing I saw was a message from Dinah asking if I would be interested in reviewing this book! Spooky? Weird? Call it what you like, such little incidents – that happen so often in daily life – make one think about the causality of what is happening out there: of what Sheldrake calls 'participatory knowing'.

When we now think of the ways in which the micro-subatomic world is seen to be inseparably linked to the macro universe – with seemingly bizarre experiments being carried out in the deepest mines to detect what is happening in deepest space – there is nothing inherently irrational in the suggestion that the most complex organism of all – our brain – should be able to detect, in its workings, a consciousness of this greater presence. Whatever you may think, this is a book to make us think, and not for burning!

Dominic Kirkham is an interested follower of SOF. He now works for a Home Improvement Agency providing services for older people.



reviews

Geoff Crocker reviews

*The Book of Books:
The Radical Impact of the King
James Bible 1611-2011*

by Melvyn Bragg

Hodder & Stoughton (London 2011). Pbk. 384 pages.
£8.99.

Interesting narrative but unjustifiable
grand claims

This is classic Melvyn Bragg: a charming meander through narrative history which requires no justification. But this genre does not suffice for the claims he makes in this book about the Bible, and more specifically for the King James Version of the Bible. What he offers is a fond eulogy, in which he claims huge impact for the KJV, usually a highly positive impact. He claims that the Bible is 'one of the fundamental makers of the modern world' which 'walks with us in our life today' and 'can teach us day-to-day morality' (p5). He seems content that American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have its verses engrained in their gun sights. He suggests that particle research at CERN derives from Biblical principles.

He gives pre-eminence to the King James Version over older and newer versions, despite that being due to the legal monopoly imposed by James I, which was only lifted in 1905. He even makes the extraordinary claim that decline in church attendance is due to the replacement of the KJV by more modern versions (p129), describing a version in modern English as a 'misguided decision' (p83) although, of course, it was a decision made on the same basis as the KJV – to render the Bible readable. 'Would other versions have had the same impact?' he wonders (p230). This is one of his few assertions which is capable of empirical test, which it evidently fails.

His best section is his 17th century coverage, since this relies on Christopher Hill's magnificent *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution*, in which Hill brilliantly makes the case that the Bible's prophetic content on social justice led to the regicide of 1649. He makes the wide claim that we owe the richness and depth of English language to the Bible, whose words have fed Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Defoe, Swift, Blake, Eliot, Melville, Hawthorne *et al.* This is true in one sense, but mistaken in another – the Bible did not give rise to the English language, but the language of Chaucer and others gave rise to the English Bible.

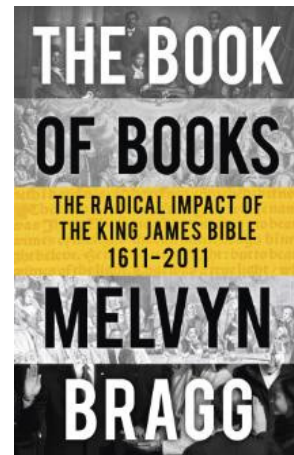
Even the Enlightenment is subservient to the Bible – 'where would the Enlightenment have been without it?' (p182); the Enlightenment failed to sweep away the KJV (p193). It

'authorised the work of ...early modern scientists' (p111). He would do well to read Roy Porter's excellent *Flesh in the Age of Reason* to see just how devastating the Enlightenment was to Bible concepts.

After a brief onslaught on Richard Dawkins, Bragg then gives us a list of social movements – abolition of slavery, education, colonisation, sexual ethics, women's rights, social reform, and democracy – all of which apparently owe their inspiration to the King James Version of the Bible. This is fond speculation, based on a flawed methodology, which identifies prime movers in each movement, and claims that they were Bible friendly. Today's younger educated elite is almost Bible illiterate. The great myths and stories are unknown to them. I happen to regret this, but claiming otherwise does not help to rectify it. What merit can be ascribed to a Bible, which is highly ambiguous on the issue of slavery, an ambiguity which fed the American civil war costing over 600,000 lives? Bragg fails to mention the impact of the Judaic Bible on modern Zionism, which inspires the exclusion and persecution of Palestine by the state of Israel, and figures as one of today's worst moral failures.

On page 122, Bragg quotes Alister McGrath writing 'In 1407, Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, banned the Bible in English'. It is ironic then that Lord Bragg is a member of a legislature which in 2011 bans the reading of the Bible at civil weddings in the UK. The Church of England, the Bible Society, and the Evangelical Alliance, are all complicit in this ban. It would be eminently fitting in the 400th year of publication of the Bible in English, to revoke this contemporary censorship of the Bible.

Geoff Crocker's book *An Enlightened Philosophy – Can an Atheist Believe Anything?* was published by O Books in 2011.



reviews

Anne Ashworth reviews

The Oldest Girl

by Aileen La Tourette

Caliband (London 2011). Pbk. 297 pages. £10.99.

To write that a novel starts with ‘attack’ may be dismissed as critics’ journalese. In this case the word is strictly accurate. The preliminary chapter is a fierce attack on the kind of Roman Catholic education the writer was subjected to as a child. In the opening pages she fairly grabs her readers by the throat. This author is Aileen La Tourette, a long-time member of SOF. Ex-Catholics often react with intense feelings about the total culture that once had them in thrall. In this novel Aileen appears to be working through her experience of the domination of religion, and also the accepted role of ‘the oldest girl’ in typical, inevitably large, Catholic families, where the girl may bear the brunt of childcare and household tasks.

The focus of her attack is the sentimentalised spin put upon the story of a child saint, St Maria Goretti, who was killed in 1902 at the age of eleven while trying to fend off a sexual attack. By 1950 it suited the then Pope to have a young innocent icon of sexual purity to promote. Pius XII was under a personal cloud, suspected of having been soft on Nazism. He needed an appealing image. *The Oldest Girl* is Aileen’s imagined story of the real Maria’s short unhappy life. The author’s rhetorical question to the dead girl, ‘Who the hell are you?’ is startlingly answered as Maria awakens and, with the wisdom of hindsight, replies. She then tells her own tale, interspersed with episodes in which the viewpoints of other characters are explored.

Maria, and before that her mother, would have lived at the bottom of the human heap, lives of ceaseless labour and painful hunger verging on starvation, enduring bullying and cruelty. Maria and her family are depicted as dirty, smelly, illiterate Italian peasants – as opposed to the privileged upbringing of young Eugenio, who would become Pius XII. But they are real people with strengths as well as helplessness. Maria’s father literally works himself to death for his family.

So you may not precisely ‘enjoy’ all you read here. It is a mark of Aileen La Tourette’s power as a writer that she can make a reader wince and

squirm with the sheer pain of it all. The many descriptions of food deprivation and its effects are vivid and appalling. Maria is no saint, nor is her killer a criminal. Both are victims of time, place and

circumstance. Maria’s mother Assunta is a wayward girl and a difficult woman, her character formed in reaction to the inhumane treatment of penniless orphans by the church of that time. They and all around them are utterly subservient to the church and its priesthood, which they are not equipped to question.

And yet Maria, from her vantage point beyond the grave, does now question. ‘How many ways are there for God to torture human beings?’ she asks. ‘Our house was ready to burst with hunger and anger.’ ‘Whomever and whatever was to blame for what was about to happen to us, hunger played its part.’

By now you may be wondering why you should read a novel about so much misery. Let me promise you this: you will be spellbound. La Tourette’s writing is powerful and enthralling, her human empathy profound. Though we know what will happen – the murder, the later canonisation – still the unfolding of events and characters remains compelling.

Admirable too is the structure of the book, which, though complex, is never confusing and allows the author to use varying techniques. These include first and third person narratives and comment from the dead Maria. At one point Maria’s narration freezes, and a significant incident is at once retold from the point of view of Alessandro, who would become her killer. Finally in 1950 we meet the Pope and Assunta at the time of the canonisation.

One small quibble: pity about the scattering of typographical errors. A better publisher’s editor would have eliminated them. But don’t worry, they are all minor and you can always easily guess what word was intended.



reviews

Mary Michaels reviews

A Tenth of Hydrogen

by Daphne Rock

Corundum Press (Leamington Spa 2011). 74 pages. £7.99

Daphne Rock, who died in 2008, seems to have come to the craft of poetry only in her fifties but swiftly achieved recognition with *Waiting for Trumpets*, (Peterloo Poets, 1998). With the award of a London Arts Board grant she pursued a particular interest in geology and industrial history to produce poem sequences on, respectively, Matlock, Blaenafon and Sheppey, which she published under her own imprint. A writing career of a mere ten years resulted in an unswervingly worthwhile body of work, of which this collection, put together by her daughter Felicity with Rosemary Norman and Jenny Vuglar (poets with whom Rock had a close association) is representative.

This book brings together previously uncollected poems, including the very last ones she wrote, and a selection from a Hearing Eye pamphlet *Is It Now?* that appeared in 2006 after the author's first experience of cancer. It includes moving poems on the writer's immediate family and her ancestors, on the experience of illness and hospitalisation, on the prospect of death. Particularly original however are those that draw on her abiding preoccupation with landscape, geology, and history. Many contemporary poets feel a desire – even an obligation – to make a link between scientific knowledge and poetic understanding: Rock may well have researched in the library as well as in the landscape but the historical and geological facts she found seem so totally integrated into her perceptions that she could effortlessly employ them as metaphors.

'Field Trip' for instance, compares a millennial event – rock being broken and moved by glaciers to populate a slope with limestone pillars and odd-shaped blocks – with the swift re-stocking of a farmer's field with cattle in 2001 after the foot and mouth disease cull. While 'Field Trip' inserts a contemporary event into geological time, 'A Death Assemblage' focuses on the finding of a 1914-18 mass grave but has as title the geologists' term for the heaping together, in the course of large earth movements, of stones from disparate places. The skeletons found may be of Germans as well as British. 'The Third Who Walks With Us' seems at first to be simply a poem about a ramble on the North Downs Way but through the image of the phantom companion (reported by Antarctic explorers) it becomes a startling comment on living with a donated organ; 'The donor, whoever he was, leaps stiles with you...having given all that the dead can give.'

Though the – always self-effacing – voice of most of the poems is Rock's own, she was also adept at expressing herself through a fictional persona; three short dramatic monologues, 'Sea Change', 'The Beach at

Trouville' and 'The Turkey's Song', I found surprising to the point of shock. And I was left with the sense of something having been said that could not possibly have been conveyed in any other way. An equivalent dramatic charge is carried by poems such as 'Years Later, Mewslade Bay', 'Crawl Space' and 'Land'. Here the writer enters lightheartedly – or perhaps, foolhardily – into an experience that turns out to be sobering. Wanting to get more than the 'theme park history' of lead mining she arranges to go down a disused mine ('Crawl Space') and ends up having to manoeuvre herself almost flat through an ever-narrowing, dripping, dark tunnel – learning in the process what no book could ever teach one about the reality of this occupation. The poem ends with an all too recognisable – and recognised – retreat into rationalisation; 'Light at the end of the tunnel. I catch myself/ in platitudes. After all,/ they must have been used to it.'

If there is one thing that can be said about Rock's poems, however, it is that they are devoid of platitudes. 'A Tenth of Hydrogen', which rounds off the book, characteristically links scientific theory with personal experience, setting the latter in a time-span of millennia. Its rumination on the fate of the individual encapsulates the notion that 'a tenth of all bodies/ contains..... a gas passed down five thousand million years ...' The point – that we are all connected in a chain of existence animated by totally impersonal elements – is made with as light a touch as the final image:

[it] flies off.... a mote to settle on
the eyelashes of the child following...

A Tenth of Hydrogen is available from the publisher: Corundum Press, 83 Montrose Avenue, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 7DR or can be ordered from bookshops (ISBN 978-0-9539815-4-0).

Mary Michaels' poetry collection *The Shape of the Rock* was published by Sea Cow (London 2003) and her latest collection is *Caret Mark* (Hearing Eye, London 2008).

reviews



Deserted Villages and the Dispossessed

Cicely Herbert reflects on villages that have disappeared and the inhabitants who lost their homes.

In 'The Dry Salvages' from his great poem, *Four Quartets* T.S. Eliot wrote:

The river is within us, the sea is all about us
The sea is the land's edge also, the granite
Into which it reaches. the beaches where it tosses
Its hints of earlier and other creation.

These words must have a special resonance for any island dwelling peoples. At the time the Doomsday Book was compiled, Dunwich, in Suffolk, had a population of 3,000, and could boast three churches. Violent storms swept away many medieval buildings and today only the remains of a priory can be found and the last of its gravestones fell in to the sea in the 1990s.

The 'drowned village' is a more recent phenomenon, brought about by the world population explosion and the human's insatiable need for a constant supply of water, necessitating the creation of mega man-made reservoirs, which inevitably swallow up large tracts of land and enforce the displacement of the local population. In Graun, on the Italian/Austrian border, two natural lakes were united to create such a reservoir, which left the church bell-tower protruding from the waters, and gave rise to many a local legend and ghost story. In the 1970s much of the parish of Normanton in the English Midlands was cleared and flooded to create the large reservoir, necessary for the provision of water for the growing population. I have yet to visit it, but I understand that the deconsecrated church, which stands at the water's edge, has been half filled with rubble and now serves as a museum charting, among other things, the history of Rutland Water.

The exact location for Oliver Goldsmith's best known poem, 'The Deserted Village' is uncertain, but it is likely that a rich landowner wished to expand his estate and create one of the magnificent gardens, complete with mock ruins, ornamental lakes and parklands so beloved of the wealthy eighteenth century gentry. Goldsmith, a man who much preferred the

pleasures of the city taverns to the rural realities of poverty and hard work, nevertheless manages to capture something of the desolation and destruction of a once vibrant society, as the villagers, soon to be exiled 'hung about their bowers' took a long farewell, vainly wishing for 'seats like these beyond the western main.' One imagines that some of these villagers may have been the forefathers of citizens of the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and other far-flung places, as were the Scottish victims of the 'Highland Clearances.'

As a child I spent every summer holiday staying in an old holiday lodge in the western Scottish Highlands. As soon as I was old enough to explore the upper reaches of the glen alone, I discovered the burned out ruins of several crofts, which puzzled me greatly. I returned there whenever I could, aware of a deep sense of sadness that pervaded the glen, which, at the time, suited my mood admirably. I learned, much later, how the Highland Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries had driven the indigenous peasant population from their lands, when their



Ruin in a Highland clearance village

English landlords, greedy and uncaring, burned down the crofts to clear the way for the more profitable enterprise of sheep farming.

World history is full of stories of loss and longing for home. One has only to think of all that has preceded the Arab Spring or the devastating destruction of towns, villages and smallholdings in Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia, where countless numbers of families were driven by war and sectarian hatred, from the homes their families had lived in for generations. The threat to the security of ordinary family life continues. In Britain today, thousands of the poorest families, especially in London, will have to leave their homes because of the new Housing Benefit cap. As a letter in the *Guardian* from Dave Morris (Feb 20th 2012) points out: 'Unless resisted, this institutional social engineering will cause the largest forced displacement of working-class people from their homes since the enclosure acts of the eighteenth century.'

The Mount of Olives

Climbing the slope beneath grey leaves he just
seemed grey and tousled like the olive-trees.
He hid his burning forehead streaked with dust
in hands as grey and dusty as the trees.

This after all. The end of the affair.
I'm going on while I am going blind
and wondering why You make me say You're there
when You are now impossible to find.

I can no longer find You. You're unknown.
Not in me. Nor in others. Nor this stone.
I can no longer find You. I'm alone.

I'm all alone with all man's pain and grief.
Through You I was supposed to bring relief.
You're nowhere. I'm a charlatan and thief.

We're told an angel came. That's past belief –

And why an angel? Nothing came but night
rustling so casually through the trees.
The disciples stirred. Their dreams incurred disease.
And why an angel? Nothing came but night.

The night that came was not unusual.
Hundreds have come and gone that way.
Dogs kept on sleeping. All the stones stayed still.
One sad night passed like any other till
a normal dawn brought on another day.

Angels don't come to those who pray like me
and nights will give significance to the rest.
All's lost to those who've lost themselves. At best
their fathers will disown them and decree
they're banned from sheltering on their mother's breast.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Der Ölbaum-Garten
translated by Harry Guest

The poem is from Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* (1907). Harry Guest is an Honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University. Among his works *A Puzzling Harvest: Collected Poems 1955–2000* (2002) and *Some Times* (2010) are both published by Anvil Press (London).

Quetzalcóatl



Quetzalcóatl came to Tlapalan
and disappeared into the sea.
He told his people not to cry for him.
He would return.

Quetzalcóatl went to Tlapalan
'the Land of the Dawn'
also known as 'the Land of Red and Black',
where he died in the year 1-Reed
and was changed into the Morning Star...

The struggle of the light.
Venus invisible for 90 days.
Then it burns for 250 days in the afternoon sky.
Then it disappears for 8 days
and returns to shine in the east as the Morning
Star.

(the descent into hell.)

Quetzalcóatl, 8 days among the dead...

These are the opening lines of Ernesto Cardenal's long poem *Quetzalcóatl* ('feathered serpent'), the legendary king of the Toltecs (a high civilisation that preceded the Aztecs in Mexico). This good king is driven out of the city for forbidding human sacrifice.

He disappears into the sea, spends 8 days among the dead and comes back as the Morning Star. He promises to return to his people, restoring a just kingdom with no human sacrifice. As well as being their king, Quetzalcóatl is also the Toltecs' god:

He taught singing.
To have kindness in the heart and to sing.
Cuali in iyolo: kindness in the heart.
A social ethic.
He taught them to teach others
to make their faces wise.
A great humanist tradition.
'They had only one god.
His name was Quetzalcóatl...'
He never permitted human sacrifice.

Quetzalcóatl, who is both divine and human, becomes the guiding star in the long human struggle for liberation (salvation) and against human sacrifice. The poem ends:

Quetzalcóatl or the historicity of myth.
Carrasco called it subversive.

Quetzalcóatl by Ernesto Cardenal, bilingual edition translated by Clifton Ross, was published in Britain by Stride (Exeter 1994).

Christ, the Morning Star

From the *Exultet*, Praise Song to the Pascal Candle sung at the Easter Vigil

This is the night
when Christ broke the chains of death
and came up triumphant
from the underworld...

O truly happy night,
which alone was fit to know the hour and time
Christ rose from the dead...

The power of this holy night banishes evil,
washes guilt away, restores lost innocence,
cheers up the sad,
casts out hatred, makes peace,
and brings down proud powers...

O truly happy night,
when heaven is wedded to earth
and divine to human.

Therefore, holy Father,
in the joy of this night
receive this evening sacrifice of praise,
which your Church brings to you
by your ministers' hands
in the solemn offering of this candle,
the work of bees...

as its light is fed by liquid wax
the mother bee produced
for this precious candle's substance.

We pray you, therefore, Lord,
that this wax-light, consecrated
in honour of your name,
may go on burning bravely
to ward off tonight's darkness.
Let it be welcomed as a sweet scent
and mingle with the lights above.

Let the **Morning Star** find its flame still burning.
I mean that **Morning Star** which knows no setting,
Christ your son,
who came back from the underworld
and shone serenely on the human race,
he who lives and reigns for ever and ever.



Rising Christ. Stained glass window, Florence Duomo, by Paolo Uccello



*Flammis eius **Lucifer** Matutinus inveniat.
Ille, inquam, **Lucifer** qui nescit occasum,
Christus filius tuus,
qui regressus ab inferis,
humano generi serenus illuxit,
et vivit et regnat in saecula saeculorum.*

This version of lines from the *Exultet* is by Dinah Livingstone, adapted from previous translations.



**Imperial Crown of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II
(reigned 1576-1612)**