

s fia

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The Growth of Common Day

sofia is the magazine of the Sea of Faith Network (UK), a network of individuals and local groups that explores religion as a human creation. The magazine comes out in January, March, May, July, September and November.

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Portholes is a bi-monthly report to members containing SoF Network news and news from Local Groups.

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Photo: Winter Solstice

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From the book of drawings *Guantánamo* by Antonio Pacitti. Available from 15 South Croxted Road, London SE21 (0208 761 2769). Email: antoniopacitti@onetel.com

sofia is the magazine of
the Sea of Faith Network (UK)
which explores religion as a human creation.

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

sofia is both anti-fundamentalist and anti-restrictive rationalist, believing in the value of humanity's poetic genius and imagination in its search for wisdom.

The Growth of Common Day

editorial

The Winter solstice has passed and now the days are growing longer. This issue takes a phrase from Wordsworth as its title, 'the growth of common day'. It opens with two articles which look at religion as a human creation, one in what might roughly be called a 'low' and the other a 'high' christian tradition. The first article takes a non-supernatural approach to the Quaker tradition, with its stress on silence in its meetings. The second looks at Orthodox christianity from a non-supernatural viewpoint, particularly its idea of 'deification' and stress on ritual.

David Boulton points out that 'the flip side of Quaker emphasis on silent worship is that it can serve to conceal sharp theological differences', with which Friends may shock each other when they come out into the open. This emphasis on silent worship at meetings can be seen as a non-destructive aspect of the Puritan instinct to distrust 'show', which also found expression in Cromwell's devastation of many beautiful churches and abolition of Christmas day. Quakers, who once fought bravely in the New Model Army against the King claiming a 'divine right', have since become well known and respected for their activism in the Peace

Movement and other social causes. They aspire, Boulton says, to 'a way of living rather than a set of beliefs': Their emphasis on deeds follows the gospel: 'whatever you did to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did to me...' (Mt 25:40), said in the context of feeding the hungry, healing the sick and visiting those in prison. In these deeds it is taken for granted that the body is important. Such 'doing God' – *theopraxis*, to use a jargon word – seems more holistic than their *theology* – 'saying God' – the silent worship that consists of *thinking* and shutting down as much else of the body as possible, not even talking, let alone singing, lighting candles, dressing up, ringing bells, swinging censers releasing swoony smells, as many religions do...

Descartes published his *Discourse on Method* in 1637, with its famous statement: 'I think, therefore I am.' The English Revolution, from which the Quakers emerged, happened in the two ensuing decades. Perhaps Paris was a long way from England but the Quakers in their worship seem to share the assumption that *thinking* is 'purer' when it is less bodily. I have often wondered

Steering Committee Votes for

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Message from the Committee

The front page has a new look! Following a close vote at the 2005 AGM to change the magazine title, the Steering Committee considered a new proposal on December 10th 2005 and voted *nem. con.* in favour. This decision supports the Editor's aim to widen readership and distribution of an already well-regarded publication, which we are sure you will continue to enjoy.

Sea of Faith Steering Committee

about Descartes' famous phrase, because in some half-waking states I feel more like saying 'I think therefore I am I think...', whereas if I actually do something that has a physical effect, such as have a shower and get dressed, make a pot of tea, I see some result. The point is that I don't just think when I am sitting in silence, but also when I am with people, talking, doing things, walking along (some things are 'solved by walking') etc. Physical activity *affects* my thinking.

Boulton's article describes how non-theistic Quakers may experience God as 'the imagined embodiment of wholly human values'. *Embodiment* is the crucial word which they have steadfastly tried to *realise* in their *theopraxis*, their social activism, but perhaps have fought shy of in their *theology*, their worship-tradition of silent private thinking, which has foregone, among other things, a rich sacramental tradition – the eucharistic *hoc est corpus* mocked as 'hocus pocus' – in its search for 'purity'.¹

For what is embodiment? A sacramental theology symbolises it, and the fading of the supernatural makes us all the more aware that *both* our *theopraxis* and our *theology* *come down* to acting and thinking for and about ourselves, bodily, social, fellow human beings belonging to Earth, where the sun rises in the morning to bring us our common day.

In the next article John Hondros looks at deification – becoming God – in the Orthodox tradition and considers what this might mean in non-supernatural terms. For the Orthodox Church deification means the transformation of the individual and the whole community 'to view the world and people from a divine perspective.' If we think of God as an ideal, then this means the *realisation* of this ideal both in the individual and the social body (the body politic). Hondros points out that, even for the theistic Orthodox, deification is not 'a post-mortem promise of immortality but an existential possibility here and now' and moral behaviour comes '*naturally* to a person when they are deified.' He looks at the non-supernatural effects of ritual, how it changes both individual and communal awareness. This ritual enactment of deification must then, of course, be followed through by deeds in daily life. The awareness creates a vision and enlarges the sense of possibility for the individual and community, but then this must become incarnate in action and a social fabric. It invites people to behave well and create a good society but does not guarantee success or, for example, safeguard them (any more than other christians) from manipulation by unscrupulous politicians.

Turning to the workaday world of capital and labour, Pope Leo XIII published his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. In 1887 in England, the socialist William Morris had been one of the leaders of the notorious Bloody Sunday demonstration in Trafalgar Square, described in his novel (where it initiates the 'change beyond the change') *News from Nowhere*, published in 1891. The Pope was deeply suspicious of socialism but nevertheless criticised 'the hard-

heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition'. Michael Morton looks at the history of the Young Christian Workers' Movement that was inspired by the Encyclical.

As you will see from the box on page 3, SoF Steering Committee has now decided that the magazine should be called *sofia*, which means 'wisdom'. It must be stressed that the magazine in no way claims to *dispense* wisdom or aspires to the pretensions of a magazine such as *The Plain Truth*. As the continuity of our logo shows, it remains a hundred percent the magazine of the Sea of Faith Network, which *explores* religion as a human creation. The world's many religions, which SoF believes were created by the human poetic genius or imagination, seek to express, in many different ways, humanity's treasury of wisdom, both philosophical and practical. *sofia* will continue to explore the many christian traditions (this issue points up some sharp contrasts between Quakers and Orthodox) and other religions in a positive but critical way, pursuing a search for wisdom that asks not only what should we think but what should we do, not just as individuals but as a species.

As the poet Coleridge put it, transforming christian myth into a humanist epic: 'Man is truly altered by the co-existence of other men, his faculties cannot be developed in himself alone and only himself. Therefore the human race, not by a bold metaphor but in sublime reality approach to and might become one body, whose head is Christ (the Logos).' On the inside back cover of this issue, your Editor does a non-supernatural 'take' on some of the Advent liturgical texts, in which Christ is invoked as Wisdom and begged to come. Yes, we do need to act wisely. Yes, we do urgently need wisdom to come to our world endangered by virulent fundamentalisms. Naturally.

1 However, the Quakers did have their symbols and special language, often involving an attractive cussedness, such as their refusal to do 'hat honour' and their dogged use of the familiar 'thou' even to their social superiors, which, George Fox said in his journal, put him and his followers 'in danger many times of our lives, and often beaten for using those words to some proud men.' (Quoted in David Crystal, *The Stories of English*, (Penguin, London 2004), p. 310.

Godless Quakers – for God’s Sake

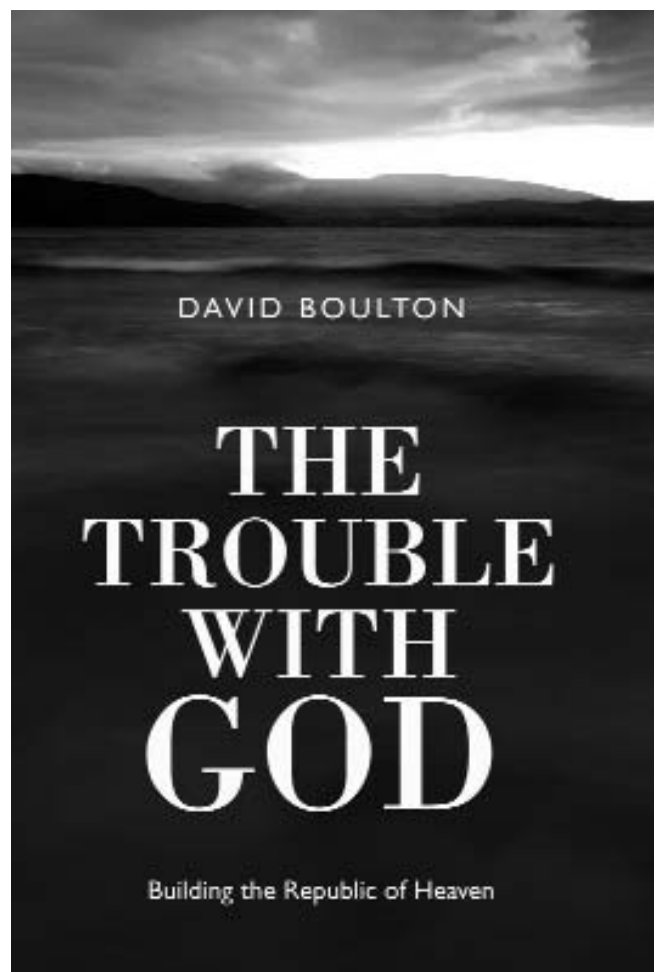
The flip-side of Quaker emphasis on silent worship is that it can serve to conceal sharp theological differences, says David Boulton in this article about Quakers who don’t think God exists.

Godless for God’s Sake is the title of a new book, to be published this spring, consisting of especially commissioned essays by British, US American and Australian Quakers who are committed to exploring and promoting a nontheist and non-supernaturalist understanding of religion in general and the Quaker tradition in particular.

Even within the liberal and diverse community of Friends, the book is likely to shock as well as challenge. Its editors and contributors – and I am privileged to be among them – have no intention of trying to convert the Religious Society of Friends into a covert arm of the international Humanist movement. But they are all frank about their own rejection of belief in a supernatural, objective God or ‘Spirit’, and firm in their advocacy of a religious pluralism that extends to a welcoming recognition of nontheist, nonrealist or non-metaphysical perspectives on religious faith and practice.

Most Quakers who described themselves as nontheist were not newcomers to the Society but seasoned Friends, members or attenders for, on average, 28 years!

Some *sofia* readers may be surprised to learn that Quakers, with their proud three-and-a-half-century-old tradition of resistance to creeds, dogmatic theology, spiritual hierarchies, Biblical literalism and clerical leadership, can be no less troubled by the challenge of nontheism than other ‘faith communities’. But for all their long record of radical social engagement, Friends can be every bit as conservative as the mainstream churches when it comes to ‘doing things our way’ and clinging fondly to the familiar language of founding fathers and mothers. The flip-side of Quaker emphasis on silent worship is that it can serve to conceal sharp theological differences which may seem all the more



shocking when they come into the open. To many Friends, then, the nontheists’ radical re-envisioning of God as wholly subjective, and of the holy Spirit as the wholly human spirit of ‘mercy, pity, peace and love’, can seem an affront, an assault on everything they hold most dear and precious.

So one important aim of the book is to show that, far from attacking or denying much-loved Quaker tradition, the ‘devout scepticism’ of nontheist Friends is a positive re-evaluation of that tradition for the twenty-first century. For more than three and a half centuries Friends have refused to formulate their own creed or assent to anyone else’s. Even as minimalist a creed as ‘I believe in God’ breaks with Quaker tradition. Deeds rather than creeds are at the heart of

Quakerism. Friends have always claimed or aspired to a *way of living* rather than a *set of beliefs*, seeking commitment in action rather than assent to propositions or 'notions'. Quakers may experience God or the Spirit in traditional theistic ways, as objective 'maker, defender, redeemer and friend', or in nontheistic ways as a subjective projection of human ideals, the imagined embodiment of wholly human values – or simply as the pure poetry of the seeking soul, a poetry that convicts us of the pathetic inadequacy of what we are while pointing us to what we might be, and what the world itself might be if we did our bit to build the republic of heaven on earth.

Help create a world where supernaturalism, superstition, magic and metaphysics can be properly and effectively challenged.

Publication of *Godless for God's Sake* is merely the latest in a series of developments aiming to explore the experience of nontheism, religious humanism or secular spirituality within the world-wide Religious Society of Friends. Quakers have always had a strong presence within the Sea of Faith Network, but have only recently begun to network among themselves. Occasional articles in the open-minded weekly *The Friend*, or lectures and workshops given at the invitation of the more adventurous Quaker institutions, have brought nontheism to wider attention. In the 1990s the Woodbrooke Quaker Theology Seminar tackled nontheism and published a number of papers, both affirmative and critical. The Quaker Universalist Group published my pamphlet *The Faith of a Quaker Humanist* in 1997 and a collection of 'essays in radical Quakerism', *Real Like the Daisies or Real Like I Love You?* five years later.

The following year Woodbrook Quaker Study Centre published a major survey by an American Friend, David Rush – also an active member of SoF UK – of nearly 200 nontheist Friends in Britain and America. Perhaps the most surprising result of the survey was that most Quakers who described themselves as nontheist were not newcomers to the Society but seasoned Friends, members or attenders for, on average, 28 years! Many were clerks and former clerks of their local or regional meeting, and even of Yearly Meeting, the Society's governing body.

In January 2004 some 37 nontheist Friends attended a workshop at Woodbrooke 'to explore the experience of nontheism in the Society'. I reported in *The Friend*: 'Not all were wholly content with nontheism as a label. Some preferred atheist or Quaker humanist, some emphasised that God, understood as a symbol of our most cherished human values, remained central to their religious life. There

was strong emphasis on the rejection of supernaturalism as a relic of an archaic world-view'.

The workshop minuted that 'With joy we affirm that people can live wonderful Quaker lives while holding a variety of religious views, and that we find this diversity is no bar to unity in the Meeting community.'

A small steering committee was formed to maintain contacts, and from this emerged an international email discussion list (subscribe free by emailing nontheistfriends-subscribe@topica.com) and a website, <http://www.nontheistfriends.org>, with links to the various SoF websites.

Woodbrooke held a follow-up workshop in January 2005. But perhaps more importantly its Quaker counterpart in the USA, Pendle Hill in Philadelphia, hosted a similar event in 2005 for American nontheist Friends. Quickly over-subscribed, it rekindled a flame that had first been ignited back in 1976 when the first 'Workshop for Non-Theistic Friends' was organised at the annual Gathering of Friends General Conference, followed by similar workshops from 1996 on. If these developments challenged some aspects of Quaker tradition, they did so by renewing and refreshing it.

Over the last two years I have had the privilege of addressing meetings in California and Oregon in the USA, and Queensland and New South Wales in Australia, following publication of *The Trouble with God* (a new international edition of which will be in the shops in January). Friends around the world have taught me much about the value of sharing our stories.

As I write, a vigorous correspondence is continuing in the pages of *The Friend*, following an account I wrote of my 'pilgrim's progress' into membership of the Society. Almost every day I receive emails from Friends telling me joyfully of their 'coming out' as nontheists or nonrealists. Sea of Faith exists to *promote* as well as *explore* religious faith as a human creation, and where better to promote, to speak our own truth, than in our own religious communities? And in the face of the present tidal wave of toxic fundamentalisms polluting our social and political life, what better contribution can we make to the creation of a strong, confident, wholly human spirituality rooted, inevitably, in the myths and grand narratives of our pre-scientific, unreasoning past, but transformed to fit our own times and help create a world where supernaturalism, superstition, magic and metaphysics can be properly and effectively challenged? Let there be light!



George Fox

Deification in the Orthodox Tradition

Athanasius says that Christ ‘became man so that we might become God.’ John Hondros looks at ‘becoming God’ in the Orthodox tradition, from the supernatural and non-supernatural point of view.

Orthodoxy has at its heart an ancient and highly developed system for the fundamental transformation of the individual and communities. It is a system of transformation that for historical and other reasons has operated independent of, and been marginalised by, the dominant Modernist paradigm of the last 500 years. But this isolation and marginalisation has allowed it to maintain its pre-Modern nature, which can now be rediscovered and appreciated in a more sympathetic post-modern world. It is this system, when understood non-theistically,¹ that can provide a valuable alternative to the current types of non-theist Christianity. It is a system, although preserved within Orthodoxy, that is the rightful inheritance of all Christians.

In this short article I can only hope to provide brief notes on a possible non-theistic approach to Orthodoxy. My focus will be on deification, and how this notion at the core of Orthodoxy might be affirmed in a non-theistic context, and in particular how the sacrament of the Eucharist – which is central to deification – can be understood in such a context.

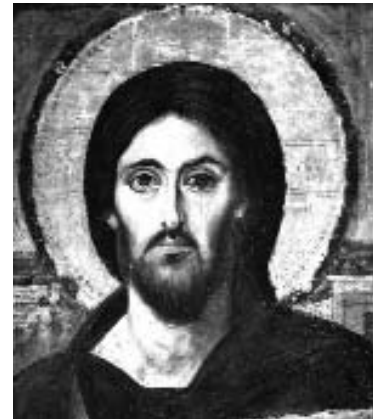
The Traditional (Theistic) Account of Deification

I said ‘You are gods’ (Ps 82:6). This phrase from the Old Testament, quoted by our Lord Himself (Jn 10:34), has deeply marked the spiritual imagination of Orthodoxy. In the Orthodox understanding Christianity signifies not merely an adherence to certain dogmas, not merely an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort, but direct union with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory – what the Greek Fathers termed ‘deification’ or ‘divinisation’ (*theosis, theopoiesis*). In the words of St Basil the Great, man is nothing less than a creature that has received the order to become god. ‘He was made man that we might be made god,’ St Athanasius says of Christ.²

Deification was commonplace in the Greco-Roman world. Hero and emperor cults, mystery traditions, Orphism, Judaism and philosophical religion all involved some version of the concept. While the Christian version of deification had its beginnings in the earliest stages of that movement, it borrowed to varying degrees from these other versions.

Deification develops along two distinct lines until the end of the fourth century. One line held that humanity could be deified in principle as a consequence of the incarnation of Christ, and in practice through the incorporation into Christ through baptism and the Eucharist. The other line, which was a philosophical and

ethical approach, concentrated on the ascent of the soul through the practice of virtue. Cyril of Alexandria integrates both these lines at the end of the fourth century. Maximos the Confessor further develops these ideas in the eighth century, and establishes it in the Byzantine monastic tradition as the goal of spiritual life. Symeon the New Theologian of the late tenth century and Gregory Palamas of the fourteen build upon Maximos, emphasising the experiential side of deification. Palamas, for instance, insisted that one could be transfigured both spiritually and physically through participation in God’s energies. It was in this form that deification entered the Orthodox Church of today.



Deification is not a post-mortem promise of immortality, but an existential possibility in the here and now.

According to the Orthodox, deification is not a post-mortem promise of immortality, but an existential possibility in the here and now. It is a process for regenerating the individual, for transforming one’s nature. The effects of deification come in different stages, and are described in a variety of ways in Orthodox literature. These include attaining a state of ‘divine illumination with which the mind is illuminated and views things, the world and people from a different perspective’³. A later stage in the process of deification is the state of *apathia*, which might be thought of as a state of non-attachment, where one is ‘peaceful and placid to every external assault, delivered from pride, hatred, spitefulness ...’ (Archimandrite George, p.46). Interwoven with these effects is the moral behaviour of the individual. Moral behaviour, from the Orthodox perspective, comes naturally to a person when they are

deified. In fact, it is a product of the deification process, and the further along one is in that process the more natural it becomes.

The sacramental rituals, particularly baptism and the Eucharist, have a central role to play in this process of deification:

The regeneration and deification of human nature achieved in Christ is rendered accessible to all through the sacraments of the Church. ... The chief sacraments, or those in which Christ's 'economy' is summed up in its entirety, are baptism and the Holy Eucharist. By virtue of its nature and its aim, the Church constitutes a veritable 'communion of deification'. (Mantzaridis, p41)

Ritual can be effective in individual and community transformation, but with natural rather than supernatural causes.

Regeneration in the sacraments is a re-membering, in Christ, of the parts of our fragmented selves, of the parts of our fragmented community, and of the union of humanity with God.

Every sacredly initiating operation draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like divinisation. It forges a divine unity out of the divisions within us. It grants us communion and union with the One.⁴

The community or social aspects of the sacraments and hence of deification should not be lost sight of, as they are an important consequence of the personal aspects.

This immediate and personal link between every believer and Christ [through the sacraments] calls for a genuine unification and communion between believers themselves. In this way a new relationship ... is set up between man and Christ. This is the Church. (Mantzaridis, p57)

It is difficult from the perspective of modern Western culture to appreciate the profound social consequences the Orthodox Church implies through this, accustomed as we have become to sharp divisions between religious and social institutions. But this 'genuine unification and communion' means nothing less than total social transformation. Although we might find this utopian vision hard to comprehend, I would suggest that monastic communities represent a microcosm of the kind of society imagined here.

A Non-Theist Account of Deification

The role and efficacy of ritual

From an anthropological and psychological point of view, illumination, *apathia* and the other stages of deification are

all non-ordinary, or altered, states of consciousness. As we have seen, sacramental ritual is at the centre of the deification process that creates these states, and therefore a non-theist account of deification requires a non-theist account of ritual's efficacy. We will briefly look at some contemporary theories on ritual to see how such an account can be developed.

Before we begin, I would like to quote from the distinguished American anthropologist Roy Rappaport to put our minds at rest that ritually induced altered states of consciousness are not some New Age fancy:

Although it may seem bizarre to the members of a society that puts exceptionally high value on what it understands to be unmodified rational thought, and is unusually suspicious of other states of mind and their insights, ritually altered consciousness is widespread if not, indeed, culturally universal. Bourguignon years ago found institutionalised forms of dissociation in 89 percent of a sample of 488 societies for which ethnographic data sufficient to make a judgement were available.⁵

Within the Academy, a vast array of complex theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand ritual. Yet to this day there is no agreement on how best to understand it, nor even an agreement on what constitutes it. In spite of this, the scholarship has forged some useful tools for its analysis. Some of these tools, and the ones that are of interest here, help us understand how ritual can be effective in individual and community transformation, but with natural rather than supernatural causes. The so-called performance approach to the study of ritual is of particular interest in this respect.

The performance approach, inspired by Victor Turner and others, emerged in the mid-1970's and its models, while diverse, share several related core concepts: Ritual is an event, a set of activities that do not simply express cultural values or enact symbolic scripts, but actually effect changes in people's perceptions and interpretations. The emotive, the physical and the sensual aspects of ritual participation, that is, its non-rational aspects, are critical to understanding ritual. Some theorists, such as Schechner and the later Turner, draw on research from human physiology in their explanation of this. Rituals are seen to have an efficacy that distinguishes them from literal communication on the one hand, or pure entertainment on the other. Most performance theorists hold the effect produced is a type of transformation, and this can be a transformation of being and consciousness. Various mechanisms for the efficacy of ritual performance are put forward in these theories. Some of the more common elements in their explanations include:

A ludic element, stressing the similarities between 'make believe' and 'let us believe'. 'The ludic is neither true nor false ... [it] simply points us to the power, the inevitability of our imaginative activities in which we have the opportunity to inscribe our fates, our desires, our stories in the air, and partly believe (to some degree) in their reality ...'⁶

A liminal element. For example, the suspension of the usual individual roles and social relationships, where groups of ritual participants are treated with the same status regardless of their place in the social structure outside the ritual environment.



A subtle interplay between a ritual's discursive and non-discursive elements: symbol, thought, emotion, and physical action are said in these theories to become fused in the ritual environment. Explanations of how this interplay effects transformation vary and are often complex, as they rely on a broad cross-disciplinary body of research.

How the particular techniques of Orthodox sacramental ritual produce the particular states of consciousness associated with deification from a non-theist perspective is too long a story to be addressed here. However, we have seen at least a broad outline of a programme that allows us to understand the mystical and transformative effects of ritual non-theistically.

But if one is to engage Orthodox sacramental ritual non-theistically, the question remains whether it can or should be adopted in its current, theistic form. I believe one must balance two competing considerations in this regard. On the one hand, as I will discuss below with regard to the role of doctrine, it can be argued that the current form represents a tried and true path to spiritual transformation. But, on the other hand, if ritual is a technique created by humans to produce certain desired effects, then like all techniques it can and probably needs to be revised and improved over time, or adapt and evolve in response to changing needs and conditions. This idea of ritual criticism, advocated by the scholar Ronald Grimes, is a relatively new field. I believe it could be of great value when thinking about using traditional rituals non-theistically, although we cannot explore it further here.

The role of doctrine

If we think of doctrine as a collection of principles and tenets concerning a supernatural world, codified into an unnecessarily restrictive and oppressive system of rules and regulations, then it has little relevance for a non-theistic Christianity. But listen to the Orthodox (theist) theologian John Romanides:⁷

The Fathers did not understand theology as a theoretical or speculative science, but as a positive science in all respects. This is why the patristic understanding of Biblical inspiration is similar to the inspiration of writings in the field of the positive sciences.

Scientific manuals are inspired by the observations of specialists. For example, the astronomer records what he observes by means of the instruments at his disposal. Because of his training in the use of his instruments, he is inspired by the heavenly bodies, and sees things invisible to the naked eye. The same is true of all the positive sciences. However, books about science can never replace scientific observations. These writings are not the observations themselves, but about these observations..... The same is true of the Orthodox understanding of the Bible and the writings of the Fathers. Neither the Bible nor the writings of the Fathers are revelation or the word of God. They are about the revelation and about the word of God.

The writings of scientists are accompanied by a tradition of interpretation, headed by successor scientists, who,

by training and experience, know what their colleagues mean by the language used, and how to repeat the observations described. So it is in the Bible and the writings of the Fathers. Only those who have the same experience of glorification [i.e. deification] as their prophetic, apostolic, and patristic predecessors can understand what the Biblical and Patristic writings are saying about glorification and the spiritual stages leading to it. Those who have reached glorification know how they were guided there, as well as how to guide others, and they are the guarantors of the transmission of this same tradition.

So according to Romanides, Church doctrine maintains continuity from Biblical and Patristic times to the present, ensuring the techniques for attaining deification remain well understood and their transmission is continued through successive generations. Doctrine therefore is restrictive, but restrictive in the sense that the accumulated knowledge of astronomers restricts how one goes about building and operating instruments for successful observation of the stars.

From a non-theist perspective, this is not to say that only one technique works – while certain techniques are tried and true, new ones are always possible. This is the key point about doctrine understood non-theistically: the map is not the territory. The map of doctrine or tradition, drawn and improved by the generations that have gone before, provide us with a (not *the*) route through the territory of spiritual practice, with a pathway to deification. That is, if you want to get there from here, this is a tried and true route.

An Alternative Perspective on Non-Theist Christianity

I have tried to provide a very broad sketch of a possible programme for a different form of non-theist Christianity. One whose foundations have been fashioned through centuries of both intellectual labour and practical experimentation since Late Antiquity. A method of spiritual therapy that celebrates mystery and ritual, but understands these as natural phenomena and activities.

There is an enormous amount of work to be done to re-fashion and re-interpret deification and Orthodoxy into a viable, alternative version of non-theist Christianity. But I believe the effort will be rewarded by the creation of a radical, new approach to human spirituality.

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- 1 I am using this term to refer to a version of Christianity that doesn't involve supernatural entities of any kind.
 - 2 Mantzaridis, G. 1984. *The Deification of Man*, p.7.
 - 3 Archimandrite George. 2001. *The Deification as the Purpose of Man's Life*, p.45.
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The Young Christian Workers' Movement

Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* was the first papal encyclical to address the workaday world of capital and labour. It criticised 'the hard-heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition'. Michael Morton looks at the history of the Young Christian Workers' Movement that resulted from this initiative.

In 1891 Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical letter called *Rerum novarum*, which considered the relationship between capital and labour and their corresponding rights and duties. Previously, the Catholic Church had not had a good nineteenth century. It had surrendered much of the influence it had wielded at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 by refusing to accommodate itself to the political and social changes that took place in a new industrial Europe. The long pontificate of Pope Pius IX (1846-78) was really a protracted rearguard action against modernity. His successor, Leo XIII, realised that even if he could not influence governments he could appeal directly to the good will of Catholic people about the justice of wages, conditions of work and private property. The encyclical was actually the first occasion on which a major church figure had explored this association between capital and labour and represented the beginning of a critique of capitalist individualism by the Church in Europe. Pope Leo criticised 'the hard-heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition'. He was equally unhappy about the 'pleasant dreams' of socialism, which would in reality mean the 'levelling down of all to a like condition of misery and degradation'. *Rerum novarum* looks forward to a society spontaneously organised into charitable, co-operative and trade associations. Only thus, it argues, can social justice be reconciled with individual freedom. For all its subtlety and depth, however, Catholic social philosophy did not fare well in the 20th century as it lost ground to more militant socialist rivals. Yet Leo XIII's reflection on the world of work was to have surprising results thanks to the innovative work of a radical young priest, Fr Joseph Cardijn, who founded the Young Christian Workers' movement.

Cardijn was born in Brussels in 1885, but moved out to Hal, a Flemish borough some sixteen kilometres from Brussels itself. In the 1890s Hal was far from picturesque. The factories opened at four or five in the morning, and the workers had to endure harsh conditions. For example, the use of ether in the manufacture of artificial silk at Tubize nearby left the work force in a state of semi-stupor. Cardijn's own

family were coal merchants and until he was 14 young Joseph helped out by running errands for his father. Then when he finished school, Cardijn left for the diocesan seminary at Malines to study for the priesthood. But on returning home for the holidays he was surprised and mortified to discover that his friends from school now considered him to have joined the enemy. They saw the young seminarist as having taken his place on the side of the capitalists and employers. They had to go into the mines, the factories and the shops to earn a hard living; by contrast, the seminarians lived comparatively easy lives and were given generous holidays. Cardijn never forget this shock of discovery, nor did he easily recover from another when his father died when he was only 21 years old. He had come to realise what it had cost his parents to allow him to enter the seminary. It proved to be an event that affected him deeply. Soon to be ordained, he carried these influences of his early life always: his origins among the working-class, his experience of his first vacation from seminary and an appreciation of his father's sacrifices to send him there.

Cardijn saw Christian faith as having to do with involvement and action in daily life... angered employers who called him a communist.

In 1913, after ordination Cardijn was appointed to Laecken church in Brussels. At once his pastoral style was seen to be very distinctive because of his exposure to the lives and hardships of working people. Like them he saw Christian faith as having to do with involvement and action in daily life. Cardijn had amongst his duties the chaplaincy to a parish girls' youth group - a small and not very active association that largely provided a chaperoned place for boys and girls to meet plus a forum for some



Former YCW President Ricky Davies with Kenya YCW team

modest amateur dramatics. Most of the girls who came worked as seamstresses, and soon Cardijn began to enquire closely into their working conditions. Within twelve months he had started a Women's Christian Workers' League which had over 1000 members. Such a foundation angered the employers who called Cardijn a communist. After the war, in 1919, he started 'Young Trades Unionists' group which was the testing ground for the Review of Life which he developed more fully later on. However, this also brought conflict because Belgium was still in the comparatively early stages of an industrial revolution and feared Trades Unions. What is more, as far as the Church was concerned, social work meant works of charity. These were dependent upon the financial support of employers and the wealthy and naturally the Church did not wish to offend them. Yet Cardijn was adamant that his groups of young workers were not just for putting on Christmas plays, learning to pray, discussing theology and going out socially. They were talking about their experience and their lives. They were taking action to build a Christian society. Sometimes the action meant reforming their own action in life; sometimes they looked and saw that the social structures of the system were wrong. They worked for social change, always challenging to put things right. Employers were angry, and church people afraid.

At that time, the Belgian Catholic Youth Association (BCYA) was run by chaplains and intellectuals. They wanted the Young Trades Unionists to become a part of the BCYA, but Cardijn wanted autonomy. It is something that the YCW strives for still. He did not wish to be affiliated with the bourgeois, middle-class youth who met to provide Christian and spiritual protection for their members against the dangers of the world. So Cardijn's group became the YCW, and was almost immediately suppressed. In reply, Cardijn went to Rome and in a famous incident in the Vatican Palace, he accidentally found his way into the presence of Pope Pius XI to whom he made his case for a young workers' movement. Pius listened to him for some time and then apparently exclaimed that 'this man

speaks to me of the masses'. In any event he gave official approval to the YCW movement, and the date, April 1925, marks the birth of the YCW under the patronage of St Joseph the Worker.

These events still find some echoes in the Church of today. Not just in the attitude of church authorities to the world of work but in the fact that young people with courage and common sense can enable movements like the YCW to happen. For it is always their movement. The chaplain or animator only accompanies and never controls or directs the workers. Eighty years later, the name of the YCW might appear to be an anachronism. At the time, 'Christian' rather than 'Catholic' was radical and tolerant, but now it is often synonymous with fundamentalist, evangelical. The notion of workers and the 'working class' also sounds somewhat dated. Many would declare the working class extinct in the West. However, a more relevant line of inquiry is one that investigates the nature of work itself. Work for us is related to earning money and status. If you ask someone 'what work do you do?', it is a primary, defining question. In fact, to discover someone does no work is an important piece of information about them too. YCW The defines work like this: 'human work is any human activity at all where a person uses their creative mind and their body to take hold of the world around them, to transform it, to use it and make it usable for society'.

Socialism has declined because the system looks so hard to beat, something that has caused many to despair of radical change.

Now that global capitalism has appeared as a dominant ideology, people are receiving the message that they are powerless and cannot even aspire to that. They have become a commodity, less important than goods. The YCW would ask, what factors have caused this situation? We need to look or investigate in order to find out. In his own time, Cardijn developed the method of SEE – JUDGE – ACT, a process that he termed the Review of Life (ROL). It was based on what Cardijn called the three truths: The Truth of Faith, the Truth of Method and the Truth of Reality. These change with the times, so that the Truth of Reality for the early 21st century is very different from that of Flanders around 1900. In our world, industrial production seems on the way out, along with the proletariat here in the West. Socialism has not become superfluous because the system has changed: it is out of favour because the system is all the more intensively what it had been before. Socialism has declined because the system looks so

hard to beat, something that has caused many to despair of radical change. But Cardijn did not believe that people cannot do anything about anything important. He was a near-contemporary of Lenin and the Russian revolutionaries and like them he maintained that there was a need to create a small group of trained 'militants' who would make things happen. He was no determinist waiting on events, and he even used the same colours as the Soviets on the YCW badge – red and gold with a cross and an ear of wheat instead of a hammer and sickle.

Cardijn's Truth of Method has not changed substantially, nor needed to. His group would 'see' - that is to say, study a question and in the context of Christian faith, for daily life is a sacred place and formative action is a response to God. With the facts comes the need for reflection. Cardijn favoured the Synoptic Gospels where the talk of the Kingdom was an idea that appealed to his radical politics and his vision of primary Christianity. The YCW said, in effect, we see, we experience the reality and we can understand and judge it so that we can move into effective action, either individually or as a group.

The use of the ROL shows other characteristics of the YCW group. The group is disciplined, to begin with. It has order, and an elected president who chairs the discussion. (It will also have a treasurer and secretary who notes down action.) The chaplain does not lead but contributes when asked. But he will have met the president before the group session to discuss what needs to be brought up. The agenda for the meeting is simply 'facts of the week', that is things that have happened to the members of the YCW and they are dealt with through the truths of reality, method and faith.

The YCW and the ROL have a noticeable seriousness of purpose. The action that results has some specific characteristics, too. It need to be challenging, confronting in some cases. It also need to be worthwhile, doing something visible which makes a difference. In addition, it is not too difficult (like changing the world, or making poverty history) but is often a step forward that will lead on to more action.

One of the issues was the place of the Catholic Church in the movement and even of Christian faith itself. Yet if it is true to the origins of the vision of Cardijn, the YCW movement will possess these ten characteristics in balance: That it is YOUNG, CHRISTIAN and for the WORKING CLASS. It

SERVES, EDUCATES, TRAINS and REPRESENTS. It is ORGANISED into GROUPS and is a MASS movement.

Fr Joseph Cardijn's world was Catholic, his young people were not mobile and many of them were factory workers. Today, that is not the case for the majority. We live in an age that has witnessed the waning of western Christianity wherein the Church actually seems to be opting for slow decline rather than anything else which might affect the status and control of those in charge. Reforms following Vatican II in 1965 when the church was stripped of its harsher mediaeval doctrines and based on the neighbourhood and the Eucharist now appear largely to have failed. Parishes have tended to become religious social clubs, reverting to the style of Cardijn's Catholic Girls in Laecken in 1913. In one way, the governance of the Church cannot always put forward a credible and attractive picture of the religious life, for it is really quite modest as religious faith. The YCW is a movement that represents the beginning of a kind of non-ecclesial Christian faith. It finds its own starting-point in different individuals and places, it moves forward as way of life and of living. During the 100 years up to the 1980s, the Church invested heavily in buildings - churches, schools, halls and clubs. It produced a sort of fixed defence

which has still to be staffed and maintained, often expensively. The YCW, by contrast, needs very little money to function, it is fluid and can meet anywhere. It is Christianity showing in reality what is only heard as a faint echo in the teaching of Jesus about the coming of the Kingdom.

The nature of the YCW as united but diverse is to be seen in the activity of the movement itself. If YCW were a youth club, you could say that it meets regularly and does certain things and everyone has a good time. If it were a philosophy or a political idea, you could say here is a book or leaflet and if you read it you will discover all about the YCW movement. If it were a prayer group or a study group, you could say that its aims would be self-evident. If it were social action you could say here are the issues, this is how we are confronting them. If it were a charitable organisation then you could measure its success by the work carried out and goals achieved. But YCW is a movement that contains aspects of all these even though it cannot be identified with any one. It is worldwide, its values often endure in people for life.



Joseph Cardijn's tomb at Laecken

Psalm 119

David Lee looks at Psalm 119, a meditation on the human idea of law, which the psalmist sees as an expression of the nature of God, a vision of how the human community ought to be.

In a previous article (sof 70 March 2005, *The Biblical God as a Human Creation*) I discussed the proposition that there are many parts of the Bible that accord with the idea of God as a human creation. Among the examples I offered were the changing image of God in different historical situations, the understanding of dreams as the voice of God, and the Biblical concept of Wisdom. In this article I suggest that the psalmist identifies God with the human idea of law.

Those who are familiar with the psalms from their use in the liturgy will know that Psalm 119 is composed of 22 sections corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the verses of the first section begin with the first letter *aleph*, the second with *beth*, and so on. The commentators describe the psalm as an alphabetic acrostic. It is difficult for those who, like myself, only read it in translation to appreciate the poetic beauty of the original form¹. Some commentators complain about the 'weariness and boredom' of reading the sections of the psalm which contain so many repetitions and such a lack of developed argument². That is to miss the point; the psalm is a meditation on the glory of the law³. The psalmist has the vision of how the human community ought to be. He thinks of this as God's word to him. The psalm itself does not explore the content of law or word, but verses 84-88 would suggest that he has a clear idea of the disorder which results from those who do not heed God's law.

As with other meditations, the psalm's value is in pondering upon a single idea, looking at it from different angles, becoming deeply aware of its subtleties and nuances, and spending time doing this. Consider the following:

I will meditate on thy precepts: and I will give heed unto thy ways. (v 15)

Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: and so shall I meditate on thy wondrous works. (v 27)

I wake before my night-watch cometh: that I may meditate on thy words' (v 148)⁴

To the psalmist God is what he does.

While it is the primary purpose of the psalmist to glorify the law there is a secondary purpose which becomes more and more important as we go on. The psalmist sees the law as an expression of the nature of God. The psalm is a presage of the Scholastic saying that for God essence and attributes are one. In other words to the psalmist God is what he **does**:

Thou art good and thou doest good: O teach me thy statutes. (v.68)

The various terms representing the law are inseparable



from the nature of God. This is not just an academic point, the psalm reflects the intense religious feeling of the psalmist; his feelings are focused upon aspects of the law as upon the Lord himself:

And my delight shall be in thy commandments: which I have loved exceedingly. (v 46)

Mine eyes long sore for thy word: saying 'O when wilt thou comfort me?' (v 82)

I see that all things come to an end: but thy commandment hath no bounds. (v 96)

But thou art nigh at hand O Lord: for all thy commandments are true! (v 151)

Of the various terms, which the psalmist uses to denote the law of God, the most frequently used is that of 'word' or 'words', which appear 38 times in the Revised Psalter translation, as compared with the 25 times that the word 'law' appears.⁵ The psalmist has in his mind a God who communicates with him and to whom he responds:

O remember thy word unto thy servant: wherein thou hast caused me to put my trust. (v 49)

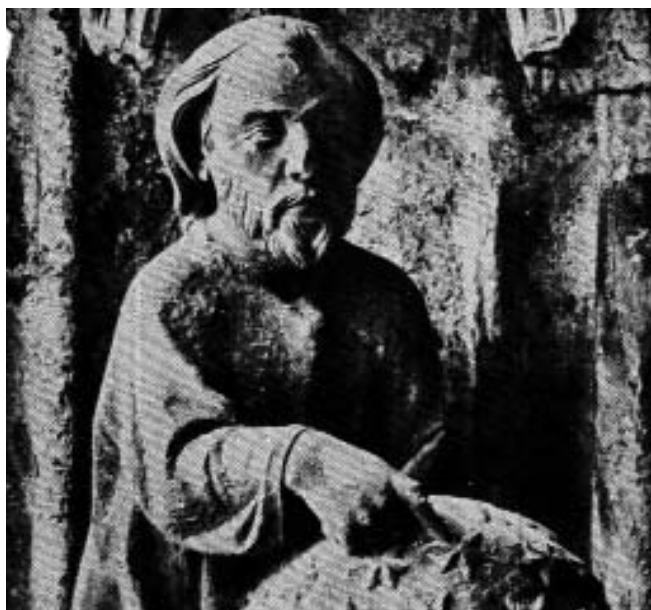
Mine eyes long sore for thy word: saying 'O when wilt thou comfort me?' (v 82)

O how sweet are thy words unto my tongue: yea sweeter than honey unto my mouth. (v 103)

The word communicates the law to the community which, in due time, formalises it into statutes and commandments. An example of this process is the figure of Moses holding the tablets of stone containing the original Ten Commandments. The psalmist delights in these things, but he also sees the challenge they present to the people:

Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein is my delight. (v 35)

Thou hast set at naught all them that depart from thy statutes: for they think only how they may deceive. (v 118)



God creating the stars

The piety of the psalmist brought him into conflict with his community and resulted in suffering on his part. A section of the psalm tells the story:

How many are the days of thy servant: when wilt thou execute judgement on them that persecute me? The arrogant have digged out pits for me: they walk not after thy law.

All thy commandments are true; they persecute me falsely, O be thou my help. (vv 84-86)

Some commentators see in this a foretaste of the complacency of the Pharisees about which Jesus had much to say in his teaching. However there can be no doubt that the psalmist is very much a part of his community; he does not write from an ivory tower, removed from the challenges and difficulties of everyday life.

In the meditation of the psalmist, we may ask how he understands the reality of God. He uses the term 'the Lord' and none other. God is not called Almighty, Heavenly, Glorious, Merciful or any of the other titles we normally associate with a supernaturalist image of God. Of course the psalm does not contain any philosophical argument, we deduce the psalmist's position from an analysis of the text – a devotional and lyrical extended poem. It can be argued that the psalmist was a critical realist. Consider the following:

Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: O give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. (v 73)

This assertion of God as Creator may be understood as the classical position of the critical realist. Apart from this one verse his comprehension of the divine is very much determined by a set of human categories. 'The Lord' is understood as the personification of law, word, statutes, judgments and so on.

My delight shall be in thy statutes: and I will not forget thy word. (v 16)

O teach me true understanding and knowledge: for my trust hath been in thy commandments. (v 66)

The critical realist is one who believes in a transcendent Real – 'there is something out there!' – but sees that it can only be comprehended in the context of and in the language of a particular culture. This is the position of Bishop Richard Holloway:

Critical realism would hold that there is that which we call God, but that it is encountered by humans in ways that are relative to their place in the universe. In other words, for the critical realist, religious experience is an experience of the Real, but it is always mediated in forms that are not necessarily 'real' in the hard empirical sense.⁷

The theological non-realist rejects the position of the critical realist. There is nothing 'out there'. This is an outsideless universe. Nevertheless religious language has its uses, references to God serve to affirm the seriousness of the human condition. This psalm focuses our minds upon the idea that law begins with an inner vision of how the human community ought to be, a vision of order and peace and justice. This vision expresses itself in human society in the form of written laws, commandments, precepts and so on. The application of these things in actual situations gives rise to the challenges and failures of imperfect human beings and their systems.

Law begins with an inner vision of how the human community ought to be, a vision of order and peace and justice.

Nothing can be more important than the continual struggle to apply and improve our laws and rules. Religious language and ideas uphold and strengthen those who are involved in this struggle, remembering all the time that God in this situation is a human creation, and is not absolute and immutable. The difficulty we have with the idea of an objective, absolute God is that those who serve such a God tend to put themselves beyond human challenge and criticism. Psalm 119 does not lead us along that path. To the psalmist the glory of the law is that it has the power to restore or maintain peace and order in an imperfect world, and, it seems, this is one with his vision of God.

- 1 The translation of The Psalms used here is that of the Revised Psalter authorised for use in the Church of England, 1981.
- 2 See *The Psalms A Commentary* by W O E Oesterley.
- 3 See *Liberating the Gospels* by Bishop John Spong, page 113. The author explains that Psalm 119 was originally intended to be used in the vigil of Pentecost in the Jewish liturgy.
- 4 Spong (*ibid*) indicates that this verse shows that the psalm was part of a vigil meditation and that different parts were used at different times.
- 5 Psalm 119 does not use the word wisdom. However the psalms are thought of as one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. In particular, Psalms 120 to 134 are called Psalms of Ascent or Wisdom Psalms. One of the rare uses of the word is in Psalm 105 v 22: 'That he might instruct his princes according to his will: and teach his counsellors wisdom.'. This suggests a rather practical definition of the word which nevertheless comes from God.
- 6 See *The Psalms – A Commentary* by Artur Weiser, pages 740,741.
- 7 See *Doubts and Loves: What is Left of Christianity* Richard Holloway, page 27.

The Context of Survival

The Growth of Common Day means realising that the Earth is our responsibility. Dominic Kirkham urges us to wake up. If we don't look after the Earth, her days and ours will come to an end.

A friend of mine has recently undergone hypnotherapy in order to break a lifelong addiction to cigarettes. This may seem a little extreme but, with intimations of mortality clearly pressing, extreme circumstances called for radical measures: when it gets to doctor's orders in 'the last chance saloon' we are prepared to try anything!

The method behind the therapy is both simple and intriguing, 'Are you sitting comfortably? Then we will regress.' In a series of stages one is taken back through memories and associations, which are remembered then 're-membered', disconnected and restructured. Though these may initially be about smoking habits in fact something deeper is going on; one's life experiences and even sense of identity is being remoulded to fit a more congenial model. The implications of this technique are intriguing for they suggest that behavioural patterns are intimately linked not only to our personal history but the way we see ourselves. To change our behaviour is not just about changing habits; we have to change our self understanding, our view of ourselves.

Rediscovery of respect for the natural world and a newly chastened sense of the vulnerability of the wilderness.

In a world of multiple addictions the applications of this technique are also multiple. From junk food dependency to our petrologic addiction to the instruments of mobility which fuel our global society and life styles, if any of this is to change what is needed is not just resolve but a new sense of identity. Herein lies the problem. How do we opt to be something, which at the moment we are not, when it is not clear what this 'something' is? A life style without smoking: possibly; a life with a totally different style? Well..

This problem is compounded by the sheer pace and scale of life. Pondering on where everyone is rushing to is not a reflection that the average lemming has time for. Anyway, the dazzling power and wealth that present lifestyles can generate is beguiling beyond measure: it was not initially

apparent to King Midas how more gold could possibly be a bad thing. That it *was* only began to cause alarm when the situation became life-threatening.

This can become the case for whole societies, even civilizations, as they embark upon a suicidal agenda of unsustainable economic growth. This seems to be the case now. We have become all too aware that the planet on which we walk is not a theatre of endless dreams but a life support system of limited capabilities. It is one which is about to be switched off. But, in the surreal world in which we now live, it is the patient (us) which seems most insistent on turning it off!

One would have thought some gurglings of discouragement might be in order. Such, one may perhaps classify, is Ronald Wright's exposition on what he calls 'the progress trap', in his recent book, *A Short History of Progress*. His theme is that mankind is so prone to increasing its numbers and levels of unsustainable consumption that it overlooks the limitations of its environment. The result is a spectacular collapse.

As an archaeologist Wright is in a good position to elaborate on the global record of such a predicament. From Sumer to the Maya or Khmer, civilizations have repeatedly fallen into 'the progress trap'. Sir Leonard Woolley, the original excavator of Ur wondered why the capital of a great empire, that once stood in the midst of a vast granary, should now be no more than a desert waste. The answer was, unsustainable environmental destruction in an attempt to provide for overpopulated cities. If, so far, none of these collapses has been final for humanity it is because there has always been somewhere else to move to or try again. Until now. For the first time we now have a global civilization which embraces the planet: there is now nowhere else to run to. We are at the point of falling into 'the (final) progress trap'.

As with giving up smoking, the problem lies in thinking of the alternative, even the impossible – life without a fag! If that's not hard enough, imagining a whole new life style is even harder; as a motoring correspondent recently wrote whilst reviewing the capabilities of new cars, even considering the planetary impact of such vehicles had not even crossed his mind, until a reader wrote to him.

Again, archaeology may be of help. Dramatic changes in human life styles – when humanity embarked upon a hitherto uncharted course – have taken place before, most significantly in Neolithic times. It was through this ‘revolution’ that the first civic communities and intrinsically dynamic societies with burgeoning populations (such as ours) became possible. But what was truly ‘revolutionary’ in this new life style was the mentality that lay behind it. As David Lewis-Williams writes in his new study, *Inside the Neolithic Mind*, the real revolution lay in the transformation of cosmological myths which turned away from the previous passive acceptance of natural phenomena to the construction of a built environment, tamed and artificially controlled. A new life style evolved; the world became our instrumental resource. It is this that has brought us to where we are.

The change that now needs to take place is just as great, and the nature of the transition in that seemingly remote time gives us a clue as to the nature of the remedial action now. Even then the taming of ‘the wild’ had led to its destruction – it was not by accident that in various continents the great faunal species disappeared with the appearance of man. Even then, having driven the last herd of woolly mammoths over a cliff, he seemed incapable of grasping the implications of his actions. The context of our survival must lie not just in the rediscovery (or rather, re-cultivating) of respect for the natural world, but of a newly chastened sense of the vulnerability of the wilderness – from which our life sprang and on which it still depends. Only in the presence of this ‘other’ can human identity be understood and sustained.

The scope of our survival strategy now becomes clearer. The simple steps of regression take us back to the roots of our malaise, deep in the Neolithic. In the context of the process of hypnotherapy, the choices and changes since then provide the pathology of what followed, as surely as adult addiction follows youthful indiscretion. It is only in the remembering of all those previous steps that we understand the genesis of our present behaviour and the points at which it needs to be ‘re-remembered’.

What such a new life style would be is unclear, but there is an overwhelming sense of urgency to focus our minds at least on the mental state which must underlie it. The central challenge seems to be, how can we have less – use less, travel less, do less – without being less. The recognition that there was something radically wrong with our whole mentality was already apparent last century to writers such as Erich Fromm. For him the distinction between ‘having’ and ‘being’ was crucial; there is a need for a systemic change to break the fetishism of unsustainable ‘economic growth’. To his valediction that ‘in the nineteenth century God was dead, in the twentieth century man is dead’ we may well have to add, ‘In the twenty-first century the planet is dead’.



Day by Christopher Truman

Ultimately, the choices must be ours – collectively and singularly. The change can only come about through the groundswell change of ordinary behaviour, through what Hannah Arendt intuitively called ‘the personalisation of politics’. The small issues of our life are the large issues. And here is another point of ‘re-remembering’ the so-called ‘Neolithic Revolution’: that came about by the manipulation of elites who exercised great power (already in 8,000BC Jericho needed a stone tower of immense strength); change now will come about through the challenging of the vested interest of elites by ordinary people.

If this may seem a hopeless situation, paradoxically, hope is no longer an issue here. The surgeon standing by the bedside expressing his pious hope for a better future is irrelevant; what is needed is the skilful action that will bring about a different future. Hope alone is a plea that something might turn up, we know not what. This is an illusion; only our actions will change things for the better. Even when the hypnotherapy is complete there remains the need for resolute action: time now to return to the present and wake up!

Please send your letters to:

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This is the new Letters Editor breaking a promise of a lifetime not to write a letter to the editor. Except I'm not really writing to the editor (that **would** be self-indulgence); I'm writing to you, the readers. Ever since I stopped being a fundamentalist, I've had problems with the written as opposed to the spoken word. Spoken words are obviously only temporary and are relatively easy to back track on. Hopefully they are as true as possible at the time they are spoken. And face to face with a listener there is always a chance of clarification and modification. But record them and they are exposed to a greater risk of being universalised, misappropriated, misunderstood, misrepresented. Worst of all they are incredibly difficult to obliterate. However, maybe, letters to the editor are as near to the spoken word as is possible in an uninhibited network like ours where ideas come thick and fast and need to be shared from the grass roots up. And with lots of them, it would be a bit like having a conversation.

So let's be having you!

Ken Smith
Letters Editor

I recently happened to see *The Da Vinci Code* on the library shelves (said he, excusing himself for reading it!) and was struck by one sentence. The character Langdon says, 'Every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith – acceptance of that which we imagine to be true; that which we cannot prove. Every religion describes God through metaphor, allegory and exaggeration. Metaphors are a way to help our minds process the unprocessable. The problems arise when we begin to believe literally in our own metaphors'.

I felt this a useful sentence and wonder whether others might feel the same.

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Although I am no longer a member of Sea of Faith, I have continued to read the magazine with great interest and usually a lot of satisfaction. Since parting company with the Church several years ago I have periodically felt the absence of any ritual that could be enjoyed without the overtones of theology and

dogmatism so often experienced in traditional ceremonies. Four years ago I created a non-religious funeral for my mother (with her previous consent), and this was very well received by many of the people present. My limited experience of Humanist or other non-theological ceremonies has been quite helpful, and I have been hoping that Sea of Faith would be able to promote or engender similar rituals.

Whilst I appreciate that many members of the Network are still either regular church attenders, or wish to function within a context of Christian language if not belief, I was nevertheless disappointed to read (in the November edition of *sof*) the liturgy *Love's Domain: A Eucharist* by Peter Lumsden. I commend him for his effort but setting aside the obviously awkward continued use of the practice of addressing 'the Lord' directly, I was extremely uneasy about such phrases as 'the ability to overcome evil'; 'the chaos, evil and futility in our lives'; and 'the evil that we and our way of life inflict on the whole world'. Such language strikes me as almost Calvinist in its gloom and negativity. It is true that traditionalists, continue to think of evil, as a positive force not far removed from the historic teachings about Satan and the devil. But I would have thought that we were striving to get away from such ideas, however much we may be able to explain them amongst ourselves as metaphoric or symbolic.

I similarly felt truly uncomfortable with 'fleshpots of certainty'; 'the wasteland of moral relativism'; 'we foreshadow the Messianic banquet'. Such language is almost incomprehensible to all but the most highly educated and seems more likely to alienate rather than include. Whilst recognising that the whole theme of the issue of the magazine was based on the theology of *Kenosis*, I cannot understand how using the word allows us to 'see what we must do'. And the next few sentences seem more like a sermon than a liturgical celebration: 'The global capitalism we have created and which we benefit from, must surrender its power to the poor... We must cease consuming many times our fair share of the world's resources.' Oh, Please!!! This is not a Eucharist. It is a *political* statement.

Finally in the last paragraph of Dr Knight's all too dense article on *Kenosis* and the work of Gianni Vattimo, he quotes with approval Vattimo's suggestion that 'We cannot NOT call ourselves Christians ... our only chance of human survival rests in the Christian commandment of charity.' Why?? There is nothing wrong with 'charity' (translated as 'love' would have been better), but why do we need to identify charity, or whatever is by association good, with Christianity alone?

Nicholas Smith.
nick@365holidaysinprovence.com

Bring to this house

Welcome Hymn

Bring to this house all that you do
Leave nothing at the door
For what you leave will follow you
For richer or for poor
Bring all that's touched by sun and rain
Your body warm and bright
Bring all your pleasure, bring your pain
Your passion and your plight

Bring all the wonder of your ways
The laughter you have shared
The strength and weakness of your days
Bring any tears unshed
Tell out the story of your life
A gospel yet untold
If it were written it would prove
A shining book of gold

Bring all that nourishes the night
Where nothing's what it seems
The world beyond all speech or sight
Imagined in your dreams
The holy darkness that you cast
Your shadow rich in play
Bring all your richness unsurpassed
To weave into the Way

Bring here the piece of ground you stand
The earth your feet have trod
Bring all you've found in any land
Of many names for God
Here may we find a place for each
The many and the one
And let the walls of this house reach
To welcome everyone

Gilo

Gilo is a member of SoF who lives and works at the Othona Community in Dorset. If you'd like details of their programme, please visit their website www.othona-bb.org.uk

Thanksgiving for Chris and Malcolm

Chris is a Vicar and Malcolm, recently retired from university work, is a deeply-involved lay member of the Church, and a member of St Tom's. They have lived faithfully together for a quarter of a century and their relationship is a focus of much good for those they meet.

They registered their civil partnership in December, on the first day possible, and went straight from the registry office to St Thomas the Martyr Church to give thanks. Bishop Alan Smithson led the thanksgiving, Bishop David Jenkins preached, and the home team celebrated the Eucharist.

Why did we do it? First to give thanks for a relationship. That was primary. But also because at St Tom's we believe this accords with Jesus' teaching and life-style. The real power of Christian living lies, we feel, not in creeds or doctrines, but in the commending of love as practical politics in the world. Affirming a loving relationship is absolutely central to this.

*Kit Widdows, Master of St Thomas
the Martyr Church, Newcastle
Kit Widdows is a member of SoF Steering Committee*

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Francis McDonagh reviews

Gays and the Future of Anglicanism

edited by Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker

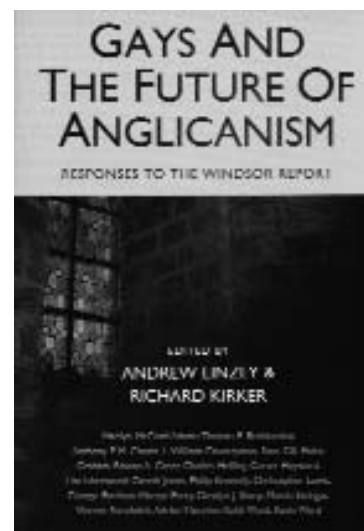
O Books (Ropley). 2005. £17.99. 440 pages. Pbk. ISBN: 190504738X.

A non-Anglican approaches this book with a reluctance to intrude on private grief, but the worry is soon dispelled. These Anglicans are not so much grieving as angry. The nearest the collection comes to private grief is in the various detailed discussions of the 'Windsor Report', the report of the commission set up in 2003 by the Archbishop of Canterbury to make proposals for a *modus vivendi* for the Anglican Communion after the fierce disagreements over the election and consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson by the Episcopal Church of the USA and the authorisation by a diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada of a rite of blessing for same-sex unions.

In general the contributors have a low opinion of 'Windsor'. Marilyn McCord Adams describes how the Windsor Report focuses on giving the fuzzy Anglican communion 'sharper definition', through 'instruments of union' (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting) (p.70). McCord Adams accuses Windsor of '[promoting] ethics to creedal (sic) status', and trying to make the Anglican Communion 'a bulwark against cultural change'.

Charles Helfing describes Windsor's proposals as 'Romanizing remedies'. An interesting part of Helfing's argument is that historically doctrinal definitions followed practice. From this he argues that, 'for many of the faithful', the experience of the ministry of women priests 'settles the question whether a woman can be a priest' (p.86), and so proposes that the test for the validity of the ministry of a non-celibate gay bishop should be a visit to New Hampshire – not a course likely to appeal to Archbishop Akinola.

The relation between fact and doctrine or supposed revelation is, of course the issue underlying the debate in the book, even if formally it is concerned with the narrower issue of authority in Anglicanism. The two are brought together in the essay by Keith Ward, who makes a comparison between the debate in the early Church on whether Christians were required to keep the Jewish law, including the Sabbath, and the current debate on the status of same-sex relationships. Ward concludes that the Christian position should be that when these relationships reflect 'loyalty and total commitment' and their sexual practice expresses and is subordinated to 'mutual personal love', they are acceptable and worthy of blessing by the Church (p.26). He admits that to develop this view from the Bible he must point to 'new knowledge of human gender and sexuality'.



reviews

Part IV of the book is entitled 'Justice for Gays', and this includes one of the most readable essays in the book, 'God's Good News for Gays', by Philip Kennedy, a Roman Catholic. Kennedy concentrates his fire on those who persist in a 'pre-modern' theology, as opposed to a 'modern' or 'liberal' theology (usefully defined on p.306). Kennedy has a brisk way with fundamentalism: 'The Bible's teaching that men who relate sexually with each other ought to be put to death is universally ignored by Christians and Jews today. It does not come from God. Its author was a human being entirely unknown to anyone at present' (p. 309).

Kennedy's thesis is simple: 'Jesus, viewed as God's Good News for and among suffering human beings, has never been remembered as a denouncer of male-male, or female-female sexual couplings... Difficulties for gay people today do not come from God or Jesus, but from human beings who are repelled by homosexuality for a host of reasons' (p.301).

Kennedy's chapter makes plain that the issue underlying this debate, of the sort of authority that can be claimed for texts composed in a remote historical age with a totally different culture from ours, is not one for Anglicans alone. It has not exploded in the Roman Catholic Church (so far) because 'over the past quarter century Roman Catholics were governed by an autocratic papacy deaf to the findings of modern theology and biblical research'. On the specific question of gay clergy, the Vatican document released in November 2005 attempting to ban gays from ordination may be a sign that this particular *pax romana* may not last much longer.

Francis McDonagh works on Latin America for the Catholic development agency CAFOD. He has written on Latin America for *The Tablet* and the *National Catholic Reporter*, and is preparing a collection of Helder Câmara's writings to be published by Orbis Books, New York. He is a member of the Roman Catholic Caucus of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement.

False Promise

Dominic Kirkham reviews

The Story of God: A personal journey into the world of science and religion

by Robert Winston

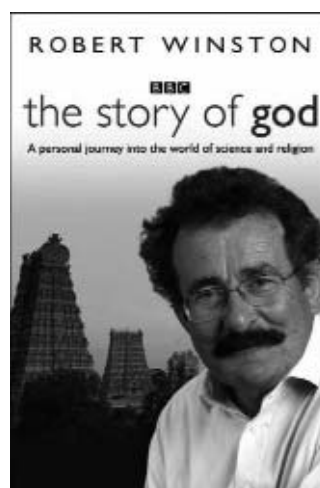
Bantam Press/BBC (London). 2005. 354 pages. Hbk. £18.99
ISBN 0593054938

Genial Robert Winston always makes a good presentation. Having documented everything from *Walking with Cavemen* to *Making Babies* (some would say 'playing God') it's perhaps not surprising that he should now have a shot at the ultimate subject – *The Story of God*. The excuse for another such study is that it purports to be 'a ground-breaking' examination of the relationship between science and religion. However, after some initial speculation on 'Religion's Roots' the science in Winston's book becomes fitful and the 'story of God' gets entangled in the thickets of religious fractiousness. It all becomes little more than an impressionistic history of what he calls 'The Divine Idea'.

Winston himself is happy to offer his credentials as a practising Orthodox Jew, so no prizes for guessing what the chapter on 'The World's Greatest Book' is about! For Winston the core of 'the story of God' is 'revelation'; thanks to Abraham we can now really get to grips with our subject. But one soon becomes incredulous: it's as if two centuries of biblical critical studies had never happened, nor the modern revolution in biblical archaeology. The biblical text is taken at face value as a historical record, without ever seeking to question its fabrication. For example, long after the putative time of Moses, recently excavated shards from Kuntillet in Sinai (c. 800BC) show a tribal deity with consort and child called Yahweh. Obviously the central figure of Winston's narrative has not yet (as he thinks) become the supreme universal being of monotheism!

The Jewish term for the bible is Tenak. That this has connotations of a tank is not so incongruous as it might first seem. A tank – such as we see regularly in action on the West Bank – symbolises a massive, if somewhat cumbersome, means of full frontal aggression. And this is exactly what the bible has always been – a tool in the fight for survival, a means of blasting away critical opposition, like a panzer. Since the outset of its construction in post-exilic Palestine (as such diverse biblical scholars as Thomas Thompson and Israel Finkelstein note) its genesis lay in the political crisis of identity that arose in the period of Seleucid domination, culminating in the revolt of the Maccabees. As in Israel today, biblical fundamentalism, with its belief in an exclusive monotheism, is a powerful political tool.

Though Winston elaborates on 'The Divine Idea' what is missing is an adequate analysis of how cultural change contributes to a change of consciousness. As Don



reviews

Cupitt (who does not merit a mention, nor SoF) noted in *After God* the idea of an individual God is inextricably linked with rise of 'a more individuated human selfhood'. In acting as the mirror by which we come to look at ourselves; god and human subjectivity were born together, with the individual locked in constant struggle with his God: from the questioning of Abraham and struggle of Isaac to the inner deliberations of George Bush to invade Iraq, in the end the outcome is always the same – God speaks through the incontrovertible expression of, what Freud would call, the Super Ego.

What is surprising in Winston's treatment of 'The Divine Idea' is his complete disregard of the crucial significance of Greek philosophical monism, culminating in Platonism. The great thinkers of the Ionian Enlightenment – Thales, Parmenides, Pythagoras – radically transformed our understanding of the world by positing that the universe was exactly that, a universe – cohesive with rationally consistent laws. This undermined belief in the shenanigans of mercurial gods, who retained their usefulness purely at a ritual and civic level, rather like monotheism today.

It is the influence of this philosophical monism which paved the way for religious monotheism. From a wider perspective, the emergence of a new consciousness in the late Bronze Age cultures of Eur-Asia – closely linked to the appearance of urban living and literary records – is the key to emergence of a radically new mode of monotheistic belief: all the world's major religions have their roots here, in what has been called (by Karl Jaspers) the Axial Age. This story was well narrated by Lloyd Geering in *Tomorrow's God* but is ignored by Winston, who seems oblivious to the fact that there's more to monotheism than Moses!

If none of this is mentioned one soon realises that an awful lot else is not mentioned in this book. Nothing about Zen or Taoism, Jainism or Sikhism, Baha'i or (except briefly) Buddhism and pre-Columbian America. In fact Winston's God is very much a WOG – a westernised oriental gentleman.

New Scientist

Cicely Herbert recommends the *New Scientist* magazine as a useful tool for scientific literacy..



reviews

For those people, like myself, whose science education ended with a hard-won pass in O level biology, the weekly publication *New Scientist* is an excellent guide to current ideas and discoveries made by the scientific world. It is an entertaining and informative read, the language it uses being, usually, simple enough to enable an inexperienced reader to keep in touch with up-to-the-moment experiments, discoveries and ideas.

The magazine is adept at uncovering quirky pieces of information – news of the manufacture of an everlasting sandwich caused something of a stir a couple of years ago. A brief glance through recent editions will reveal that, as occasionally reported in the *New Scientist*, the world is a delightful place inhabited by strange creatures – the discovery of ‘singing mice’ comes to mind. When presented with female pheromones these peaceful rodents woo each other with songs ‘nearly as complex as those of birds,’ with vocalisations made at ultra-sonic frequencies. The report on this phenomenon (5/11/05) is accompanied by a photograph which portrays a real mouse as appealingly as those pictured in Beatrix Potter’s books.

The world of technology is explored by Duncan Graham Rowe in ‘Even A Chatbot Can Turn Nasty’ (15/10/05) which reports that the Chatbot (a small humanoid robot made of lego) will become aggressive when sexually propositioned and that humans are willing to ‘continue abusing bots long after they would have stopped being rude to a person.’ The conclusion is that human beings find it necessary to stress their superiority even over ‘a lowly machine.’

A study in Israel reported in N.S. (22/1/05) has revealed that ultra orthodox Jewish pedestrians in one city in Israel were found to be three times more likely than average to jay walk or to launch themselves across a busy road without looking out for traffic. Research on the subject concludes that religious believers may take extra risks because ‘they are more fatalistic, and have less fear of death.’

In the same issue of *New Scientist*, there is an interesting report by Fred Pierce entitled ‘Return to Eden’ which describes how lands ravaged by years of war can be restored to fertility by forward planning and the safe storage of vital seeds and plants. In Cambodia many unique varieties of plants have been lost forever and in Afghanistan, the ‘genetic heartland

of a number of globally important plants, decades of rule by warlords, the Russian military and the Taliban have left most of the land a scientific black hole.’ But thanks to the work of dedicated scientists and conservationists many varieties of irreplaceable seeds and plants are safely stored away for future planting, so that once productive lands can be restored to their former fertility.

On a lighter note, the *New Scientist* reports on a suggestion by Karen Polinger Foster of Yale University that the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon may in fact have been a sunken garden in Nineveh made by the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib in about 700bc. Ancient Egyptians favoured sunken gardens to ‘create a cool, damp micro-climate which later became connected with the idea of kingly power’ at a time when ‘carpets were designed to resemble gardens, while garden building had features resembling carpets.’ This suggests that the hanging gardens were in fact ‘a spectacular sunken carpet of flowers that appeared to be suspended in mid-air when viewed from above.’ (N.S. 22/01/05)

This information would have been useful to me when, as a student teacher in the 1950s, I was faced with a forty minute lesson in which to explore the subject of ‘The Hanging Gardens’ with a group of truculent 15 year olds at a technical school in Chislehurst, Kent.

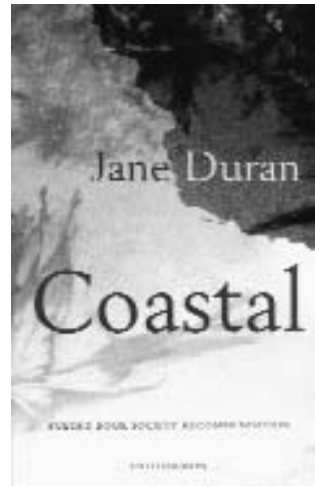
Recent editions of *New Scientist* have addressed the rise of fundamentalist religious beliefs with particular reference to the debate on Darwinism and an opposing view of Intelligent Design. Apparently nearly half of Americans questioned in a recent poll not only ‘do not believe in evolution by natural selection, but do not believe in evolution at all’ and that ‘many who do accept the fact of evolution, cannot however, on religious grounds, accept the operation of blind chance and the absence of divine purpose implicit in natural selection.’ The implication of this widespread belief in the USA is alarming. It means, in effect, that warnings of the progress of global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer can be dismissed, and the pursuit of free market economies can continue in the belief that God will take care of us.

Myra Schneider reviews

Coastal

by Jane Duran

Enitharmon (London) 2005. £8.95.



reviews

The connections between her past and present life are at the heart of this new collection by Jane Duran. The poems, with their tremendous sense of closeness to the people and places in her life, have a deep emotional charge which is often carried by an apparently simple image or detail. She develops themes from her first collection, *Breathe Now, Breathe* and takes further the controlled, understated writing of the second, *Silences from the Spanish Civil War*.

The book's first section focuses on memories of her early life and her mother's last years. It begins with the title poem which opens: 'I love your old age, / days when you repeat stories...' These stories take Duran back to her childhood in the USA:

You can still go there and catch hold –
those silver birches, that river.
You want to have all of it or become it.' ('The Past')

She brings alive the warmth and safety of burying her face in her mother's coat as they walk past an icy building, the 'pewter magnifying glass on the dresser / magnifying each hour', the hairpins which won't stay in the 'heavy grey' of her grandmother's hair, the whippoorwill which gained an extraordinary hold over her imagination. Location and the memory of seemingly small incidents and details set off wider reference to America's past: scenes painted by Edward Hopper, the prehistoric past which is conjured up by a remembered photograph in the National Geographic.

In the moving poem, 'Dementia', the poet shows how she and her mother support each other by drawing on the 'forests' in their imaginations and also how she gives her mother a context by filling in 'the spaces / abandoned now by her memory / so the day shines and she is still in it.' A sense of completion underlies this poem and completion in different forms is a theme central to the book. Its first section is also in part an elegy for Duran's parents whom she refers to in a haunting image:

I miss you as if you were fiction
and the ink still wet
where we crossed paths – '

The 'Zagharit' sequence which forms the second section, begins with the adoption of Ramy in Algeria where Duran's husband grew up and follows through the first years of the child's life. The opening poem, 'The Mat', sets out the situation in which Ramy starts his life: the heat in Algeria and the explosions which could be

heard in the children's home where the babies 'cried every day / each in his own abandonment.' The details build up to the emotional weight of the last line: 'Together we began our search for quiet.'

A difficult journey is delineated, not only the problems of adopting a child in a disturbed country but the poet's own journey through childlessness. In 'Courtyard' she writes about the sadness of this condition, her longing to be 'helpful' and 'included'. She traces too the way she and the child grow together. In 'Lullaby' she interrupts her singing to listen 'to his breathing / in this deep country we live in together.' Her closer relationship with Algeria, its troubles, the people she knows there is an important thread running through these poems which include childhood memories of her husband's and list the relatives he lost in war. The lullabies which the poet sings to the baby are ones she learned from her father 'that came down / through Spanish time'. The reference is one of several peepholes in this section to her past and they balance the peepholes from the past to the present that appear in the earlier section. The river imagery of 'Confluence' underlines the bringing together of different times in Duran's life and the sense of fulfilment arising from a new start.

There are poignant poems both sections of the book which focus on women, not only the poet and her mother but 'women / who give birth in secret', 'women who let their hair go uncombed' and in the final poem, 'Zagharit' it is the cry of the women during a ceremony for the child which carries the keynote of this compelling book:

...we all stand at the top of the stairs
and the women begin to cry
that piercing, throbbing continuous cry
that is the transformation of pain,
or the creation of pain
to make room for joy,
and I take you by the hand
and the women follow you downstairs
into the bright company'.

A Human Liturgy

I have been thinking about some of the Advent liturgical texts and the first thing that struck me was that the liturgy is profoundly social. It says 'we', not 'I'. 'Stir up your power, *we pray*, Lord, and come...' The liturgy prepares to celebrate the birth of Christ in the yearly liturgical cycle, an event that has already happened. But the salvation/liberation promised and initiated by this incarnation has not yet been fulfilled and, as well as commemorating the birthday, the liturgical texts look forward with longing to a future 'reign' of justice and peace. Salvation is seen as forgiveness of personal shortcomings but above all as a *social transformation*: 'Heavens, be glad, and Earth rejoice, mountains sing praise, because our Lord is coming. He will have pity on his poor. In his days justice will rise and an abundance of peace.' 'And there will be peace in our land when he comes. He will speak peace to the nations...'

Then I noticed that, though this Advent liturgy speaks of a virgin birth, it is profoundly *sexual* with its constantly repeated *rorate caeli* refrain of: 'Skies, drop down dew, and clouds, rain down the just one. Earth, open and sprout a saviour.' This joyful sexuality and sensuality express a strong confidence in Earth's own creative and regenerative powers. 'Mountains of Israel, spread out your branches, blossom and bear fruit. The day of the Lord's coming is near.' 'Mountains, break forth in joy and hills in justice, because the Lord, the light of the world, is coming in power.'

The liturgy follows the seasonal cycle of the temperate/Mediterranean Northern hemisphere. Advent comes in Winter and it is not by chance that the great 'O' antiphon for the winter solstice, December 21st, is a prayer to the sun: 'O Rising One (Daystar), splendour of eternal light and sun of justice: come and give light to us sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.' Justice is seen in terms of bringing to light. Although no stranger to cruel punishments herself, when the Catholic Church prays in her liturgy for prisoners, she prays for them to *get out*: 'O key of David..., come and release from prison the captive sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.'

Recently, I visited the Treasures of Ancient Persia exhibition in the British Museum and afterwards I sat in the now open-access round Reading Room and read up something about the Persian religion of Zoroaster. Zoroaster believed in a supreme Wise Lord called Ahura Mazda (Wisdom personified), who was surrounded by 'beneficent immortals' (*amesha spentas*) characterising abstract qualities such as Justice, Truth, Devotion. Abstract qualities became Beings in their own right. In the first of the Advent 'O' antiphons, Christ is invoked as Wisdom and begged to come. I thought that if we in SoF do not believe that abstract qualities exist as Beings 'out there' but regard them as human ideals, that we can try to realise, we can still summon them, *as such*. I have had builders in my house and they left a terrible mess for me to clear up. Every morning when I got up, I had my tea and then summoned my energies: 'Come on, Dinah, up!' I was talking to myself but, oddly enough, it did help and the place was ready for Christmas.

Advent

O Wisdom
proceeding from the mouth of the most high,
not most high elsewhere,
not supernatural,
but most high in us.

Earth has evolved unconsciously –
not woven or designed by any god –
her own life web
with its beautiful, terrible
endurance, bliss and pain.
To know it intimately,
watch, participate,
heart-ponder, undergo,
those are wisdom's depths,
our common treasury.

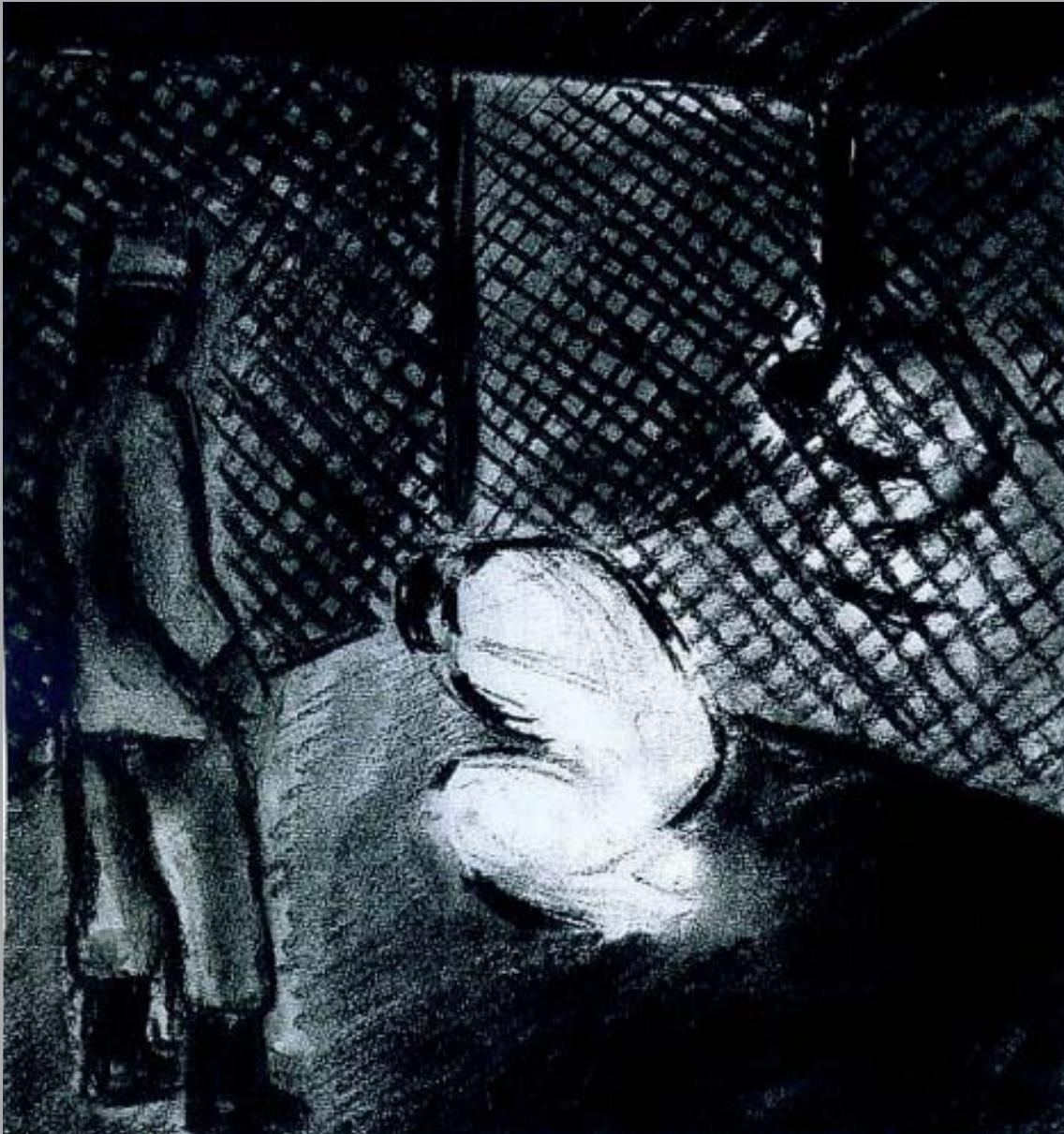
O Wisdom reaching from end to end
to look after everything strongly and sweetly,
come and teach us carefulness.
No imaginary heavenly father
since he's been put down,
we inherit the Earth to mind or lose;
if she belongs to us, we no less belong to her.

Earth is our matter,
we her humanity in the making.
We can speak for her,
become her consciousness.
Those are wisdom's heights
but none can make it there
unless, earthwise,
love is the meaning.

Skies, drop down dew,
and clouds, rain down the just one.
Earth, open and sprout a saviour.
O Wisdom, come,
making love not war.

O come and set us free.
Do not delay.
O come and release from prison the captive
sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.
At this winter solstice, O Rising One,
splendour of eternal light and sun of justice,
come and give light to those sitting in darkness
and the shadow of death.

O desired by the nations,
cornerstone that makes both one,
come and save humanity formed from earth.
O Emmanuel, come and save us,
in justice and peace
look after everything strongly and sweetly,
God nowhere else.
O Wisdom, come,
God with us.



Sun of Justice,
come and release from prison
the captive sitting in darkness
and the shadow of death.