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Conference Issue

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Photo of a Women's Community Centre in Teheran taken by Emily Johns on a recent tour of Iran with the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Back Cover Image

Zapatista elders on their march from the Lacandon Jungle to the capital, Mexico City, in 2001.

sfia is the magazine of
the Sea of Faith Network (UK)

which explores and promotes religious faith as a human creation.

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

sfia is against fundamentalism and for humanity with its questing imagination and enabling dreams.

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

Together and Other

This is the annual Conference Issue of *Sofia* and SoF's conference this year was on the theme of the Other.

The magazine contains the three talks of the main speakers, with apologies to the authors when they have had to be abridged. Still on the theme of the Other, we have reviews of two books, one about disabled people by SoF local group convenor for Scotland, Graham Monteith, and one a collection of poems by Peter Campbell, many of which are on the theme of mental illness.

Of the three main speakers, Don Cupitt's talk on *Learning to Live without Identity* put a strong case against 'localism' for a 'globalist outlook [that] wants to see a single set of universal laws of reason, laws of nature and moral principles prevailing throughout the whole world.' Embracing the whole of humanity, Don Cupitt's globalist outlook echoes the sheer exhilaration of Paul's christology: 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.' (1Cor. 12:13). 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Gal. 3:28). We are 'one body because we all share the same loaf' (1Cor. 10:17). In this 'glorious freedom' (Rom. 8:21; cf. Gal. 5:1) 'everything is yours' (1 Cor. 3:22). Or as Don Cupitt puts it: 'We can now be anything and everything.' And: 'A great tradition eventually comes to belong to all humankind.'

He also puts a strong case against a localism that expresses itself as violent extreme nationalism, citing, among others, the example of Israel: 'The Return to Israel fulfils Judaism – and then eclipses it, as all the previous old religious values of Judaism disappear into militant nationalist politics.'

Universal human rights and well-being are a noble ideal and nationalism can lower the spirits even on less violent occasions. My heart always sinks a little when I visit the beautiful Kenwood House on Hampstead Heath and I see a notice saying 'English Heritage'. Surely as public property, Kenwood House belongs first to Londoners (as Don Cupitt points out, a city of over 200 languages) and then to everybody. In fact, Londoners are very proud of the diversity of their city and warmed to the Mayor's campaign after the 7/7 bombings: 'Seven million Londoners. One London.' Perhaps that is why, despite the fact that

any great metropolis can also be a 'city of dreadful night', visions of an endtime just society have often been portrayed (in *Revelation* and elsewhere) as a *city* (New Jerusalem, perhaps), or a *garden city*.

Other the other hand, I was greatly cheered up when I visited the ancient Mayan site of Palenque in Mexico and saw a notice saying '*Patrimonio de l'Humanidad*': 'Heritage of Humanity'. The standard translation is 'World Heritage Site', which completely dehumanises the idea and is a small illustration of what can be lost in translation.

During the English Revolution of 1649, the Digger Gerrard Winstanley wrote: 'In the beginning of time the Great Creator Reason made the Earth to be a Common Treasury.' But then he goes on to say: 'But not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of Mankind should rule over another.' A Common Treasury in which 'everything is everybody's' is an inspiring ideal: 'When the Earth becomes a Common Treasury again ... then this enmity in all Lands will cease, for none shall dare seek a dominion over others, neither shall any dare to kill another, nor desire more of the Earth than another.' But this is not the case at the moment. 'The truth is, experience shows us that in this work of Community in the Earth and the fruits of the Earth is seen plainly a pitched battle between the Lamb and the Dragon.' Or, speaking as a Muslim, as the SoF Conference's first speaker, Attaullah Siddiqui, put it in answer to a questioner: 'The fact is, you are killing us.'

Today many of the indigenous Mayan descendants of the great civilisation at Palenque are Zapatistas and one of their famous watchwords is 'for a world with room for many worlds.' They do want one world (they speak Spanish as well as their native Tojolobal, Tzotzil and Tzeltal) but in it they want people to be free to live in their own way, for as their leader Marcos put it (who, incidentally, posts his communiqués on the internet):

This process of total globalisation (economic, political and cultural) does not mean the inclusion of different societies incorporating their

particularities. On the contrary, it implies the imposition of one single way of thinking: that of financial capital. In this war of conquest everything and all of us are subjected to the criterion of the market – anything that opposes it or presents an obstacle will be eliminated. It implies the destruction of humanity as a sociocultural collective and reconstructs it as a market place.

Until we have globalisation with a just society, the dominant culture will always need criticising from below. In agricultural terms it is dangerous to have a monocrop and eliminate all the other strains, because if the monocrop strain becomes diseased, you risk disaster. The excluded Other needs to defend itself and struggle for a place in the world, not counter-domination but, to use a word stressed by Ataulloh Siddiqui: participation. Any excluded group, including women, is not usually just ‘granted’ rights: they have to fight for them.

A second reason not to try to eliminate the Other is the poetry of Earth. The Nahuatl word for poetry is *in xóchitl in cuícatl*: ‘flower and song’. As the Maya prophet Chilam Balam de Chumayel said chillingly of the conquistadors: ‘They came to make our flowers wither, so that only their flower might live.’ Or as Blake castigated: ‘Planting thy Family alone / destroying all the world beside’. Just as Earth has so many different flowers and birds and animals, it is delightful that it has such an abundance and diversity of cultures and about 6000 languages are spoken on it, most with their own poetries and songs. Each of these has a slightly different ‘take’ on the world and although we can try to translate, often ‘poetry is what is lost in translation’. Many of these cultures and languages are rapidly disappearing and the Earth will be the poorer for it.

In the phrases quoted from Paul’s Letters above, ‘neither slave nor free, neither male nor female’ he is talking about equality ‘in one body, in Christ Jesus’. Fortunately, slavery is supposed to have been abolished since Paul’s time. Of course, women want equal rights in the body politic, as do different groups, ‘Jews and Greeks’. On the other hand do we really want a whole world with ‘neither male nor female’? Doesn’t it add to the spice and pleasure of life to have both men and women (as well as the variety of children generated by sexual reproduction)? And doesn’t the abundance, particularity and diversity of human life, languages and cultures on Earth add greatly to its richness?

The problem remains: is it possible to have **both** the positive aspects of globalisation, in which ‘everything is everybody’s’, that Don Cupitt argues for so powerfully, **and** keep the vital positive contributions of the Other, both as offering a critique of the dominant culture and for its sheer wealth of life? And stop killing each other?

As Chaucer put it at the beginning of *The Parliament of Fowls*: ‘The life so short, the craft so long to lerne.’ At the end of this poem, all the different birds fly away with their mates in a jubilant chorus:

And when this work all brought was to an ende,
To every fowl Nature gave his make
By even accord, and on their way they wende,
And Lord, the blisse and joye that they make!

Poem for Innocent Victims of War

You did not die for me
Or love or desperation.
No-one chipped your names
On plaques on peaceful blocks of stone.
You are just the useless dead
Who mock our daily sin of passion,
Climb through our heads in cold, slow silence.

When you were people
We could have loved you,
Found out your names
And brought you presents.
We could have walked around with your response.

Or even if you chose to die
We might have understood your longing
And written down your utmost fear.

Now, though, you have got beyond our feelings,
And we can never almost follow
To learn your last shared and perfect secret

A.C. Jacobs

A.C. Jacobs, who described himself as a Glaswegian Jew, was a poet and translator from Hebrew. As an adult he lived for many years in London and died in Madrid in 1994. The above poem is taken from his *Collected Poems and Selected Translations* (Hearing Eye/Menard Press, London 1996.). Copyright Menard Press on behalf of the estate of A.C. Jacobs.

Learning to Live without ‘Identity’

‘Today, more than ever, we need a truly *world* religion; a religion that is free from the impulse to conquer and convert others,’ says Don Cupitt in this talk given to the SoF annual Conference at Leicester.

In our tradition we have for many centuries tended to alternate between two styles of thinking that I shall call *globalism* and *localism*. The globalist outlook wants to see a single set of universal laws of reason, laws of nature, and moral principles prevailing throughout the whole world. But in reaction against it, localist thinking emphasises local differences, and tells us to identify with our own cultural tradition – our own distinctive vision of the world, our faith and customs. Above all, we should seek out and cling to everything that *differentiates* us from the rest of humanity, and binds us together. *Difference* is more important and valuable than *sameness*.

The contrast I am describing is familiar in the Hebrew Bible. The globalist or universalist strain, found in some of the Latter Prophets and the Writings, presents a religious vision that reaches out to the whole of humanity, whereas the localist strain concentrates exclusively upon the election by God of the people of Israel, their special task and destiny. At its most globalist, the Hebrew Bible speaks of Adam, and is a book for all humanity. At its most localist the Hebrew Bible is extremely ethnocentric, laying down all the ritual observances by which the Jews insist upon their difference from all other peoples, and saying to them that your own people’s special relation to your God is the fundamental fact about you which must rule your whole life. For you, Jewishness comes first in every way, and humanity in general comes a rather poor second.

People began to get militant and assertive about their own distinctive religious heritage.

In the more recent Western tradition, the great triumph of Isaac Newton’s physics made globalism prevail across the Western world for over a century. Newton had proved that a universal mathematical physics was possible. He had shown that all local motion everywhere in the Universe is governed by a small set of simple and clear mathematical rules. Nature was an elegant and predictable machine, the same everywhere, and it seemed that the whole scheme of things within which we human beings live was well-designed and good. There were universal

laws of Reason and of Nature, and it seemed obvious that our human codes of law and morals should follow the same pattern and be the same everywhere. People began to speak about international law, and to draw up declarations of universal ‘Rights of Man’.

Globalism peaked, one might say, in the language of the American and French Revolutions, and in the work of the Jewish scholar Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1788), in whose day some leading Jews even contemplated giving up their separate Jewish identity and becoming completely assimilated into liberal Protestant Christianity. That is something we could hardly imagine today, for of course during the nineteenth century there was a sharp localist reaction in the rise of messianic nationalism, not only amongst the Jews themselves, but in many countries. Your nation had its own distinctive language, history, culture and art-tradition, and you must be prepared to sacrifice your life for the sake of its honour, its independence and its sovereignty. In fact, nationalism and the cult of the national spirit became an immensely powerful secular religion. Ethnocentrism was a sacred duty.

Extreme nationalism divides the whole world up into competing nations, each of which thinks only of its own interest. In time, it provokes a reaction, as internationally-minded people try to check national egoism and develop international laws, conventions and institutions. And that is roughly where we are today.

This political history has been reflected in the history of religions. The scholars of the Enlightenment were the first to construct a list of major world religions, each with its own great territory, its language, its culture, its history, its doctrines and rituals. Thus, as the modern nation-state was being invented, so the modern conception of a religion as a kind of spiritual nation was also being invented. People found themselves committed by birth to sacred territories: to Christendom, or Islam, or Hindustan, or the Buddhist world, or to what was usually called ‘fetishism’ or ‘animism’. Language, culture, religion, homeland – these things were all part of your birthright.

This was a fateful development, because in due course it made people around the world aware of their own distinctive religion as their own *heritage*. One had a duty to know about it, and take a pride in it, so that as in politics the concept of ‘my nation’ was the seedbed of militant nationalism, so people began

to get militant and assertive about their own distinctive religious heritage. It's not something you question or criticise: it is something you fight for. So Judaism begat 'Sionism', Islam begat 'Islamism', Hinduism begat militant BJP-Hindu nationalism, and even Buddhist monks took to the streets. It was the West that had invented the concept of a religion as a great cultural bloc that was your heritage, and through which you *identified* yourself, and it was the West that invented the transformation of objectified religion into aggressively militant ethno-nationalist ideology. So the early-twentieth-century world of warring nation-states gave way in due course to the late-twentieth-century world of warring religions, often fighting for sovereignty over territory.

It's worse than that. As during the twentieth century there was an enormous expansion of world population from one to six billions, technological advances, political upheavals and cheap mass travel all combined to encourage very large-scale population movements. These movements are transforming every large country – and especially every large Western country – from a nation into an empire. A nation is a more-or-less ethnically and religiously homogeneous group of people, who feel they are all of one blood, and are indeed all interconnected by descent. By contrast, an empire embraces under a single political authority many peoples of very diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Thus the British used to be, and to feel they were, a nation; but now they feel the country becoming more like an empire. More than that, we realise that our modern conception of what a religion is commits the people of each major faith to try to build around themselves the entire social and cultural world of their own tradition. And it is indeed entirely natural that, just as Christians have long wanted to Christianise the whole of British social and cultural life, so today Muslims should want to make Britain into an Islamic country. Even the Jews, tiny though their numbers now are, can still seek planning permission to create purely-Jewish districts by running overhead wires around them to create an 'eruv'.

A practical contradiction thus arises. Britain has become like an empire, and I for one rather like living in an empire, with all its cultural richness and variety. It's as if, nowadays, 'everything is everywhere': almost all the peoples, all the cultures and religions of the world are represented today in modern London, a city of over 200 languages, just as all the varied voices and activities of humankind can quickly be accessed in one's own study. But it is not going to be possible for any one religious group to dominate completely, and to remake the whole human world in its own image. All of us now have to learn to live as members of one minority group amongst others. All of us now have to acknowledge others, and must also acknowledge the (limited) sovereignty of the state to which we owe allegiance.

When in the past many competing religious and ethnic groups had to coexist within one empire, the standard method of reducing friction was segregation. The capital city was divided into 'Quarters', and different ethnic groups lived in different villages – an arrangement that survives in many places today. But in dynamic, rapidly-developing societies segregation soon leads to inequality, and inequality leads to sharp political unrest; and my own belief is that our modern experience is showing us that we need to change our understanding of religion. We need to give up the idea that in our own tradition we already have, readymade, a complete civilisation in miniature, founded on an exclusive and final revelation of Truth, and demanding our absolute and exclusive allegiance. Still more do we need to give up the idea that our very identity as persons is given us by and through our commitment to such an idea of religion. And that is what I mean by 'learning to live without identity'. We need to become *inwardly* globalised. Nowadays, when 'everything is everywhere', I'd rather lose my identity and be everyone and anyone.

Ten years ago I was asked to write a contribution to a symposium of essays on the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. In response to that challenge, I wrote a deliberately-subversive piece saying that I was unhappy with the whole idea of there being two big things, one called *Judaism* and the other called *Christianity*, and each being a kind of finished block that is not going to change. Sorry, but no: that whole way of dividing up the religious world and talking about religious differences is now inappropriate. In our society we don't live in one or another of a whole series of walled-off ghettos.

It's as if, nowadays, 'everything is everywhere.'

Everything is everywhere, and everything now mingles. None of us can claim privileged access to his own tradition: on the contrary, all your tradition is just as accessible to me as mine is to you. The whole idea of *any* privileged access to Truth is dead.

Everything is in the melting-pot, everything mingles, and I'd like to talk about what will emerge from this mingling. Where is it taking us, and what kind of future will there be for religion?

Here is what I wrote just ten years ago, and what I still think today.

* * *

Is it now too late to be talking about Jewish-Christian dialogue? As it is usually understood, the phrase implies cautious, friendly conversations or negotiations between teams of somewhat elderly

parties, mostly male, who represent two independent communities of faith. The aim is to find some common ground and to establish amicable relations – in short, to agree to differ, because it is tacitly taken for granted that the two communities propose to remain permanently distinct. We are coming together in order to agree upon how we can most peaceably stay apart. On neither side is there expected to be any compromise whatever, because it is taken for granted that religious allegiance is like allegiance to one's own nation, but even more so. It is both what people call an 'identity', and what people call an 'absolute'. That seems to mean that through it, uniquely, we identify ourselves, finding our place in the world and our task in life; and that therefore its moral claim upon us overrides all other claims. Accordingly, negotiations between representatives of different religious groups are rather like diplomatic negotiations between the representatives of distinct sovereign nation-states. The talks may lead to the establishment of peaceful, friendly and co-operative relations between two sovereign parties. But sovereignty itself remains axiomatically not-negotiable. It is an absolute, a unique 'identity', almost an eternal essence, something that one cannot envisage ever being superseded or becoming obsolete. Its claims are a matter of life and death. For their sake one must be ready to accept martyrdom, or even (nowadays) to get involved with terrorism.

This ancient idea of unconditional allegiance to some local group is still found in many forms in the late-modern world. It may be called fundamentalism, tribalism, communalism, ethno-nationalism, and so on; and it creates a rather untidy picture of the human scene. The local god, or nation, or other object of unconditional allegiance to which people rally may be almost any threatened language, or ethnic group, or 'race', or religious group, or nation state; and the domains of these varied rival foci of 'absolute' allegiance may very easily overlap, and so create acute and painful conflicts in the minds of individuals.

All of us now have to acknowledge others.

Now I have a number of arguments to put forward in connection with this situation. Their cumulative effect is, I shall suggest, that we should give up the received quasi-political and highly reifying ways of thinking about 'the Synagogue' and 'the Church', and the dialogue between them. The very notion of 'a religion' as a small, distinct, unchanging, self-identical, closed ideological world, like an isolated sovereign nation, in which people are

unanimous in matters of belief, is dead. Notoriously, we can't even say very clearly exactly who 'the Jews' are nowadays, or who might count as their officially-accredited and generally-recognised representatives. There are too many shades of lapsed membership and partial belief. And much the same is true of 'Christianity' and 'the Church'. I shall argue that the real situation is that if we want to go on thinking of 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' as distinct traditions, each with its own literature, its own body of beliefs, its characteristic style, then we should recognise that they are nowadays fast becoming entities like 'Platonism'; as their embodiment in a distinct community of shared belief becomes ever less clear-cut, they are becoming assimilated. They are turning into relatively enduring and identifiable strands within an historically-evolving global cultural tradition. As such, they are no longer strictly tied to just one territory or organisation: they are becoming public property, freely accessible to everyone, and part of everyone's thinking. In this sense, I am myself as Jewish as many Jews, and as much a Buddhist as many Buddhists. Nowadays, surely, we all of us 'contain multitudes'.



Church v. Synagogue

A great tradition eventually comes to belong to all humankind. When, not long ago, the site of Aristotle's Lyceum was found in Athens, local politicians declared grandiloquently that the remains 'bear witness to the continuity of Hellenic civilisation', with the implication that they see themselves as the true and legitimate heirs and successors of Pericles and Plato. But in practice people around the world seem to feel able to study Plato and Aristotle for themselves, without needing to seek instruction from modern Greek politicians and philosophers. And similarly, it has become very noticeable in recent years that the best writing about Christianity no longer comes from Christians, nor even from traditional academic theologians. It comes from post-Christians, and has done so for many years, because modern Christians have come down in the world since the days of their own great tradition, just as modern Greeks and Egyptians are not quite the equals of their ancient predecessors. In which case we should perhaps think of giving up the idea that 'Christians', 'Muslims' and 'Jews' are three very distinct communities rather like nation-states, each with privileged access to its own unchanging core-tradition of religious and moral wisdom. Until about the sixteenth century something like that was indeed the case: if you wanted to learn about another major tradition, then you had to travel and to sit at the feet of a learned person from within that tradition. But nowadays abundant printed books, the free worldwide dissemination of information, and the globalisation of culture have made everything freely



A soldier stands by the Israeli and US flags

available to everyone. We can now be anything and everything. Most of us, at least, are not confined, and do not wish to be confined, to a cultural or religious sub-world or ghetto. Judaism and Christianity, like Platonism and Buddhism, are becoming strands in everyone's thinking. The old idea of an exclusive

and unchanging historically-transmitted religious 'identity' – a unique body of truth in the sole custody of a special body of people – is rapidly becoming obsolete.

Is it not curious that the people who are chosen to represent us in ecumenical and inter-faith conversations always turn out to be very cautious and conservative characters who think like lawyers? In a world in which tradition is dying, we seem to feel safest when we are represented by extreme traditionalists. We like to be represented by people who are utterly unrepresentative of us. It is as if we very much want them to go on defending, on our behalf, positions that we no longer hold ourselves.

What then has happened? In the earliest times – or so we are told – religion was monocultural and henotheistic. Each people or *ethne* had their own language, their own sacred territory and their own god. Identities were clear-cut to such an extent that if you went to live in another territory, amongst other people, those new people became your people and their god your god. (See *Ruth* 1:15f.; *1 Samuel* 26:19 etc.). The notion that religion is – or at least ideally should be – strictly ethnic and territorial has survived to this day. People still use terms like Christendom and Islam in a territorial way, and speak of lands like France and Italy as 'Roman Catholic countries'. Politicians in those countries do not find it at all easy to acknowledge publicly the fact that there may very soon be – and perhaps already are – more practising Muslims than practising Catholics in the home population. In Italy some years ago, politicians who were not themselves practising Catholics at all nevertheless found they simply could not bring themselves to attend the inauguration of Rome's first major mosque. They were accustomed to thinking of themselves as non-Catholics in a Catholic country, and somehow could not take in the thought that they might be turning into non-Muslims in a Muslim country.

Our thinking about true religion and territoriality has become oddly confused. For more than one-and-a-half millennia the Jews were in effect the principal and most obvious example of an ancient faith that had lost its own territory and now survived within Christendom, within Islam, and elsewhere in encapsulated form. People identified themselves as

Jews, and were identified, in every other way except through their possession of their own holy land. Your Jewishness was conveyed to you through your genealogy, your community-membership, your language, scriptures, customs and cultural tradition: but territory – no. The Jews were often regarded as a dispersed, homeless, fugitive people, living in a state of what seemed permanent diaspora, homelessness. The state of being exiled from one's proper sacred territory seemed pitiable. Then came the Restoration, the founding of the state of Israel, and a seemingly wonderful fulfilment of prophecy. But, fifty years later, not all Jews have wished to return, and visitors to Israel are astonished to find what a secular society it is, and how little regard is paid to the Torah. Can Judaism not survive the fulfilment of its own hopes? Is the recovered possession of one's own holy land somehow now a religiously bad thing? In countries like the United States there has for some time been anxiety that the Jews in diaspora may disappear within half a century by marrying-out, and by complete assimilation into the host culture. But now we find that a worse danger threatens in the opposite direction: the Return to Israel fulfils Judaism – and then eclipses it, as all the previous old religious values of Judaism disappear into militant nationalist politics.

A great tradition eventually comes to belong to all humankind.

Judaism, then, seems to be caught between Scylla and Charybdis. In America, and in 'the West' generally, it threatens to become just one more strand in the new globalised world-historical culture, like Platonism. It will become simply part of the universal syllabus, part of everybody's heritage, and will no longer be, nor need to be, embodied in a distinct visible human society. At the opposite extreme, Judaism also disappears in Israel. The ancient dream of a mono-ethnic theocratic state society cannot be realised in the modern world, except by turning religious values into political ones.

Islam is, of course, nowadays caught in just the same dilemma: and so is Christianity. The ideal of 'a Christian country' is fading, disappearing. In Western society at large, 'the Christian tradition' has become just one more strand in everybody's cultural heritage. What survives of 'the Church' is so drastically reduced that it no longer has any special claim to, nor expertise in, the old 'great' tradition. In which case, conversations between officially-nominated teams of Jewish and Christian representatives will be mainly exercises in denial. They will be conducted as if old-style distinct, homogeneous faith communities, in which traditional religious values are preserved intact,

still exist – which is not the case, in a world where all of us alike are ‘mediatised’, immersed in the new media culture. And so long as we go on clinging to the memory of our lost closed worlds, for so long we will be failing to discuss the prospect that faces us all alike – both people who are ancestrally Jewish, and people who are ancestrally Christian – in the new globalised world-culture. At our interfaith conversations we try to reassure ourselves that we really are still different from each other and do still possess our own distinct ‘identities’. But the reality is that the process of world-cultural assimilation is swallowing us both up. We are becoming more and more alike. All distinct ethnic and religious identities, of the old kind that we are so desperately nostalgic for, are rapidly vanishing.

This very painful example brings out the scale of today’s religious crisis. We are right to have seen the Jews as ‘a light to the nations’, because certain universal structures of religious thought have been so clearly and even classically exemplified for us all by the Jews for so long. The central idea is that of a domain unified under a Monarch, a transcendent controlling principle and focus of loyalty that has instituted and now orders

everything. The Monarch’s power unifies everything and makes it all holy: the Holy Land, the Holy People, the sacred language, the Holy Books of the Law. There is a very clear line between the sacred and profane realms, and it is the line that separates insiders from outsiders; and all your various loyalties – to your people to your mother-tongue, to your land, to your holy city, to your God and so on – are fully synthesised.

Some such arrangement as this prevailed for most of the time around the world from the beginnings of agricultural civilisation until about the year 1500 CE. The Hebrew Bible describes with great clarity the (rather late) establishment of Israel’s version of the system, and prints it almost indelibly upon our minds and hearts as the ideal to which we aspire. This is what we long for; this is how human beings should live. This is that it is to have an identity; this is what it is to know where you belong, who your friends are and who your enemies, and how you should live.

But it is all fast disappearing now, as I first realised when in 1980 I visited an Inuit (or Eskimo) primary school in Baffin Island and found that the syllabus, the culture, the language and even the pop music being imparted to the children was indistinguishable from that in the primary school which my own younger daughter was still attending in Cambridge. We cling to our identities – just because they are vanishing so rapidly. Much of religious talk and practice nowadays seems to consist of lamentations over, and rather ineffectual attempts to re-enact, all the things that we are now fast losing. Wouldn’t it be better if we were to talk together about what is now coming upon all of us?

For is it not the case that our own tradition itself anticipated the globalisation – the reversal of Babel – that we now see? The development of a single world-wide communications network, the emergence of a globally-dominant language, the English language, and the spread of a single ethic, based mainly upon the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all around the globe, is surely a very significant religious

event. The choice of its motto by the BBC, a lifetime ago, shows that this was once obvious. ‘Nation shall speak peace unto nation’. But today, unfortunately, we are absorbed in trying to conserve our separate identities. You have never seen, and I at least have not seen, any recent piece of religious writing that welcomes globalisation as Pentecost, as a fulfilment of ancient hopes. Why not? Are we missing something?

* * *

That is what I wrote in 1997, and here is my conclusion: Identity is dead. We are better off without it.



United Nations

Don Cupitt made the original Sea of Faith TV series in 1984(now reissued on DVD). He is a Life Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge and his 34 books include *After God*. His latest book, *The Old Creed and the New*, has just appeared from SCM Press.

The Otherness of the Other – Islam Today

Ataullah Siddiqui argues for participation, rather than integration, of the Other.

In Islamic tradition it is the relation between human and human that counts more than relation with God. The Quran is not an encyclopaedia that you open and you'll get every answer to that. Quran gives you basic principles and from there you develop your own concept and ideas. There are four main Quranic values, which have been translated as mercy, forgiveness, justice and the fourth, which is very difficult for me to translate into English, means whatever you do, do it as well as you can, do your best. If these are the values, what happened to the Muslim world? I think that question will remain in many minds, quite rightly.

First, I'd like quickly to run through probably a thousand years of history. Until 1250, the fall of Baghdad, Muslim thought and western philosophical traditions went hand in hand; they understood each other very clearly, to the extent that they quoted each other. With Aquinas on the one hand Al-Ghazzali on the other, they were on the same wave-length, with the same world view, philosophical traditions, philosophical aspects and other things. And lots of writings in Islamic traditions influenced the West and the western philosophical tradition influenced Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought. But with the fall of Baghdad in 1250 the intellectual, philosophical traditions declined and philosophy came to be seen as something to disassociate from. It was seen as not good science and increasingly in Islamic religious schools philosophy has been almost abandoned. Logic, elementary logic, was introduced as a subject, but philosophy as wider thought is missing even today.

The colonial leadership, the colonial masters, were eager to produce clerks, not scholars.

Then comes another problem: the problem of colonial history, colonialism. The colonial past created a great impact on the Muslim world. With the exception of two countries, Afghanistan and current Saudi Arabia, all Muslim countries were under the rule of the colonial empire. And what happened? The

colonial leadership, the colonial masters, were eager to produce clerks, not scholars. They had to run an empire; clerks were produced: those who could read and write and do small work, and a civil service that could run the state, but not thinkers. The result was that large numbers of Muslims decided that colonialism is something that is here for now and one day it will pass and will move on. Therefore there is no need to engage with the current world, the contemporary world. The priority was preservation, not engagement and the seminaries that produced religious scholars were of this opinion in most of the Muslim world. Traditionalism becomes the most important element in all their discussions.

There was another group of people and scholars who said there is no need for seminaries and traditional schools, the way to salvation is modernity, western science and technology, not necessarily intellectual traditions. Secularism in its worst form was accepted. And here I can give you the example of Turkey where secularisation by force was imposed on a Muslim world. When the colonial period was over, leadership was shifted into the hands of those who were influenced by western secular ideas. And many Muslim countries were ruled by military rulers. So, on the one hand there were people who did not want to engage with western thought or to enter into any debate or discussions – they believed the West and western thought was evil. On the other hand, those who looked to western thought were largely dictators and military rulers, or, in some Muslim countries, the western powers appointed kings to rule.

A third group emerged saying, 'No, let us look at it slightly differently, not everything is bad in western thought and ideas and there is a lot that needs changing within Islamic tradition. There is a need for change in the Muslim world.' These three groups all still exist in the Muslim world. The traditionalist school still believes the old traditional syllabus is absolutely necessary to foment religious leadership. Seminaries in the Muslim world are largely controlled by them.

After colonialism, what was absolutely necessary was debate. The Muslim world needed to engage with the wider society and relate the past to the contemporary world. But that debate did not take

place, simply because the Muslim world is not a free world. You cannot have free thinking in dictatorial regimes, where books for the library are vetted and the committees are there to see what you are reading and even foreign students studying in some Muslim countries have to go through the checks that, yes, your thought is in the right direction. How can you produce a group of scholars who can debate, argue and a leadership who can discuss these things openly?

What is the West?

Then, there is another problem as well, the political agenda, the political domination of the West, has created an idea that the West is monolithic. The West's philosophical discourse, music, art, all its varied literature has been forgotten. The West is seen as a political entity, as 'the other'. I remember a few

years ago some young people asked me to give a talk 'Islam and the West' – see the emphasis 'and the West' not 'in the West'. So I say to these 50 or so young people who were born and brought up here: 'You gave me the topic, now tell me, what is the West?' There was silence. Somebody said, 'Where there are many Christians'. I said, 'In that case The Philippines is a western country,' and he said, 'No, no that is not a western

country.' Someone said, 'No, it is a direction.' So I said, 'If we were sitting in Los Angeles from there the directions change; it would be a different West.' He said, 'No, no that is not the West.' So what is the West? The concept is not clear even to people born and brought up here. Sometimes I provoke young people by saying we are the West; we live here, we contribute here, we engage here and therefore now we are part of western thought and actions. And you can see the hesitation, but that's the reality of it.

What we need in the Muslim traditions is some imaginative discourse. Where will it come from? I think that increasingly the debate that is taking place about the soul of Islam is largely in European and North American societies and I believe that there will be a contribution from Muslims who were born and brought up here, because at least they are free to think and debate and discuss. Therefore I can see that in the next two generations you will have Islam with

a European accent. It will be distinctly different from South Asia, Malaysia or the Middle East and the Islam that we are talking about there. In European western society, its discourse will be predominantly human rights, gender issues and minority jurisprudence. What is the meaning of living as a minority?

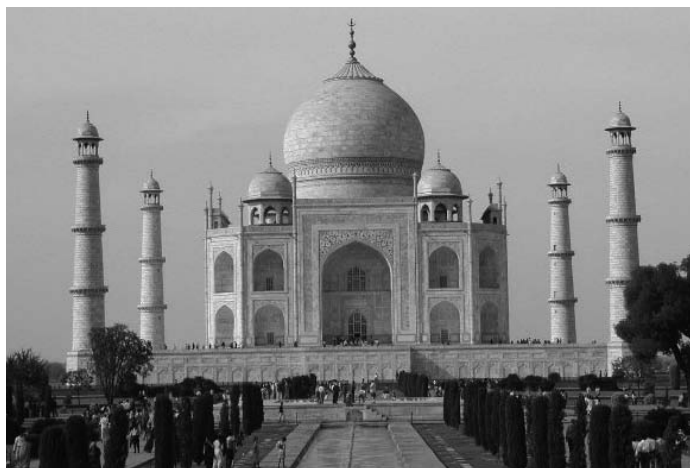
Remember Muslim thought is predominantly majority-thought, ruling thought. Sometimes I have had discussions with a Jewish friend. He told me: 'You do not know as a Muslim how to handle being a minority, you do know how to handle power.' I replied: 'You who lived for 2000 years as a minority, do not know how to handle power.' That's the reality between Jews and Muslims at the moment. But the problem is that almost 40 – 42% Muslims have lived as a minority for many, many centuries; my own family has lived as a minority for six or seven

generations. We have never lived in a Muslim world, but yet we are Muslim. But the religious language, or emphasis, that we use as a minority is not being used by people who live in a majority society.

There's another debate which comes up quite often in Europe. There is a pressure on Muslims to integrate, participate in the western society or western European culture. But my question

is: is integration enough? Let us look at the height of Jewish integration in German societies, which was in the 1920s to 1930s. They even wanted to forget their history, they even wanted to forget that they were Jews, they were Germans, they spoke with a German accent, had German culture, German music, German everything. Yet, what happened to the Jewish people? The height of Muslim assimilation or integration in Europe was Bosnia. But then what happened? When the Bosnian Muslims faced the atrocities that they faced they were not asked why you didn't integrate, they were asked what happened 900 years ago. When the Jewish people suffered, they were not asked why didn't you integrate, they were asked about what happened long ago. So I feel that integration is not the answer.

I believe participation is the answer; you must participate with your values. In Asian society Hindus and Muslims live side by side. I remember myself,



Taj Majal

living in India, born in India, our neighbours were Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and people of no faith, tribal or aboriginals; these four groups were living next to each other, we shared each other's festivals. Death in somebody else's family was like a death in my family. We called each others' elders uncle, auntie and their children were like brothers and sisters to me. Yet there was a perception of the other, that we never explored together. We lived in India in excellent conditions for dialogue but we never discussed theology. When I came to England we always discussed theology but never lived dialogically. In the Indian context we never explored what was so important to the other person and therefore we inherited a suspicion of the other. And that suspicion of the other explodes sometimes, which is what happened in the Bosnian situation, and happens quite often in India.

It is absolutely necessary to discuss and value the otherness of the other.

Therefore my concern would be that in any interfaith exploration, it is absolutely necessary to discuss and value the otherness of the other. We need to see the other as a partner in the well-being of society. We need to have some sort of engagement and working together in this world. This new way of thinking is absolutely necessary, but it is equally important to transform theology. I'll give you one interesting example. I had in front of me nearly 40 Imams, these are the village scholars, Muslim scholars, living in Britain, and they are Imams in different mosques, they are the community leaders. They also gave me a topic: Islam and the West. I said, as far as I know, Islamic traditions demand from an Imam or scholar that he must know the cultures, customs and practices of the people that he lives with around him. That is an essential part of training an Imam to give a religious opinion. So I said that western thought is Enlightenment thought. Are we teaching that in our seminaries? The philosophical tradition Britain has inherited is an important part of what the Imam here must know, must understand. Secondly, your understanding of religion, even of your own Islam, will be richer if you understand the Judaeo-Christian traditions that contributed in Europe. So understanding the Judaeo-Christian tradition from Judaeo-Christian sources, taught by them, is also very important. It is a mistake to neglect this. Then there was silence for another minute or so. And they said, what you are saying is right but we do not know how to do it, it is very difficult for us.

Now I will come to the last point: what is the Islamic approach to human reasoning? There was an incident in the Prophet's time and the Prophet told one of his very close companions that he was sending him to Yemen to work there, to help the people there.

'Now tell me how you will judge people, how you will work there and what your guiding principle will be.'

He replied, 'Quran.'

'And if you don't find anything there? Now this is very important, if you don't find anything there what you'll do?'

'I'll try to look into our traditions.'

And the Prophet said, 'If you don't find anything in our traditions, what you will do?'

And he said, 'I'll use my own reasoning.'

And the Prophet said, 'You are in the right direction. Off you go.'

The Muslim situation is that the book or the principles of Quran and its prophetic tradition will remain core but it has to adapt to the context in which we are living. It has to be contextualised, That is not something new in Islamic history. It is the consistent view of jurists and religious scholars.

A debate that is taking place in the Muslim world, particularly in the European context, is about *sharia*; that most dreaded word *sharia*. I have my own problem with that. When I hear *sharia's* been implemented, implemented as if there's something here to implement. *Sharia* doesn't have a book of *sharia* that you implement. The literal meaning of *sharia* is 'leading to the water', but *sharia* also means you must take account of the context in which we are living. I believe the issue of human rights, which is nowadays a consensus, that there is a set of standards that we must follow, could easily become part of Islamic tradition. Contemporary jurists and contemporary Islamic scholars are debating those issues and saying let us accept this as part of humanity's collective consensus on a standard of human rights. Science and technology and all other areas are now debated. I am saying reason must always be applied with religion's basic values, and that reasoning has a measured part to play in shaping the theology of the future.

Dr Atallah Siddiqui is the Director of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education and a Senior Research Fellow at the Islamic Foundation, Leicester. This is an edited version of the transcript of his recorded talk given at the SoF Conference in Leicester in July 2006.

Recording and Transcription by Oliver Essame.

Secular and Religious Humanism

Noel Cheer spoke about the possibilities for dialogue between secular and religious humanists.

Humanism, as it has been classically understood, can best be seen as putting into practice *humanitas*, or human virtue, as seen in the practices of understanding, benevolence, compassion, mercy, fortitude, judgment, prudence, eloquence, and love of honour. For practical and rhetorical purposes we can allow that there are basically two kinds of humanism: secular and religious.

Humanism is so often said to be the opposite of religion that it is difficult for most people to see the term religious humanism as anything other than a contradiction. Yet this has not always been so, and it is not so now for most subscribers to the Sea of Faith who use the term humanism to name human-centredness. There is much in common between secular and religious humanism. Members of both groups agree that all human activity and institutions are made only by humans there being no other creative agency.

Spirituality is best seen, not as a free-thinker's alternative to religion, but as its very source.

Because this life is all that we will ever have, the secular is immensely important and the human is where we locate our priorities and our values. Those of us who retain some affection for a Christian upbringing but who can no longer assent to what we take to be its defining affirmations call ourselves post-Christian. We take the view that, while institutional forms of Christian expression have more-or-less lost the plot, the plot remains important.

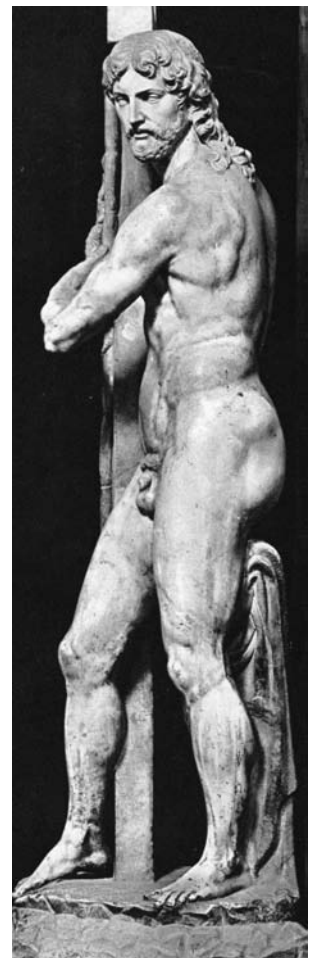
All humanists have in common a moral earnestness. We yearn for a better world, and the more active among us try to bring it about. Yet we differ, deeply. Religious humanists make the claim that the religious dimension of a human being is our best part, even while conceding that some forms of religious expression have done much harm. On the other hand, secular humanists show, in speech and in writing, what can justifiably be called a deep loathing of religion. While secular humanists call for no religion, religious humanists call for better religion.

Much of what separates secular and religious humanists can be seen in the way they each use certain key words. First, the term spirituality needs to be delivered from both its medieval concern with metaphysical dualism and also from its late 20th century New Age uses. Then we will be free to promote it to name that capability which steers us towards religion in the first place. Secondly, we need to show that religion,

while often expressed in supernatural terms, does not depend on them. Supernaturalism is an option, not an essence. The potential benefits of gaining some clarity in these matters are enormous. Not only will we find a forum in which to meet and greet our secularist friends, we might rescue faith from its fundamentalist prison and put it back, to use a quasi-biblical phrase, on the throne of our hearts.

In seeking to describe a relationship between spirituality and religion which will work in today's world, we must note the three-stage historical progression in the use of the word spirituality. The early and traditional use of the term can be found in most dictionaries. It speaks of two kinds of reality, with the spiritual above and the material below. It depends upon acceptance of an unseen world more real than this one, which reveals itself in visions, dreams, and physical manifestations. We scurry around like ants down here below while the perfect realm broods over us. This dualism, which owes a lot to Plato, is still embedded in mainstream Christianity.

During the last half-century a new formulation of spirituality arose as a sort of personal substitute for stuffy, old-fashioned religion. It had become romanticised and democratised and was aided by the Orphic and Gnostic idea of interior journey, which has dogged Christianity from the start. It became a scheme for opposing both secularist rationality and the dogmatism of the formal church. This development transferred the authoritative source of spirituality from the custodial care of ecclesiastical institutions to the commercial concerns of book publishers. It re-potted the roots of spirituality in the ephemera of currently fashionable warm fuzzies and the dynamics of the publication of self-help books. So saccharine are some manifestations that they have attracted the Australian epithet, 'New Age wank'.



Michelangelo: *The Risen Christ*

A third, and to me the most satisfactory, definition of spirituality commends itself because it talks of what is lodged in our very humanness. The American theologian Owen Thomas defines spirituality as:

the sum of all the uniquely human capacities and functions: self-awareness, self-transcendence, memory, anticipation, rationality (in the broadest sense), creativity, plus the moral, intellectual, social, political, aesthetic, and religious capacities, all understood as embodied.

Under this definition spirituality is a natural phenomenon, unlike the medieval dualist supernaturalism; and an enduring phenomenon, unlike *Oprah's Book of the Month* approach. Such spirituality is oriented to this life and to this world and to this time. It is part of the human condition; it lurks in the pockets of our genes. Spirituality is best seen, not as a free-thinker's alternative to religion, but as its very source.

Some secular humanists loathe the word religion. Their publications do not define religion as much as characterise it and then proceed to denounce it from an assumption that religion is inescapably supernaturalist, corrupt and daft. As Rob Wheeler wrote in a review in *Sof* (68):

The trouble with most books arguing for [secular] humanism is that they start with a crude critique of religion, focusing in an entirely unbalanced way on the horrors committed by Roman Catholicism in the past and the idiocies of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists in the present. Having shown that religion is mad, bad, dangerous and false, they tend to assume that there is nothing else they have to do. Secular humanism naturally follows by default, QED.

However, the passionate anti-religious humanist, too, knows the feeling of deep commitment. The following passage by Richard Dawkins, that voluble scourge of all things religious, refers to Ursula Goodenough's book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*:

Yet, by the book's own account, Goodenough does not believe in any sort of supreme being, does not believe in any sort of life after death. By any normal understanding of the English language, she is no more religious than I am. She shares with other atheistic scientists a feeling of awe at the majesty of the universe and the intricate complexity of life... If that is religion, then I am a deeply religious man. But it isn't. And I'm not.

To insist that religious thought and expression are obliged to offer supernatural explanations is similar to asking physicists still to speak of phlogiston as the active agent of fire, for astronomers to defer to Ptolemy, doctors to prescribe according to Galen, and for biologists to declare that crocodiles emerge spontaneously from mud on the banks of the Nile. To imprison religious expression in pre-Enlightenment thought-forms, as many conservative Christians still lovingly do, and as Dawkins does for ease of ridicule, is outdated, dishonest or both.

Following Owen Thomas, we might use Tillich's words to define spirituality, when manifest as religion, as 'the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a

concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary.' Note the absence of any reference to the supernatural, or prescription as to the form of its expression. Our itch, our yearning, is for the realisation of our humanness, our hardwired spiritual potential pushes us to aspire to transcendence. The pursuit of transcendence is a religious pursuit.

Classical Christianity has made life difficult for itself by preserving pre-scientific knowledge in dogma, like spiders in amber, long after it has been superseded. Lloyd Geering speaks as strongly as any humanist, even atheist, against theism and he argues passionately for a Christianity Without Theism. Theism, he says:

added to purely human words a dimension of absolute authority which they did not deserve ... For centuries the Western world has encouraged us to believe that our future is in the hands of a benevolent and all-powerful God and that we have been placed here on earth to prepare for an eternal destiny elsewhere.

This paper takes the view that the itch, which takes on many names: spirituality, religion, faith, belief, integrity is that which seeks to promote the human condition. It is as ubiquitous as language and as problematic as sexuality. And, like sexuality, the uses to which the religious disposition may be put are widespread. We deplore some of those uses without demanding an end to the underlying spirituality.

To insist that religious thought and expression are obliged to offer supernatural explanations is similar to asking physicists still to speak of phlogiston.

As Feuerbach said in a lecture in 1848, we are all born as animals and, if the circumstances are right, we develop both the aspiration and the competence to transcend our animal substrate to become spiritual beings. And we can do it with out leaving home, let alone the planet.

What has The Sea of Faith Network got to offer a secular humanist? At least we are neither a church, nor a church substitute. You might call it a talk-shop, wherein any and all ideas about the expression of faith are heard sympathetically. One of our members described it as a safe place in which to talk about unsafe things. I get rueful nods of acknowledgement whenever I refer to it as a detox centre. There are even some capital-H Humanists among the membership of Sea of Faith who are made more comfortable by there being no assertions of dogmatic certainty nor definitions of orthodoxy. Sea of Faith does not suit everybody and nor does it try to. It treads that uneasy line between a rejection of a supernatural order of things and the feeling conviction that all that is profound and ennobling about being



Ludwig Feuerbach

human, needs forms of expression that sound supernaturalist, when what is really happening is that we are talking in the language of transcendence. It's the age-old problem of metaphors being taken literally. We are not being supernaturalist when we affirm that God or the gods are figures of speech which we deny at our peril.

So is it time to look to a convergence between Sea of Faith and such Humanist groups who preach that religion is irredeemably supernaturalist? My own view is that that will eventually be possible, but it will take some time. Just as there are devout religious hardliners who promote religion over against a devalued world, there remain, if the published Humanist journals are any guide, a dyed-in-the-wooliness unreflecting hostility even to the word religion or any of its synonyms. Humanists need to be aware that voices, like Don Cupitt's, are saying that the dualism of Classical Christianity is no longer sustainable in the face of post-Enlightenment science.

The expression of religious faith does not, of necessity, require an acceptance of supernatural agencies or realms, even though many take that option. Scientific discoveries require us to look for improved metaphors by which to express the sheer wonder of life on earth. If scientific paradigms may be modernised, why not religious also? New expressions of religious faith are constantly emerging. In recent decades there has been a re-emphasis on earth-centred values and rituals. Many radically religious people – post-theistic, post-Christian, religious humanist and many others – take the view that the earth is our only home. Ever. It is not merely a transit lounge in which we piously wait for death to waft us away to another world above the bright blue sky.

Our deepest values, including the right to chose or reject expressions of faith, are best protected by secular government. While humans exist, religion will persist in one form or another because to ascribe value and to commit utterly to it is an essential part of being human. The search for better ways will go on as long as humans exist because, at rock bottom, that is what religion is. The ambition to be radically, totally human is about as sacred as it gets.

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- 1 Owen C Thomas 'Political Spirituality, Oxymoron or Redundancy?' *Journal of Religion & Society* Volume 3.
 - 2 Richard Dawkins, 'Snake Oil and Holy Water' in *Forbes.com* April 10, 1999.
 - 3 Lloyd Geering, *Christianity Without God* (Bridget Williams Books (NZ) and Polebridge Press Santa Rosa (USA), especially pp. 137-144 but elsewhere passim.
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Noel Cheer is the Chair of the Sea of Faith Network in New Zealand. This is an abbreviated version of the talk he gave to the England SoF Conference in July 2006. The unabridged text with full bibliography and references is available from the editor or from the SoF (UK) website at www.sofn.org.uk

Fourth Station

Cricklewood Station,
Cricklewood Station,
I wait for the five o'clock
with resignation.
It's down to King's Cross
for a conversation
with a man in a bookshop
creased with perspiration.

I've never seen the colours over west so hard,
like ripples of blackcurrant on a faded postcard.
No coronas on the floodlights in the marshalling yard.
It's the kind of night God must have used
for passing on the word.

Graffiti on the shelters
on Cricklewood Station,
chalking the genetic code
of mass imagination,
putting out the candles
of a deeper indignation,
jumping on the five o'clock
for a private assignation.

I've never heard such singing of the voltage in the wire,
like the suicidal pleadings of a tabernacle choir.
They can keep you out of work, they can't put out the fire.
It's the kind of night God must have used
to push sexual desire.

Graffiti say that God was here
on Cricklewood Station.
If I had known it soon enough
I would have booked a conversation
to offer to that great divine
heartfelt congratulation
for leaving us a night like this
in form of compensation.

I've never seen the moisture on the brick so sheer,
like ear-rings that are clinging to a deaf mute's ear.
There's a cutting kind of silence in this section of the year.
It's the kind of night God must have used
to make his passion clear.

Cricklewood Station,
Cricklewood Station,
I wait for the five o'clock
with indignation.
It's down to King's Cross
for a brief flirtation.
And the evening in the back row
of a godless generation.

Peter Campbell

This poem is published in *Brown Linoleum Green Lawns* (Hearing Eye, London 2006), review on page 20.

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A voice of the young!

Dear Editor,

As a relative newcomer to the Sea of Faith, I attended the conference with as open a mind as possible, based on the London conference in March of this year and the smattering of Cupitt's work I had read in the time. My overall impression of the attendees was one of friendliness, open mindedness and cerebral agility, especially the latter (I have a considerable reading list to work through!) Much of the base group activity went over my head as it was concerned with internal goings-on of the organisation, of which I had next to no knowledge. David Hart's 'Trading Faiths' workshop was a particular highlight and provided considerable food for thought.

Better minds than mine will be able to discuss the numerous issues raised in the conference more eloquently than I can, so I shan't attempt to do so. However I will stick my neck out to discuss an issue which appeared to crop up repeatedly in base groups and over dinner; that of attracting 'young people' to the network. Although I am comfortably into my fourth decade, it was flattering to be addressed as 'young', and one supposes that in the context of the assembled SoF members, I appeared to be one of a tiny handful of 'youth'. I will address some of the questions/comments heard.

How do we attract young people to the organisation?

Firstly, how do you define young? Are you talking about people of my age (early to mid 30's) or younger still (teenagers/undergraduates)? In her report from the Steering Committee, Alison McRobb mentions the presence of a number of 'young, really young' people at the London conference, referring to (I assume) myself and what appeared to be a dozen or so sixth formers or first year university students. I would hazard saying that people younger than this sort of age are not going to be interested in the Network: the majority of youngsters are not interested in the grey areas of religious thought – they prefer clear-cut, well defined answers. Many young people might be put off by the intellectual muscle that is bandied around in the Network's writings and discussion; I certainly found it intimidating to a degree.

Furthermore: do young people even know of the existence of the organisation? I did not know it existed

until I read of the London conference on Sue Blackmore's website. Even then, when discussing the Network with older people, the typical response was, 'Don Cupitt? Is he still on the go?'

'We need a (young) guru-type figure to attract young people to the Network'

Do you? Why should this be the case? If a more youthful presence is required in the organisation, then surely you would like to attract them on the basis of the ideas discussed by the Network, rather than the influence of some hipster theologian who the kids will consider to be cool? Was there anyone particular you had in mind? I don't see the suggestion that the older generation require a 'guru-type figure' to lead their thinking (perhaps Don fills this role to a certain extent). Furthermore, why would a guru need to be young? At the two conferences I attended I had no problem chatting to people old enough to be my grandparents; I think the fact that I was at the conference at all was enough to be taken seriously. The last thing I would want to see would be a 'SoF Youth League' denying the young people the opportunity to hear the wisdom of the old and the old to experience the enthusiasm, ignorance, irreverence and (occasional) flashes of insight of the young.

Incidentally I find the somewhat radical nature of the SoF 'old guard' quite appealing in itself. I took secret pleasure in counting the hands of delegates at the London conference who would admit to having taken LSD! Which leads me onto...

Fear of the 'counterculture'

This is an issue I heard addressed by several people at the conference, either indirectly with regard to their children/grandchildren/youth of today, or directly as something that young people became involved in after abandoning a religious upbringing. I myself have been involved in this 'counterculture' and its proliferation of ideas and practices regarding sexuality, drug use, 'alternative living' (?), systems of belief and so forth, and I can readily understand how incomprehensible some of these ideas and practices may appear to older generations. However, I can safely say that although such things have had their own influence on my sense of spirituality, the ideas and practices of my (Roman Catholic) upbringing and education have had at least an equal influence in my religious development. It would be ridiculous to dismiss this aspect of my life completely, and SoF is perhaps one of the few places where such seemingly disparate influences can be discussed as seriously and objectively as possible.

Obviously I do not speak for all the delegates at the conference, but the few with whom I discussed such ideas had an idea of the counterculture as being more 'other' than any religious group. In short: I think that appealing to 'younger generations' might be a struggle for the Network, but hang in there! Aim for quality over

quantity – it is surely preferable to have a small ‘youth wing’ who are eager to participate and are sympathetic to the aims of the Network than have no youthful element at all. ‘The presence of young people should be giving us some pointers for the future’ – making your existence known to them should be one of them.

Andrew Murray
11 Walkley Road
Sheffield
S6 2XJ

There are lots of people like us out there

Dear Editor,

I am prompted to write in response to the last paragraphs of Stephen Mitchell’s article in the July issue of *Sofia*. I joined Sea of Faith after having read Don Cupitt’s book of the same name, admittedly nearly twenty years after it was published, and because of an increasing disaffection with many aspects of the Church of England but also with the Church in general. Sea of Faith did appear to give some hope in that there were those of like mind who were seeking and exploring religion in an intelligible way in contrast to the growth of fundamentalism in all parts the Church.

I am quite prepared, as Stephen put it, to be one of the people who are willing to stick with it by staying in the church and find common starting points for dialogue. But that is difficult when amongst those who I would regard as non-fundamentalist amongst the clergy one often finds that their sermons assume a lack of intelligence amongst their congregation together with an unwillingness to recognise either the enormous steps taken by biblical scholarship over the last 150 years or the change in knowledge of our world since the enlightenment.

I am sure that within the churches there are many who think along the same lines but do not know where to go. If I was able to go so many years without knowledge of Sea of Faith does this indicate that there is a need for greater publicity of the organisation and its aims and to encourage more to join up?

Philip Feakin
4 Oakview Gardens
East Finchley
London N2 0NJ

God as being being, existing existence

Dear Editor,

As someone who was deeply influenced by the Sea of Faith T.V programmes, who has a shelf full of Don Cupitt books, quite a few Lloyd Geering and a couple of David Boulton’s, and has been a member of SoF for the last 6 years, and has struggled to remain in the

Church, I am writing to express how enormously heartened I was to read Stephen Mitchell’s article *The Trouble with SoF*.

As Don Cupitt states in *The Great Questions of Life* ‘truth is just sitting there, in public’ ‘in the midst of common life and in the voices of common people’. They know all about God – ‘God help us’; ‘Thank God’; ‘By God’; ‘God willing’; ‘Oh God’; ‘By the grace of God’; ‘God bless’; ‘in God’s name’; ‘Please God’; ‘Playing God’ etc. I’ve yet to hear ordinary people express themselves in non-theistic language ‘thank non-theism God’! Thank you, Stephen; like you, I now see God, not as a being, not as existing, not as real, not as alive, but instead as being-ness, as existence, as reality and as life – the very source of all that is. That is no more an abstraction than the use of the word ‘God’ by ordinary people. It is a faith to be tested by ordinary people in ordinary life.

Yours sincerely
Grenville C. Gilbert
‘Middlemead’
14 Newlands Road, Sidmouth
Devon EX 10 9 NL
01395 513767



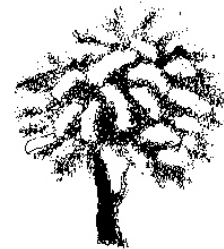
In or out of the body?

Dear Editor,

Your issue no.78 is enlightening. The soul, or spirit, needs the body but, in life, it can exit the body and lead ‘a life’ of its own. I speak from personal experience, from the effect of having spent most of my life coping with the effects of a ‘near death experience.’ In my 20s, I had a severe car crash. My CNS was crippled; my spine a hair’s breadth from total paralysis. I just survived, as a zombie, as the living walking dead. Many years later, innovative Cranial treatment disclosed to me the possibility, linked to the experiences of others, that my ‘spirit’ vacated my body at the moment of severe impact and went ‘walkabout’ for fifteen years – somewhere. It took me around twenty years to ‘get the spirit back in line with the body,’ to become I AM again. This has partly been achieved by stimulating undamaged tissue, tissue having memory, into remembering a younger, pre-crash self and thus to literally ‘reconstruct the self with a spirit’ using ‘tissue memory’ in a ‘laying on of hands’. Even so, somewhat alarmingly, I can still occasionally feel ‘myself’ move in and out of ‘myself,’ particularly in a potentially dangerous situation. Once, speeding on an autoroute in France, I found ‘myself’ on the car ceiling looking down at ‘myself’ below driving, very far away indeed. Briefly I had no link with the other ‘self’. If God is within us, he is outside us, the inconstant self, as well.

Yours sincerely
Christopher Truman
TRUMAN433@aol.com

Mayday Notes



A Different Voice from Israel

As we've been seeing day after day the horrifying images of war from Lebanon, it was heartening to read this dissenting article from Gideon Levy published in *Ha'aretz*, one of Israel's major newspapers on Sunday 30 July 2006:

'Israel is sinking into a strident, nationalistic atmosphere and darkness is beginning to cover everything. The brakes we still had are eroding, the insensitivity and blindness that characterised Israeli society in recent years is intensifying ... The devastation we are sowing in Lebanon doesn't touch anyone here and most of it is not even shown to Israelis. Those who want to know what Tyre looks like now have to turn to foreign channels: the BBC reporter brings chilling images from there, the likes of which won't be seen here. How can one not be shocked by the suffering of the other, at our hands, even when our north suffers? ... The hospitals in Gaza are full of burned children, but who cares? ... Since we've grown accustomed to thinking collective punishment a legitimate weapon, it is no wonder no debate has sparked here over the cruel punishment of Lebanon for Hezbollah's actions... Lebanon, which has never fought Israel and has 40 daily newspapers, 42 colleges and universities and hundreds of different banks, is being destroyed by our planes and cannons and nobody is taking into account the amount of hatred we are sowing.'

Death of God at Speakers' Corner

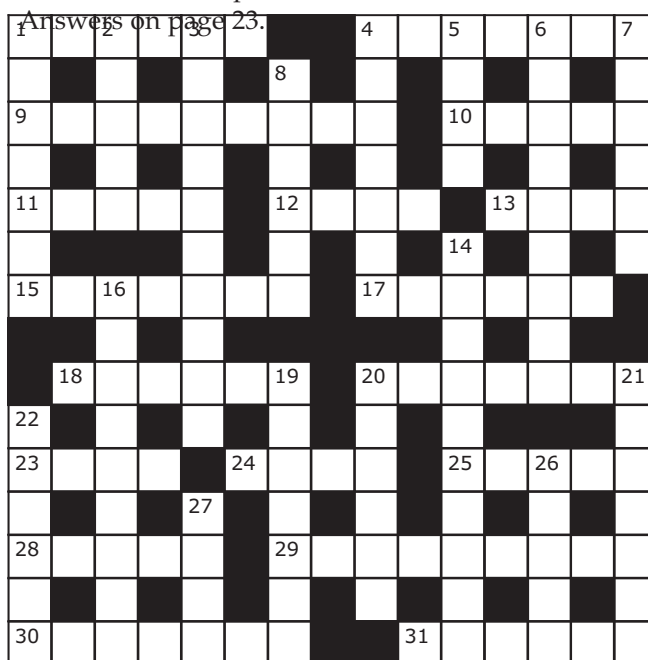
For many years Peter Lumsden has spoken week-in week-out about Christian Atheism on a platform at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London. He has been a fixture there. Two short documentaries have been made about his work and he has them put them onto a DVD, together with a film about the San Francisco to Moscow Peace Walk he went on in 1960. Copies of the DVD are available from him at 23d South Villas, London NW1. Price £8. Peter was too ill to attend this year's SoF Conference but was delighted to receive a card signed by many attenders.

The Faversham Stoa

Rob Wheeler writes: The Faversham Stoa is a philosophy discussion group which meets monthly in the Three Tuns pub in Faversham, Kent, on the third Thursday of the month from 7.30-9.30. The convenor is Rob Wheeler (telephone. 01795 536 826). Anyone can join and there is more information on their website: <http://www.stoa.org.uk/faversham>

Crossword

I'm delighted that Chimaera has produced this rather sophisticated crossword for readers. More are promised for future issues.



Across

- 1 Priest could be a feature of 28 (6)
- 4 John's father, the voice of the times once (7)
- 9 The ledger in which Benedict wrote the rule? (5,4)
- 10 Fabulous man takes a backward stance (5)
- 11 I trust there will be a Russian in the company (5)
- 12 It sounds like I own a Scottish Island (4)
- 13 A first degree for Capone? 20 down would be against it (4)
- 15 Yesteryear is a name in the record — and the silver ring (4,3)
- 17 The holy man takes the way to the old city back and stays (6)
- 18 This sanctuary was bedlam (6)
- 20 See 8 down
- 23 That's affirmative, but you'll only hear half the book (4)
- 24 Emmet and I are against it (4)
- 25 Endless recording of the golfer's final hit (3,2)
- 28 This cat, said 5's poet, burns with 14 (5)
- 29 Revolutionary holds one of Evita's family as a duenna (9)
- 30 I hear chaplain is a bit of an idiot (7)
- 31 What David sang was a charitable afterthought (6)

Down

- 1 Long suffering social change takes time (7)
- 2 BT parts company with Miss Jones but leaves the crest (5)
- 3 The tale told about Cupitt is excusable (10)
- 4 Proceeds, thanks to the book (7)
- 5 'A Poison Tree' from father in The States (4)
- 6 He thought of French actress being recast (9)
- 7 Maturely see behind the epitaph (6)
- 8, 20 across 6 said this: "I think I am Roman" and so, he was (6,4,3)
- 14 Illumination for Dennett, Dawkins, et al (10)
- 16 Galatians, taking oxygen for a shortfall, generates a warm feeling for 15 (9)
- 19 Singular spectacle of a nameless Tati film (7)
- 20 Prophet was a priest taking the pilgrimage back (6)
- 21 Confused Germans provide places to eat (7)
- 22 A spasm on a PC can result in some old fashioned language (6)
- 26 As 28 and the troops of Midian might do for the restless weasel (5)
- 27 In time, but without secretarial help, it is said (4)

Set by Chimaera

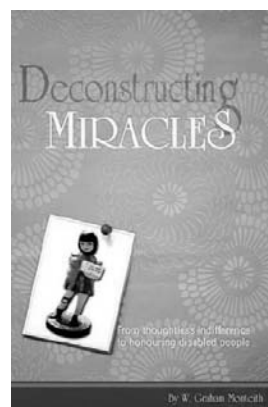
Lives Made Whole

David Paterson reviews

Deconstructing Miracles

by *W. Graham Monteith*

Convenanters Press (Glasgow). 2005. £14.95. 236 pages. ISBN: 1905022212



reviews

Type 'Deconstructing Miracles' into Google and you get '10 references out of 63,500', and 6 of these 10 are references to Graham Monteith's book. A brilliant title then! Graham aims to 'deconstruct' not only the biblical miracle stories, but also religious and secular 'healings' of today, and the subtitle 'From thoughtless indifference to honouring disabled people' is a better guide to the main thrust of the book. The guests at the wedding banquet in Luke 14 are 'the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame', yet – Graham writes – 'disabled people are manifestly absent from the Church's feasts'.

It is a fact of our time that those born lacking limbs, or efficient nervous systems, or sight, or hearing, and those who have had these impaired by illness or accident, need no longer be trapped in subhuman lives, or denied access to a full place in society. The development of medical, surgical and psychological understanding and skills enable us to override all these handicaps. We have an obligation to do so, yet social attitudes too often still stand in the way. Campaigns for disabled rights are often driven by anger, while society is driven by fear and the church remains indifferent. Disability must come to be seen as a 'normal' part of human life in all its diversity.

The problems are not simple. Graham keeps stressing the difference between a 'medical model' which sees disability as something to be cured – surgery, or techniques and counselling to enable a person to fit in to society – and a 'social model' which does not lay on the disabled person the sole obligation to adjust, leaving society with no obligation to change. Graham is critical of each approach if it ignores the other.

So how are we to understand Jesus' miracles in this context? Are they 'violations of natural law' as David Hume defined them, and therefore rejected them? Or are they perhaps 'social events which took place in the compassionate human life of a historical healer'? (p 20). Graham is clear:

The truth and beauty of the revelation of God we find in Jesus must lie in the human complexity of all whom he met and whose lives he enriched and somehow made whole'. (p 24)

I confess that I found this book extremely difficult to read – and I was ashamed of myself. Was it perhaps because I share in the fascination and fear which characterises society's response to severe disability? Maybe. But I think there was another, rational factor.

Graham is determined to treat the subject holistically, and spends several pages discussing the concept of holism. He quotes from a colossal number of authors, each so briefly that the reader is caught between wondering what the quoted author's context was and precisely how the ideas quoted support or run counter to this book's argument. I often felt quite dizzy. Graham's reading list is long and varied, and I wonder whether some sympathetic and ruthless editor might have helped produce a more accessible book.

Graham's stated aim is 'to produce a non-disablist hermeneutic rather than a new theology of miracles', and, true to his admirable holistic ideals, he explores this in a host of different ways. I found his commentary on Isaiah 35: 1 – 6 particularly memorable. There is no limit to God's restoring power. The whole cosmos, the desert, the feeble hearts, all are brought to new life in Isaiah's vision of a renewed world; and the blind, the deaf and the lame are brought back to the centre (see pp 195, 196). Any theology of nature must respect contingency while recognising the interdependency of all aspects of the cosmos (p 85).

'The uniqueness of the Christian community lies...in its inclusiveness and lack of discrimination' (p 109) – a high ideal, too often marred by prejudices based on fear of what it would be like to be disabled (p 113). The use of healing miracles in hymns, prayers and preaching often ignores the individuality of the person healed. This can be very offensive to disabled churchgoers.

Graham acknowledges that a new mindset has been brought to disability by modern circumstances. 'Disability is a modern social construct which has very little relevance to biblical times.' (p 133). But social exclusion was at the heart of human suffering then as now. Graham tells how he found in the Iona Community a shining example of social, political concern and activism wedded with personal compassion. He clearly wishes to find this in the Jesus of the gospels, though perhaps it is even more important that the 21st century Body of Christ should lead in this social revolution and not lag behind.

David Paterson is a SoF Trustee and former Chair of the Steering Committee.

Danielle Hope reviews

Brown Linoleum Green Lawns

by Peter Campbell

Hearing Eye (London). 2006. £6. pbk. 59 pages. ISBN: 1 905082045

Survivors' Poetry is a national literature organisation that provides poetry workshops, reading, performances, publishing, outreach and training. It promotes the development and writing of poetry by survivors of the mental health system. The term poetry is important here. For Survivors' Poetry focuses on producing good poetry, rather than writing mainly as a means of self-discovery or solace. Of course, the process of writing poetry may benefit the person who writes it in many ways, including giving solace or revealing facets hitherto hidden. But much poetry written in 'therapy' or solace does not communicate to others and remains purely personal. Survivors' Poetry seeks to move beyond this and to develop the poetry by people who are survivors or have endured the mental health system.

This first collection of poems by Peter Campbell, one of the founders of Survivors' Poetry, fits exactly this vision of Survivors'. As the title suggests, Campbell's topics are those of being confined in asylums, in their gardens and corridors, the drugs, the encounters with other people. In the poems we also travel with Campbell outside the asylum, see through his eyes and the eyes of those close to him.

Much of Campbell's work is direct, accessible and biting, often with a twist of irony. In 'Decisions' the poet recounts: 'I tell him I am Zeop the Centurion / He writes it down into my case notes'. The next day at the meeting the hierarchies within hospitals are portrayed: 'Porcelain cups for the psychiatrists / Plastic for everyone else.' Then:

'We don't think that you are Zeop the Centurion,
He says.
'I know that', I say.
'Why else do you think I'm in here?'

Some of Campbell's work marches or dances on the page, with very strong rhythm and rhyme. 'Fourth Station' (reprinted on page 15) uses this form, and is a powerful and prophetic work. Campbell takes us on through railway stations, the graffiti, the singing in the wires, the power of the night and his wish to book a conversation with God, to offer congratulations for 'leaving us a night like this / In form of compensation.' Finally Campbell takes us down to King's Cross 'For a brief flirtation / And the evening on the back row / Of a godless generation.'

Here we see good evidence of two more of Campbell's strengths – his ability to end poems well, landing with the poise of an accomplished dancer or a Beethoven symphony, and his piercing eye for

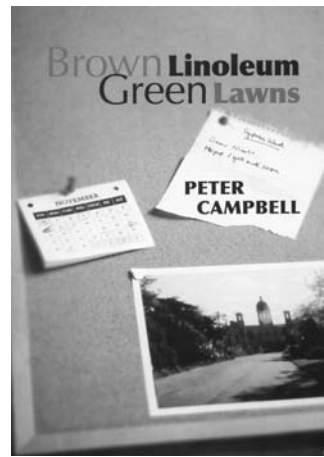
detail. Take for example, in 'That Pleasure' (building from the John Dryden quotation – 'there is a pleasure sure in being mad, which none but madmen know!') where Campbell speaks how 'After the bath, / they stand in the arms of their belt-less clothes', showing his subject with belt removed (presumably because he might hang himself) and frail, needing the arms of his clothes to support him.

Campbell occasionally overdoes the marching tone to his poems so they become too much like the repetitive chorus of a pop song. 'Coming out' runs close to this edge, with a chorus 'That we're coming out. We are coming out...' And although this poem probably goes down well at readings it offers much less on the page. Campbell's work is a mix of rhyme and non rhymed and sometimes he can over strain the rhymes – for example in 'Song' we find – sea / me, deep / keep, you / two, although the poem redeems itself with a poignant ending – 'But the music is not mine'.

There is a grace and gentleness of many of Campbell's poems that appeals too, especially those that use more subtle forms. One of my favourites was a tender love poem where 'the day came in less like a vagrant selling tins' and the night 'less like a hawker overspent' in the warm arms of the lover. Or, speaking of the use of sedation, a delicate but chilling poem 'Drugtime Cowboy Joe' where 'You can have your sunsets cloudy bright, / Bright, bright to cloudy or extra bright'.

Attractively presented by London publishers Hearing Eye, this entertaining and at times powerful collection gives a vivid insight into the experiences of a true survivor of the mental health system. Campbell is never sentimental, has a precise eye, and a strong sense of the poetic sprinkled with very effective irony. If you are looking for poetry that says and means something fresh, this is well worth the £6.

Danielle Hope's third collection of poems is *The Stone Ship* (Rockingham Press, Ware 2003). She is a former trustee of Survivors' Poetry.



reviews

Cicely Herbert reviews

The Life of Galileo

by *Bertholt Brecht*

at the *National Theatre, London*

In thinking about the dilemma faced by Galileo Galilei, I am reminded of the strange reasoning of George Bush, president of the most powerful nation on Earth, and a professed Christian, who tells us that he cannot sanction the loss of an unborn child's life through the act of abortion, but fails to explain how he can sanction the random bombing of untold innocent civilians in lands far from his.

Bertholt Brecht's greatest play, *The Life of Galileo*, is revived in a new production at the National Theatre in London and addresses the moral dilemmas thrown up by scientists when the discoveries they make are in direct conflict with traditional religious beliefs and ideals. Howard Davies's new production contains a towering central performance by Simon Russell Beale. This is acting at its inspiring best. Not all the supporting actors are in his league however, especially vocally; indeed, it's my constant grumble that these days many young actors cannot make themselves heard, possibly as a result of the very different technique required in television. In spite of this reservation, I found that Brecht's main argument and the theatrical gusto of the play shone through. Another especially fine performance was that of Oliver Ford Davies, vocally superb, as the Cardinal Inquisitor, who argues against Galileo's scientific discoveries. because, 'when the weaver's shuttle weaves on its own and the zither plays of itself, then the masters will need no apprentices and the rulers no servants.' The scene between the Inquisitor and Galileo's former ally, Pope Urban VIII, as he is ceremoniously robed for the Inquisition, evoking centuries of tradition and power, provides one of the strongest moments in this production.

Bertolt Brecht thought long and hard about the kind of theatre he wished to create and he evolved his famous 'alienation technique', which involves the use of 'epic acting, inscriptions projected upon the stage, a particular use of songs, music, choreography and scenic design,' all elements which counteract the fable, 'commenting on rather than supporting it'. David Hare's latest version of the play has dispensed with some key elements of Brecht's vision for the theatre, in particular the use of rhyming couplets for the banner headlines that introduce each scene, but at the performance I saw, this loss in no way lessened the power of the play.

Galileo built his own telescope and his observations of the planets were deemed by the



Galileo

reviews

Catholic Church of Rome to be so dangerous to the status quo, that he was forced to recant from his revelation that it is the earth, and not the sun, that revolves in the heavens. The National Theatre's revival of the play is timely, addressing as it does matters of deep concern for us all at the present time.

It is useful to read the author's notes on the play with reference to the dawning of a 'new age.' It was while Brecht was preparing an American version of his play for the actor Charles Laughton, that the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Brecht wrote, 'Overnight the biography of the founder of the new system of physics read differently. The infernal effect of the Great Bomb placed the conflict between Galileo and the authorities of his day in a new, a sharper light.' At the time, Brecht added one key speech to his play, in which Galileo says:

I maintain that the only purpose of science is to ease the hardship of human existence. If scientists, intimidated by self-seeking people in power, are content to amass knowledge for the sake of knowledge, then science can become crippled, and your new machines will represent nothing but new means of oppression. With time you may discover all that is to be discovered, and your progress will only be a progression away from mankind. The gulf between you and them can one day become so great that your cry of jubilation over some new achievement may be answered by a universal cry of horror.

The Life of Galileo plays in repertory at the National Theatre until October 31st 2006. For information call 020 7452 3000. nationaltheatre.org.uk

Galileo's book, *The Starry Messenger* can be seen on display in the public gallery at the British Library.

Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays edited by Peter Demetz (Spectrum Books. Prentice-Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs, NJ).

Cicely Herbert is one of the trio who founded and continue to run Poems on the Underground. Her poetry collection *In Hospital*, together with the Victorian poet W. E. Henley, was published by Katabasis in 1992.

David Boulton reviews

A Radical Reader: The Struggle for Change in England, 1381-1914

edited by Christopher Hampton

Spokesman Books (Nottingham). 2006. £18. 624 pages. Pbk. ISBN 0 85124 725 3

Let's say it straight out. This is a marvellous book. In six hundred pages Hampton tells the story of five hundred years of 'struggle for change', and he does so in the words of the men and women, agitators, rebels, poets, satirists and even preachers, who not only talked the talk but walked the walk, living, and sometimes dying, in their quest for a republic of heaven in England's green and pleasant land.

They are all here in this brilliantly selected anthology: the ones who have long been part of the radical canon – Wat Tyler, John Lilburne, Gerrard Winstanley, Milton, Blake, Shelley, Byron, Dickens, Morris, Harriet Martineau, Josephine Butler, Sylvia Pankhurst, Karl Marx – but many less-familiar names too, from the Peasants' Revolt through the English Revolution to Chartism and socialism. And some whose names we shall never know are also honoured: the author of the Martin Marprelate tracts that raged against Elizabethan pomp and episcopacy; the anonymous 'Real Friend to the People' who wrote a 'Declaration of... Rights of the Commonalty of Great Britain' in 1782; the journalists who wrote for the illegal 'Poor Man's Guardian' in the 1830s.

Both in his chronological and well-linked selections and in his incisive introduction, Hampton shows himself well aware of the critical connection between religious and social radicalism. The inspiration for social transformation was often a fresh re-envisioning of the kingdom teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. We find it in the excommunicated priest John Ball, in the Quakers George Fox, John Lilburne and Gerrard Winstanley, in the visionary Blake, and even in the atheist Shelley (who, on the quiet, was a bit of a fan of Jesus). For activists like these, armchair radical theology wasn't enough. As Winstanley put it, 'action is the life of all, and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing'.

Which leaves me wondering where Sea of Faith would fit in the radical tradition – if, indeed, it would fit at all. We pride ourselves on our radical theology. Leaving aside the question of whether it really is very radical in the twenty-first century to propose that religious faith and its gods and demons are wholly human creations, what connections have we made in our twenty-odd years between the religious radicalism

we profess and the social radicalism that should surely be its outcome? Let's be honest. Not enough.

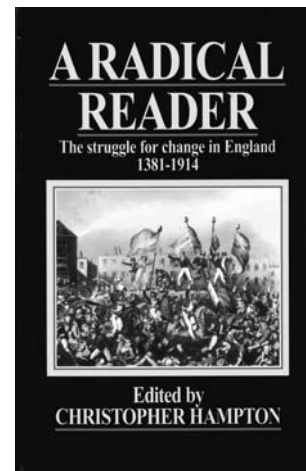
Listen to Hampton on the voice of radical protest: 'It is not the voice of moderate middle-ground opinion urging the virtues of compromise and accommodation to make an unpalatable system more acceptable. Those who adopt such a course may call themselves radicals, but they cannot challenge the underlying conditions that are the causes of injustice and oppression.' Ouch.

Winstanley too: 'Everyone talks of freedom, but there are few that act for freedom, and the actors for freedom are oppressed by the talkers and verbal professors of freedom.' Ouch again. Are we as a self-described 'radical' network actors as well as talkers, or mere 'verbal professors' of the egalitarianism, the social justice, the war on poverty and oppression that must be at the heart of our humanist understanding of religious tradition?

These are not good times for social radicals. We have seen days of hope come and go. But it was always so. Jesus' kingdom of heaven turned into a church that proselytised with fire and sword, the Peasants' Revolt collapsed with the murder of Wat Tyler, the English republic was strangled after ten short years, the dream of international socialism was shattered by Stalin's tyranny. Closer to home, our own attempts in SoF a generation ago to see off what appeared to be a declining religious fundamentalism largely failed, as religious fundamentalisms of every shade staged a world-wide come-back. Is failure, then, endemic to the radical project? Are the poor (and the superstitious) always with us?

Hampton includes Arthur Hugh Clough's answer, written as he watched French troops kill off Mazzini's republic in Rome in 1849:

Say not the struggle nought availeth...
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main..



reviews

As our own *Sofia* editor wrote in *The Guardian* recently, 'The Christian epic story of salvation and the final coming of heaven on Earth is an imaginative portrayal of a humanist project for justice and peace'. The long history of the project may as easily be written in its setbacks as in its stirring victories. But to quote Hampton's introduction again, 'the struggle has had to be continually renewed by the people... Again and again they have come back, beyond exhaustion – those 'conscious and conscientious men', as Milton put it, 'who in this world are counted weakest', but without whose unwavering courage 'the force of this world' cannot be defeated". [Hampton, incidentally, adds conscious and conscientious women to Milton's men. Milton's radicalism deserted him when it came to exclusively gendered language].

A Radical Reader was first published in 1984, since when, as Ken Coates writes in his Foreword to this new edition, 'the Thatcher years extinguished many hopes, and... New Labour extinguished more'. The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and its publishing arm, Spokesman Books, are to be congratulated for reissuing it now. 'Say not the struggle nought availeth'... But say, too, that the struggle demands action as well as words, deeds more than creeds. If in this wounded world our religious humanism fails to find effective expression in social action, it will hardly deserve a place, or even a footnote, in the English radical tradition.

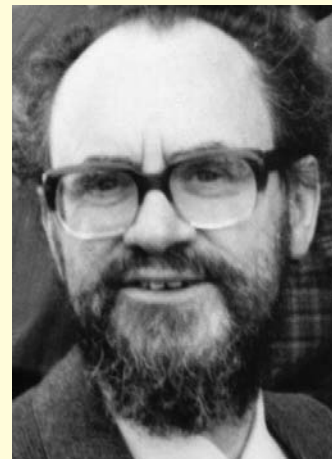
David Boulton's books include *Gerrard Winstanley and the Republic of Heaven* and *The Trouble with God: Building the Republic of Heaven*, available from the Quaker Bookshop, Euston Road, London

Answers to the Crossword on page 18

S	M	L	A	S	P		E	I	L	R	A	H	C
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John Andrew Storey

John Andrew Storey was born on March 24th 1935 in the Isle of Ely. He was a Congregational Minister from 1961 to 1963, then left to become a Unitarian. From 1963 until 1994 he served as a Unitarian Minister in various places. It was then he began writing his hymns, which became widely known and sung, both in this country and abroad. In 1972 he founded the Unitarian Buddhist Society. His concerns over racism, conservation, ecology and peace led him into political activism and during his years in Plymouth he stood as Ecology Party candidate. His hymn, *The Larger View*, was sung at the closing session of this year's SoF Conference.



The Larger View

In their ancient isolation
Races framed their moral codes,
And the peoples of each nation
Trode their solitary roads.
Now the distances are shrinking;
Travel, and the printed page,
All earth's many lands are linking
Spreading knowledge of each age.

Now new times demand new measures,
And new ways we must explore;
Let each faith bring its own treasures
To enrich the common store.
Then no more will creeds divide us –
Though we love our own the best –
For the larger view will guide us
As we join in common quest.

This hymn is published in *The Common Quest: Selected Writings of John Andrew Storey*, edited by Charles Hughes and Sylvia Storey (Lindsey Press, London 2000). It is reprinted here by kind permission of Mrs Sylvia Storey. The editor would also like to thank Miles and Jane Howarth for information about the author and for bringing his book to her attention.

Zapatistas



'For a world with room for many worlds'

Zapatista elders on their march from the Lacandon Jungle to the capital, Mexico City in 2001. Comandante Esther, a very small woman, addressed the Mexican Parliament. Zapatistas cover their faces as an ascetic practice 'until the faceless have faces'.