

The Fountain

Don Cupitt gave this talk at the launch party of his latest book *The Fountain* in Emmanuel College, Cambridge on 22nd February 2011.

The Fountain is billed as being probably my last book. It may be seen as a purely rational religious book for the era of cultural globalisation, being pitched somewhere between Christianity, Buddhism, and the kind of modern critical secularism that began with young Hegelians like Marx and Feuerbach. For about a decade I've called my philosophy 'Energetic Spinozism', meaning a form of religious naturalism whose dominant metaphors speak not of rational necessity, substance, and eternity, but of an explosive outpouring, streaming, and scattering of energies-read-by-us-as-signs. Everything pours out and passes away, everything is *broadcast*, and *on show*, everything is constantly being re-read, re-interpreted and re-valued. In short, everything is utterly transient, including both you and me, both the stuff of the world and all our readings of it. Everything is always in flux. Call my energetic Spinozism watery, if you like, in contrast to Spinoza's dryness.

The Fountain metaphor applies these ideas of the continual coming-forth of all temporal Being, to Big-Bang- cosmology, to life, to the world of human communications, to the human self, and even to God, who is spoken of as pouring out his spirit upon all flesh in the last days. Even God scatters and democratises himself, and so passes away. Hence the slogan 'God, ever-living and ever-dying'. I've been trying to introduce various neologisms to describe how everything pours out all the time from nothing, calling it E/ Vent or forthcoming, or M/Other, a kind of symbolically-female darkness, the O/void.

As I tell all this story, I'm trying not to *escape* from our utter transience, but to get readers so immersed in it that we get a blissful intuition of the eternal in the very midst of life. The Fountain is all gushing, formless transience: but as we step back from it, it becomes a symbol of healing and repose, and of life's consoling self-renewal. In city squares and in great gardens the Fountain is situated at a point where many ways meet, a *focal* point that attracts the eye. An observation as old as Aristotle points out that there are motions so even and rapid that they can seem to be completely still. Like a child's spinning top, like a

beard of light 'resting' upon something, like the far-off stream tumbling down a hillside, and like the Fountain.

Let's switch the metaphor for a moment replacing the Fountain with the Sun. The process by which the sun lives or exists all the time is identical with the process by which it dies all the time. It synthesises living and dying. It hasn't a care. It is all-out. It is pure Act: it lives in an eternal Now. That's how we too can and should live. We should – to use another jargon phrase – be 'easy going', happy to be transient, pouring out our own lives along with everything else. Hence my phrase 'Solar Ethics', and indeed I hope that one day *The Fountain* may be published in one volume with the *Solar Ethics* of 1995.

So, then, this little book is for everyone. It says that our chief religious problem today, in an age of extremely rapid cultural change, is time-dread and the fear of death. I try to show that one can be completely happy to be just a mortal. Go with the flow: we are always in the midst of things, and will never be left out. We can be content always simply to coincide with our own expressive lives. I *am* the time of any life; so should *have* the time of my life.

Thus I have urged people to give up the old metaphysics of substance, and instead be content with our own passing lives. We come to pass, and we pass away. That's it. That's all. We are already in the last world we will ever know, as I believe most people nowadays recognise. We should therefore move on from the kind of outlook that persuades us to spend all our lives preparing for another life beyond this one. We are there already! The Church is both institutionally and ideologically committed to the idea of another world beyond this one. That idea is, I think, no longer tenable, which is why I wrote thirty years ago that 'Classical Western Christianity is now our Old Testament'. It's time to move on, and to explore the next dispensation.

The Fountain is reviewed by Stephen Mitchell on page 24.