

# The Human Form Divine

This Christmas issue of *Sofia*, called *The Human Form Divine*, begins with an interview with Don Cupitt, in which John Shuck converses with him by skype from Portland, Oregon, USA. The conversation was broadcast on Shuck's *Religion for Life* programme (and can be heard on SOF website). Cupitt focuses on Jesus' ethic of exceeding generosity, pouring ourselves out like sunshine. He points out a contradiction in the Sermon on the Mount (a collection of sayings, perhaps from several sources) between 'two different Jesuses... One of them says: "Act immediately, give yourself, shine like the sun, come out into the open, live by self-outing." The other Jesus says: "Be prudent and calculating..." The first Jesus, he says, is the 'solar' Jesus and 'that's what the original Jesus was like.'

The theme of exceeding generosity means going the extra mile, loving our enemies as well as our friends, *exceeding* 'the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees', who merely obey the letter of the law. I was interested to learn that 'generosity' and 'kindness' both have the same proto-Indo European root *gn/kn*. The former comes to us through the Latin and the latter through the German branch. Generosity is related to generate, engender: an outpouring of life, of creativity. It is also related to genus, generic, meaning type or kind. Likewise, kind is related to kin, kindred, German *Kinder*. Being kind means loving and giving, and 'kind' like 'genus' also means type, or sort. So generous and kind is the kind of human being we are to become. That is the humankind of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus.

He says we should be like the Creator. Cupitt mentions the lilies of the field. When Jesus says, 'Consider the lilies of the field. Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these,' I think the point is not only that we should *live* rather than always just being anxious about our lives. Perhaps Jesus is also saying that the Creator, who could have made just one square black and white plant and one

animal, was actually *exceedingly* creative and made so many kinds of animals and flowers with matchless beauty... Life itself is a super-abundant outpouring and if we live abundantly, that is also being like the Creator and shares the *generative* energy of life on Earth.

Don Cupitt has now published his fifty-first book, *Ethics in the Last Days of Humanity*, which is reviewed on page 20. On page 22 we also have a review of SOF's new book, *From Monk to Modernity* by Dominic Kirkham.

*Sofia* is delighted to bring you two new writers for it in this issue. In his article called *Post-Atheist Humanism* Martin Spence argues that reductionist atheist humanism is the mirror image of fundamentalist theism, and that the humanist tradition offers a richer idea of humanity. Again we have the idea of richness, of generosity, against what is 'reduced', mean-spirited or narrow-minded. Then in his article on *Faith as Commitment to an Ultimate Concern* Chris Smith thinks about faith and idolatry.

I offer the first of a series of theological reflections on a classic Christian doctrine from the viewpoint of religion as a human creation. It is on the theme of Incarnation, in which God becomes human, the human form divine. The front and back cover of this *Sofia* present the parallel between the story of the Flight into Egypt, when an angel told Joseph to 'take the child and his mother and flee' from mortal danger, and a Syrian refugee mother feeding her tiny baby on the beach at Lesbos, where she has just made the perilous crossing in a rubber dinghy. I think refugees will be on all our minds this Christmas.

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*Sofia* is unable to publish the article by Andy Pakula announced as forthcoming in the September issue, as it did not come forth!