

Yet You See I am Alive

Soon this cold winter will be over at last and Easter is approaching. The title of this issue of *Sofia* comes from the words of Bunyan's Great-Heart.

When Christiana is terrified of going through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Great-Heart encourages her: 'For my part, as I have told you already, I have gone often through this Valley, and have been much harder put to it than now I am. Yet you see I am alive.'

The question for this issue of *Sofia* is whether the Christian Grand Narrative is dead if we discard its supernatural elements. Or in what way is the story still alive? In what way is Jesus Christ still present? In his article 'What Really Happened at Easter?' Eric Whittaker offers an imaginary reconstruction of Cleopas and his wife Mary on the road to Emmaus three days after Jesus' crucifixion.

Whittaker points out that Paul, who has left us the earliest New Testament writings, never

mentions the Empty Tomb, Paul's meeting with Jesus 'on the Damascus road was obviously a vision, and was in any case long after the forty day period', but Paul always believed that it was on a par with Jesus' other Easter appearances 'and no one disputed this'.

His article inspired me to check Paul's account in his letter to the Corinthians (1:15:3-9) in my Greek New Testament. He gives a list of appearances of the risen Christ and the verb he repeatedly uses (4 times) to describe them is 'ωφθη (*ophthe*): meaning 'he was seen'. This is an aorist *passive* form. He uses the same word for all the appearances, including his own vision on the road to Damascus 'last of all'...

In an extract from his forthcoming book Geoffrey Crocker argues that in stories like the



SOF Annual Conference
Leicester University
27-29 July 2010

Speakers:

Maryam Namazie, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain
Kumi Naidoo, Executive Director of Greenpeace
International

Third Speaker to be confirmed

Don Cupitt will reflect on each day's activities

For more details and booking forms see insert fliers or contact

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Resurrection, myth has greater power than a literal interpretation. I have also printed an edited version of the talk I gave to the Oxford SOF 2009 Day Conference, arguing that the Christian Grand Narrative can be translated fruitfully and without much difficulty into non-supernatural terms. On the other hand, another speaker at the Conference, Victor Anderson, thinks we should move on from that old narrative and suggests that the tremendous story of the Universe and our own Earth, including our own evolution, is more worthy of our respect because it is literally true. He has sent a résumé of his talk to be printed in this issue too.

At the bottom of page 3 you will find an announcement of this year's annual SOF Conference, whose theme is *Religion and Social Justice*. You will find a booking form and further details on inserted fliers. Please book early for what looks as if it will be an interesting and challenging event, as well as all its social joys.

CORRECTION TO SOFIA 94

The Editor would like to apologise for the mistake in Bruce Kent's biography. Bruce Kent is not, as was stated, 'a former Catholic priest'. He is a retired Catholic priest.

Jesus was not 'seriously relaxed about the super-rich.' And in Psalm 119 the psalmist prays that his heart may not be inclined to covetousness or his eyes to vanity. This *Sofia* includes a meditation on that Psalm by David S. Lee, who says 'none of these insights into the meaning of the psalms requires belief in a supernatural God.' We have also included an extract from Psalm 119 in Miles Coverdale's translation of 1535 (the version in the old *Book of Common Prayer*). We are delighted to show below another cartoon by Josh, done specially for *Sofia*, on the theme of Jesus' famous camel joke.



Cartoon by Josh