

# God is Human

The Christmas message is God come down to Earth from heaven.

In a recent interview with the BBC Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, said that he was ‘very anxious’ about the Government’s Spending Review and the benefit cuts that will be imposed on the poorest in our society. ‘Quite often,’ he said, ‘that can make people start feeling vulnerable – even more vulnerable as time goes on – and that’s the kind of unfairness I feel.’ He had ‘a lot of worries’ because ‘people are often [on benefits], not because they are wicked, stupid or lazy, but because their circumstances are against them, they’ve failed to break through into something. To drive that spiral deeper – as I say – does seem a great problem.’

With gentle irony he said he was not convinced that all sections of society are making an equal contribution: ‘I am not completely convinced about that, I must say. Because with the stories we have of continuing large bonuses of the very wealthy, it’s not the sort of thing that convinces people that’s something they can all sign up to.’

The Government’s ideologically driven attack on those who are out of work is even more brutal because it is accompanied by the loss of so many jobs, so that there just will not be jobs to be had. The cap on housing benefit means that thousands will lose their homes in high-rent areas like central London, when the lack of social housing is a direct result of previous Conservative governments’ policy, and there is no plan whatever now to put a cap on *rents*, or to acknowledge that these high payments do not go to the families in need of housing but to landlords. At the same time we have a cabinet of millionaires and their recent Spending Review has made no serious attempt to tax the rich, curb bankers’ bonuses or collect huge sums in unpaid taxes from wealthy tax dodgers.

Jesus said: ‘Whatever you did to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.’ He said he had come to bring ‘good news to the poor.’ The Government’s Spending Review certainly is not good news to the poor. Jesus also preached the Golden Rule: ‘Do as you would be done by.’ The basis of that Golden Rule is

*imagination*, the ability to see ourselves in another’s place. Blake said:

Can I see another’s woe  
And not be in sorrow too?

And Mary Wollstonecraft wrote to her lover, Gilbert Imlay: ‘Imagination is the true fire stolen from heaven that renders men social by expanding their hearts.’

SOF regards God (and all gods) as the product of the human imagination too. In this issue of *Sofia* we have an article by David S. Lee reflecting on some Old Testament themes from that point of view. And an article by Eric Whittaker compares the usefulness of imagining God to the usefulness in mathematics of the imaginary number ‘*i*’, which, he says, is very useful. We also have the first extract from *Part of a Pilgrimage*, a Journal kept by long-time SOF member Anne Ashworth following her long spiritual odyssey.

This is the Christmas issue of *Sofia* in a midwinter that will be very bleak for some. The Christmas message is ‘God is human’. God has ‘come down to Earth from heaven.’ Jesus offers a God who *is* Love, *is* Kindness, so that: Love rules! Kindness rules! That is to say, they should. Not only that. In the Christian story, Jesus the newborn baby *is* God. When Paul speaks of Jesus as Christ he says that in him: ‘We are one body because we all share the same bread.’ But of course in the world today we humans very patently do *not* all share the same bread. That is a vision of what should happen. And today the only place to find Christ’s body on Earth – to find God – is in one another.

As we know, the early church fathers fought for hundreds of years over how Jesus could be both God and human. The great Athanasius, defender of the term *homousios* – ‘one in being’ or ‘consubstantial’ – had to escape at night by boat pursued by angry Arians. Finally at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 they came up with the **statement:**

we should confess our Lord Jesus Christ  
to be one and **the same** Son,  
**the same** perfect in deity,  
and **the same** perfect in humanity,  
true God and true man,  
**the same** of a rational soul and body,  
one in being with the Father in deity,  
**the same** one in being with us in humanity,  
like us in all things except sin;  
begotten from the Father before the ages in deity,  
and in latter days, **the same**, for us and for our  
salvation,  
from the Virgin Mary mother of God in humanity:  
one and **the same** only-begotten Christ Son  
Lord...

Jesus Christ is not only one in being – *homousios* –  
with the Father as God, wholly God, but also one in  
being – *homousios* – with us in humanity, wholly  
human. If you listen to that statement out loud as a  
kind of poem, what you hear repeated thunderously  
is *the same, the same, the same*. It sounds even more  
thunderous in Greek *ton auton ton auton, ton auton* and  
in Latin *eundem, eundem, eundem*. There is something  
scandalous here. What I hear the thunder saying is:  
God is human, God and human are *the same, the same*  
*the same*. Jesus Christ is one person with two natures.  
Mary is called ‘mother of God’ because you are not  
the mother of a ‘nature’ but of a *person*, and because  
the fully human and fully divine Christ is one  
person, in what is technically called the ‘sharing of  
properties’ (*communicatio idiomatum*), whatever can be  
said about the man Jesus can be said of God, so we  
can say God was born, God suffered, God died on  
the cross... The most orthodox christology, in  
which Christ is wholly divine and wholly human,  
leads to the most humanist outcome: God and  
human are the same. God is human.

William Blake calls Jesus ‘the Lord, the universal  
humanity’ and the heart of the Christian message is  
that humanity has the potential to become like the  
God we have imagined, at least partly, in knowledge  
and creative power, in goodness, in love. Though of  
course Athanasius, the great defender of the  
*homousios*, did not think God was imaginary, he  
wrote: ‘God became human so that we might  
become God’.

If we imagine God *as love, as kindness*, the only  
ones who *can* love or *can* be kind to one another and  
create a fair society are ourselves. Meanwhile, merry  
Christmas to all. The possibilities the story suggests  
are well worth celebrating.



Sea of Faith Network

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