

Now I See

In the story of Jesus healing the man born blind in John's Gospel (chapter 9), the Pharisees are outraged that Jesus has healed him on the Sabbath Day. So they quiz the man about his healing. The man answers: 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed and now I see.' The Pharisees interrogate the parents and then quiz the man again, telling him: 'Give glory to God! We know this fellow is a sinner.' The man replies: 'I don't know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that I was blind and now I see.' *Now I See* gives us the title for this *Sofia*, which concerns both seeing the world around us and *insight*.

Our first article, *Religious Insight*, by Tony Windross describes how, paradoxically, it was only when he came to see religion as 'self-evidently a product of the human imagination', that he decided to become ordained. Tony was one of the earliest members of the SOF Network, together with other Anglican clergy, Don Cupitt, Stephen Mitchell and David Paterson, who agreed with him. They hoped, as they put it, that the Church would 'buy non-realism' but that did not happen. Remarkably, Windross is still a working priest, now Vicar of Pevensy in Sussex. But, he says, it can get lonely in the Church. Tony will be speaking at this year's SOF Annual Conference in Leicester in July.

In our next article, *Seeing and Saying*, Kathleen McPhilemy explores the poet's twofold task to see and to say. She concludes 'I believe that the self is continuous, social and responsible... As a poet, I am not a politician, a doctor, a community worker; my role is to see the world with as clear a vision as I can., and part of that seeing is to see myself as clearly as I can... Seeing clearly is hard and painful... Saying is equally difficult.'

This *Sofia's* front cover shows William Blake's painting of Paul seeing Christ on the road to Damascus. The first account we have of the Resurrection is by Paul writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15: 3-8). He gives a list of those by

whom the Risen Christ 'was seen' – the Greek verb he uses, ὤφθη (ophthe), is in the *passive* – and 'last of all,' he says Christ 'was seen' by me. That is, Paul makes no distinction between his own vision of Christ (after Christ has 'gone away into heaven') and the others before that. He develops it into a vision of a kind society. Christ becomes the 'head' / figurehead of a *social body*, in which 'we are one body because we all share the same bread' and everyone is of equal moral worth, whether 'Jew or Greek, – we could say whether Jew or Aryan – slave or free, male or female' (Gal 3: 28). All are one 'in Christ' and 'the only thing that counts is faith working through love' (Gal 4:6).

This is enacted symbolically in the ceremony of the Eucharist where Christ is present in – or – as – the gathered community. In Luke's Resurrection story of the disciples (Mr and Mrs Cleopas?) meeting a stranger on the road to Emmaus, they invite him in to dinner and recognise Jesus 'in the breaking of bread'.

Jesus, we are told, loved eating and drinking and a feast – the 'eschatological banquet' – becomes a key metaphor for the achieved kind society or, as he put it, 'reign of God'. Everyone will be invited to the feast. Those sleeping out rough in our cities, some dying of cold, and those forced by inhuman government policies to resort to food banks to survive will be the honoured guests. These poetic visions of Jesus and Paul are what made Christianity the mother of humanism.

In Dominic Kirkham's article he explains why he does not think Cardinal Newman should have been canonised, but also points out that Newman's 'novel understanding of the development of Christian doctrine... itself reflected something of the new evolutionary thinking.'

In his article on Bonhoeffer, Martin Spence recalls that one of Bonhoeffer's answers to the question 'who is Christ for us today?' was 'Christ

is community'. Jew and Aryan are of equal moral worth – he was executed. In later liberation theology Christ is to be found today in people living now and, above all, in the poor and dispossessed, 'crucified' not for but *by* 'the sins of the world'. The struggle to make things better is Christ rising again. The leading liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría and five of his fellow Jesuits were assassinated in 1989.

For Blake, 'all deities reside in the human breast' and 'The religions of all nations are derived from each nation's different reception of the poetic genius, which is everywhere called the spirit of prophecy.' In the evolution towards humanism of the poetic visions of 'the reign of God' and 'the body of Christ', Christ becomes a metaphor. Metaphor and personification belong to our human poetic genius and are imaginative ways of seeing. The 'development of doctrine' means seeing more clearly what is real and what is imaginary.

We don't have to lose what is imaginary when we see that it is not supernatural. (Indeed, imagination is necessary to both religion and science.) The imaginary is part of our common treasury and creates our commonwealth. Fundamentalist secularists blindly discard it as dross. Like those terrible excavators digging the foundations for Trump's wall and blindly destroying indigenous sacred sites.

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Below this editorial there are details of the upcoming SOF London Conference, *Music and Religion*, on March 28th. There is still time to enrol.

The SOF Network Annual Conference will take place, as usual, in Leicester in July. There are more details on page 8. With this *Sofia* you should also receive 2 insert fliers, one with information about the Annual Conference, and the other a booking form.

SOF NETWORK LONDON DAY CONFERENCE 2020

In the Beginning was Music?

Music and Religion

Saturday 28th March 2020

10.30 – 4.30 pm

St John's Church, Waterloo Road, London SE1 8TY



Speakers

Patti Whaley

BA, MA Musicology, ABRSM Diploma in organ performance (Distinction)
Former Chair of Trustees, SOF Network

Stephen Mitchell (with Elaine Henson)

BA Music, former Secondary School Music Teacher
Former Chair of Trustees, SOF Network

Katie Hainbach

BA Music, MMus Vocal Performance
Head of Music at Alyth Synagogue

Download booking form sofn.org.uk/london/docs/leaflet2020.pdf

send with your cheque or £20 note

to John Sargeant (SOF), 61 Fordington Road, London N6 4TH.

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