

sfia

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Tree of Peace and Unity, Dunadry Hotel, Belfast

SOF 2019 Conference

sofia

down to Earth

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Front cover image: The Tree of Peace and Unity in the Dunadry Hotel, Belfast. [facebook.com/dunadry/photos](https://www.facebook.com/dunadry/photos)

Back cover image: Statue of Justice on the roof of the Brittany Parlement, Rennes. commons.wikimedia.org



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Sofia does not think wisdom is dispensed supernaturally from on high, but that it can only be sought by humans at home on Earth, and is inseparable from human kindness.

Sofia regards religion as a human creation and, in rejecting the supernatural, is for this life and humanity with its questing imagination and enabling dreams.

Sofia is for diggers and seekers in its own native radical tradition and everywhere.

SOF 2019 Conference

At this year's annual SOF Conference our first main speaker was from Northern Ireland. *Sofia's* front cover shows the Tree of Peace and Unity in the garden of the Dundadry Hotel, Belfast. It began as two lime trees but as they grew, they joined together to become one. Tony Blair, David Trimble and John Hume met under this tree to broker peace in Northern Ireland in 1998. (That hard-won Good Friday Agreement is now threatened by a No-Deal Brexit.)

Our in-house main speaker's talk was on Justice and *Sofia's* back cover shows the flamboyant golden statue of Justice on the roof of the Brittany Parlement building.

The Conference's official title was *Is That All there Is?* For most of the time that theme hovered somewhere in the background, rather than being explicitly addressed. But from the three very disparate main speakers and other contributions, a theme that did emerge strongly in the course of the Conference was Exclusion/Inclusion.

Our first speaker, Ernie Rea, describes his Journey of Faith from Exclusive to Inclusive. As a child growing up in a Protestant family in Northern Ireland, he played with all the local children, except the one Catholic family. They were different, he thought, and worshipped a different God. He began meeting Catholics when he went to university. Then when he worked as a Protestant minister and for BBC Radio Ulster during the Troubles, he made steadfast and courageous efforts to fraternise with Catholics and support Civil Rights. When in 1989 he became BBC Head of Religious Broadcasting, he says, 'I became part of a wide interfaith network. So I became friends with Jews, Muslims and Hindus.' What is fascinating in this Journey is how, as he becomes more open and generous-minded through meeting people, his God becomes more open and generous-minded too. In his conclusion he says: 'I believe in a God who not only tolerates diversity but loves and embraces it.'

Our in-house speaker Stephen Williams traces the development of ideas of justice through Justice as Law, Justice as Virtue, to Justice as Fairness. He does raise the question: 'Is that all there is to Justice?' when he says:

'When we take a long view, we see law as dynamic, altering over time and with the principles dominant at one time often contradicted in the practices and procedures of a different age... However, I suggest that if we were to stop the clock at any point in that history, instead of an acknowledgement of that reality, we would find an assumption that the current expression of justice is the only right one, the embodiment of an eternally valid principle.'

But by the end of his talk Stephen plumps firmly for Justice as Fairness. He quotes founder of the NHS Aneurin Bevan's critique of utilitarianism in his book *In Place of Fear*: 'Not even the apparently enlightened principle of "the greatest good of the greatest number" can excuse indifference to individual suffering.' In his concluding section Stephen looks in some detail at the work of John Rawls, who proposes Justice as Fairness and, of course, fairness means *inclusion*.

Our final main speaker, yoga teacher Avril Robarts, speaks about her engagement with Indian religious ideas and how she has found it helpful to include them in her spiritual life and practice.

There were also many short talks and workshops at the Conference. For reasons of space we can only give summaries and reports of a just a few of them. Among the short talks, Carol Palfrey spoke about 'the forgotten hero of Norwich', Thomas Browne, who included ideas from both science and religion. 'Belief can be soft and flexible,' says Browne. 'I have experienced a few Christians and I have mixed my own by *commolition* to satisfy mine own reason.' David Francis' short talk was on developing an inclusive religious education for schools.

It was a packed Conference and this is a packed *Sofia* but it still has space for two poems, a love poem on page 15 by David Lambourn, and Kathryn Southworth's poem, 'A Perturbation of Light' (page 25) does directly address the question *Is That All there Is?* She answers, in effect, yes but so what?

From Exclusive to Inclusive

A Journey of Faith

Ernie Rea tells some stories about growing up in Northern Ireland, his work as a Protestant minister during the Troubles and as a religious broadcaster for the BBC.

I was brought up in Belfast immediately after the war in a time of austerity. We didn't realise at the time but with hindsight it was a pretty grim place. Mine was a very happy existence but there wasn't much entertainment. The church was absolutely central. My family were Presbyterian and we went to a large church in Belfast city centre. There was a congregation of about 600 on a Sunday morning. The preaching was a bit fire and brimstone and the religion was a bit legalistic. I can remember – I think I was five years old – a Scottish Sunday School teacher whispering in my ear, 'Ernie Rea you're going to hell!'

I learnt my religion at my mother's knee. I remember on Sunday evenings we would sit down in front of the fire and she would read from the Children's Bible. Those stories became the bedrock of my existence. I loved them. They gave me my faith, even though I interpreted them then in a very literal way.

I grew up in a warm family environment. I had five sisters and I was the youngest. It was a loving family and the church, even though it was an enormous one, had a sense of belonging about it. We lived in a comfortable middle class area, a leafy suburb, in quite a large house. For me life was good but, looking back, there was a down side. There were about thirty houses in our street. Twenty-nine of them held families who were a variety of Protestant. The thirtieth, a very large house at the opposite end of the street, was the home of the Campbells. And the difference was the Campbells were Catholics. I think I knew every child of my age within a radius of about half a mile. I played with them all, except the Campbells. I wasn't ever expressly told that I was not allowed to play with the Campbells but I remember a sense that they were different, that they went to a different place of worship, that they worshipped a different God.

And our Festivals forced us apart. We enjoyed the Orange processions, specifically on the 12th July. There was a lead-up time of about three weeks

and you could hear the sound of marching bands, echoing across the city. For me they were a joyful occasion. My whole family went to watch them. As they went along they played songs that were familiarly called 'Kick the Pope' songs. During this period the Campbell children did not come out at night. They certainly didn't go to the Orange processions. Nor were they present at the enormous bonfires which we used to go to look at. Some of the biggest were on the Shankill Road. A huge crowd gathered in front of them on the evening of the 11th July, before the parades the next day. On the top was a Guy who was wearing a papal tiara. The Campbells did not go to the bonfires. For weeks, you would hear the sound of Lambeg drums echoing across the roof tops. They never struck me as a child as being particularly threatening. But with hindsight, that ominous *boom boom boom* had all the effect of marching figures, threatening if you belonged to the other side.

I have to say that there may have been a degree of prejudice in my upbringing but mine was a pretty tolerant family. However the Campbells were the Other. If I had been asked, I would probably have said that they worshipped a different God from me. I was educated at a wonderful school, a Methodist foundation, a grammar school. But significantly, I don't think there were anything but Protestant children in attendance. We had a wonderful headmaster, who was a conscientious objector during the Second World War. He had great moral authority and he would have welcomed Catholic children in his school. But there was a system of separate education and all Catholic children were expected to attend Catholic schools. In fact, there was a wonderful female dentist, who was a pillar of the Catholic church, who decided on principle that she was going to send her children to state schools, non-Catholic schools. She was determined that her children would mix with non-Catholics. The Bishop of Down and Connor refused to confirm her children unless she sent them to Catholic schools. To her enormous credit she refused.



The Troubles

But within months things began to turn nasty. We were aware that there were other forces who were infiltrating the Civil Rights movement. There were masked men who suddenly appeared. Bernadette Devlin, whom I knew at Queen's University, was one of the orators of the Civil Rights movement and it became very plain at an early stage that she was sympathetic towards the IRA. Within a few months

violence broke out, especially in the major cities of Belfast and Derry. My friends and I quickly disengaged. This was not for us.

I was brought up in a monochrome religious environment. When I went to university, the situation changed but only to a limited extent. I met Catholics; we attended the same classes. I even met a couple of Jews. They were a tiny population in Northern Ireland. I think a total of about 300 people. But even in university there was little sense of real friendship. Catholics even played different sports. We played rugby, hockey and cricket. They played hurling and Gaelic football. So again until I reached the age of 21, I had very little exposure to anything other than my Protestant Presbyterian background.

When I had finished at Queen's University, I had a vocation to the ministry. I applied to the Presbyterian church. I was accepted and went for a three-year course of study. I found that there was a religious divide within our college. There were those like me, who were of a liberal bent, who welcomed the discovery of biblical criticism, who rejoiced in the fact that we were able to treat Biblical stories as myths. Then there were the others, who were intent on interpreting the Bible in a fundamentalist way. Those who were of a liberal persuasion took part in the Civil Rights marches, those who were fundamentalists identified with the Unionist position and were deeply suspicious about what was going on.

But what I discovered in my university years was that our society was full of injustice. There was discrimination in employment. At that time a huge proportion of the workforce was Protestant. The prime minister of Northern Ireland had once spoken of a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people and advised Protestants only to employ Protestants. The city of Derry, the second biggest city in Northern Ireland, had a large Catholic majority, but there was a degree of gerrymandering because they were all crammed into one ward, so that in that one ward they returned a single Catholic councillor with an enormous majority, while the other wards were all packed with Protestants, so this outwardly Catholic city had a Protestant council. And there was discrimination in housing and jobs. As we became aware of that and discontent began to grow, the Civil Rights movement got underway. Some Protestants joined in. We joined the marches, we felt sympathy with what was going on. We felt the situation was entirely unjust and needed to be addressed.

The great turning point in my life came at the end of my second year when my spiritual advisor was responsible for assigning us to churches where we would be assistant ministers, or curates. I thought that, coming from a comfortable middle class background, I would be sent to a comfortable middle class church. In fact he sent me to Woodvale Presbyterian. It was situated at the top of the Shankill Road, which was the most ardently Protestant, Loyalist area in the whole of Belfast. It was where the hardest of the hard men lived. And my specific job was to run a youth club. In the three years that I was there I conducted the funerals of 13 people who were murdered in the Troubles. One of them was a very beautiful sixteen-year-old girl from my youth club, who was out walking with her boyfriend. An IRA car pulled out in front of

them, a gun was produced, a shot was fired, missed him but hit her in the head.

There were regular bombs and shootings throughout the area. Terrible things would happen. If you were a young man, aged say seventeen, and you were walking up the road at night and you came to a junction, where the left hand side was Protestant and the right hand side was Catholic, you might be stopped by a gang of thugs carrying baseball bats, and they would tell you to repeat the 'Hail Mary'. You did not know which side they came from. So you had to guess. If you chose wrong you might get your knee caps smashed. That was done by both sides of the divide. There is something truly appalling about the idea that one of the best-loved prayers in the Christian tradition could be used for such a barbaric event.

One day I was visiting an elderly man on the Shankill Road who was dying of cancer. I parked my car. There was a bus stop and a queue of people, including two young men wearing denim jackets. I said hello to them. They responded. Then I crossed the road, walked to the door and sat down at the bedside of this dying man. Within five minutes I heard gunshots. I rushed out. There was a bus at the bus stop. The side window was completely broken, the front window was smashed. I waited till everybody got out of the bus and went in and the driver was slumped over his wheel with blood pouring down his shirt. I said the Lord's Prayer. I swear I heard or felt his spirit leave his body. I later discovered that the two youths that I passed when I went across the road were the people who carried out the shooting. There were a number of young men who went to my youth club who were involved in sectarian murders.

During those three years when I reflected on those kids who were caught up in that appalling violence, I knew that some of my colleagues who had trained with me for the ministry said: 'It's all down to original sin! They carry the mark of Adam.' As far as I was concerned these kids – that's what they were – in normal circumstances might be guilty of minor crimes, of burglary or muggings or what have you. They would not have been murderers. They were caught up in these times because, to be a macho man, to commit acts of violence against Catholics was a sign of authority; you got kudos for doing it. In different circumstances they would have been different people and that is not to excuse the dreadful things they did.

Working for the BBC

After I left the Shankill Road I spent five years in a rural town called Banbridge, where I was the minister and they were very happy years working alongside wonderful, committed Christian people, who managed to rise above the Troubles with their principles intact. But after the Shankill Road, it was a bit of an anti-climax. At the end of the five years I was approached by the BBC offering me a job. I'd been broadcasting more and more and had my own television show on a Friday night on Ulster television. So for the next five years I was working in Broadcasting House in Belfast and they were the most exciting and exhilarating years of my life, because religion was central to what was going on. Religion did not cause the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The Troubles were caused by a mixture of circumstances, historical and contemporary, by culture and by the struggle for land and by power and identity. But when you throw religion into that mix, so that people began to say God is on our side, then you have a very dangerous situation indeed.

In our studio in Broadcasting House in Belfast we could bring together Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Loyalists, who could talk in a safe environment. Many Protestants heard their first ever Catholic Mass on Radio Ulster. Many Catholics heard their first ever Anglican Matins on Radio Ulster. We very often started work at 7.30 in the morning and didn't finish till past 10 at night. But it was exhilarating, exciting stuff.

One of the great moments of my life was Easter Sunday 1981. I was told to go up to Derry to produce Morning Service for Easter Sunday from a Catholic Church in the Republican Bogside area. The celebrant was a friend of mine whom I knew very well. It was one of those awful nights. There was gunfire, bombs going off sporadically, there were masked men in the streets. We did the rehearsal on the Saturday night. I took my friend out to supper to a very nice hotel. And he said to me, 'I've got to go and celebrate the Easter Vigil with my congregation in the Bogside. Will you come with me?' I said I'd be delighted. We went into this huge Church in the middle of the Bogside. These were among the killing grounds during the Troubles. This was not a place for any Protestant to enter, let alone a Presbyterian minister. We went into his church, it was packed full, there must have been at least a thousand people. He welcomed me, he said who I was, I got a round of applause, and then he celebrated Mass. Everybody in that church went to receive communion except for me.

Protestants were not allowed to receive communion in a Catholic church. I sat there, lonely, isolated and sad. I waited till everybody went up and everybody came back. My friend the priest waited till they all sat down. Then he walked the length of the church to offer me communion. This was a man who recognised that division and partisanship struck at the heart of what the Christian religion was all about.

I have one final experience before I left Northern Ireland which I want to share with you. It was an Easter Sunday *Songs of Praise*, recorded in St Matthew's Church of Ireland Church in the Shankill Road. In those days, and occasionally today, there were some interviews with people who had gone through an intensive experience and had some sort of testimony about their faith that informed their lives. One of the people we chose had been injured in a terrible bombing at the Abercorn Café in the centre of Belfast. He lost both his legs and he had gone public by saying he forgave the people who did it. He belonged to a very fundamentalist Baptist congregation. We started filming and as I watched I thought he's uneasy, he's uncomfortable. And sure enough, the next day I got a phone call to say he wanted to withdraw from the programme. I asked why and he said he felt very uncomfortable in the presence of priests and nuns in that service with him. I like to think that he was got at by his congregation, but it seemed to me an irony that here we were offering him an opportunity, on Easter Sunday, to give testimony to the faith that was in him, which enabled him to go through this horrendous bombing, and he decided that he wouldn't take it because of the presence of Catholics in the congregation.

I left BBC Northern Ireland two weeks after that programme went on air with a very heavy heart. I had come to the point where I could see very little difference between Catholics and Protestants, who worshipped the same God. We were brought up in different circumstances in the city, Protestants in a position of privilege, Catholics in a position of injustice. But the old certainties I had entertained as a child had been blown wide apart. I came to England, to take up a more senior job with the BBC in Bristol. My principal job was to produce *Songs of Praise*. But what a change! When I was in Northern Ireland I was living in a society in which religion was at the heart of what was going on. Most people had some connection to a church, no matter how tenuous. Bible stories were familiar territory. In England I quickly became aware that religion was a minority interest. For

most of the population it was out on the extremes.

Some extraordinary things happened. I went to a church near Chichester for *Songs of Praise*. It was quite a small church, about 400 people in it. After the recording the floor manager came up to me and said, 'There's a gentleman outside and he wants to know is he going to be on television?' I said, 'You can tell him I think it's very likely because it's a small church and the cameras go all round, so yes, I think he probably will be.' As I was packing up for the night and went out to my car, this man came running up to me and said, 'Look, let me come clean: I should not be here singing hymns in Chichester. The lady who is standing beside me is not my wife.' Get your mind round that! You're away for a dirty weekend, you've got a choice of things you could do. You don't even have to go out of your hotel. What do you do? Go where there's a television programme going on!

We were the first people to produce gospel *Songs of Praise*. I got a horrendous letter in green ink saying: 'Dear Rea, You white middle class Ulster piece of SHIT. Why don't you give us the hymns that we long for instead of this black gospel rubbish?' And every tenth word was an obscenity, mostly the 'F' word. His final paragraph said that he looked forward immensely to being in heaven revelling in the presence of the Risen Lord and looking down and seeing me roasting on a spit. He signed the letter 'Yours in the love of the Lord Jesus!' To his credit, he didn't hide behind a shield of anonymity. He signed his name and address.



Beyond Belief: Social Media. This and other episodes of the BBC Radio 4 programme *Beyond Belief*, presented by Ernie Rea, can be heard on bbc.co.uk

Head of Religious Broadcasting

Then in 1989 I was appointed Head of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC. I was working with a wide spectrum of the great and the good. I became part of a wide inter-faith network. So I became friends with Jews and Muslims and Hindus.

One of them was Rabbi Hugo Gryn. Hugo was born in the city of Berehova, which was then part of Czechoslovakia. In 1944 he was taken to Auschwitz. As they were coming up to the line his uncle said to him, 'If they ask you your age, say you are 17 and if they ask you what you do, say you are a carpenter.' Hugo was 13, he was not a carpenter. But he obeyed and watched as his uncle went to the gas chamber and he was sent over to the other side to work.

He became part of the panel on Radio 4's the *Moral Maze*. Hugo was a great man. Like many Jews, he valued the Jewish traditions, but God rarely figured in his conversations. There was an electric moment in the *Moral Maze* when the British National Party won a seat in the Isle of Dogs in a by-election and there were great fears that this was the beginning of an upsurge in anti-Semitism. This victorious councillor came onto the *Moral Maze*. In the middle of the discussion he said: 'Well, of course the Holocaust didn't really happen. There were Jews who died, lots of other people died but there were certainly not six million. And most of them died of cholera and other diseases.' And suddenly this voice rang out: 'Look me in the eye! And tell me there was no Holocaust. I lost relatives in Auschwitz. Why can't you look me in the eye?' There is a CD that the BBC issued of the Greatest Moments in the history of BBC radio and that was one of them

And of course, it was a great joy to meet many Muslims. My experience of Muslims has been almost universally good. They were people who believe that Islam is a religion of peace and want to live in peace with all. But hanging over this was the terrible 9/11. And I did make a programme which included Anjem Choudary, who has recently been released from prison after being convicted of encouraging terrorism. One of his companions was the man who killed Fusilier Lee Rigby. I made this programme and I heard the most horrendous statements made in Walthamstow, where speakers were encouraging people to go out and indulge in what they referred to as 'Martyrdom operations'. Suicide bombings to you and me.

On the Saturday night after 9/11 I was invited to go to SOAS to explain what our reaction should be to 9/11. One of the other speakers was Sheikh Zaki Badawi, another wonderful man who was the Principal of the Muslim College in London. Just before we went onto the platform I asked, 'What are you going to say so that we know that we are

not saying exactly the same thing?' And he said, 'I am going to say it wasn't Muslims who did it.' I thought he was saying that nobody who could do such an act could possibly claim to be a Muslim. But he wasn't! His initial reaction was that this was some sort of a conspiracy. Zaki loved Islam so much, he was so convinced of its high moral values, that he couldn't bring himself to believe that anyone who committed such a barbaric act could possibly claim to be acting as a Muslim. So he went into denial.

It's been a fascinating journey. Where do I stand now in my Journey of Faith? Here I part company with what I perceive to be the general stance of SOF members, although I know you are a broad church. I believe in God. And by that I mean that I believe that there is a transcendent reality, which exists beyond the realm of this world. Without that sense of 'The Other' I'm not sure that our much loved religious traditions have any meaning. However at the heart of God is mystery; and I am absolutely convinced that all the great religions are seeking and worshipping the same reality. Had I been born in Saudi Arabia or in Pakistan I would be a Muslim. Would my experience of the Ultimate Reality be invalid? I think not. I believe in a God who not only tolerates diversity but loves and embraces it.

My experience is Christian. That is who I am. Therefore I am convinced that we must hold on to those stories which we find in the Bible, and which are the bedrock of our traditions, even as we interpret many of them in a non-literalist way. We should be willing to share those stories in a non-proselytising way with those whose experience is different. And we need to listen to their stories too.

And we need to listen to those stories in Community. I am doubtful of the testimony of those who say that their faith is entirely individualistic, that they need no church or fellowship. We need the wisdom and experience of others to correct our judgements.

So I believe in God; I affirm our stories while being open to the stories of others. And I rejoice in my Faith Community. It has been an interesting journey.

Ernie Rea is the presenter of the BBC programme *Beyond Belief* and former BBC Head of Religious Broadcasting.

This is an edited transcription of a recording of the talk given by Ernie Rea to the SOF Annual Conference.

Justice Through the Looking Glass

Stephen Williams asks: Is That All There is to Justice?

It's not always easy being human. We have evolved to be a highly adaptable species, but the downside of that genetic advantage is that we frequently face unfamiliar circumstances. If we had to deal with each situation as something totally new, we would be immobilised by the amount of information we would have to process, so we rely on a range of fixed points, some psychological, some social, to create a manageable environment. However, if we try to interrogate those fixed points, the things we have been taking for granted, they often turn out to be more shaky than we had assumed.

That is what I've taken to be the thinking behind the theme of this Conference *Is That All There Is?* Within SOF, it's a perspective that we've often explored in the context of religion but it's not restricted to religion. There are assumptions about politics or economics which mostly go unchallenged and we could consider those, but for the purpose of this talk I want to look behind the idea of Justice. Is it something we can rely on or is it a will-o-the-wisp that disappears when we try to grasp it?

Justice and Law

I'll concentrate on (English) criminal justice, partly because it's where I have some experience, but also because for many people it's the first thing to come to mind when Justice is mentioned. Television local news gives a lot of space to stories of crime and punishment.

The title of my talk refers of course to Lewis Carroll. In *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice finds herself in a world where everything is back to front – or almost so as the two worlds can coexist. As the White Queen tells her, 'There's one great advantage, that one's memory works both ways.' When Alice remarks that she can't remember things before they happen, the Queen replies that it's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.



Later Alice learns from the White Queen that the Hatter is in prison. Apart from Alice herself, the Hatter and the Hare are the only characters to appear in both Alice books, and Alice is interested to know more. This is how the conversation unfolds:

'That's the effect of living backwards,' the Queen said kindly. 'For instance, he's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all.'

'Suppose he never commits the crime?' said Alice.

'That would be all the better, wouldn't it?' the Queen said.

Carroll is playing with us, but his satire only works because he shares his readers' assumptions about how justice ought to happen. And about how justice has always been and how it always will be. At that time, Justice was understood as a response to past events, and in the case of criminal justice

came with the expectation that the punishment should fit the crime.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, criminal justice policy took on a more instrumental character. Punishment now had to be for a purpose, which might still be about reflecting the seriousness of a crime, but also took in ideas of reform and deterrence, so it was expected to produce results. Probation, where I spent many years, had its origins in that period. For a more recent example, you may remember that when Michael Howard was Home Secretary, he promoted a large increase in the use of imprisonment, which he justified, not because it was what offenders deserved but with the slogan 'Prison Works'.

In the last thirty years, especially, there has been a focus in policy on preventing crime, so that often sentencing is concerned as much with what someone might do in future as with what they have done in the past. That can lead to defendants receiving much heavier sanctions than the original offence would justify. We are not far from the Looking Glass World of the White Queen and the Hatter and in some situations indeed, there may not be a crime at all. The most obvious examples are with sex offending, and the use of sex offenders' registers, and in measures to deal with people seen as potential terrorists. In both cases there are good arguments for pre-emptive action, but it's a novel understanding of justice that underpins it, and one that continues to be debated.

It isn't as if nothing changed before the days of Lewis Carroll. If we look back to the Middle Ages, we find criminal justice tied up with the concept of the King's Peace. Crime was then understood as a disruption of good order, and the task of the courts was to restore order and affirm the authority of the King. To achieve this, they had various measures at their disposal, but these could result in similar cases, or even separate defendants in the same case, being dealt with very differently. What mattered was that the King's Peace was upheld. Consistency, the like treatment of like cases, something which we would nowadays think a key element of Justice, was not that important.

Before the 12th century, criminal justice did not really exist as something distinct from Justice generally. In Anglo-Saxon times, the focus was on wrongs and redress. The law codes of the time contained tariffs of the compensation owed to victims. It was a hierarchical society, and those tariffs reflected social status, so that an offence

against someone of higher class would attract a greater penalty because they were deemed to have suffered a greater wrong.

That emphasis on compensation is a reminder of the original use of law to settle private disputes, what we now call civil justice. I won't go further into that now, except to say that similar processes can be seen in the history of both civil and criminal law. When we take a long view, we see law as dynamic, altering over time and with the principles dominant at one time often contradicted in the practices and procedures of a different age. Of course, it's not particularly ground-breaking to say that social institutions change. However, I suggest that if we were to stop the clock at any point in that history, instead of an acknowledgement of that reality, we would find an assumption that the current expression of justice is the only right one, the embodiment of an eternally valid principle.

Justice and Virtue

Aristotle understands the relationship between law and justice differently. Law must still aim to deliver just decisions but its primary purpose is to encourage the habit of Justice. 'Legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them.' Justice is therefore a state of character, a virtue, and a just society is one made up of just citizens.

A virtue, however, is not a personal, individual attribute. Aristotle speaks of people who take refuge in theory, thinking that they are philosophers and that they will become good in this way. He compares these to patients who listen attentively to their doctors but do nothing. Just as these will not be made well in body, so those who would be just will not be made well in soul by a course in philosophy! Justice has meaning only in relation to other people. 'States of character arise out of like activities' and 'by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men, we become just or unjust'. We learn by doing, and the more we adopt the habit of justice the more just we become.

The corollary of that is that justice does not come naturally. 'Neither by nature nor contrary to nature do virtues arise in us... Rather, we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.' However, if through our transactions with others we can also become unjust, clearly habit alone cannot guarantee virtue, and we must say more. In Aristotle's theory, Justice is teleological; he emphasises the purpose of objects

and institutions, so that excellence is found where there is a fit with that purpose. One of his examples is a flute. Its purpose is to make music, so the just way to deal with a fine instrument is to give it to the best flute-player who will produce the finest music. However, this is not a reward for that flute-player or because he deserves it. It is because that is what flutes exist for.

Moving beyond flutes into the nitty-gritty of daily living, matters become more complicated. Justice is still about excellence and enabling institutions to achieve their purpose, but it is not self-evident what that means. Aristotle himself could maintain the justice of slavery as an institution on the basis that it is what slaves are fitted for. He does, however, offer a route to an understanding of Justice, that he calls 'Practical Wisdom'. Justice is then what just people habitually do, so that Justice is based on shared appreciation. It is arrived at through conversation and deliberation, so that justice is as much about politics as ethics. It requires the seeker after justice to be an active and engaged member of a city or *polis*, the highest manifestation of civic life.

A weakness in Aristotle's approach is its specificity to fourth century Athenian democracy. The idea of Justice as teleological, a reflection of the purpose of objects and institutions, and therefore virtuous, has persisted but without the intrinsic safeguards of shared conversation and deliberation. It easily became authoritarian and oppressive, as later communities adopted ideological approaches to the question of purpose. Religions have been particularly susceptible. Christianity, for instance, developed doctrines of the true purpose of mankind in Christian salvation, which justified (literally, declared to be just) crusades and the suppression of heretics.

In the 18th century, Jeremy Bentham saw the purpose of human life as to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. That was true for individuals but could be generalised to the principle of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' as the primary social virtue, trumping abstract notions of justice, or any separate community interest.

How might it work? It implies decision-making based on a calculation of all the pleasures and pains caused to all the members of a society but that is not practical; the alternative is to leave it to individuals to determine where the balance lies for them, so that the greatest happiness is found in the summation of all their choices. It's what we now call

the free market. Or decisions could be put to a vote where individuals in an electorate can register the pleasure or pain they anticipate from a proposal, without reference to any wider interests. It's what we now call populism.

At its extreme, therefore, Bentham's utilitarianism, in the name of satisfying the purpose of human existence by maximising pleasure, subordinates justice to impersonal and irrational forces like the market (that cannot be bucked) or the popular will (that is beyond challenge).

John Stuart Mill, for one, was not happy with that position. He saw himself as a utilitarian and probably coined the term, but he recognised the dangers in a system governed by subjective and sometimes unconsidered preferences. There is such a thing as the tyranny of the majority. Mill saw Harmony as a necessary objective alongside Pleasure if we are to make good choices about where happiness lies. The goals we seek must be in harmony with each other and with those of others. For utilitarianism to work it must be supported through education, promoting the rights of women, and other measures that cultivate the mind towards the idea of harmony.

Mill's utilitarianism is ingenious and is more accommodating of the virtue of Justice. However, a century later, Aneurin Bevan, the founder of the NHS, was still grappling with the same problem. In his book *In Place of Fear*, he wrote: 'Not even the apparently enlightened principle of "the greatest good of the greatest number" can excuse indifference to individual suffering.'

Mill's other contribution was his exposition of Liberty, that regardless of the wishes of the majority, there can be no justification for restricting individual liberty unless it is to prevent a greater harm. It represents another qualification of the excesses of extreme utilitarianism. However, it has since been taken in other directions. For present-day libertarians, Liberty itself has become the human purpose, and to restrict it unnecessarily is an injustice. Taxation is such a restriction, unless it is to meet the cost of defending liberty, and it is unjust to levy taxes on one individual so as to provide income or resources for another. If someone wishes to be philanthropic, then that has to be their free choice. For the true libertarian, the very idea of a welfare state is an injustice. It's an argument especially associated with the American writer, Ayn Rand, but has many supporters, and

according to some commentators may have purchase with our new government.

What happens if I do with Justice and Virtue, the idea that justice is found in the elucidation of the purpose of human life, what I did with Justice and Law? I think I find the same, that over its history it is manifest in widely different and often contradictory ways, but that at any specific point the prevalent view is seen as the only one.

Justice and Fairness

In our time the leading thinker about Justice has been John Rawls, to the point where even those disagreeing with his conclusions have had to engage with his arguments. In *A Theory of Justice* he rejects both utilitarianism and libertarianism completely and argues instead for 'Justice as Fairness' as the central principle of social living. He nails those colours to his mast at the very beginning of the book:

'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory, however elegant, must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions, no matter how efficient and well-arranged, must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.'

Rawls isn't talking here about the specifics of justice and recognises that it will have different manifestations in different contexts. He is describing a more fundamental conception, the principles governing justice in any society. Those principles are necessarily public; everyone accepts them and knows that everyone else accepts them (even if they don't always abide by them).

He follows Kant in treating all rational human beings as ends in themselves, so that it is unjust to regard them as means to someone else's ends. Justice is universal, what Kant calls categorical, which doesn't mean that Justice is always expressed in the same way but that the principles of justice, once established for a specific social setting, are universally applicable. The rights secured by Justice are not subject to political bargaining or a utilitarian style calculus of social interest.

Rawls asserts that in a just society, when humans are seen as ends in themselves, the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled. He recognises that his approach has a 'tendency to equality', but he also acknowledges differences and that different people want different things. A society is both a co-

operative venture for the benefit of all, and a focus for conflict as individuals seek potentially competing benefits. Some of those differences are down to individual predilections but there will be certain things that everyone can be assumed to want, a society's primary social goods.

'The Good is the satisfaction of rational desire. Primary Social Goods are things that a rational person is supposed to want, whatever else.' These are:

**Rights and Liberties
Opportunities and Powers
Income and Wealth**

How these primary social goods are distributed is the business of Justice.

How can there be justice if there are differences in the way those primary social goods are distributed? Rawls argues for a principle that difference must benefit the whole of society, and the test for that would be the benefit it brings to the least advantaged. An example would be giving higher pay to doctors if it leads to improved medical care for the poorest.

So how might this all work out in a real society? Rawls looks to the classic idea of a social contract, the notion that members of a society are bound together by their consent to the disciplines of social living. It's hypothetical, of course, and no-one believed in an historic moment when people came together and contracted to live as a society. It's only useful as a myth superimposed on already existing societies, but the question can still be asked: 'What would social justice look like if we had gone through that process?'

For Rawls, that question does not go far enough. If the present-day members of a society attempted it, they would necessarily bring to it all the distinctions in their various circumstances, in wealth and income, of course, but also in health, intelligence, level of education, political power, quality of social relationships, and indeed talent. Their contribution to the process would inevitably be coloured by the knowledge of where they would end up in the eventual social contract.

To do the thing properly would require an original position in which members of a society can consider the requirements of social justice without knowing how they will be affected. He assumes, for instance, that a system producing large financial disparities would be rejected, where people don't know their eventual place in that system. The

approach rests on what Rawls calls 'the veil of ignorance'.

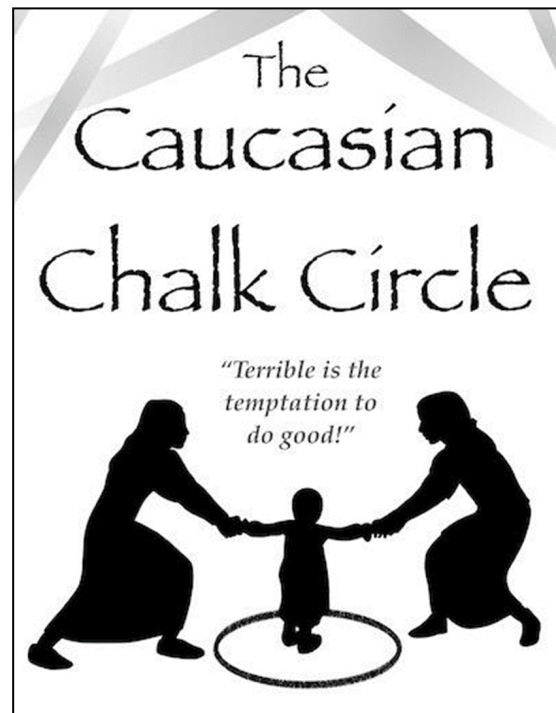
So is that all there is to Justice? We have seen that Justice in relation to both Law and Virtue is fluid and inconsistent. Rawls' Justice as Fairness approach explicitly allows for variability. However, it cannot be demonstrated in real life but rests ultimately on a thought experiment, an original position relying on a veil of ignorance.

But might that be the way forward? For all the difficulties, we can't easily do without a conception of Justice and Rawls is surely right to see it as fundamental to living socially. We can't get there by prescriptive statements of what is just, but by giving us a thought experiment, he is offering us a route to understanding through imagination, just as in a rather different way Lewis Carroll did. But imaginative contributions demand an imaginative response. Justice is not a given but has to be worked at.

I will end with another literary reference. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht concludes with a dispute between two women as to who is the mother of a young boy. To resolve the question, the judge places the boy in a chalk circle and has the women compete to pull him out, only to conclude that the one who lets go is the true mother. It's based on a Chinese story, although there are parallels with the Biblical account where Solomon faced a similar situation.

The difference is that that story is taken as a demonstration of the wisdom of Solomon, while Azdak, Brecht's judge, is corrupt, looking to make money from his office and coming to decisions as the fancy takes him. And with Brecht, we know all along which is the biological mother.

The boy, Michael, is the child of the governor and his wife; the governor has been overthrown and killed in a revolution and the boy has been left with Grusha, a kitchen maid. When the old regime is restored, the boy is potentially the heir to a fortune if he is acknowledged as the governor's son, and his mother wants him back.



During the hearing, Azdak finds pretexts to fine both women for contempt of court and makes a nice profit in the process, but at the crucial moment of the test, Grusha lets go of the boy and cries in despair, 'I brought him up! Shall I also tear him to bits? I can't.'

Azdak replies immediately to Grusha: 'The Court has determined the true mother. Take your child and be off.' To the governor's wife he says: 'Your estates fall to the city. They'll be converted into a playground for the children. They need one and it will be named after me: Azdak's Garden.'

The governor's wife has been supported by lawyers arguing for the ties of blood, but Azdak has rejected legal assumptions in favour of what felt right at the time. The play ends with a song:

*And after that evening Azdak vanished and was never seen again.
The people of Grusinia did not forget him but long remembered
The period of his judging as a brief golden age,
Almost an age of justice.
But you, you who have listened to the Story of the Chalk Circle,
Take note what men of old concluded:
That what there is shall go to those who are good for it,
Children to the motherly, that they prosper,
Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well,
The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit.*

Stephen Williams is the former Deputy Chief Probation Officer for the West Midlands. He is SOF'S current Treasurer and a former Chair of SOF Trustees.

The Indian Tradition

Avril Robarts looks briefly at some Indian religious ideas and practices and how they have helped her.

Those in the SOF Network and many others, I'm sure, have turned away from some traditional religious ideas without, necessarily, turning away from the belief that there might be a spiritual way of life. I am aware of the downsides of some Indian views and practices but, in a modern secular society, I am able to cherry pick what is helpful, as a way of considering my own life's challenges without being tied to cultural artefacts.

The Indian writings cover nearly two thousand years, and have an infinite variety of views, but several main themes emerge and develop over time. The first spiritual/religious experiences recorded in the *Vedas* included the ritual ingestion of soma. Scholars now think that this was the mushroom *amanita muscaria*. Many early cultures used mind-altering drugs to communicate with the gods. They apparently sometimes had 'bad trips', as the *Vedas* contain prayers to the soma gods not to harm them.

The US psychologist Abraham Maslow, in a 1943 paper then in a 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*, proposed a hierarchy of needs. Religious belief and practice may have developed to fulfil those needs.

Indian spiritual traditions recognise four legitimate goals: *dharma* (righteousness, moral values), *artha* (prosperity, economic values), *kama* (pleasure, love, psychological values) and *moksha* (liberation, spiritual values). Of course, there are many different strands of Indian religious and spiritual thought. Some are body- and world-denying, some quite the reverse.

Questions posed in the *Upanishads* have quite a different starting place than the Judeo/Christian/Muslim faiths, where irrefutable teaching is given by a creator God who must be obeyed. By Upanishadic times in India, people were beginning to question the old priestly rituals and their efficacy. If the Ultimate – Brahman – is *neti, neti* (not this not that), how can we know the right way to live harmoniously with it? This is the concern of the *Bhagavad Gita* (5th to 2nd century BCE) where Arjuna, the general, is about to fight for the legitimate king in a terrible civil war. He realises

that he will kill friends, relatives, elders whom he should honour, and, overcome by horror, feels unable to fight.

His charioteer, who happens to be the god Krishna, tells him that he must fight for the maintenance of order in society. Arjuna asks how he is supposed to know the spiritual way in such circumstances. The *Gita* then becomes a dissertation on the practice of Yoga. At this time, Yoga was not the posture Yoga that we know today, but a variety of meditative and/or devotional practices. Yoga is described as 'skill in action'. This led on to present Hatha Yoga.

In about the same period, a prince in Northern India rode out in his chariot. His charioteer was again Krishna, who showed him examples of old age, disease, and death, to which all are subject. Gotama left his palace and, after practising many austerities, meditated under a tree and suddenly saw a way for humans to live in the face of such suffering. He became known as 'Buddha' (the enlightened one).

He said that his main teaching was *dukkha* (suffering from uncomfortableness) and the cessation of *dukkha*. Buddha prescribed an eightfold way of living, including moral behaviour and meditation. Whereas the former spiritual teachings had been for the priestly and warrior classes of India, Buddha's teaching was available to all. A prince asked Buddha how you could tell if someone is enlightened. His answer was, 'Watch them in community.'

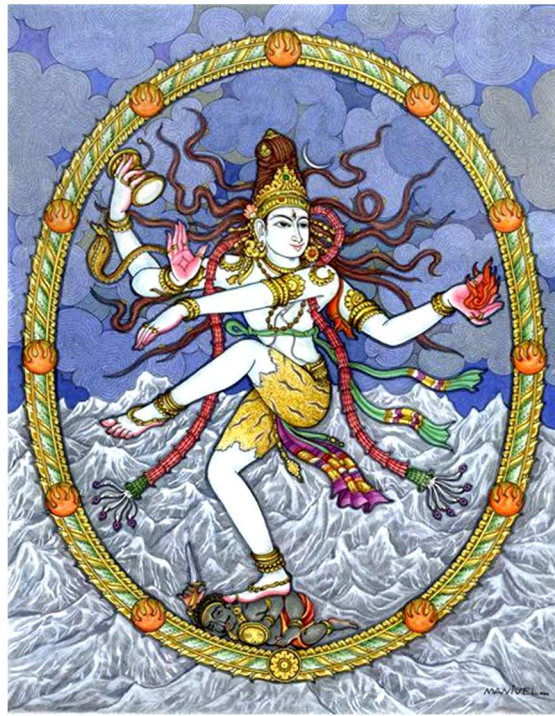
There are many different kinds of meditation practices in the Indo-Tibetan traditions, but all are based on the Buddhist idea of realising impermanence. Nagarjuna, the great Buddhist philosopher, said, 'Since all is empty (impermanent), all is possible.'

One form of meditation is the Tibetan sand drawing, where total focus is on creating a mandala. It is an expression of the levels and types of energies at work in the universe and emphasises the importance of the phenomenal world. To demonstrate emptiness, after days or weeks of creating the intricate pattern, the sand is brushed

together into a pile and spilled into a body of running water to spread the blessings of the mandala. Those who attend a modern yoga class with postures and some breathing, and some relaxation, may be saying 'What! Could you just run that past me again?'

One of the strands of Indo-Tibetan thought led to a development known as *tantra*, in which the body and its energies were explored and developed as inseparable from other expressions of reality. The history of *tantra* is obscure but the word may refer to an unbroken thread, or a woven cloth. The modern practice of *hatha yoga* flows from this tradition.

What happens if things go wrong? This Tibetan tradition absorbed the demon figures to turn them



Shiva dancing. Image: meditation24-7.com

into 'protectors of the truth,' usually translated as 'wrathful deities', though they are not treated as gods. As a meditation focus, they represent the power to destroy hindrances such as anger and craving. The idea, as I understand it, is that in difficult circumstances, wisdom and compassion need some help from power to change hindrances to good.

In Indian iconography, Shiva dances phenomena into appearance, and dances it out of manifestation again. What is the end result of all this? The *Gita* says (6:19) our peacefulness will be 'as a lamp in a windless place

which does not flicker'.

Avril Roberts is a Yoga teacher with an interest in Indian religious traditions.

There was No Test

There was no test
 no demon-stration
 no propaganda
 no threat
 no reference to any thing or any one

I was not anaesthetised
 not neutered
 not overfed
 not branded
 not pheromone-marked

I was simply invited to be part of you for a while
 and I was.

I was asked to share in being you for a while
 and I did.

I was asked to be your partner in that dance in which new selves are created
 and I was,
 I was.

David Lambourn
 September, 1986

The Forgotten Hero of Norwich

Carol Palfrey gave her short talk on Sir Thomas Browne.

Medical, migrant, precarious, ferocious, electricity, precarious, holocaust and hallucination.

What do these words have in common? The answer is that these are just nine of the 784 words coined by the subject of my talk today – Sir Thomas Browne – who lived in Norwich, the capital city of my home county, for 46 years. I have called him the Forgotten Hero because very few local people have ever heard of him. Now this is surprising because Norwich boasts very few statues. Yet right in the heart of the city is a splendid statue of Sir Thomas, who sits on his pedestal completely overlooked by passers-by except for the odd pigeon alighting on his head.

So who is Sir Thomas Browne and why have I called him a Hero? He was a man of many parts – a philosopher, a Christian moralist, a naturalist, an antiquarian, an experimenter, a myth-buster and, as I have already pointed out, a coiner of new words which he invented to meet his exacting needs for description. Browne was an intensely curious man whose concerns included disabusing the credulous of their erroneous beliefs, the meaning of order in nature, how to reconcile science and religion and how to think about life and death. These are some of the preoccupations of our own age and I believe the spirit of Thomas Browne could teach us all how to think in a more open-minded way about these matters.

Thomas Browne was the son of a wealthy silk merchant. He was born in London on 19th October 1605, was sent to school in Winchester and went on to study medicine at Oxford. However, the curriculum there was somewhat old fashioned and he therefore travelled to Padua and Leiden, the leading European centres of medicine at the time. Although these continental studies contributed to the development of his curious mind, they also exposed him to the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants raging at the time.

After qualifying as a doctor, he married and in 1636 settled in Norwich, setting up what became the city's leading medical practice. He remained in Norwich until his death in 1682 and is buried in the city's largest church, near the site of his house – and his statue. In 1642 the Civil War broke out. Norfolk fought on the side of the Parliamentarians. Browne witnessed the Puritans sacking the Cathedral and churches in Norwich but, despite his Royalist leanings, he led a relatively quiet and uneventful life.

As well as being a much loved and respected physician, Sir Thomas was renowned in his lifetime as a writer of philosophical essays. His first book, *Religio Medici*, was a kind of spiritual autobiography presenting his tolerant approach to religious differences in a country increasingly divided by doctrinal disagreements. 'Belief can be soft and flexible', says Browne. 'I have experienced a few Christians and I have mixed my own by *commolition* to satisfy mine own reason.' His best known statement about religion comes at the beginning of *Religio Medici*, in which he admits that many people might think he has no religious belief which, he says 'is the scandal of my profession'. He goes on to explain that his attitude towards religion and science is impartial, neither violently defending the one nor opposing the other. 'But still,' he concludes, 'I assume the honourable stile of a Christian.'

What is most striking about Browne's independent attitude to religion, at a time of religious conflict is that he does not come down on the side of either the Catholics or the Protestants but daringly says: 'I borrow not the rules of my religion from Rome or Geneva but the dictates of my own reason.' *Religio Medici* was immediately put on the Papal index of banned books. Browne's Christian faith leads him towards a humanistic moral philosophy.

He reconciles any conflict between science and religion by putting science in one place to be dealt with in one way and religion in another place to be dealt with in another way. But, as we have seen, Browne's faith is his own and not one foisted upon him by any Authority. Browne recognised that religious texts are interesting, confusing and ambiguous because they contain more than literal truth. His religion, unlike his science, is not a rational way to understand the world but poetic, mythic and metaphorical. It makes him tolerant and predisposes him to seriousness before mystery. Browne is content to understand a mystery without definition.

Let us listen to what Sir Thomas might have said in an imaginary conversation about his faith:

'I looked at many things and wished to look at more. I am a tireless slave to curiosity. Surely, though, we cannot doubt there is something beyond what we can see. It is the purest conceit to think that the world reaches no further than the limits of our own senses'.

In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, written in 1646, he records and corrects popular misconceptions about the natural world. For example, there was a popular belief that dead kingfishers made good weathervanes because, when hung up, they would point in the direction of the wind. So Browne carried out his own experiment. He hung up two dead kingfishers and found that they often pointed in different directions, proving once and for all that the belief was not true. A more esoteric question which he pondered was whether Adam and Eve, being created by God, had belly buttons.

Another of Browne's major works was *Urne Buriall*, written in 1658, in which he meditates on death and cremation in the light of the discovery of a cluster of urns containing buried bones in a field near Walsingham. 'Who knows the fate of his bones?' he reflects.

The Garden Of Cyrus, written in 1658, explores what he calls the 'mystical mathematics' of numbers and, through careful observation, he notices the prevalence of the number five in nature. He considers the benefit of planting trees in groups of five set out in a lattice pattern which he calls a quincunx.

Browne was much admired by Samuel Johnson but Johnson obviously found some difficulty dealing with all of Browne's newly-minted words, as only two made it into his dictionary. Who else joins Johnson in praising Browne? Over the centuries he has been admired by a number of eminent writers including Coleridge, who believed that his generation of writers owed a great debt to Thomas Browne, whom he called 'A crack'd Archangel'. When writing *Moby Dick* Melville was inspired by Browne's fidelity to nature, as well as his mystical side, and he makes use of Browne's description of the Sperm Whale he had observed when one was washed up on a Norfolk beach. Virginia Woolf was enthralled by Browne's antiquarian interests. W. G. Sebald includes a reference to Browne in *Saturn's Moons* and the Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, remarked that he set out on his career by doing his best to be Sir Thomas Browne. Browne's most renowned literary champion today is the Spanish novelist, Javier Marias.

I would not be honest if I omitted the one stain on Sir Thomas Browne's reputation. He attended a witch

trial in Bury St Edmunds – it is not known why. The judge, who was uncertain about the evidence, saw Browne in the public gallery and called on him as an expert witness. Browne gave his opinion that the symptoms of allegedly bewitched children were natural but then added the comment that that this naturalness was evidence of the 'subtily' of the Devil controlling the witches' actions. We do not know whether this remark was the deciding factor in the verdict of the

court but the accused women were found guilty and hanged. However, bearing in mind the obsession with witchcraft at that time, I for one, am prepared to forgive him for what we would now consider an irrational error.

Browne was never elected to the Royal Society, though this was something he undoubtedly deserved, possibly because he remained in Norwich rather than mixing in London's scientific circles. Browne received his knighthood almost by accident during a Royal visit to Norwich when the Lord Mayor, who was a strict republican, refused to accept the honour usually conferred on an eminent local dignitary and suggested that the title be

granted to Thomas Browne.

Finally, I would like to share a couple of personal reasons for wishing to talk about Sir Thomas Browne. He was the first person to document the Norfolk dialect. In his tract entitled: *Of Languages and Particularly of the Saxon Tongue* he identified words such as 'mawther' (meaning woman or girl), a word still in use in Norfolk today. And, best of all, he actually mentions the village where I live when he reports: 'A kind of stork was shott in the wing by the sea neare Hasburrowe (Happisburgh, pronounced Hazeborough) and brought alive unto mee; it was about a yard high, red head, colourd leggs, and bill, the clawes resembling human nayles, such as Herodotus describeth in the white Ibis of Egypt.'

There is so much more to say about Sir Thomas Browne but I leave you with what I think is one of his most memorable phrases: 'Life is a pure flame and we live by an invisible Sun within us'.



Sir Thomas Browne's statue in Norwich

Carol Palfrey is the convenor of the Norwich SOF Group and Secretary to SOF Trustees.

Story-Telling and Faith

1. Martin Spence led a workshop on the Resurrection story in Luke.

This year's Conference featured two 'twinned' workshops on story-telling and faith. David Lambourn and I each took a Biblical text and invited people to look at them simply as stories, albeit stories which have been used to affirm religious faith. This was a practical exploration of SOF's understanding of 'religion as a human creation', for story-telling is fundamental to the human condition. As David put it: 'Humans are to stories as fish are to water.' Stories are a medium in which we live and move and have our being.

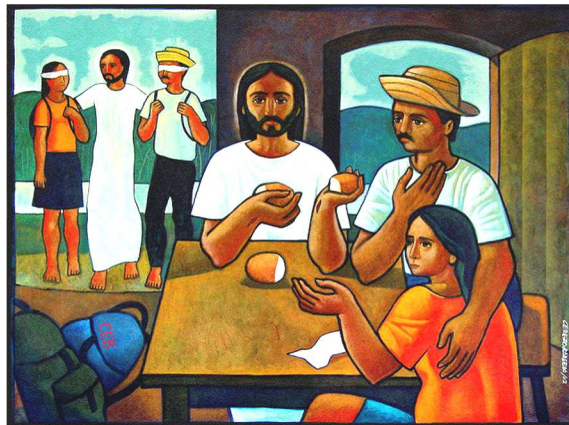
I chose to look at the last chapter of the Gospel of Luke for two reasons. Firstly, together with Mark and Matthew, it is one of our three synoptic gospels – primary sources for the resurrection story which defines Christian faith. Secondly, it is generally reckoned to be better-written than Mark or Matthew, better crafted, and therefore perhaps better placed for a discussion on the nature of story telling.

We've all been in workshops or group discussions which somehow fall flat, which fail to take off. And we've all been in discussions which start to buzz, taking on their own life. In my view, the discussion of Luke's last chapter was definitely a buzz. As workshop 'leader' I had prepared several possible questions or lines of approach to keep things moving, but the discussion quickly took on its own dynamic and threw up ideas and observations which had never occurred to me.

One question on which I had focused was movement: How does the story *move itself forward*? We did tackle this, talking about the story's transition from bewilderment to understanding; from the followers' stunned grief at the fact of Christ's death, and fearful disbelief at the disappearance of his body, to a new understanding of both death and resurrection as foretold in scripture. And this is interwoven with a movement from women to men: the empty tomb and the two figures in 'dazzling garments' are encountered by women, whose report is dismissed by the men. So at this point the women are wiser than

the men, because they trust the evidence of their own eyes. The men will only catch up when Jesus appears and patiently explains to them what's going on.

Other participants brought in other observations, several of which focussed in different ways on *authorship*, on Luke's role and intentions. For instance, we talked about Luke's status as author both of his Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, and agreed that it was likely that he wrote Acts first and the Gospel later. Acts is essentially a list of events, a chronicle, while the Gospel is a literary feat, the product of a mature mind and well-honed skills. The Gospel adds value to Acts, contextualising and underpinning it.



Maximino Cerezo Barredo *Emmaus* (2002)
artandtheology.org

We talked also about Luke's insistence on Christ's resurrection as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. In fact, his emphasis is very much on the prophecy, from which the resurrection follows as a necessary consequence. In his conversations on the road to Emmaus, and then in Jerusalem, the resurrected Christ is in effect saying to his disciples: 'You know the Bible, you know these things were prophesied in scripture,

so why are you so surprised now that they've actually happened?'

We talked, finally, about Luke's resurrection story as also an argument, a polemic. His is sometimes described as the most 'historical' of the Gospels, but this is not history in the modern sense of the word: there is no diligent presentation of available evidence, no acknowledgment of different possible interpretations. Rather, Luke starts *convinced* that Christ is risen, as foretold in scripture, and he organises his material within a narrative framework which foregrounds this conviction. His polemical purpose is not to persuade doubters, but rather to re-confirm the faith of the faithful.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to our two workshops on story-telling and faith. There are plenty of other stories out there to continue the discussion in the years ahead.

2. David Lambourn led a workshop on the story of Ruth

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself; on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'.

Is that all there is? No, there is also Hebrew literature: stories in addition to the law and the prophets of which Ruth is but one – and a significant one at that.

Ruth, we came to understand during our conversation, is read annually at the Jewish festival of *Shavuot*, a late Spring festival celebrating the ongoing barley and wheat harvests. *Shavuot* also celebrates the gift of *Torah*, specifically the first five books of the Bible: the story of Jewish origins, their covenant with God, the moral and religious obligations and civil laws – the very constitution of the Jewish people? Ruth is read in parallel with this celebration of the Law. We wondered: What reasons might there be for including what, at face value, is simply a very well-crafted short story as holy writ and read liturgically every year? Well, quite a few, we thought!

Chiefly, taking a cue from Isaiah Berlin that moral conflicts are an intrinsic, irremovable element in human life, we came to see the Book of Ruth as a 'worked example' of how members of an extended family could cope with difficulty and misfortune and yet remain loyal to the conflicting demands of *Torah*.

The story tells of famine, of emigration to Moab, of marriage with foreign women, of the death of all three men of the family and all that is implied for the well-being of the remaining women, of Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law, one of whom elects to remain in Moab when Naomi decides to return to her home town, Bethlehem.

Issues of identity and title to a field arise. Sheer survival is an issue. Ruth labours all hours gleaning behind the harvesters and hands over her gleanings to her mother-in-law, having committed herself lifelong to Naomi. Naomi cannot inherit a field owned by her late husband, nor can it be sold on the 'open market';

it isn't a free trade area. Naomi forgoes the right to levirate marriage on the grounds that there is little point, her being above child bearing age. In the meantime, Boaz, a well-to-do relative, is manipulating matters in order to help Ruth in her efforts to assist Naomi who, in her turn, encourages Ruth to 'set her cap' at Boaz – exactly what is to be understood by Ruth's night-time visit to Boaz's bed escaped us as to detail. It certainly seems to challenge the religious expectations of that time – and perhaps of ours! This is not the only challenge to the law as it stood: on the return from the Babylonian exile. Nehemiah set down

clear rules as to who was acceptable as a Jew – foreigners were out, but the story of Ruth offers an alternative possibility. Ruth, a Moabite, is vulnerable on this score – marriage to Boaz would overcome such vulnerability. Following the night-time visit, Boaz expresses his willingness to marry Ruth, a willingness which is tied up with the ownership of the field. Boaz acquires the field by a somewhat devious ruse in which he devises a way of discouraging an un-named prior family claimant from exerting his claim.



Ruth gleaning in Boaz' field: Macklin's Bible britishmuseum.org

Following their marriage, Boaz and Ruth produce a son whom they immediately hand over to Naomi who, in effect, becomes the mother of the child – so ensuring her rights and survival. Would this be understood as a form of surrogate pregnancy?

Ruth, a story – apparently owing little to any oral tradition – stands as a 'worked example', illustrating that the law might be interpreted in order creatively to sustain Israel at the strategic level of the family. By being celebrated alongside the gift of *Torah*, annually at *Shavuot*, the story continues to license such interpretation in the name of 'coping'. A story of robust kindness overcomes both the barrier of ethnicity and the straitjacket of legalism?

Martin Spence was a full time trade union negotiator. He is now vice-Chair of SOF Trustees.

David Lambourn, ordained during the era of 'South Bank Religion' and one-time SOF Membership Secretary, continues to cope playfully.

Six Big Ideas to Transform Religious Education

Dave Francis offers a contribution.

While it's true to say that Religious Education is very good in many schools, the overarching picture is one of retrenchment and deterioration. Academisation and the continuation of Michael Gove's hated English Baccalaureate are having a devastating effect. Increasingly, RE is not being offered to students at Key Stage 4, or in adequate time in primary schools, despite the legal requirement. Examination entries are suffering a catastrophic decline, undoing all the good work of the previous decade.

But in SOF we have a rescue plan. First, in line with the recent report of the Commission on RE in England, we must change the name of the subject to 'Religion and Worldviews'. That is 'religion' – singular – to mark out the field of study, and 'worldviews' – plural – to encompass the religious and non-religious worldviews relating to the concerns to which religions and philosophies of life have addressed themselves.

I like this name change: it finally gets away from the charge of indoctrination, of trying to educate pupils to be religious. But a change of name is not enough on its own. We also need to remember that what really matters is what's *in* the tin, not on the label. And this is where the *Six Big Ideas for RE*, developed by Barbara Wintersgill's specialist team, of which I was a member, comes in. *Pupils should have opportunities to learn about and understand that:*

1. **Continuity, Change and Diversity:** There is an amazing diversity of worldviews and ways of life, which are themselves diverse and changing, interacting with each other yet also maintaining continuities through different times and contexts.
2. **Words and Beyond:** There are many ways in which individuals and communities interpret and respond to authoritative texts and traditional non-verbal artistic material, and themselves use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, literal and figurative, to express their own beliefs, values, experiences and identities.
3. **A Good Life:** There are many ways in which worldviews provide guidance on how to be a good person and live a good life. These can be interpreted differently by members of the same traditions and agreement may often be found across traditions.
4. **Making Sense of Life's Experiences:** Worldviews are about experience as much as belief, and they can help individuals interpret their experiences as well as providing transformative experiences through practice, and a sense of identity and belonging.

5. **Influence and Power:** Worldviews interact with the wider community and cultures, affecting and affected by politics, artistic and cultural life, social values and traditional rituals, sometimes having considerable power and influence beyond their own adherents.

6. **The Big Picture:** Worldviews provide coherent overall accounts, however provisional, of the nature of reality – life, the universe and everything – often based on texts or traditions taken as authoritative, though people interpret and live out these worldviews in different ways, and not everyone accepts the need for such 'grand narratives'.

Note that all of these can – and should – be exemplified, by a range of worldviews, both religious and non-religious, as proposed in *Big Ideas in Practice for Religious Education*: tinyurl.com/bipractice. Children and young people need an educational programme that considers the great wisdom traditions of the world, both religious and non-religious, in order to prepare them for life in a multicultural and multi-faith society. This needs to be done in a way that is *critical, objective and pluralist*, and, I suggest, committed to the principles of 'Solar Living'.

Solar living, or 'solarity', may be seen, as Don Cupitt wrote in *Above Us Only Sky* (p.viii), as 'a new religion for the non-religious'. Here, 'we accept and joyfully affirm life and its limits, traditionally described as Time, Chance and Death. We no longer wish to veil the truth about life, not do we dream of somehow being able to transcend its limits.'

The SOF *Solarity* resource already has 82 sessions for religion and philosophy out-of-school-hours clubs that have been published on solarity.org.uk. We now need to construct a *Solarity* contribution to *Religion and Worldviews*, making use of the *Six Big Ideas*. This proposed resource goes far beyond what is currently available. It will:

- approach the living wisdom traditions of the world in terms of their 'Big Ideas';
- enable non-specialist educators to engage their children in investigative study;
- promote high levels of understanding of Religion and Worldviews;
- equip learners with the imagination, empathy and resilience needed for making a positive contribution to society;
- provide learners with access to the wisdom that will help them to cope with life's many challenges.

We now need to take up the opportunity provided by the RE Commission recommendations for a national course in Religion and Worldviews.

Dave Francis is Deputy Chair of the RE Council and Associate Adviser for Bath and North East Somerset SACRE.

Revisiting

Simon Mapp revisits *Dreamtime*

by John Moriarty¹

Altjiranga, the aboriginal word meaning 'Dreamtime', is how the earth came into being. The *Altjiranga Mitjina* is the eternal dream and when on 'walkabout' the aborigines dream of the world.

'Give me land lots of land,
Don't fence me in.'²

It's the need to explain things down to their component parts that blinds us to these very things. As William Blake writes:

'Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight,
And threefold in soft Beulah's night,
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From Single vision & Newton's Sleep.'³

John Moriarty was born in Kerry in 1938 and educated at University College Dublin, taught the History of European Ideas at the University of Manitoba in Canada for six years before returning to Ireland in his thirties, where he lived a simple life of gardening, writing and wondering. His first book was named *Dreamtime*. It is an extraordinary weaving of myths, theology and spirituality – a reimagining of Christianity for the modern world, offered by realigning ourselves back to the Earth. Science has yet to catch up with Christianity, for man has walked on the moon but so far failed to walk beautifully upon the Earth.

Moriarty's deepest need in relation to people and society was not to be fenced in. His second need was to explain that, in his view, mythology and poetry should play an equal role in today's search for meaning. This, John felt, is where western culture can begin to heal itself. To ask if John Moriarty was a philosopher or a mystic is a fair question and maybe he's a mixture of both, for Moriarty engages in philo-mythology. His words are imaginatively pluralistic, while he is also a man of both wisdom and deep Christian faith.

'And yes, there are days in Connemara when speechlessness isn't a choice. You look up from your work, out over a lake to the mountains, and as well as losing your grip on your spade you lose your grip on yourself and on your world. And for as long as it lasts what

a wonder it is, having no grip, either with your hands or with your mind, on anything. Having no sense of yourself that you want to hold on to... Having neither a past nor a future that you want to hold on to.'⁴

Central to Moriarty's thinking is when he talks of being 'doctrinally poor'. To live a life of faith beyond the doctrines of religion is to live a faith which is more profound. It is an emptying of ourselves, a kenosis – a theme also found in the writings of Kierkegaard.

John Moriarty talks rather beautifully in *One Evening in Eden* (a collection of recorded public talks) that to have a rock-like faith is arguably to have no faith at all, for you only have a true faith when you don't know, when you enter the darkness, when you don't set limits of the numinous deep and you cross over, go beyond, the doctrinal dogmatic boundaries.

The only question Moriarty says we should ask of ourselves is this: Are you still growing, are you still living dangerously? Are you vulnerable to further experiences? Or, do you only rest your head on questions of which you already know the answers?

'God's absence or our experience of his absence is now in a most marvellous way a mode of God's presence. Although God has disappeared as object of awareness, he nonetheless abides as Ground, as Divine Ground, of our being. But until, beyond all empirical means and modes of apprehension, we apprehend this, we are derelict. Everything that could walk out on Christ walked out on him. It might even be that his sufferings walked out on him. For where there are sufferings there is something to hold on to.'⁵

Johannes Tauler (German preacher and mystic) was to write 'Everything depends on a fathomless sinking in a fathomless nothingness.' But as John writes in *Dreamtime* (p.30), this 'nothingness' is not a 'negative emptiness, it's an infinitely rich emptiness. And it ever and forever heals us of nihil, of nihilism.'

John's continuation to heal both himself and the West is also to criticise the condition in which it/we only consider an answer satisfactory if it fits comfortably within the framework of our own pre-suppositions. This is as relevant to the discipline of the sciences as to the theo-philosophers when any discipline is reduced to a precept.

Moriarty tells of the time when on one of his daily walks, seeing a hare leap before him, in an instant he fell to the ground and buried his head into the hare's form and asked that his European education be taken from him. The insecurity of laying our heads in the hare's form is to go beyond human awareness into faith – into a Divine-deep outside limits. The West's $E=MC^2$ education has become, according to Moriarty, a thermometer able to tell the temperature of the water but unable to tell if the water is still or a torrent. This reminds me of Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* (6.52): 'We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are no questions left, and this itself is the answer.'

Moriarty found himself out of step studying philosophy as a post-graduate in Leeds. He felt that the works of Ayer, Hume and Wittgenstein were no match for the works of *Mabinogion* (Medieval Welsh folktales of Celtic mythology) and soon moved from philosophy into literature, which he found liberating.

'In a dream sent to us from within the atom itself, we unstitch its ultimate particle, then we will find what Pascal's housekeeper found when she unstitched the lining of his waistcoat. We will find a memorial of its night of fire'.
(*Dreamtime*)

Although he did not wish to undermine their valuable contribution, he found science and philosophy were not the liberating discipline some might claim; we need the *mythos* as well as the *logos*: 'To Plato I say, *A Birdreign* not a *Republic*... For a Christian the road to Birdreign begins where it began for Jesus, at the end, below, of Bright Angel Trail.' (*Curlew*, p.314.)

Birdreign from Irish mythology is Conaire Caomh, the king's reign where his supernatural father appeared as a bird and took off his bird form to lie with his mother the queen in human form. Bright Angel Trail is one of the trails that lead down into the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

When the water is a torrent, when the clouds are diluvian and the waves rise, we enter the dereliction and it is here that Moriarty sees as the place where one is closest to God, the *Tenebrae* – the darkness and the passion; the nothingness or no-thing-ness. This is what Moriarty calls humanity's 'Trans-torrentem Destiny', the evolutionary event many know as Gethsemane. John 18:1: 'And Jesus went forth with his disciples over a torrent called the Kedron.' And this small torrent was 'Colorado-river deep'. John Moriarty offers a unique way of looking at the Gethsemane experience. He asks: 'Have we

Christians closed our account prematurely with what crossing the Kedron might mean?'

(*Curlew*, p.46)

The West defines itself by the maths, but for Moriarty this is wrong for the myth should be our mother tongue: myth opens us up

to what it is to be fully human. Re-enchantment comes from our reading of the ancient Celtic, Native American, Hebrew, Greek, Egyptian, Indian (and many more) myths and legends; texts should be spiritual exercises, 'formative not informative'. One should strive to be in conflict with one's holy books and to see afresh the sight and wonder of the world:

'Every bush is a burning bush,
Every river is a medicine river,
Every stone is a-stone-ishment,
Turned inwards on its rose window wonders.
(*Dreamtime*)

NOTES

1. Published by Lilliput Press (Dublin 1994).
2. John Moriarty, *Nostos: An Autobiography* (Lilliput Press, 2001).
3. William Blake, Letter to Thomas Butts, 22nd November 1802.
4. *What the Curlew Said*, (Lilliput Press 2007) p.10.
5. *Dreamtime* p. 29.

Simon Mapp works as a funeral Chaplain across the Midlands and is active in the Methodist Church.



aboriginal-art-Australia.com

Barbara Burfoot reviews

Leaving Faith Behind

Edited by Fiyaz Mughal and Aliyah Saleem

Darton Longman and Todd (London 2018). Pbk. 192 pages. £9.19.

This book contains six contributions by people from a Muslim background; five of them no longer consider themselves Muslims. The sixth is one of the editors, Fiyaz Mughal, who is 'a Muslim who believes in a divine entity that created life, yet who also believes in evolution'. The other editor Aliyah Saleem is the founder of Faith into Faithless which supports people leaving their religion. Faith into Faithless is now fully integrated into Humanists UK.

Three of the contributions are from women, including Aliyah Saleem. Two of the women write under pseudonyms, Marwa Shami and Aisha Hussain. All of them left Islam largely because of its attitude to women. It may be significant that they are all university educated.

Aliyah emerged from attending Islamic Academies in Canada and Pakistan as a 'fully veiled fundamentalist Muslim'. She came across feminism while studying for an A level in Sociology and 'the more I studied feminism, the more my own world started to fall apart'. The defining moment for her was listening to Carl Sagan reading from his book *The Pale Blue Dot* and then googling the photographs of Earth taken from space, so small in the immensity of the Universe. She could no longer imagine the tiny god of this tiny world calling people before him on judgement day to explain why they hadn't worn a hijab.

Marwa Shami's piece is called 'Purity'. She developed an hourglass figure when very young. She wore loose clothing to disguise it but she still seemed to attract male attention and believed herself to blame for being a source of temptation. She developed an eating disorder but nothing she did by way of extreme exercise or vomiting after meals diminished the size of her breasts. She ceased to be a Muslim at university.

Aisha Hussein's family are still not aware that she no longer considers herself a Muslim. She was not only a practising Muslim but an evangelist for Islam, at first in online forums and later on stalls at university events. At university she began to explore the rich and varied history of Islam including

the origin of the Quran. It is often claimed that in leaving Islam Muslims lose touch with their heritage but Aisha's researches have given her a wider and deeper grasp of it.

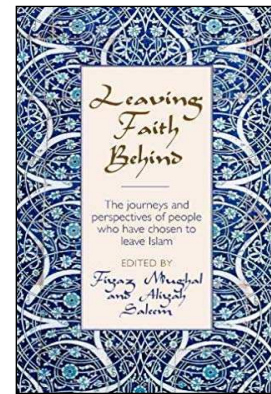
The contributions by the three men are very different. Jimmy Busani's is a series of anecdotes illustrating his problems with Islam up to the day when his elder brothers threw him out of the family home because he is gay.

Probably the most interesting contribution to me was Hassan Radwan's 'Losing Faith at Fifty'. He began to read the Quran critically rather than devotionally after 9/11. He left Islam for the same reason as I ceased to be a Christian: the contradiction between claims that God was loving and merciful and the existence of Hell. The descriptions of Hell in the Quran are far more detailed and graphic than those in the Bible but in the end both orthodox Christianity and Islam are inviting adherents to worship a torturer. Liberal Muslims and Christians use the same argument about the matter: 'It's metaphorical'. It may be, but it is still a metaphor for indescribable suffering. Hassan spent four years with the Council of British Ex-Muslims and still values their work but now he refuses to wear a label. He is simply Hassan.

Fiyaz Mughal's piece, 'Liberal Fallback: the Assault on Liberalism' has an undertone of sadness that some Muslims feel obliged to leave the faith. He describes a situation which will probably be familiar to some SOF members who are still engaged with churches under increasing pressure from evangelicals. He asks readers of the book to read on 'with an open mind and without fear or trepidation, for some of the most enlightening events are the ones that make us question the world around us, including who we are and what we believe in'. I would join him in that request.

I am conscious of how much more there is to this book than I have been able to cover in this review. Please read it. It will amply repay your time and attention with insights into a world which is unfamiliar to most of us.

Barbara Burfoot is a former Chair and Secretary of the SOF Network and a retired Humanist celebrant.



reviews

Francis McDonagh reviews
In the Closet of the Vatican
Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy,
 by Frédéric Martel,
 Bloomsbury (London 2019). Hbk. 576 pages.£17.99.

Frédéric Martel has produced a formidable work, some 570 pages, the result of interviews with 48 cardinals, 52 bishops and *monsignori*, 11 Swiss guards and over 200 priests and seminarians in more than 30 countries over four years. Despite its subject, it is not a salacious book, though it contains many amusing anecdotes.

Referring to the pontificate of John Paul II, Martel reports:

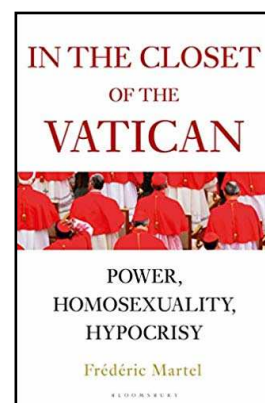
In the pope's immediate entourage, there was ... a trio of bishops who were quite remarkable in their way because they operated as a gang... The first is an archbishop who is always presented as an angel with the face of a saint, and whose beauty has caused tongues to wag. When I meet him today, almost thirty years later, he is still a handsome man... His inclinations have been confirmed by many sources, and he is even said to have been removed from the diplomatic service 'after being caught in bed with a black man', I am told by a priest in the Secretariat of State who slept with the man in question several times.

The second bishop close to John Paul II played an important role in the preparation of papal ceremonies. He also appears in photographs beside the holy father. Known for his sadomasochistic practices, he was said to have dressed all in leather when he frequented the Sphinx, a cruising club in Rome, now closed. An expression used about him became famous at the Vatican: 'Lace by day, leather by night.' (pp 254-55).

The third member of the 'gang', Martel says, was given to financial manipulation and 'affairs with boys'. The extract gives a flavour of the reports given to Martel, apparently by a variety of sources currently in the Vatican, ex-officials and current or former diplomats.

Martel was brought up as a Catholic in Avignon, but abandoned religion around the age of 14 and describes himself as 'a Catholic

atheist'. His aim in writing the book, he says, was to expose a system created by compulsory celibacy that causes suffering to those who are part of it but, more importantly, makes the Church 'sociologically homosexual' and leads to a culture of secrecy that encourages a cover-up of sexual abuse. An important part of his thesis is that the prelates who publicly denounce homosexuality are usually the most active 'members of the parish', to use Vatican in-house jargon. Alongside the exotic specimens is the model Martel describes as 'a great classic of the holy see', sleeping with one's private secretary or assistant.



Martel devotes one chapter of his book to interviews with male prostitutes working in the square surrounding Rome's Termini railway station and other well-known cruising areas. The young men, mostly migrants from Eastern Europe or Africa, say that priests are an important sector of their clientele; some, but by no means all, work in the Vatican. One theme of these often moving interviews is the priests' desperate need for tenderness, to create, or invent, a relationship. Martel uses this as evidence for his argument of the damaging effect compulsory celibacy has had on the lives of priests. His findings on prostitution were subsequently confirmed by police officers.

The periods to which Martel devotes most time are the pontificates of John Paul II (1978-2005) and Benedict XVI (2005-2013). Both popes, he says, surrounded themselves with gay officials, and John Paul was taken in by the Mexican Marcial Maciel, the founder of the Legionaries of Christ, subsequently exposed as a serial abuser and expelled from the priesthood by Benedict XVI. Maciel found favour with John Paul for his anti-communism, and for the resources he was able to bring to the Pope's crusades, and it has been said of the Polish pope that he was so absorbed in his anti-

communist crusade, and his travels, that he took little interest in the running of the Vatican.

Martel quotes Krzysztof Charamsa as saying that Benedict XVI presided over ‘the gayest pontificate in history’. Charamsa is the former priest who lost his job in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (previously called the Inquisition) when he came out as gay in 2015. Martel discusses Benedict’s mild manner and his fondness for ermine-trimmed capes and red moccasins and, to the point of obsessiveness, his relationship with his handsome secretary, Georg Gänswein, described by *Time* magazine as ‘the Heartthrob from the Vatican’. Gänswein plaintively told *Vanity Fair*: ‘Being good-looking is not a sin,’ and Martel concludes that there was no more to their relationship than the ‘loving friendship’ (*amor amicitiae*) approved by Thomas Aquinas.

Benedict’s unexpected resignation, Martel believes, was triggered by his discovery of

widespread homosexuality among the clergy in Cuba on his visit to the island in 2012. This, he says, was the tip of the iceberg; below the surface of the water were the activities of his courtiers, which were now impossible to ignore.

Martel finds Pope Francis inconsistent in his statements on homosexuality, despite his famous ‘Who am I to judge?’ remark. But Francis’ vehement attack on the curial cardinals, referring to ‘double lives’, makes Martel think the Pope has rumbled the curia. Nevertheless, despite the Pope’s own move from the Vatican palace to live in more modest surroundings of the Casa Santa Marta, reform of this corrupt renaissance court clearly has a long way to go.

Francis McDonagh has worked for two leading Catholic development agencies, translates for the international theological journal *Concilium*, and is an occasional contributor to the *Tablet*.

A Perturbation of Light

I was disturbed in the night
by my granddaughter tip-toeing the corridor –
no sound, no sign
but a subtle change in the light
through my door

so slight her little body, so soft her foot
as she felt her way along the carpet
and yet enough to wake me as I lay.

The course of the universe may be altered—
so they say— by a butterfly
though our own identity may be doubted
as solid integrity

for one electron will shift another
without a touch – and an atom move a star –
so why then should we be concerned
if a perturbation of light

is all we are.

Kathryn Southworth

This poem is reprinted from Kathryn Southworth’s and Belinda Singleton’s collection *Wavelengths* (Dempsey and Windle, Guildford 2019) and reprinted by kind permission of the author and publisher.

David Boulton reviews *Embodiment*

by Dinah Livingstone

Katabasis (London 2019). Pbk. 62 pages. £10.

Dinah Livingstone is probably best known to *Sofia* readers as the magazine's editor and, as such, a leading light in the SOF Network: a theologian who sees theology as poetry and knows, with William Blake, that 'all deities reside in the human breast'. But when she isn't chiding Don Cupitt for equating globalisation with the kingdom of heaven, or translating Nicaraguan revolutionary poets, she is making waves with poetry of her own. 'Such an original and accomplished poet,' the *Times Literary Supplement* called her, and *Red Pepper* said 'Dinah Livingstone's poetry speaks persistently and openly of the struggle for the heart's hope of utopia in a language at once celebratory and defiant.'

Dinah published her first poetry pamphlet, aptly titled *Beginning*, in 1967 and her first collection, *Saving Grace*, in 1987. *Embodiment* is her tenth, and it comes in two parts. As she explains on the back cover, 'Part 1, Voices, listens to many speakers, both living and dead, real and fictional, from a close neighbour to an exile from Earth on an exoplanet. As well as humans, there are grammatical great tits and a talking fox. Part 2 has the title sequence Embodiment and more on the pain and pleasure of our life as an animal with imagination.'

'Animals with imagination...' It's there in her first poem:

'... one species among many that belong,
evolution's product, mortal like the rest,
fallible, linguistic, making the planet
articulate her story, form the poem
wording Earth's deep hum.'

The hum is heard by an exile in the Goldilocks zone of exoplanet T677E:

'Earth has cities where they speak
300 languages, have meetings,
music, arguments and laughter...

I've heard too that some Earth people
yearn for another country
above the sky. They call it heaven.
How strange when they have so much...'

Then there are those Japanese great tits who '... have the power/to form a compound sentence in four tweets/combining 'Scan for Danger' with 'Come Here'... Communicating some complexity,/their tweets are not just isolated words:/a simple grammar

quickens what they say;/they are incipiently linguistic birds.'

Part 2 has the title sequence 'Embodiment' consisting of six poems introduced with a sonnet. Like the whole body of Dinah's work, these

poems celebrate the wholly human spirit but with the paradoxical reminder that our spirit is not some disembodied soul, a ghost outside the machine, but the messiness of our flesh and blood and birth and death, We are embodied beings, incarnations:

'How could a disembodied spirit speak
or dance or sing the paradox, the power,
the passion and the truth of human hearts?'

Dinah's style is direct and conversational. As one critic puts it, 'The language is direct, unselfconscious and colloquial but under its apparent artlessness lies work of considerable intelligence and subtlety.'

From 'Love':

'Everywhere in the universe
bodies attract and are attracted,
particles, planets, heavenly bodies
relate to one another, gravitate.
My love is my weight, Augustine said,
my gravity...

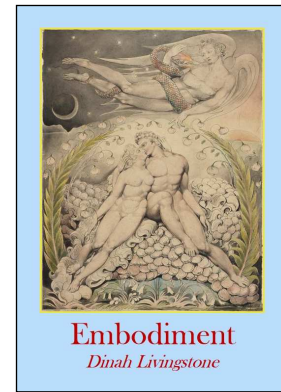
Though sounding a bit quaint today,
William Morris's John Ball was right
that fellowship is life and lack of fellowship
is death...'

From 'Ageing':

'I wanted to take down a curtain
But couldn't get the ladder up the stairs.
It is such a nuisance being old...

But sometimes there comes a clarity,
A sense of calm and gratitude.
Life's precious and while I'm still here
I have many things to do before I go...'

Like editing *Sofia*, and more poetry, please!



David Boulton, journalist, broadcaster and author, is a former editor of the investigative series *World in Action* and head of current affairs at Granada TV, one-time editor of *Sea of Faith* magazine and a founder of the Nontheist Friends Network.

As I Please

John Pearson remembers David Paterson.

My first memory of David, from 1992, is of overhearing him boldly pronounce, *'It depends upon what you mean by chair'*. How could I ever relate to such a great philosophical mind, I thought. I was at once both alarmed and in awe.

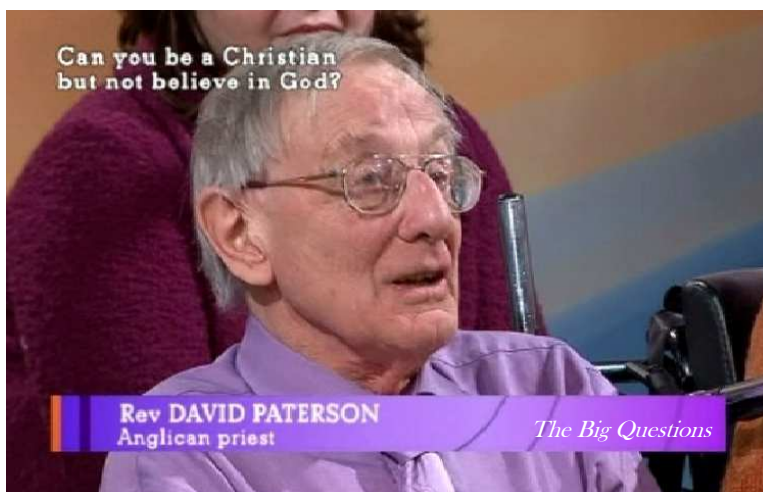
All his writings, TV appearances and the like show him as a man of great intellect. But never did he boast of the scholarship he won to Christchurch, Oxford or his degree in mathematics. He once told me he might have gained a higher classification had he been to more lectures. He went instead, he said, to the more interesting ones on philosophy and theology! I have memories of our many stimulating conversations, conducted at my level, to which he graciously descended.

In Trustees' meetings, to which he contributed much wisdom, he could also demonstrate a mischievous streak. Occasionally he would stridently advocate a view diametrically opposed to the feeling of the meeting, prompting long drawn-out discussion, during which passions ran high. Eventually, on losing his case, he would declare, *'Oh well, it wasn't that important anyway!'* The rest of us, worn down by a pointless diversion, would look to the skies, while he would chuckle to himself.

Some issues did seriously concern him, such as our taking on Trust Status (which he regarded as dishonest) and the National Lottery (which he regarded as a tax on the poor). I think he never changed his views on either.

He was a passionate advocate and practitioner of inter-faith dialogue and understanding. Over many years he made an annual trip to India, maintaining relationships which he had made with charities there, the same itinerary each time. Firstly, a stay in the village of Valod, then the town of Bhavnagah and finally the city of Ahmadabad. He began and continued this in his search for greater awareness of the cultural histories of immigrants from Gujarat to his parish in Loughborough, where he served for 40 years as Priest of St Peter's.

Between 1998 and 2006 some of us were fortunate to go with him. In 1989 he took me, my wife and two daughters, then aged 9 and 14. To suggest he became an honorary grandfather on our family expedition may appear presumptuous but it seemed so to us, and he certainly had a great care for Jenny and Sarah in



the strange new world he introduced to us.

I myself travelled with him again in 1999-2000 and in 2006. This last time Kit Widdows, then vice-Chair of the Network, came too. In Kit, a fellow Oxbridge mathematician, David seemed to find and very much enjoy the companionship of a man of similar background and intellect. They got along very well together.

I feel that David and I 'clicked' at a personal level, if not an intellectual one. He was a man of immense generosity, understanding and compassion, though he did not always suffer fools gladly. (On reflection I got off lightly). Given his love for India and its people, it was amusing to see him shouting crossly at an awkward taxi driver – as if forgetting himself and supposing that, when communicating with 'foreigners' in English, the louder he shouted the more they would understand. They didn't.

David's friendship with me and my family far outlived the India years. He had a number of stays in Newcastle or at our cottage on Holy Island, which he particularly enjoyed. He paid special visits for my wife's ordination and for my 60th birthday. He was supportive of me during studies for my doctorate, taking my side against the pretensions of academia. And he rather liked the novel which I wrote ... or so he said! When we next met he beamed at me, *'It really is surprisingly good, you know.'* Like a proud son I grasped at the word 'good'. Only later did I ponder the word *'surprisingly'*!

About that chair by the way, 27 years ago: either I was missing something profound – just possible, I suppose – or perhaps he was just being his endearing mischievous self? David, if you are out there, which I guess you would say you are not, we all miss you.

John Pearson is Chair of SOF Trustees and Editor of *Portholes*.



Justice
Statue on the roof of the Brittany Parlement, Rennes