The Christian Parapsychologist

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The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies

THE CHRISTIAN PARAPSYCHOLOGIST

New Series Volume 1 No 20 March 2019

Editor: Dr Robert A. Gilbert

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Papers, brief articles, reviews and editorial correspondence for publication should be submitted, in electronic or printed form, to the editor, Dr R. A. Gilbert, at 215 Clevedon Road, Tickenham, North Somerset BS21 6RX, England (email: sacregis42@hotmail.com). Books and periodicals for review should be sent to the editor at his postal address, above.

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Editorial

Consider these two lines from Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*:

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both ... .

This is a fair description of where *The Christian Parapsychologist*, and its editor, find themselves today. Do we stay on the printed road, or do we move on to the digital track? In an ideal world we could remain on both, but in the longer term that is not a viable option. The question of a larger digital presence is also one to be addressed by the Fellowship as a whole, but although I can speak only for this journal, the issues involved do concern us all.

As an organisation, the Fellowship – in common with all voluntary institutions based in the 'real', material world – faces a difficult future. We suffer from a falling membership and rising costs, which place an ultimately unsustainable burden upon our funds. When we add to this the dwindling circulation of the *CP*, and a shrinking pool of contributors, it is clear that our future is far from rosy, unless we embrace the digital world and the prospect of a virtual journal. This would certainly reduce our costs and, with the appropriate development of the Fellowship website, give us a very significant advantage: it would enable the virtual *CP* to become inter-active, permitting continuing current comment and debate on all of the issues raised in our often controversial papers.

I do not wish to alarm readers, especially not those of the pre-internet generations (to which I belong), who may be unready to accommodate such changes, and who will be relieved to learn that there is no immediate need or intention to change the way in which the *CP* is published. The material and virtual worlds can and do co-exist, and for readers without access to the internet, a printed journal will always be an available option – but in the longer term, adapt we must. Readers may be reassured by looking at the websites of organisations concerned with Christian spirituality (e.g. the Sozein Trust (http://sozein.org.uk)) and with parapsychology (e.g. The Afterlife Research Centre (http://www.afterliferesearch.co.uk)). An internet presence for the journal also enables us to reach all those who find or are directed to our

Fellowship website and who seek to know more of our purpose and our activities.

It is also important to recognise that not all institutions accessible on the internet and concerned with the psychic and the spiritual, are Christian in any meaningful sense; we need to exercise discernment and to be wary of what they offer. And we need also to be aware that the world of social media is filled with potential pitfalls; debate outside forums of recognised merit and morality is at best unwise and at worst seriously damaging to our work. But with care these pitfalls can be avoided. Which brings me to another point: our aims and objects.

'Christian parapsychology' is a term all too easily misunderstood and all too easily wilfully misrepresented. The stated purpose of the Fellowship is 'to promote the study of psychical and religious experience within a Christian context', which presupposes both our commitment to the Christian faith and our determination to be objective in our study. For us there is no conflict between these two, but we face continuing hostility from fundamentalist, ultra-evangelical 'Christians' who would deny that we truly *are* Christian, and from arrogant, opinionated scientific materialists who dispute the objective reality of all that we study. How, then, should we respond to such critics ?

To those in the first category we should make clear that we do not, and will not, compromise our fundamental Christian faith. We recognise that all Christians are called to be evangelists, but that means proclaiming the doctrines of a compassionate, loving saviour: Jesus Christ. We are not called to reject debate about Christian doctrine, or to abdicate reason in favour of blind biblical literalism – an abdication that all too often typifies extreme and charismatic forms of evangelicalism. But we must, at all times, respect our opponents and respond to their attacks dispassionately and objectively (as exemplified by a recent letter in *The Church Times* refuting the absurd claims in a previous issue of cabals of occultists flourishing among Anglo-Catholic clergy).

The fundamentalist mind-set also pervades atheistic communities. They reject the very notion of the supernatural and the psychic, so to them we must respond with academic rigour, applied to scientific research, historical

fact and philosophical debate. This is especially important in the field of popular culture, in which scientists are treated as virtually infallible; we can witness to the reality of the unseen world, and to the validity of our psychic and spiritual experiences by careful dissection of the dogmas of the sceptics, and by correcting the errors that they propagate through television programmes and through such information websites as Wikipedia – which is heavily and unjustly biased against all claims concerning the paranormal, the psychic and the spiritual – by posting corrections on the website, or publicising any refusal to accept such correction.

But what of the world at large? There is a significant, largely non-Christian, public that seeks for spirituality of one kind or another and browses the internet in search of both a spiritual home and sound evidence of the reality of psychic phenomena. To many of these searchers, adrift between the Scylla of hostile atheists and the Charybdis of religious fundamentalists, the label of 'Christian' is anathema. I like to feel that as we debate the whole spectrum of issues within the compass of the terms 'psychic' and 'spiritual' in this journal, we shall be able to overcome their alienation from Christianity and to present them with ideas and arguments that can help them to find their spiritual homes.

To this end we must be inclusive rather than exclusive in our approach to our work; non-judgmental and welcoming to those who are unable or unwilling to accept the essential, and universally proclaimed doctrines of the Christian faith; but always ourselves remaining wholly and recognisably Christian. A daunting task, perhaps, but one in which we have striven successfully for many years, due in no small measure to our contributors whose insights, information and controversies enable us consistently to do more with less.

Robert A. Gilbert

The Image: Icon or Idol

by Michael Paternoster

In 63 BC Pompey the Great completed a successful campaign in the Middle East by occupying Jerusalem. He then shocked Jewish sensibilities by going where no Gentile was allowed to go and entering the Temple. Worse still, he dared to enter the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest ever went, and then only on one day in the year. He expected to find in the innermost shrine an image of the god worshipped there. Every temple in the ancient world had a cult image: some crude, archaic and hardly recognisable, others works of art wrought in ivory and precious metals. To Pompey's surprise the Jerusalem temple contained nothing of the kind. Worship to him without an image was literally unimaginable.

The Jews were unique in the ancient world in worshipping without any visible representation of the Godhead. They believed that to make an image purporting to represent God was forbidden by the second of the Ten Commandments; it would be blasphemous and idolatrous, and in any case impossible, for "no man has seen God at any time," (1 John 4:12). At first the God of the Hebrews was one god among many: He demanded their exclusive worship, and in return favoured them above all other people. Gradually, they came to see God as unique and all other gods as idols or demons, or as having no real existence at all.

The Hebrew scriptures – what we call the Old Testament – do not speak with a single consistent voice. They were compiled over hundreds of years and contain traces of earlier attitudes, dating from long before they came to see the God they worshipped as Creator and Lord of the whole world. Take, for instance, the story of Jacob. Fleeing from his brother Esau he slept one night with his head on a stone and dreamed he saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. When he woke in the morning he said, "surely the LORD is in this place and I knew it not." He set up his stone pillow as an altar and called the place Beth-El, the House of God. It became a major shrine for his remote descendants (Genesis 28:10-19). Much later Naaman the Syrian, cured of leprosy by Elijah, begged a load of earth to take back to Damascus, assuming that the God of the Hebrews could

only be worshipped on Hebrew soil. It was understood that he would be obliged also to continue to "bow down in the House of Rimmon" (2 Kings 5:15-18).

In a further episode in the life of Jacob, when he ran away with his wives from their father Laban, one of them stole her father's household gods and hid them in the luggage, obviously believing that if she had their images the gods would come with them and protect them. As the story is told, she is censured neither for theft nor for idolatry (Genesis 31:19-35). Yet a few centuries later Aaron's attempt to provide the children of Israel with an image to worship is roundly condemned. They were emphatically *not* to be like other people. The worship of the Golden Calf has become a by-word for idolatry (Exodus Ch. 32).

In the gradual process of taking over the Promised Land, the Israelites took over with it the pre-existing holy places and continued to worship at them, merely changing the name of the deity worshipped. However, from the days of their wilderness wanderings they inherited a portable shrine, a tent that could be packed up and moved wherever they went. It contained, among other things, the Ark of the Covenant – a box containing the two tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten Commandments. This was considered to be the throne of the invisible God. As the symbol and focus of the presence of God, this was their most sacred object. It was paraded round the walls of Jericho and carried into battle to give God's people victory over God's enemies. Its capture by the Philistines was a major disaster, its return an occasion for rejoicing. With David's capture of the Jebusite holy city of Jerusalem, the Ark finally had a permanent home, though opinion was divided as to whether this was really what God wanted.

When the kingdom split in two, the people of Israel established a cult centre in Samaria where, according to the writers and editors of the books of Kings and Chronicles, the worship was idolatrous. Their sympathies were with the establishment in Jerusalem, where the smaller kingdom of Judah controlled the Temple and tried to make it the only allowable place of worship. Reforming kings like Josiah set about destroying all local holy places on the pretext that they were surviving pockets of idolatry. Psalmists and

prophets set out to ridicule the making and worship of idols. No attempt was made to understand the rationale of the use of images as a focus of devotion. Take, for instance, Psalm 135:15-18 (BCP):

> As for the images of the heathen, they are but silver and gold: the work of men's hands.
> They have mouths, and speak not: eyes have they, but they see not.
> They have ears, and yet they hear not: neither is there any breath in their mouths.
> They that make them are like unto them: and so are all they that put their trust in them.

This kind of rhetoric was no doubt justified when in a world of many gods and many lords it was an entirely new idea that there was only one God, the God of all the nations upon earth, creator and sustainer of the universe. Quoted out of context and used to justify the destruction of the results of centuries of Christian devotion, it amounted to wilful misunderstanding, in itself totally unwarranted.

If the Temple in Jerusalem was unique in its day in containing no image of God, it was like every other temple in one respect: in resembling a slaughter-house. Day by day in every town and city of the Roman empire droves of sheep and cattle were sacrificed. This created a huge surplus of meat, which was sold off in the market. For most people this was their only source of meat. For the early Christians this posed a moral dilemma, on which Paul was asked his opinion. Some argued that as the gods of the heathen had no real existence, there was no sin in buying and eating what had once been offered to them. Others held that to eat food once sacrificed to idols was to participate in idolatry. Paul tended to agree with those for whom it was a matter of indifference, but urged them to respect the scruples of others and avoid giving needless offence or leading the weaker brethren astray (1 Corinthians 8:4-10). He certainly does not advocate vegetarianism out of concern for animal rights. He goes on to discuss the payment of clergy, using as a rather far-fetched text the Old Testament injunction, "thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth the grain," asking the rhetorical question "doth

God care for the cattle?", clearly expecting the answer 'No' (1 Corinthians 9:9; Deuteronomy 25:4).

In this he falls far below the awareness of God's concern for other species found especially in the Book of Job and some of the Psalms, where indeed the whole rationale of animal sacrifice is called in question (Psalm 50:8-9 & 12-14, BCP):

> I will not reprove thee because of thy sacrifices, or for thy burnt offerings: because they are not always before me.
>
> I will take no bullock out of thine house: nor he-goat out of thy folds ... .
>
> If I be hungry, I will not tell thee: for the whole world is mine, and all that is therein.
>
> Thinkest thou that I will eat bull's flesh: and drink the blood of goats?
>
> Offer unto God thanksgiving: and pay thy vows unto the Most Highest.

These words became suddenly more relevant than ever before after the traumatic events of 70 AD: Jerusalem was captured, the Temple razed to the ground, and the sacrifices enjoined by the Law abruptly ceased, never again to be performed.

Rather than Christianity being the offspring of Judaism as we know it, both are children of the religion of the Old Testament, forced to come to terms with an unprecedented situation and devise a form of worship tied to no particular locality and involving none of the traditional forms of sacrifice.

That they took increasingly divergent paths had for Christians a serious consequence: they no longer enjoyed the privileged position which exempted Jews from the token sacrifice of a pinch of incense on the altars of the deified emperors. Jews were let off on the grounds that they prayed daily for the emperor, but everyone else was expected to comply as a test of loyalty. To most people, including the magistrates who administered this, it was a mere formality, but for Christians it was a clear case of idolatry. When Jesus was asked the catch question whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, the

point was that Roman coins carried the image of the emperor, which Jews saw as a blasphemous infringement of the Second Commandment. What Jesus implied by his answer was that Caesar was entitled to his due, but so was God. The coinage was made in the image and likeness of Caesar, but mankind was made in the image and likeness of God. We owe to the civil authority a real but limited allegiance, but we owe to God total and absolute allegiance (Mark 12:14ff; Matthew 22:17ff; Luke 20:22ff).

Over this matter of sacrificing to the genius of the emperor Christians faced, for the first but certainly not for the last time, a conflict between loyalty to the state and loyalty to God. Not all magistrates enforced strictly the requirement to offer a token sacrifice; some turned a blind eye, but others came down heavily on what they saw as civil disobedience. For three centuries many Christians were put to death for their obstinacy. Persecution was intermittent rather than constant, but the law could be invoked at any time, and towards the end Diocletian made a ruthless and determined effort to eradicate Christianity as a threat to the unity of the empire. It was a last unsuccessful fling, and not long after Constantine decided 'if you can't beat them, join them.' He professed himself a believer and enlisted the Church to help maintain the disintegrating fabric of Roman society. But the long years of persecution had left their mark. Their Hebrew inheritance and a faith tempered in the fires of persecution combined to produce an ingrained horror of anything that could be interpreted as idolatry.

However, now that they were free to build and adorn their own places of worship, the question of the place of the visual arts in their churches had to be taken seriously. For both Christianity and Judaism – and later for Islam – their most fundamental tenet was that God is unique, and could not properly be represented by any image. Christianity differed from the other monotheisms as it evolved its distinctive theology: God is not a solitary being but three persons united in one Godhead. For the other faiths this amounted to polytheism, but this was a complete misunderstanding. What had changed everything was the Incarnation. If God had originally created man in his own image, subsequently defaced by sin, in Jesus the image was restored. Paul described him as "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Because

"the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily" (Colossians 1:19), it is therefore unquestionable that matter is capable of being the vehicle of spirit. There can be no objection to portraying Jesus, since he was a historical figure who had lived on earth and become part of the whole web of creation.

For the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the sacramentality of matter is not limited to the elements of bread and wine, water and oil, but it can extend to pictorial representations of Jesus and his mother, the angels and the saints. There are, however, two limitations. They take the prohibition of 'graven images' to rule out statues, but not pictures. And of course there can be no representation of God the Father, who has never taken bodily form. Images such as Blake's 'Ancient of Days'of Michelangelo's 'God creating Adam' are therefore unacceptable: the only permissible way of symbolising the Trinity is the icon of the hospitality of Abraham, commonly known as 'The Old Testament Trinity', of which the most famous example is that by Rubens, familiar to most of us through reproductions. It illustrates the episode in Genesis, Chapter 18, when God spoke to Abraham through three men, understood to be angels. The three are taken to represent the Trinity, but it is impossible to identify them as individually representing particular Persons.

Sacred art, in the specialised form of the icon, has flourished, and still flourishes, in the churches that are heirs to the Eastern Roman Empire – but only after fierce and bitter controversy, which is best summarised in Osbert Lancaster's book, *Sailing to Byzantium*:

> In 717 the imperial throne was occupied by a tough soldier from the borders of Syria, Leo the Isaurian, whose religious position was, to borrow an Anglican term of reference, considerably lower than the angels. In his view all representations of sacred personages provided a direct encouragement to idolatry, and he immediately launched a campaign of image-breaking of a ruthlessness unsurpassed even by Cromwell. How far his religious convictions were influenced by a possible Semitic origin, or encouraged by the example of Islam, remain matters for dispute. What is in no sort of doubt was the strength of the reaction they provoked. The iconodules, as the supporters of

> images were called, rose in defence of the Holy Pictures, headed by the monks, who in the Eastern Church were a far more turbulent element than they were in the West. Persecution on a wide scale followed, and was intensified in the reign of Leo's son, Constantine Copronymus.

Lancaster notes that the iconoclastic controversy raged for a century or more. He writes,

> The principal argument of the iconoclasts had been based on the proposition that correctly to portray the Godhead was impossible, and any attempt to do so must of necessity be blasphemous and heretical. This view was itself defined as heresy on the ground that, as our Lord himself had taken human form, to maintain that He could not be represented pictorially was to deny the Incarnation.[1]

In his *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, St John of Damascus provided a theological justification of the use of images in worship. He summed up his position thus:

> I do not venerate matter, but I venerate the Creator of matter, who became matter for my sake, who assumed life in the flesh and who, through matter, accomplished my salvation.[2]

In a rather more recent book,[3] Ian MacFarland, the current Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, has a chapter on icons on which, considering his American Lutheran background, he takes a surprisingly positive view. While noting that the Second Council of Nicaea, in 787, effectively settled the matter so far as the Orthodox Churches are concerned, endorsing the theological position that since the body of Jesus was God's body, the veneration of icons was a corollary of belief in the incarnation, he admits that the churches of the Reformed tradition have not accepted it, even though the Orthodox make a clear distinction between *worship* due to God alone and

[1] Osbert Lancaster, *Sailing to Byzantium*. John Murray, 1969. Pp. 16-17.
[2] John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003. 1, 16.
[3] Ian MacFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. Part 2, chapter 7, pp. 167 ff.

veneration, a proper response to holiness in people and, by extension, to their representation in art and to authentic relics. A similar distinction is drawn in a classic of Anglican theology, Bishop John Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed* (1659), in which he says of the Virgin Mary, "Let her be honoured and esteemed, let Him be worshipped and adored."

MacFarland points out that the figures depicted in icons are named individuals, but they are not represented as they were in their lifetimes but as they are now in glory. The pride of place given to icons in the devotional life of the Eastern Churches tends to lead to a rejection of the sacred art of the West from the Renaissance onward, seen as too secular in style.

A valuable corrective to this tendency is provided by John Drury's *Painting the Word*, a beautifully written and beautifully illustrated study of the kind of art now seen mostly in art galleries though it was originally intended for churches. Drury reminds us that the artists we think of as Old Masters were Christians living in a Christian world that now seems alien even to those of us who are Christians, and that it takes an effort of imagination to appreciate that in their own way they are witnesses to the central truth of the Incarnation and the consequent sacramental significance of matter.[4]

During the middle ages the use of images had become as acceptable in the West as in the East, but it had developed along rather different lines. The Byzantine Empire lasted until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, but the Roman Empire in the West had disintegrated a thousand years earlier. The East could count on an educated laity, but in the West until the fifteenth century literacy was largely confined to the clergy. Christianity had lost ground to barbarians and much of northern Europe had to be reclaimed for the faith. The problem of idolatry took a new form. Some missionaries, like Boniface, the apostle of Germany, tackled paganism head-on, destroying objects of worship dear to the natives they strove to convert at whatever risk to their own lives. Others followed the wise counsel of Gregory the Great, which was wherever possible to take over existing holy places so that people could continue to worship where they were accustomed to, but with their worship redirected from vain idols to the living God. As St Paul had said on

[4] John Drury, *Painting the Word Christian Pictures and Their Meanings*. Yale University Press, 1999

Mars Hill, "whom ye ignorantly worship, Him I declare unto you" (Acts 17:23). Inevitably, with an uneducated and illiterate population this distinction was not always as clear as it should have been. Many churches were indeed built on sites sacred long before the coming of Christianity, but pagan deities were sometimes confused with Christian saints; the Black Virgin of Chartres, for instance, possibly began life as an image of the great Mother Goddess.

The nineteenth century missionary movement, largely but not entirely Protestant, faced the same dilemma as the missionaries of the Dark Ages. On the one hand there were those who tried to build on what potential converts already believed and bring them to see Christ as the fulfilment of their hitherto partial and imperfect awareness of the divine. Others, convinced that 'the heathen in their blindness bow down to wood and stone' insisted on trying to eradicate every trace of paganism and destroy anything that they considered idolatrous. Converts were expected to repudiate their past, the traditions of their people, and thereby become totally without roots. It has to be said that to build on existing beliefs involves acquiring a deep and sympathetic knowledge of those beliefs. For instance, it is not true that the Chinese *worship* their ancestors, they *venerate* them. As Christians they should continue to honour them and pray for them. Indeed, those self-styled Christians who refuse to pray for the dead could learn from them instead of presuming to teach them. As a more open-minded evangelical, Bishop John Taylor, reminds us, mutual intercession is the lifeblood of the Church and prayer is the "tender bridge" that unites the generations; the link is not severed by death.[5]

The seismic upheaval in Western Christendom that led to apparently permanent destruction of the unity of the Church was not primarily about idolatry, but it resulted in a devastating wave of iconoclasm almost as drastic as the campaign of the Emperor Leo and far more lasting in its effects. Whereas the iconodules mounted a successful counter-attack, no comparable theological justification for the use of images appears to have been attempted in the West, because the mediaeval understanding of the purpose of images was radically different from the Orthodox view. In the

[5] John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision*. SCM Press, 1963. Ch. 11.

West, images served a didactic purpose as 'the Bible of the poor'; in the East, the images were understood sacramentally. As Osbert Lancaster explains:

> The scenes and characters in a church such as S. Savin, for instance, are to familiarise the unlettered faithful with the scenes and characters of Holy Writ; at Hosios Loukas or Daphni they exist in their own right as participants in the divine liturgy, allowing the worshippers not instruction but an opportunity for veneration.[6]

Consequently, no-one in the West tried to defend the images by claiming that their veneration followed logically from a belief in the Incarnation. Although the majority of the population remained illiterate long after the Reformation, the argument that pictures in church were a teaching aid ceased to carry much weight once the worshippers could hear the scriptures read in their own language, and those who could read were more edified by panels giving the text of the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer than by wall paintings and stained glass, which had to be explained to them by the priest.

Edward VI of England saw himself as the new Josiah, chosen by God to root out idolatry in his realm. It was perhaps fortunate that he died young before he had entirely succeeded in doing so. This phase of the Reformation in England was instigated from the top; the majority of the population would have been content to go on in the old ways and felt bereft by the sudden disappearance of much they had treasured and which informed their piety.[7] A century later, a second wave of destruction under the Commonwealth had a degree of popular support. Men like William Dowsing, who roamed East Anglia with a bible in one hand and a half-brick in the other, indulged in a mindless orgy of destruction. The beauty and value of works of art accumulated over the centuries meant no more to them than to the fundamentalist Muslim fanatics of today. All was simply taken to be idolatrous. Stained glass was easy to smash; wall paintings could be scraped off or

[6] Lancaster, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[7] Editor's note: For an objective, detailed study of popular attitudes to religion during the Reformation period, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. Yale University Press, 1992.

whitewashed over; statues were more difficult to destroy, and often just lost their heads.

Because from Tudor times onward it suited the ruling class to profess Protestantism, there was for some three centuries a process of rewriting church history which has resulted in most people being convinced that the religion of the middle ages was characterised by superstition and idolatry. When, long after the purging of the Reformation, traces of wall painting were found in St Cuthbert's church at Wells, an officious churchwarden took it upon himself immediately to destroy them. Even today, I discovered in a distance-learning course in church history, put out by an evangelical theological college, a module on the Oxford Movement prefaced by a bible study on idolatry; this I find unbelievably perverse.

The iconoclasts of every period tend to display the cast of mind referred to, in a totally different context, by Raymond Leppard in his book *Authenticity in Music*:

> All cults, religious and political as well as musical, tend to reject compromise as an unacceptable failing that mars the ideal, diminishes the particularity and weakens the message.[8]

The polarised attitudes of the seventeenth century can be illustrated by the writings of Bunyan and Traherne. Bunyan's most famous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, has been enormously influential in the English-speaking world. It tells 'under the similitude of a dream' the story of a Christian from the city of Destruction to the Celestial City. On the way he encounters all kinds of dangers and temptations. At one point he has to avoid the twin perils of Giant Pagan and Giant Pope. For Bunyan, Catholicism and paganism were equally idolatrous and to be avoided at all costs. In fact, he regards the whole world as under the dominion of the Evil One and the most innocent pleasures as snares of the devil. By contrast, for Traherne, whose writings are only now becoming widely known, this world is God's world; he sees God in everything and everything in God:

[8] Raymond Leppard, *Authenticity in Music*. Faber, 1988. p. 75

> I give thee thanks for the being thou has given unto the heavens, sun, moon, stars and elements, to beasts, plants and all other bodies of the earth, to the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea. I give thee thanks for the beauty of colours, for the harmony of sounds, for the sweetness of food, for the warmth and colour of raiment, and for all my five senses, and all the parts of my body, so curiously made, and for the preservation as well as use of all my limbs and senses. Above all, I praise thee for manifesting thyself unto me, whereby I am made capable to praise and magnify thy name for evermore.[9]

Strangely, these two utterly contrasting writers have captured the imagination of two twentieth century composers, both of whom would have considered themselves agnostics. Vaughan Williams had a lifelong fascination with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, culminating in his great, but rarely performed, final opera. Equally memorable on a much smaller scale Finzi's *Dies Natalis* sets words from Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*. Music has provided a kind of posthumous reconciliation of opposites.

The whole recurring debate over the legitimacy of images stems in fact from two basic approaches to God, identified by Charles Williams in *The Figure of Beatrice* as the Way of Rejection and the Way of Affirmation:

> [The] Way of Rejection .... consists, generally speaking, in the renunciation of all images except the final one of God himself and even –sometimes but not always –of that only image of all human sense. .... The other Way is the Way of Affirmation, the approach to God through these images.[10]

In Christian theology the Way of Rejection can be traced from Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite through works such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* in fourteenth century England, to the great mystics of the Counter-Reformation, notably St John of the Cross. His teaching might perhaps be summed up in the words of a song from *Oklahoma*: "It is all or nothing with me; is it all or nothing with you?" In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* he envisages

[9] Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*. Edited by H. M. Margoliouth. OUP, 1958. Vol. II, pp. 228-229

[10] Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante*. 1943 [Re-issued, D. S. Brewer, 1994] pp. 8-9.

the journey of the soul as an arduous climb rewarded in the end by the Vision of God, but only if one keeps to the direct route and resists all temptation to stray from it. To find God, ignore everything that is not God. Paradoxically, St John is also one of the greatest of Spanish poets, and his teaching is conveyed by a wealth of imagery, largely derived from that most sensuously evocative book in the Bible, the Song of Songs.

Centuries before St John of the Cross, in the high middle ages, the greatest of Italian poets, Dante Alighieri, a layman, was the supreme master of the Way of Affirmation. The plot of *The Divine Comedy* is superficially similar to that of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It begins with the poet lost in a dark wood, beset by perils and temptations. Beatrice, the woman he loved and lost, is now in Paradise, and sends Virgil to rescue him and guide him through Hell and Purgatory until he reaches the earthly Paradise – rather like Bunyan's Delectable Mountains – from which the Celestial City is visible afar off. Paganism at its best, exemplified by Virgil, can take him that far. From there on, Beatrice herself descends to meet him and escort him through the heavens until for one brief moment he is allowed to see the Vision of God.

The Divine Comedy could not, nonetheless, be more different from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As a mediaeval Christian, Dante fully accepts the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church, and brings into his enormous epic every aspect of the mediaeval world-view. It is his love for a human being that sustains and leads him on, step by step, to the love of God, "the love that moves the Sun and the other stars." Beatrice is not the dearest idol he has known, but for him a chosen vessel through whom he comes to know God and finally see him face to face. All human life, and especially all genuine relationships of friendship and love, speak to us of the love of God. They are good in themselves but also point beyond themselves.

Charles Williams gives Coleridge's definition of a symbol, for which he prefers the term image: "(i) it must exist in itself, (ii) it must derive from something greater than itself, (iii) it must represent in itself that greatness from which it derives."[11] If any such symbol exists, it can only be that the

[11] *ibid.* p. 7

whole universe is sacramental, in which case the proper attitude to the material world is not idolatry but veneration.

Ultimately, the two ways to God converge, and which of them one chooses to follow is a matter of temperament. There need be no conflict, but sadly the history of religion, and not just of Christianity, is marred all too often by the proponents of one way refusing to compromise or recognise the validity of the other way. If only we could accept that the Way of Rejection and the Way of Affirmation are not mutually exclusive; if we faithfully follow either way, we shall in the end arrive at the same place.

Criteria by which to evaluate ESP

by Neil Broadbent

Psychic awareness is rarely frequent; for many it is a once in a lifetime event. ESP is not something to dabble in, any more than it is wise to dabble in surgery. Nor is it safe to try and prematurely open up faculties not already open. In other words, never seek psi either for oneself or for another; nor should one practise psychic awareness alone. But, if such perceptivity is already a feature of one's life it is wise to learn how to handle it, especially when lack of proper control and discipline can, and does, lead to trouble. This distinction, between going and actively looking for psi and receiving unsought communications, is central to CFPSS teaching. A person who is naturally psychic cannot help being aware of ESP any more than someone who is not deaf can help hearing; there is no blame possible to be attached.

Sadly, it is too easy to get carried away, believing that ESP is something not only different but superior, and that because one has decided to use this gift in God's work, nothing can go wrong. This is far from the truth. That one has experienced something psychic conveys no special status whatsoever. To think otherwise leads to pride which inexorably separates one from our fellow humans and, for this reason, is considered the deadliest of all sins.

Many people are indeed psychic, but those not spiritually ready to use their gift are liable to hurt themselves and others. Those who desire ESP for material purposes, amusement or curiosity are liable to contact earth-bound souls. The development of psychic gifts for their own sake is a snare to

spiritual growth entrapping the aspirant in a web of glamour and deceit. It will not produce increased spiritual awareness.

Just as there are receptive and executive experiences of psi, though in this life the two are often intermixed, so there are negative and positive sensitives. A negative sensitive has a 'flaky' personality, is prone to dissociate, enter trance or psychologically disintegrate. They can be highly strung. Such a person may convey aspects of a greater truth but will do so by giving over their will to another entity, opening themselves to unhealthy relationships. He, or she, is not in control of themself.

Other researchers speak of a lower and a higher psychism. The former is a gift, present in variable degree in many people, outstandingly so in those who are called sensitives. These vary greatly in spirituality, but on the whole they do not show the fruits of the Spirit any more strongly than do their non-psychic neighbours. The higher psychism is seen in the great saints of religion, and develops with their spiritual growth. A positive sensitive is a person of healthy body and mind, with an integrated personality and is in control of themself. Such a person can enter into a conscious, willed state of stillness in which to serve others. This distinction between lower and higher psychism indicates that psychic ability is not necessarily accompanied by spirituality, but spirituality tends to be associated with increasing degrees of psychic awareness.

All forms of sensitivity should be dedicated to God. It is wise to train ourselves in prayer and waiting on the Spirit for divine inspiration. The essence of prayer is, of course, stilled attentive waiting upon God for him to draw us towards further integration within ourselves, our communities and our Saviour. In all these things we have one sure recourse: God's love for us. Knowledge of God is attained through self-sacrificing love not by psychic experimentation. The wise psychic will spiritualise their gift.

In order to discern intelligently the value of ESP we may look at their consequences because as in all things, it is 'by their fruits you shall know them'. The following questions will help:

Does my gift help me accept the world and people *as they really are*?
Does using my gift lead to increasing psychological integration,

intellectual breadth and spiritual growth in me and in others?
Does it increase faith, hope and joy?
Does it promote healing and love in individuals and groups?
Do I use my gift out of love for God and other people?
Does it bring courage and liberation to others?

Someone emotionally mature who is non-intrusive and sympathetic, perhaps a spiritual director or soul-friend, may help one tease out truthful answers to the above.

St Teresa of Avila (1515-82) gave us wise criteria by which to evaluate true visions:

they have a sense of power and authority;
they produce tranquillity, recollectedness, and a desire to praise God;
they impart an inner certainty that what is envisioned is true;
they are clear and distinct, with each part carrying great meaning;
they give strength and peace and inspire love for God.

The most important criterion is that true visions result in a life of improved ethics and psychological integration.

In all psychic matters the psychological attitude is the determining factor. The intuitive, feeling kind of personality needs to cultivate a degree of analytical, objective thinking to counter-balance any tendency to over-confident assumptions. Equally, the logical, reasoning and seriously minded souls need to allow that there are 'more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophy'.

What is needed is scrupulous self-honesty. To see oneself as one *is*, rather than as one would like to be. Such reflection upon our experience of ESP will help us understand the forces that impinge upon us and encourage us to reach a state of consciousness such that we can become both truly aware and responsible.

Our task during this earthly life, one of physical embodiment or incarnation, is to grow into the fullness of our unique identity as given by God. Incarnation produces the separation necessary to enable each of us to

develop our individual character. We are to learn lessons of self-control, selflessness and humility; to learn how to reason and handle intuition; to master both emotion and intellect. Hopefully we develop good habits of honest thinking, sincere feeling, determined willing and responsive praying. Incarnation is for individuation. As Polonius said in *Hamlet*, "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." (Act 1, scene 3, 78–82).

We are to grow from the baby's 'all or nothing' reactive immaturity, through the teenager's years of crowd mentality and thence through life's vicissitudes towards mature individuality and prayerful perception of God's mystical relationship with us and all creation. This lifelong adventure applies not just to individuals but to groups, organisations and nations. Our modern western societies place a very high value on intellect and the achievements of the scientific community. It is unfortunate that life's complexities, darknesses and mysteries are so often given 'all or nothing' responses of the kind one may find in a two-year old. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to soften such abrasiveness into an appreciation not only of black and white but of all the colours of creation. Our society is making steps towards 'emotional intelligence', though it may be a long time before the arts are as highly prized as the sciences.

Scientists teach us that single facts can never be 'proved' except by their coherence in a system. It is the same with ESP: psychic communications are like a jigsaw puzzle. Once solved, jigsaw puzzles are not proved by experiment or statistics—they are seen to be correctly assembled.

One looks forward to the days when the gifts of the Spirit are duly appreciated and seen to be positive handmaids to growth in spirituality: when perceptions of every kind are acknowledged as being 'to the greater glory of God.'

It is vital that to faith we add knowledge of things psychical and spiritual. The Church must integrate modern findings in this as in any other field of human living or fail society.

Controversy and Coercion: A 6th-Century Cover-Up

by Marion Browne

Accusation and counter-accusation about the early Church's suppression of the doctrine of reincarnation are still capable of arousing strong emotions. A case in point is a recent review[1] of Howard Jones's article on reincarnation in *The Journal for Spiritual and Consciousness Studies* which emphatically denies that any such suppression ever took place. But can this view be justified?

Unearthing the evidence to disprove it is no easy feat, not least because posterity has treated the key figure in our enquiry more kindly, perhaps, than he deserves. Historians agree that the emperor-theologian Justinian, who reigned in Constantinople from 527 to 565 AD, successfully codified the law, refashioned institutions, strengthened fortifications and built or rebuilt numerous churches. Such is the esteem in which some academics hold him that it takes a degree of foolhardiness to challenge them on the subject. I have met one such person who, in the course of her long career, apparently imbued cohorts of university students with admiration for his impressive list of achievements. When I put the case to her that he had at the same time ordered the destruction of vast libraries of important early Christian works, she told me in a raised voice, and laying emphasis on the relative pronoun, that I didn't know *what* I was talking about.

Unluckily for her, I happened to have reviewed[2] a recent reprint of Origen's *On First Principles*.[3] This translation by G. W. Butterworth, along with his introduction and that of Henri de Lubac[4], had now been republished after being unavailable for over a decade. The introductions were a revelation, conveying an entirely different impression of the emperor's character from the one my adversary had championed. Corroborative evidence of Justinian's contempt for speculative philosophy exists elsewhere, it is true, although only those who relish ploughing through magisterial historical tomes are likely to find it. But if they do they will be amply rewarded. In Chapter 40 of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* the author reproaches the emperor for suppressing the ancient schools of philosophy and rhetoric in Athens, commenting, "The studies of philosophy and eloquence are congenial to a popular state, which encourages the

freedom of inquiry, and submits only to the force of persuasion." Thus Gibbon justly interprets Justinian's actions as a violation of freedom of thought and an attempt to stifle rational argument.

Until the emperor's intervention in 529 AD Plato's Academy had enjoyed a long and distinguished life. According to Theodore James:

> Perhaps its greatest influence has been felt in the philosophy and speculative theology of the Christian Church...Clement of Alexandria, Origen...[and] Gregory of Nyssa...drew copiously from the Platonic well...Plato's emphasis on the necessity of following truth wherever it led, on the presence of order and intelligence in the universe as an indication of the providential interest of a supreme being and as a basis for scientific progress, on the spiritual character and immortal destiny of the human soul, ... on the need for living the good life publicly and privately, on virtue, self-control and intelligence as elements of happiness, all have been accepted, developed and integrated into the Christian way of life.[5]

But if this was true of the early Church in Alexandria, the Church of the 6th century under Justinian, according to Gibbon, had changed markedly. The threat of barbarian invasion, he points out, was "less fatal to the schools of Athens than the establishment of a new religion, whose ministers superseded the exercise of reason, resolved every question by an article of faith, and condemned the infidel or sceptic to eternal flames." Justinian's closure of the Academy, an institution founded by its namesake in around 388-387 BC and revered ever since, proved to be merely a foretaste of what was to come.

Controversy, especially in the Eastern Church, was by no means new, as the number of bishops' councils that were held throughout the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries bear witness. Of these the two of most concern to Justinian were the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the one he himself convened at Constantinople in 553. This was, as David Wright remarks, "an age of interference and even domination by the emperors, of colourful and abrasive personalities, and of bitter antagonism between leading bishoprics."[6]

A particular target of Justinian's attention was Origen of Alexandria's speculative theology, as developed at Constantinople by the archdeacon Evagrius, a close friend of Gregory of Nazianzus. As Henry Chadwick notes, Origen (184-254 AD), like Justin and Clement of Alexandria before him, "was very sympathetic to the Platonic doctrine of the soul as being 'akin' to God, but obliged to live in a material world which is not its true home."[7] In this, and in his allegorical interpretation of the Bible, Origen was much influenced by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 BC - 40 AD), whose Hellenized Judaism gave to Alexandrian Christianity its distinctive characteristics. The 'Wisdom of Solomon' in the Apocrypha, as Isidore Epstein points out,[8] was an early product of this Alexandrian Jewish school of thought which dates back to the second century BC. Chapter 9, verse 15 of this book declares: "The reasoning of men is feeble, and our plans are fallible; because a perishable body weighs down the soul, and its frame of clay burdens the mind so full of thoughts."

David Wright notes that before the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD no universal agreement had been reached as to what was orthodox and what was not, except possibly in the New Testament: "The differences between the orthodoxy of, for instance, Alexandria and Carthage, arose out of the different ways of thinking of their theologians ... . Tertullian used the language and thought forms of law, rhetoric and Stoicism; ... Clement and Origen used the concepts of Platonism and Pythagoreanism."[9]

The first signs of serious trouble for Origen's theology arose later in the 4th century. Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, launched an attack on it in around 375 AD which was to have far-reaching consequences. Henry Chadwick describes Epiphanius as an ascetic who "interpreted his faith to require a rigorous hostility to every sort of intellectual pretension, including theological speculation."[10] He particularly resented Origen's influence on a group of four Egyptian monks known as the Tall Brothers. Their principal supporter was the aforementioned archdeacon Evagrius, whose theology was to provoke Justinian's wrath nearly two centuries later.

The ramifications of Epiphanius' attack spread to Palestine in 393 and caused a bitter dispute between Rufinus and Jerome, former friends who

both followed a monastic way of life on the Mount of Olives and at Bethlehem respectively. They had also been fellow admirers of Origen. Jerome, however, who seems to have found "rigorous hostility" a more convincing argument than gentle persuasion or speculation, suddenly underwent a change of heart concerning the Christian scholar whose works he had translated into Latin and whom he had once described as "the greatest teacher of the Church since the apostles." To be fair to Jerome, he had good reason to fear being accused of heresy. Opponents of Origen's theology claimed that it was of pagan origin. This being so, anyone of prominence in the Church who adhered to it might risk loss of liberty or even of life itself.[11]

A leading cause of theological disputes in those days was the increasing use of technical terms that did not originate from the Bible. As David Wright points out, this led to the Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East "misunderstanding and misrepresenting one another".[12] The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) in particular issued decrees that offended the Eastern Churches which adhered to the patriarch Cyril of Alexandria's one-nature portrayal of the incarnate Christ. These dissidents became known as the 'monophysites'.

Justinian's great ambition was to reunify the East and West politically and religiously. The possibility of reconciliation with the monophysites was important to him, mainly because his wife Theodora sympathized with them. But accepting Chalcedon's decrees was also indispensable to his political ambitions for the recovery of the West. Although the monophysite problem was proving difficult to resolve, the emperor nevertheless found time in 542-3 to publish a long refutation of Origenism. His chief concerns in this case were both political and religious. Evagrius' musings on it had caused an immense amount of trouble in Palestine. The patriarchs obligingly did not put up any resistance to its condemnation. The monophysites, however, were hostile to three other writers whom the Council of Chalcedon had acquitted. Justinian's method of pacifying them was to incorporate citations of objectionable propositions from each of the three writers into the Chalcedonian definition and these became known as the 'Three Chapters'. But first Pope Vigilius of Rome had to be persuaded to agree and he signed reluctantly, later withdrawing his agreement in 551.

In 553 Justinian summoned the Fifth Ecumenical Council to Constantinople and it was here that Origen and the Three Chapters were condemned. After much hesitation and several changes of mind Vigilius finally assented to this decision. His death on the journey back to Rome meant that he did not have to confront the inevitable outcry awaiting him.

That Justinian condemned Origen and the Three Chapters is certain. But in doing so did he at the same time suppress the doctrine of reincarnation? Origen certainly speculated on its possibility, and since he had been a student of Platonism and Pythagoreanism this was to be expected. Moreover, he was no minor figure in the early Church. Pope Benedict XVI considers him to be "crucial to the whole development of Christian thought."[13] Henri de Lubac in his aforementioned introduction stresses that the writings Origen left behind numbered close to a thousand titles and they were widely used for more than a century without serious obstacle to their diffusion. They spread rapidly in the West as well as in the East.

Condemnation was not a mere matter of advising clerics not to read works that might give offence or refusing permission to continue copying them. It involved the wholesale and systematic physical destruction of the author's writings. This is precisely what happened to Origen's work on the emperor's orders. As Henri de Lubac comments: "There is no way to measure such a loss. Epiphanius and Justinian have served the enemies of Christian civilization well."[14]

The celebrated library at Alexandria had already been pillaged in 389 AD on the orders of Archbishop Theophilus. Edward Gibbon in chapter 28 of his *History* accuses Theophilus of being "the perpetual enemy of peace and virtue; a bold, bad man, whose hands were already polluted with gold and blood". Nearly twenty years later, says Gibbon, "the appearance of the empty shelves excited the regret and indignation of every spectator whose mind was not totally darkened by religious prejudice." Justinian could therefore reassure himself that there was an archiepiscopal precedent for the wilful destruction he was contemplating.

Origen's work was saved from complete annihilation by a number of Latin translations, mainly by the above-mentioned Rufinus of Aquileia, and others

by St Hilary and Jerome. But to hear Origen's authentic voice we must turn to a few parallel passages and citations which have survived in the original Greek, and also to the *Philocalia*, an anthology of some of his work compiled by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. Yet ironically, Justinian's own letter to Menas, Patriarch of Constantinople, before the Council of Constantinople in 553, is one of our prime sources of Origen's original words. It contains numerous extracts from *On First Principles* which formed the basis on which Origen was condemned at the Council.[15] By this means we can judge how far Rufinus' Latin translation has deviated from the original in certain key passages. That he did so deviate is confirmed by an admission in his own preface that he would follow the example of an esteemed predecessor. This man had apparently translated over seventy of Origen's *Homilies* and a number of commentaries on Paul's Epistles, "both of which are known to contain in the original a good many statements likely to cause offence".[16] Rufinus adds that his forerunner "so smoothed over and emended these in his translation, that a Latin reader would find in them nothing out of harmony with our faith." Of equal importance in assessing Rufinus' unreliability is the evidence of Jerome, whose own Latin translation of *On First Principles* has not survived, apart from a few citations in his letters. He complained to Rufinus, "Who gave you leave to omit so much from your translation?"[17]

It would seem that fear of being branded a heretic loomed large in Rufinus' thoughts just as it did in Jerome's but he dealt with it in a different fashion. An element of deceit crept into his interpretation, whether by the addition of his own thoughts or the subtraction of Origen's, in order to avoid giving offence to the ever-growing chorus of bishops with doctrinaire minds. But his personal inner faithfulness to Origenism was unwavering. Jerome, on the other hand, openly declared his hostility to Origen, yet remained faithful to his texts in his translations. It is a moot point as to which of the two approaches is the more intellectually dishonest. Justinian himself merely quoted verbatim from the original Greek, which is why the evidence of his letters is so important.

Given the necessity, then, of consulting Origen's original text wherever possible, it is all the more curious that one striking example of an extract from

Justinian's letter to Menas which appeared in the comparative Greek and Latin passages in Butterworth's original 1935 translation of *On First Principles* does not feature in the Ave Maria 2013 reprint. A note at the back of the book merely states: "Butterworth includes here a parallel Greek fragment from Justinian."[18] Fortunately it is reproduced in J. Stevenson's *A New Eusebius*.[19] To give some idea of how far Rufinus was prepared to go in "smoothing over and emending" offending passages I quote first from his own version of *On First Principles* II.8.3:

> Just as the Saviour came to save that which was lost and then when it is saved, that which was said to be lost is not lost; so also perhaps that which is being saved is called a soul, but when it has been saved it will be called by the name of its more perfect part. Some, too, will think that this point can be added, that just as that which was lost, undoubtedly existed before it was lost, when it was something, I know not what, other than lost, and just as there will also certainly be a time when it will not be lost; so the soul, which is said to have become lost, will apparently have been something at a time when it was not yet lost and may have been called a soul from the fact of its becoming lost, but when delivered from its lost condition it can once again be that which it was before it became lost and became a soul.[20]

I defy even Rufinus' most ardent supporters to make sense of these labyrinthine absurdities. If anything is lost it must surely be the reader. But when we turn to the original Greek as quoted by Justinian all becomes crystal-clear:

> Those rational beings who sinned and on that account fell from the state in which they were, in proportion to their particular sins were enveloped in bodies as a punishment; and when they are purified they rise again to the state in which they formerly were, completely putting away their evil and their bodies. Then again a second or a third or many more times they are enveloped in different bodies for punishment. For it is probable that different worlds have existed and will exist, some in the past and some in the future.

John Cavadini, who provided the foreword to Ave Maria Press's new presentation of Butterworth's original translation, chose not to include the above fragment from Justinian, presumably because it would have weakened his argument that scholars now regard Rufinus' translation in a more kindly light.[21] But phrases in the Greek passage such as "it is probable that" are entirely in accordance with Origen's method of speculating and of following where reason leads him, in the true Hellenic tradition. We may contrast him with Augustine of Hippo, who knew practically no Greek, although he studied Platonism and Neoplatonism. But Augustine's rigorous insistence on settled doctrine was very much a Latin characteristic. As A. H. Armstrong observes, when discussing the difference between Eastern and Western ways of thought: "Augustine in the West ... knows much too much about the precise relations to each other of the Persons in the Trinity for one who asserts the unknowability of God in the strong terms which he sometimes uses."[22]

The punishment of which Origen speaks in Justinian's quotation is intended to be disciplinary and remedial in character and not the infliction of pain for the sake of it, which would be unworthy of God. But, as Butterworth remarks, "it lay open to attack by men whose ideas of heaven were framed after the pattern of things on earth."[23] Misunderstandings are the cause of many conflicts. Perhaps if reason, respect for truth wherever it leads us, a wider knowledge of the many ways in which God reveals Himself to us and displays His compassion for us all became a necessary part of all religious beliefs, theological disputes would cease to exist. People tend to seek confirmation of what they already believe, rather than open their minds to concepts that are anathema to them. This is especially true of reincarnation. In our earthly state it is difficult to imagine why we would make the decision to embark on yet another risky adventure in this world once we had experienced the blessings of Paradise. The soul, however, free of its earthly limitations, can see from a much wider perspective what is necessary for its moral progress. God's ways are still a mystery to us here on earth. But through His grace, that of His Son Jesus and his enlightened followers, Christians know that those ways must of necessity embrace love, wisdom, justice and truth.

Not all who invoked Jesus' name, however, were enlightened. The historical evidence is unambiguous. Origen's humane, speculative theology - which allowed for the possibility of reincarnation and the remedial preparation of the soul for complete unity with God - came under sustained and vicious attack from the fourth century onwards. It was Justinian who delivered the fatal blow. The question, nevertheless, remains: Would he even today find any shortage of willing supporters? If support means conspiring to cover up the crime, then I fear that the answer has to be 'no'.

Notes

[1] *The Christian Parapsychologist* March 2018, p.47

[2] *De Numine* Autumn 2014, pp.47-8

[3] Origen *On First Principles*, Foreword by John C. Cavadini, Ave Maria Press Inc. 2013

[4] Henri de Lubac, from *Histoire et Esprit, l'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, Paris 1950. Chapters I and II selected and translated by William Babcock

[5] Theodore James, Preface in *Plato Dictionary*, ed. Morris Stockhammer, Vision Press Ltd., London 1963, pp. viii-ix

[6] David Wright in *The Lion Handbook of the History of Christianity*, Lion Hudson plc, Oxford 1996, p. 164

[7] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin Books 1993, p.101

[8] Isidore Epstein, *Judaism*, Penguin Books 1990, p. 196

[9] Wright, *op. cit.*, p.110

[10] Chadwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 184ff

[11] G.W. Butterworth's introduction to *On First Principles, op. cit.*, p. xlvi

[12] Wright, *op. cit.*, p.164

[13] *On First Principles, op. cit.*, frontispiece

[14] *Ibid.* Henri de Lubac's introduction, p. xii

[15] *Ibid.* Butterworth's introduction, p. lxiv

[16] *Ibid.* Rufinus' Preface, p. lxxviii

[17] *Ibid.* Butterworth's introduction, p. lxvi

[18] *Ibid.* Notes, p.450

[19] *A New Eusebius*, ed. J. Stevenson, SPCK London 1970, pp. 216-7

[20] *On First Principles, op. cit.*, pp. 154-5

[21] *Ibid.*, p. viii

[22] A. H. Armstrong in *The Legacy of Greece*, ed. M.I. Finley, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, p. 370

[23] *On First Principles, op. cit.*, p. I

More Angels and Others

In the absence of suitable short articles, I have been able to put together a number of further extracts from authors whose works may justly be described, for the most part, as non-spiritual and non-psychic. They seem to me to be germane to our interests and fascinating enough in their own right.

A prophecy of death

Old William Halliday told me he had heard from the old people of Allington [in Wiltshire] ... strange tales of ancient times and how the world was once full of 'witches, weasels (wizards) and wolves'. Also how there was once a Prophet named Saxon, who was born a peasant boy and used to drive plough oxen. One day the carter gave him some orders about one of the oxen. Upon which the boy broke into prophecy and predicted that that the ox would not belong to his master another day, for that someone would take the beast from him. Which came to pass. The boy Saxon also prophesied his own death by famine which came to pass thus. A gentleman took the lad into his house, and not wishing him to communicate with the servants kept him locked up in a room by himself. But being suddenly called away on business he went off with the key of the room in his pocket and forgot all about the young prophet for some days. When he remembered Saxon he came back in all haste. But it was too late. The boy had died of hunger.

(R. F. Kilvert) *Kilvert's Diary. Volume Three.*
Selections from the Diary of the Revd Francis Kilvert
14 May 1874 – 13 March 1879.
Chosen, edited and introduced by William Plomer.
New and corrected edition 1960. pp. 154-155.

The Revd Robert Francis Kilvert (1840-1879) served variously as curate and vicar at several parishes on the Welsh borders. He was a perceptive and engaging diarist, who recorded far more than the simple, everyday events of his parishes. He died tragically, only weeks after his wedding, and his wife destroyed much of the diaries – to posterity's loss. The prophecies of this story are a part of local folk tradition but seem to have been founded on historical events.

Thought-reading

[Re.] Your letter of March 14, about a chemical explanation of the "two rings" in Zöllner's marvellous book. I think the explanation so good as to make it highly probable that the thing was trickery, in that case: but that trickery will *not* do as a complete explanation of all the phenomena of table-rapping, thought-reading, etc., I am more and more convinced. At the same time, I see no need as yet for believing that *dis*embodied spirits have anything to do with it. I have just read a small pamphlet, the first report of the Psychical Society, on "thought-reading." The evidence, which seems to have been most carefully taken, excludes the possibility that "unconscious guidance by pressure" (Carpenter's explanation) will account for all the phenomena. All seems to point to the existence of a natural force, allied to electricity and nerve-force, by which brain can act on brain. I think we are close to the day when this shall be classed among the known natural forces, and its laws tabulated, and when the scientific sceptics, who always shut their eyes, till the last moment, to any evidence that seems to point beyond materialism, will have to accept it as a proved fact in nature. You would find the "Report" .... very interesting – all the more so that "thought-reading" is a phenomenon on which any domestic circle can experiment for themselves: it needs no professional "medium".

(C. L. Dodgson) *The Letters of Lewis Carroll.*
Edited by Morton N. Cohen. 1979. Vol. 1, pp. 471-472)

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898), better known as 'Lewis Carroll', had an abiding interest in psychic phenomena and was an early member of the SPR. This letter, December 4, 1882, is to his friend James Langton Clarke. The book is *Transcendental Physics* (1880), an account of Professor Zöllner's investigations into spiritualist phenomena. Clarke's letter to Dodgson has not survived, so his 'explanation' remains unknown.

The passing of the Fairies

It was whilst on the journey to Montpellier over the stony plain, with a hot sun smiting down on me, seated on the box beside my father, whilst the

postillion rode one of the two horses, that I experienced a curious sensation. I saw, or fancied that I saw, a crowd of little imps or dwarfs surrounding the carriage, running by the side of the horses, and some leaping on to their backs. One was astride behind the post-boy. They were dressed in brown, with knee breeches, and wore little scarlet caps of liberty. I remarked to my father on what I saw, and he at once removed me into the shade, within the carriage. I still saw the little creatures for awhile, but gradually they became fewer and finally disappeared altogether. The vision was due to the sun on my head, but why the sun should conjure up such a vision is to me inexplicable. I cannot recall that my nurse at Bratton had ever spoken to me of, and described, the Pixies.

Here I am going to allow myself a digression of Gnomes or Pixies. It is a curious fact that my wife has seen one, or thinks that she has, in Yorkshire. In a green lane at Horbury she saw, or fancied she saw, a little man about two feet in height, clothed in green, sitting in the hedge. He had black beady eyes, and looked hard at her. She stood observing him for a while, and then, when he began to make faces at her, she became frightened, and ran away.

My son Julian, one day in 1883, was in the garden picking pea-pods, between two rows of peas, when he saw a little dwarf in brown with a red cap looking at him, and walking towards him. He was so frightened that he ran away and came into the house, white as ashes, and told me and his mother what he had seen. He was then aged six. In both cases the apparitions may be traced to sun on the head, but why take such similar forms ? ....

In the midst of the Tavy valley [in Devonshire] rises a mass of rock above the brawling and sparkling river .... Formerly it went by the name of the Pixy Castle, and it was held to be inhabited by the "good people" as the pixies were called. It was said that on Sundays they clustered on the rock, listening to the Mary and Peter Tavy Church bells, trusting that, though Christ had not died for them, nevertheless the bells did bring to them a promise of ultimate salvation.

As a young boy I have sat on the Pixy Castle, and thought of the elfin folk, yearning after that salvation, which is so lightly esteemed by many of us mortals, as they hearkened to the call of the church bells, and endeavoured to detect a promise in their peal. All that is over. No one ever accords these

little beings a thought. Not a soul in Peter and Mary Tavy parishes considers how their mothers told of the little hearts on Pixy Rock pulsating to the distant bells.

We have to pay a price for every new acquisition, and the opening to us of the recently discovered worlds of microbes has followed on the banishment of the world of the Elves. Scientifically we have gained much. Imaginatively we have lost a great deal.

(Sabine Baring-Gould, *Early Reminiscences 1834-1864*. 1923. pp. 18-21)

The Revd Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) was a priest, poet, polymath and prolific writer across a very broad spectrum: novels, hymns, history, hagiology, theology, folklore, folk music, biography and travel. His own experience occurred in 1838, when he was travelling with his parents in France. His wistful lament for the vanishing of the 'good people' is in tune with his outlook on salvation and his deep loathing of Calvinism and its odious doctrines.

Torquil the Timid

I remember that my little black-and-tan Torquil is staying out of town at present with some friends. I wonder how he is. .... I find him weak and emaciated, just able to recognize me. .... He appears to have been in great agony for days. He has been too ill to lie down. ....

I bear my Torquil in my arms to the green sward and the sunshine, and lay him out as gently as I can. I stroke him, and know how terrible it is to realize that he cannot tell me what is wrong with him. Life seems to be ebbing. He is growing weaker. His pulse is falling. He turns to look at me; and the lustre of youth and beauty vanishes from his eyes. He sighs and is dead. With my fingers I close his eyelids. I stroke his forehead and his sleeky ears until I feel his body getting cold for the want of the life that has gone out of him. Unconsciousness and death have solved everything for him. Thus passes Torquil the Timid in the beauty of his youth.

I think of Torquil's helplessness – how unutterable were his last feelings. To me his muteness, his dumbness, was more eloquent than all the words men have uttered down the centuries.

(Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, *A Last Voyage to St. Kilda*. 1931. pp. 28-29)

Alasdair Alpin MacGregor (1899-1970 was a Scottish writer and folklorist. He wrote widely on the lives and folk-beliefs of the people of the Western Isles, and produced two collections of ghost stories. He was also a passionate advocate for animal rights. But this brief account of the death of his collie, Torquil, serves to emphasise how impossibly hard it is to find words that can express and communicate inner experience - whether of animals or human beings.

Letters to the Editor

Further thoughts (on 'Ministers, Mediums and the Afterlife')

From: Alan Minchin

Whilst not wishing to prolong a particular debate, Roger Straughan's undermining of the reliability and authority of the New Testament (*CP* September 2018) should not be allowed to pass unchallenged, especially in a Christian periodical.

Knowledge of God's self-revelation in human history, culminating in and through Our Lord Jesus Christ, is known to humanity *only* because we have had, and continue to have, The Bible. Without this Scripture there would be no Christian Faith, Church or even C.F.P.S.S. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to be assured that what is presented to the world is authoritative and accurate.

Thanks to the diligent scholarship that lies behind today's English translations we have a far better understanding of The Bible than your correspondent seems willing to acknowledge.

There are more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament to which can be added 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 early portions of the New Testament giving us around 24,000 extant manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament. As one biblical scholar, Prof. F. F. Bruce, commented, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textural attestation as the New Testament".

Roger's comments regarding variant readings is misleading. In reality the textual variants that exist are mostly single letters or grammatical differences and, as scholar Norman Geisler affirmed, "only about one-eighth of all the variants had any weight as most of them are merely mechanical means such as spelling or style. Of the whole, then, only about one-sixtieth rise above "trivialities" or can in any sense be called 'substantial variations'".

Historian Philip Schaff has shown that only 400 variants could have any possible effect on the meaning of the passages concerned and that only 50 of these are of any importance. Not a single one of these variants altered "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture's teaching".

Textual scholars B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, after their work had shown the insignificance of the majority of variants, claimed that this leaves the text 98.33% pure.

It is quite obvious that these facts show a far different picture of the New Testament than the one painted by Roger !

Thanks to the scholarship of the likes of Bruce, Geisler, Westcott, Hort and Schaff (as well as others) we have available today a "golden era" of Bible translations with commentaries and study Bibles in which the scribal errors, mistranslations and interpolations of the past are documented for all readers to have knowledge of.

But there is one other important question to be considered. Has The Bible been overseen by The Holy Spirit and is it His hand that has been operating for many years, through the textural work of the scholars, in order to ensure that that which the Christian Church proclaims to the world truly is 'of God'?

Varied Near Death Experiences: 'The Trickster'

From: Ian Fordyce

I enjoyed, and was provoked by, Mark Fox's article in last September's *Christian Parapsychologist*. Near death experiences must be unique to the personality of each person who has one. The remarkable thing about them is

that so many are similar in so many ways, not that there is anything intrinsically questionable about their differences.

I am coming from a place where reincarnation is my particular interest, remembering several previous lives as I do. I am therefore a universalist, believing everybody goes to heaven, sooner or later. This absence of hell in the afterlife does raise the question of what happens to evil? Where has the devil gone?

My personal theory for this starts with 'the Harrowing of Hell' on Easter Saturday, which comes from a New Testament era book which is thought apocryphal in the west, but is accepted by the Greek Orthodox Church, and myself [Editor's note: presumably *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, but it should be noted that this is not treated as canonical by any Orthodox Church]. By this, Jesus drove the devil and all his works out of the afterlife, and confined him to this world. Can you doubt that the devil is alive and well, and encamped somewhere in the deserts of Syria?

Mark Fox has prompted me to think harder about the demarcation line between this world and the next; a division that feels to many as no more than passing through a curtain. My personal theology for this is challenged by the concept of 'the trickster'. For me, heaven is for real, and NDEs are often remembered as the most vivid experiences a human being can ever have.

On reflection, I believe that everything in the afterlife is controlled ultimately by God, but everything in this world is subject to the predations of the devil; that we escape his influence at the moment of death. NDEs are journeys into the 'no man's land' between the two, but for me, I would wish to downplay any 'trickster' input into these often beatific experiences.

Near Death Experiences and Synchronicity

From: Michael Cocks

Mark Fox begins by referring to the work of Raymond Moody who can be said to have pioneered more than forty years of research into Near Death Experiences. There has been enormous interest in this field and there is a big literature, but despite records of many mind boggling experiences, Fox sees four questions arising, which have yet to be answered. They are:

(I) Why is it that not all clinically dead and resuscitated persons report Near-Death Experiences?

(ii) Who or what is the 'being of light'?

(iii) Why have 'visions of the future' reported by some Near-Death Experiencers turned out to contain marked inaccuracies?

(iv) Why have we been unable to determine beyond reasonable doubt whether anything leaves the body during a Near-Death Experience?

I want in the following notes to address questions (iii) and (iv).

Researchers trying to prove the reality of NDEs beyond reasonable doubt, have been baffled by things *not* seen in an NDE, like symbols painted over an operating table lamp, invisible except from the ceiling where the alleged NDEer is said to hover, or when the NDEer reports an object that is *not* there; when NDEers make a prediction of the future which is incorrect. It is seen as a real problem with regard to the hidden symbols have *never* been detected, even when accounts have been otherwise veridical.

If we are thinking in the everyday world mode, these apparent mistakes can throw some doubt on the objective reality of what is happening.

Mark Fox does accept the reality of NDEs, and invokes the psychologist Carl Jung's concept of the Trickster, a wayward spiritual force, playing naughty games. In this way he seeks to evade the requirement of the see and touch world, that the laws of cause and effect are followed, that things can be weighed, measured and counted.

Mark Fox is looking in the right direction, but I believe that there is more to be said. Let's look at things through the eyes of the New Paradigm described by Quantum Mechanics. Its founder, Max Planck, had this to say, "All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force ... We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind. This Mind is the matrix of all matter". This Mind is one and indivisible, and, through Quantum Entanglement, all is entangled with all else, regardless of space and time. That this is so, explains how prayer works, how 'psychic phenomena' are experienced, and how the synchronistic phenomena occur, the

phenomena that show that the material order is illusory, and is too, an order of mind. Numbers of QM physicists have written on synchronicity, notably Max Planck, Wolfgang Pauli, David Bohm, F. David Peat, Victor Mansfield, and Brian Josephson. They write on synchronicity because they understand the physical to be an aspect of Mind, where the so-called 'laws of nature' sometimes show themselves superseded by an overriding Mind or Thought.

Let me describe two of many important synchronicities that I have experienced. In the first case I had been visiting with a close friend who was undergoing a severe emotional crisis. My attempts at support were not helpful, and my friend screamed at me to leave and pushed me out of this house.

That evening I received an email from a Swedish priest, Joakim Thoresson, in which he described a dream he had had about me. In this dream he had been participating in a clergy conference in Berlin. To his surprise he saw me sitting across the table from him. He turned to the woman sitting beside him, and said, 'Why, that is Michael Cocks!' She replied, 'You are seeing the spiritual Michael. The physical Michael is back in New Zealand. He has been attacked. But don't worry, he has plenty of support.'

With this story in mind, let us consider the NDEer supposedly hovering over the presently lifeless body lying there lifeless on the operating table. Is the NDEer not in a similar position to the dreaming Joakim in his imagined Conference in Berlin? The NDEer is not seeing with physical sight; the seeing is with Mind or Spirit, and such is part of universal Mind, where all is connected to all else, and that universal connection is independent of time and space. Joakim becomes aware that Michael has been attacked and is aware that he is OK. The dream about the Berlin Conference becomes a scenario or story as a vehicle conveying the intimation about Michael. Since the NDEer is seeing with spiritual eyes, any anomalies are quite understandable. Whatever process produces a dream scenario, is operating here.

Joakim has been the source of other very surprising synchronicities. There was an occasion when I had had a long telephone conversation with a friend, Dr Brian Cocksey, up in Auckland, New Zealand. We covered many topics,

some initiated by Brian, and eleven by myself. My topics centred around the imagery of the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, and also a paper on Communion by a clergy friend.

When I put down the telephone, I looked to see if there were new emails. There was an email from my friend Joakim. He wanted to tell me about a dream he had had perhaps ten days before. In this dream all eleven of my topics were clearly featured. (Note that I see this email immediately *after* my conversation with Dr Cocksey.)

In the dream previously quoted, the information was presented in the scenario of a clergy conference in Berlin. This time it was presented in a scenario relating to his parish church, where a very non-Swedish ranting American was preaching. There seemed to be spirits in a circle above the congregation, and a bride was outside the door. Once again, all the topics of my conversation were present in this other dream scenario, dreamed ten days in advance of that conversation.

To return to our discussion of the nature of NDEs. I submit that when NDEers are out of the body, they are experiencing their spirit selves seeing with spirit eyes, as is often the case when we dream. When we dream I think most us will remember dreams where a preoccupation of the day is dressed up in some weird dream scenario. So, it should not surprise us when a NDEer fails to see a symbol painted above an operating table lamp, or when objects are "seen" in the operating room that are not there. The "seeing" or "hearing" are through spiritual senses, not physical.

In explaining anomalies in NDE experiences, Mark Fox invokes C. G. Jung's 'Trickster', who is similar to the mischievous Scandinavian god Loki. I can well see why he suggests this. But I personally would not look for a particular cause of error, but rather point to the characteristics of the spirit world, namely, that it exists beyond space and time, and is one and undivided. 'God is in all, through all, and above all'. In God all is connected to all else. The physical Internet is a little like this spiritual oneness. Feed in a search word, and receive a mass of information from round the world. As for ourselves, our souls are likewise not separate from All That Is. In the case of Joakim Thoresson, he is aware of information from another time and place, and

seems to construct scenarios which make sense of this information to his dreaming self.

In the light of all this, I am maintaining that NDEs and synchronicities are functions of the spiritual and causative level of reality. These functions are much less circumscribed than the "caused" level or reality that we call the physical. NDEs and synchronicities are manifestations of a spirit realm where all is connected to all else. This realm brings the physical world into existence with all its "natural laws". But the causative and creative spirit world from time to time through NDEs, synchronicities, and many other phenomena, show these "laws" apparently suspended by the higher causative realm of Spirit.

[Read more at: https://brainyquotes.com/quotes/max_plank_211839]

Mark Fox and Near-Death Experiences

From: Barrie Rowson

An NDE, like life, is a many faceted experience. I think I may have an explanation for part of it: synapses.

Many of the observations of the clinical staff may be communicated telepathically to the patient's 'dead' brain to be stored there in the brain's synapses as a quantum mechanical bias. This information is then read out to the patient's brain as it recovers. The information is then organised unconsciously and presented to the patient's consciousness as a visual image, sometimes as though seen from the ceiling. On this explanation anything that the clinical staffs have not seen can't be 'seen' by the patient in the NDE. In particular, any hidden images that can only be seen from the ceiling will not appear in the NDE.

Behind this explanation is my idea of how telepathy works. Two entangled photons can influence each other over considerable distances apparently instantaneously. This effect has been demonstrated in many laboratories but it is only statistically significant and revealed by averaging over many observations and so it is too unreliable for normal communications (Mark Fox's trickster figure?). Now the synapse is a sub-microscopic gap between two nerve cells in the brain and communication between the cells takes place

by just a few molecules crossing this gap. Because the gap is so small and the molecules so few this mechanism is subject to some quantum uncertainty and possibly some quantum influence from other synapses many metres away, *i.e.* in other brains. In order to get any kind of significant effect it is necessary to average over many synapses. However, the human brain has countless millions of synapses and it may be that the unconscious mind is able to do the necessary averaging in special circumstances. Also it will be necessary for the synapses in different brains to become entangled. I guess that this happens when people interact in a sufficiently emotional way.

Incidentally that is where mindsight might come from. The blind person uses the eyes of the medical staff to 'see' what is going on in the theatre using synaptic entanglement. (For more on this, search Wikipedia for synapse, quantum entanglement and telepathy.)

NDEs and Christian Theology

From: Gerald Bostock

At the end of his long and fascinating article on the subject of NDEs (*CP*, September 2018) Mark Fox suggests that a decades-old conversation should be joined by 'another voice'. May I suggest the Queen of the Sciences, aka theology, be such a voice and propound the necessary context for the scientific conversation involved?

A valid theology will proceed on the assumption that the natural, the psychical, and the supernatural realms are all subject to divine laws and universal patterns and will thereby constitute a cosmos properly so called. On this basis we are entitled to regard Mark Fox's careful and considered elucidation of the elusive nature of NDEs as the psychic counterpart of the scientific uncertainty principle. This principle states that there are limits of a fundamental and unavoidable nature to the knowledge we have of atomic particles, even while our knowledge of large-scale reality is secure. This appears to be the case with psychic phenomena, as McClenon indicates when he wrote that "they have an elusive quality (which) cannot withstand close scrutiny", and as a result they will "elicit scepticism as well as faith" (p. 17). His observation raises the question of whether this observed characteristic of

the psychic realm will also be found in the supernatural realm. In particular, if Christ is our key to the essential nature of the psychic and spiritual realms of creation, we are entitled to ask if our understanding of Christ and our experience of his spiritual nature evince a similar elusiveness. Our general understanding of his nature in terms of incarnational theology will be clear and unequivocal, as is our knowledge of large-scale physical phenomena. But in terms of our specific and individual experience of his spiritual nature, severely limited as this is by our moral, psychical, and spiritual weaknesses, we may expect *a priori* to find that this experience has an elusive character, one which might well "elicit scepticism as well as faith".

Do we in fact recognise an essential elusiveness in the divine figure of Christ as far as our experience is concerned? And can the case for this be validated by the Bible? If so, it will be important to recognise a parallelism between the psychical and the spiritual realms; the one indeed will illuminate the other on the basis of a fundamental uniformity in the laws of the cosmos.

The elusiveness postulated in the divine Christ does not, of course, apply to his humanity and the telling contrast between a visible Jesus and an elusive Christ is made clear in the Bible especially in St John's Gospel. At the beginning of the Gospel we are told with reference to Jesus that "among you stands one whom you do not know" (John 1:26). The divine Jesus, to whom the Baptist is trying to draw attention, is indeed unknown and is also elusive. This is apparent later when the brothers of Jesus are led to believe that he is not present at the feast of Tabernacles although in fact he went there secretly (John 7:8-9), and the elusive nature of his presence is then indicated by Jesus himself saying, "You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am you cannot come" (John 7:36). Again, at the end of the Gospel we see Jesus as a risen Lord who is manifestly elusive; he stands, for example, on the shore of the sea of Tiberias as one who is unknown until one disciple sees the light and exclaims, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7).

The discovery of the risen Jesus by the sea shore represented a liminal experience, with the shore an obvious symbol of the boundary between earth and heaven. As such it runs parallel to the NDEs themselves described by Mark Fox as "quintessentially *liminal* phenomena, 'betwixt and between'

experiences ... at the boundary of life and death" (p.13). There are further parallels with the psychic realm arising from the disjunction between the humanity and the divinity of Christ. This two-sided disjunction represents an oscillation within ourselves, resulting on the one hand from our limited perception of the divine and on the other hand the need for God to mediate the revelation of himself in accordance with our capacity for him which must depend on a series of variables. What is at stake here is the theological principle of accommodation, a principle which has often been ignored in the West but which is of cardinal importance in its recognition of the need to shield humanity from the blazing light of God. The principle is well articulated by Origen:

> But sometimes [the Word] comes down to him who is unable to look upon the radiance and brilliance of the Deity and ... is spoken of in physical terms, until he who has accepted him in this form is gradually lifted up by the Word and can even look upon, so to speak, his absolute form. (*Contra Celsum*, IV:15)

This passage makes two essential points: first the need to protect humanity in its spiritual weakness, as Origen makes clear elsewhere when he says "God hides himself in darkness from those who cannot bear the radiance of the knowledge of him". One is bound to wonder whether the 'forgetfulness' associated with the great majority of NDEs (p.25) represents a form of protection from knowledge which is too 'high' for many of those involved. (One recalls that A.J. Ayer could not cope easily with his NDE!). The second essential point is that it is necessary for humanity to be 'lifted up' in order to see the 'absolute form' of Jesus. The classic exposition of this process is of course the story of the Transfiguration of Christ when three chosen disciples were raised up the mountain of divine awareness until they could pass from seeing the human form of Christ to seeing his heavenly form (Matthew 17:1-2). This naturally meant that, as Origen made clear, Christ changed his form. Christ in other words was a 'shape-shifter', a concept linked by Mark Fox with "the elusive, 'trickster' aspect of NDEs" which he notes is generally mirrored in the study of paranormal claims (p.16). We need to observe the theological parallels here. First, shape-shifting and spiritual transformation is shown to be a Christian concept and not just a significant feature of pagan

mythology. Secondly, the figure of the trickster considered at length by Mark Fox is implicit in Biblical theology as well as in pagan thinking. The Gospel refers to the existence of many false Christs (*cf.* Matthew 24:24) and also to the power of evil to disguise itself as an angel of light (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 11:4), leaving plenty of scope in Christian theology for the role of a trickster figure.

When we look at the actual encounter of individuals with Christ in his various forms, the parallels between psychical insights and Biblical truths are difficult to ignore. We should not doubt the ultimate correlation between them and the mutual enrichment which could follow from the development of that correlation.

Reviews

Arthur Balfour's Ghosts, an Edwardian Elite and the Riddle of the Cross-Correspondence Automatic Writings

by Trevor Hamilton

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It is well known that scientists assessing survival evidence cannot rule out the acquisition of information by the psychic powers of the living, however unlikely this may be. The idea behind the 'cross-correspondences' messages, received after the passing of such early psychical researchers as Gurney and Myers, was that communications via different mediums would make sense only if put together, especially if they were full of literary and classical allusions. Some writers have considered the correspondences to be the strongest survival evidence, even the summit of the work of the Society for Psychical Research. In a scholarly 1966 book, for example, published for the Fellowship, *The Case against Jones* by John Vyvyan, the Correspondences have the final chapter, of nearly 40 pages, before the Conclusion.

Trevor Hamilton, who published an admirable biography of Myers, *Immortal Longings*, in 2009, has now re-examined the full corpus of cross-correspondences material, including scripts of mediumistic communications only made public in 2000. It is readily apparent that there were aspects of the

case that were kept secret for many years, and which will change our perspective on it. Of course it had long been clear that evidence that was scattered in many séance records, and could only be properly assessed with the help of recondite knowledge, was not likely to change public perceptions.

Moreover, Professor Archie Roy had already written a candid account, *The Eager Dead* (2008), based on Balfour family papers, which revealed that one SPR leader was engaged in adultery with one of the mediums concerned, encouraged by the ostensible communicators, and the child of the affair was supposed to be a messianic figure, a hope not fulfilled. (see my 2008 review at http://www.iapsop.com/psypioneer/psypioneer_v4_n6_jun_2008.pdf).

Trevor Hamilton discusses each automatist in detail - there were six major ones, only one of whom, Mrs Piper of Boston, was a professional medium. He then poses a series of questions about the evidentiality of the material, some of which have of course been raised before, not least by the original S.P.R. investigators. For example, he suggests at one point, in discussing a certain script, "it might just have been part of the highly literary and articulate Margaret Verrall talking to another." (p. 220). She emerges as a remarkable person, wise as well as psychically gifted.

The book is a considerable achievement, requiring the study of hundreds of pages (usually typed out, often privately printed), together with accompanying commentary, relevant correspondence, and familiarity with the distinctive S.P.R. milieu and its literary and classical background. The author's Myers biography was an apprenticeship for this! Though he calls for further study of the scripts, using modern technology to examine patterns etc., his unprecedented general survey is unlikely to be equalled. In particular, for the first time we learn more about some automatists who were previously hidden behind pseudonyms, such as Trix Fleming ("Mrs Holland".)

In his 'Afterword', Trevor Hamilton draws attention to the paranormal cognition in some scripts, and concludes that there were genuine cross-correspondences (that is, not mere coincidences) in the material. But what was their origin? There is certainly an impression at times of a post-mortem group trying to communicate, and at others of confusion. Some of the best evidence was received before the affair.

But, from a Christian view, the new disclosures made in Archie's Roy's book undermined what we might call the apologetic use of the cross-correspondences case; perhaps I may be forgiven if I make the same points which appeared in my *Psypioneer* comment of June 2008. Spirit communicators who advocate adultery or declare their love for a married woman (predicting the death soon of her husband) are not to be encouraged. Nor is a new messiah to be expected. The case also damages the reputation of the S.P.R. A Christian critic of psychical studies can point to the scandal and argue that even these able and in some ways sceptical investigators got themselves into deep waters, therefore Christians should steer clear. In a religious age, it is noticeable how little religious faith plays a part in the at times troubled lives of the mediums involved in the cross-correspondences.

Leslie Price (Founder editor of *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 1975-8)

God and the Paranormal Part 1: Mediums, Ghosts and the Afterlife in the Bible

by Revd Kristina Rake, MA.

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform [Published via, and obtainable from Amazon] 2015. ISBN: 978-1516826803. Paperback. 326pp. £16.06 Post free.

Rake is a deacon in the United States Old Catholic Church, and it is very clear from the outset that her practical experience of being a medium (unusual for her office) has brought the usual negative attention from what she labels *naysayers* - those she defines as 'people who condemn all paranormal and psychic work'. Writing from personal experience of *naysayers* and their arguments, she goes to great lengths to ensure that every objection and attitude raised against both the subject and the gifted are dealt with in a firm Scriptural and academic manner.

The book's main argument is that it is perfectly acceptable, indeed Scriptural, to use the gift of communication with the deceased in a natural, Christ-oriented manner. Rake achieves this by firstly examining how the Jews initially understood *sheol*, the abode of the dead and where God was not to be found, reasoning this is one of the reasons why communication with the dead

was outlawed in early Old Testament (OT) Scripture. An exploration of the development of understanding of *sheol* and the afterlife as the Jewish nation matures is undertaken, journeying through OT, inter-testament and New Testament (NT) literature. We're then taken through the different Jewish understandings of the afterlife in NT times, as further points for her argument. One lovely point I'd missed in thirty-five years of Bible study was how Jesus argued with the Sadducees using their *own* narrow canon of the Pentateuch to rebut their trap question of the woman with seven husbands.

Rake explains the concept of *purgatory* using both the main, 'slimmer' Protestant canon of scripture as well as the deuterocanonical books. Great delight is taken in showing why Luther removed the latter books, calling this his 'gerrymandering of Scripture'. As an open-minded Protestant, I now find myself exploring these books and the history of the Canons (plural) of Scripture, wondering whether a baby was accidentally thrown out with the bathwater with some of the over-zealous excesses of the Reformation!

The Communion of the Saints (in the Apostles' Creed) is explained, and quotes from early Christian writings and Church Fathers show how the Church would pray for the dead, seeing them as one living Body of Christ, both 'carnate' and discarnate.

All the usual 'Satanic verses' (as she calls them) used to condemn communication with the dead are examined, from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, I Samuel and others. The infamous 'Witch of Endor' narrative is given its cultural context, describing necromancy back then, and comparing and contrasting it with modern mediumship. This clarified for me why those verses were highly condemnatory and necessary, and why mediums and necromancers are not necessarily the same thing – who today would dig a pit, fill it with blood and then utter incantations over it to summon the deceased in your local psychic fair?

Rake's work is academic, yet accessible, though I would recommend a reprint to eliminate the frequent typos. It is a book to be recommended for those who have experienced the caustic attitude of *naysayers*, as well as those who wish to explore this realm: from gifted to the academic.

I came away from this book feeling very affirmed that God is working through the psychically gifted, and much more able to argue with today's *naysayers* using Scripture, Reason and Tradition.

Matt Arnold

[Matt Arnold is a lay pioneer minister in the diocese of Southwell & Nottingham, and has been engaged in contextual ministry with new spiritualities travellers for the past twelve years.]

Grief's Hermitage. A book of comfort and consolation for the bereaved

by Josephine Griffiths

(Published by the author and available via Amazon's subsidiary, 'Book Depository') 2017. ISBN: 978-0648169703. Hardback. 8 + 134pp. £19.09 Post free (Paperback. ISBN: 978-0957970199. £14.14 Post free).

Following on from *This Year for Joy*, her splendid anthology of readings in what I would call 'personal spirituality', Josephine Griffiths now presents us with a carefully chosen and apposite selection of 'The Poetry of Grief'. But this is much more than an anthology, for the poems are sandwiched between her poignant account of her own grief and how she came to terms with it, and her creative reflections upon grief – couched in the language of her own prose and verse.

Grief's Hermitage grew out of her belief that 'by writing, directing my agony into a useful channel I might find some surcease of sorrow' which, after more than ten years, she did. It is also her hope that its contents may bring consolation to others in their grief. This it will assuredly do, for it is a remarkably well-chosen anthology that is designed to be sampled not progressively, but at random, grief itself being 'the only organizing principle'.

She also emphasises her beliefs – tested to the utmost in her case – 'in the continuation of life after death and that love is stronger than death', and for this reason she includes her own experiences of grief in the hope that by sharing them, 'readers may be encouraged to believe in the possibility of a continued connection with a loved one'. It is a hope that can be realised, but why use the term 'Hermitage' in the context of grief?

Simply because it is a 'good word for the state grief brings us to, simple and expressive, but with great depth and resonance to enrich and support us through these painful and tender times,' and there is more on the concepts of 'Hermits and Hermitage' in the final chapter.

The anthology itself cannot be faulted. The poems and the prose extracts, largely grounded in the Christian faith, are judiciously chosen – and not drawn solely from expected sources. Thus we have Shakespeare, Donne, Tennyson, Christina Rossetti and T. S. Eliot, plus Hardy, Edward Thomas, Kathleen Raine, Frances Cornford and many others; perhaps most unexpected is a visionary extract from *Three Men in a Boat.* This will surprise many who do not realise that Jerome's book is as much reflective as humorous. Even more rewarding are the deeply moving reflections and poems of Josephine Griffiths herself.

Above all, the value of *Grief's Hermitage* lies in the comfort that it can bring to the bereaved. On a personal level I can empathise fully with her deep grief over the death of a friend of fifty years; five years less in my case, but the hurt is just as deep. The grief can, however, be transmuted into a positive experience – especially when aided by a book such as this.

More Strange Encounters

by Chris Aspin

Helmshore Local History Society. 2018. ISBN: 978 0 906881 29 3. Paperback. 30pp. £3.65 Post free. (Available from: Chris Aspin, 21 Westbourne, Helmshore, Rossendale, BB4 4QD.

One can hardly credit that so many strange happenings can occur in such a small area, but in this further slim volume of his tireless personal researches, Chris Aspin continues to reveal and record fascinating, perplexing and entertaining accounts of ghosts, poltergeists, prophecies and psychic powers – plus a case of seeming reincarnation.

This concerns a three-year-old boy whose stories – of escaping from a fatal fire and of another previous life in an Asian community – 'came out of the blue'. They were not followed up, alas, but his mother had other psychic experiences of prophetic dreams, about the death of Kurt Cobain, the 9/11

attacks and a more recent, and alarming, dream about a fatal mudslide in California.

And then there is the *Robin Hood*, a haunted pub if ever there was, with poltergeists and ghosts afflicting licensees and customers alike over the last forty years, but 'Only once did the poltergeist speak'. It said simply 'Help me', but without success and even today 'the poltergeist has not departed' – which bodes well for the hope that this rich mine of what we may call 'psychic oral history' will continue to produce more of these disturbing but delightful tales.

Periodicals received

If one word unites the various journals that come to us, it is 'eclectic'. And perhaps 'independence', for variety and unorthodoxy of approach are also their hallmarks. Let us begin with *Psychical Studies*, the Journal of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies, (available (£10 p.a.) from the editor, David Taylor, 15 Brier Mill Road, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 3HA; editorusps@yahoo.co.uk; 0121 550 8874 & 07505 323443). The most recent issue, No. 93, Winter 2018, includes 'Psychical Experience: A step to something greater', the Whitby Memorial Paper by Vernon Marshall. In his paper Dr Marshall looks to something beyond spirit conversations via mediums, towards what he labels 'practical mysticism' and points out that 'Speaking to the dead does not initiate a personal relationship with the divine'. He is also sadly aware of the institutional hostility to the non-rational so often faced by mystics.

In addition to the usual reports and reviews, there is a stimulating paper by David Taylor, 'Shadows on the Wall: Observations on the anomalous', in which he carefully separates true scepticism – which is objective – from false, and argues that 'we must embrace the doubts we all have about psychic phenomena'.

Questioning, if not scepticism, also features in the Autumn/Winter 2018 issue of *Reaching Out*, the journal of The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies, edited by Angela Howard (subscription £10 p.a., via Cherry Simpkin, cherry.simpkin@btinternet.com, Tel. 0208 852 6735). In 'Some Questions to get you Thinking', James Gorden gives his personal answers to questions that

were set in the previous issue. We must hope for further replies. This is followed by Pat Gundrey's 'This Much I Know ... a Personal Journey Towards Awareness of a Wider Reality'. Again, a subjective account, but it is from such personal records that an increasingly broad understanding of psychical and spiritual experiences can be built up.

Two other papers deserve special notice. In 'A Momentary Encounter with Bygone Grief', Jill Inskip describes a remarkable, and unnerving, awareness of the spirit of place; in this instance the execution room at Shepton Mallet prison. The other paper is 'FWH Myers, Science and the Afterlife', transcribed from a talk given by Professor Don Mason. Myers's life and work, together with the views of Professor Brian Josephson, are presented as a powerful rebuke to the scientific materialism of such atheist scientists as the late Stephen Hawking.

Next in the line of journals comes *The Journal for Spiritual and Consciousness Studies* (published bi-annually by the Academy of Spirituality and Consciousness Studies, Inc., at P.O. Box 84, Loxahatchee, FL 33470, USA. Subscription details from pauljhauser@gmail.com).

The current issue, Vol. 41, No. 1, Summer 2018, is far more satisfying than some recent numbers. Of four papers under the heading of 'Philosophical Discussions', the first is most rewarding. In 'The Psi-ence Fiction of H. G. Wells', James E. Beichler, the journal's Editor-in-chief, gives an excellent survey of the concepts and imaginative leaps in those novels and stories that concern our interaction with other dimensions; it is both intriguing and stimulating and I would hope for a sequel.

Two other papers are very different. Robert Hanks considers 'Reconciling Conflicting Spiritual Teachings: Divine Atonement', but he takes too narrow a view of just how Christian theology understands the Atonement, taking as his source for definitions of the doctrine of Atonement an extreme evangelical source (compellingtruth.org, which advocates only the substitution theory), and opposing these views by citing a biblical scholar (Bart Ehrman) with a pronounced bias against orthodoxy.

The other 'philosophical' paper is by James Pandarakalam, who contributes 'Physician Involved Assisted Suicide'. He is concerned that debates over euthanasia ignore the possibility – let alone the reality – of after-death survival, and surveys the variety of medical, moral and spiritual issues within such debate which we should be addressing. It is an excellent, timely and important contribution to a topic that concerns us on both the psychic and spiritual levels.

Michael Tymn's 'historical' paper, 'Resurrecting Betty White' is an intriguing account of the work of a remarkable American medium of the early twentieth century, but under 'research', Alastair Scott-Hill's lengthy paper on 'Correlation Research on selected Reincarnational Process aspects from a number of after-life sources (Books)', fails to satisfy. This is because he takes the reality of reincarnation as an unchallenged assumption, and also does not consider the possibility of cross-influences among the books he cites.

Among much else in the latest issue – No. 127, 2018/2 – of *Paradigm Explorer*, a Journal of the Scientific and Medical Network, (membership of which is £60 p.a. (three issues) SMN office, 151 Talgarth Road, London W14 9DA) there is a splendid paper by Eben Alexander on 'Consciousness and the Shifting Scientific Paradigm' that builds further upon his remarkable NDE. This is followed by Bernard Carr's 'Recollections of a Singular Friend: Stephen Hawking'. There are other short articles, reports and the usual extensive and stimulating array of both in-depth and brief reviews.

In digital form we have Michael Cocks's online journal, *The Ground of Faith*, (http://www.thegroundoffaith.net). Recent issues have included the various parts of Michael's 'The story behind Afterlife Teachings of Stephen the Martyr' and 'The Churches and *The Perennial Philosophy*', an impassioned account of the impact on the Churches of Aldous Huxley's seminal work in the seventy years since the book's publication.

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The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies was founded in 1953 by a group of clergy and laymen on an ecumenical basis. The Fellowship exists to promote the study of psychical and religious experience within a Christian context and membership is open to those who satisfy the Council that they are members of a recognised Christian denomination, or that they are sympathetic to the Christian faith and are willing to accept this pre-eminent ethos of the Fellowship.

All members receive copies of the *Fellowship Review* of the Fellowship in addition to copies of *The Christian Parapsychologist*. A fuller prospectus of the Fellowship is available from:

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THE CHRISTIAN PARAPSYCHOLOGIST

March 2019, in this issue:

We begin this issue with a welcome contribution from Canon Michael Paternoster, whose paper, 'The Image: Icon or Idol', examines the role of material and imagined imagery within the Church and considers the scriptural and historical justification for accepting – or, for some, rejecting – the use of images within the broad context of religious worship.

It is followed by Neil Broadbent's brief but valuable survey of 'Criteria by which to evaluate ESP', in which he provides a helpful list of questions to aid those who possess psychic gifts in discerning their value.

Then we have Marion Browne's paper, 'Controversy and Coercion: A 6th-Century Cover-Up'. The author draws upon a wide range of authorities to argue that belief in reincarnation was widely accepted in the early Church as being consonant with the Christian faith until the time of Justinian, when it was suppressed as a heresy. Her view is certainly controversial and should stimulate constructive debate.

Our final paper is 'More Angels & Others', a second collection by the editor of extracts relating to psycho-spiritual experiences from the works of literary authors not usually associated with such topics.

There is again a significant crop of 'Letters to the editor', almost all relating to Mark Fox's paper on Near-Death Experiences that appeared in our last issue. By way of contrast the reviews in this issue are concerned with a variety of quite different topics.

Our 'Periodicals Received' are now back to strength, with the principal contents of four printed journals and one digital title carefully reviewed.

Forthcoming issue: September 2019

Two major contributions are currently to hand. One is Andrew Fisher's paper from last year's annual conference, 'Building a Church; Religious Images and Imagination' – a fully illustrated, wide-ranging and yet concise survey of just what a material church should be, and how we should comprehend it.

The other paper is 'Swedenborg on Reincarnation and Memories' by Brian Talbot. This detailed account and analysis of the Swedish visionary's awareness of, and approach to, reincarnation will, perhaps, surprise many readers who would not usually associate this topic with his work.

There will also be short papers, reviews and (our readers permitting) letters to the editor.

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