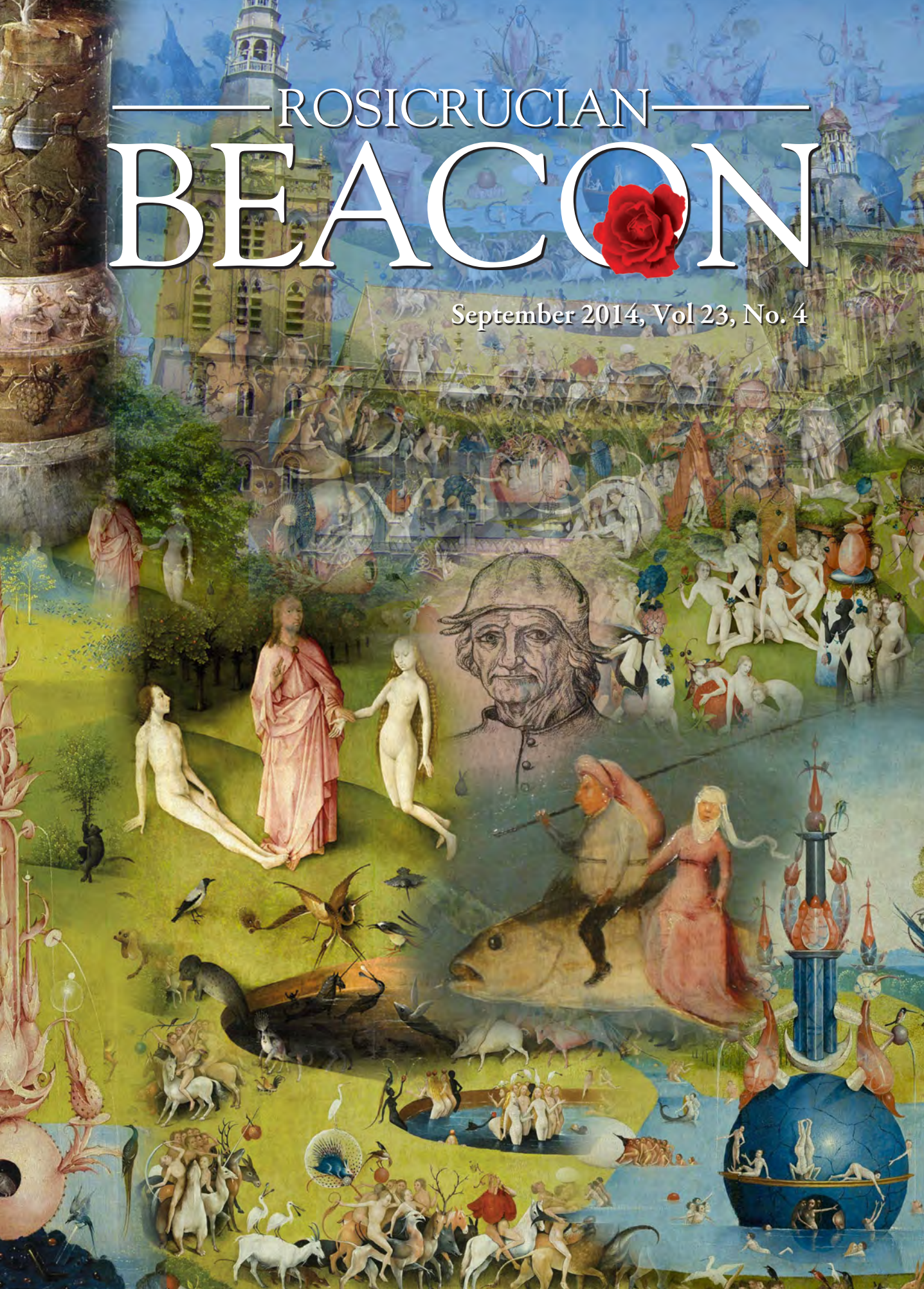


# — ROSICRUCIAN — BEACON



September 2014, Vol 23, No. 4



# Find your Inner Master

**F**OR MILLENNIA, philosophers and spiritual leaders have known that there exists a kernel of perfection within every person; manifesting as an 'alter-ego' with supreme confidence, calmness, maturity and wisdom. Rosicrucians call it the 'Inner Master', for it has all the qualities of refinement, high purpose and spiritual maturity that we would expect of any true Cosmic Master.

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Master. If you are searching for a way of accomplishing the most fulfilling and rewarding you know, and happiness, peace and justice for all is what you yearn to see in our world, then learn to attune with your Inner Master and learn from its wisdom and spiritual maturity.

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Tel: +44-(0)1892-653197

Fax: +44-(0)1892-667432

Email: [membership@amorc.org.uk](mailto:membership@amorc.org.uk)



# — ROSICRUCIAN — BEACON

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A.M.O.R.C.®

Greenwood Gate, Blackhill,  
Crowborough TN6 1XE  
UNITED KINGDOM

Tel: 01892-653197

Fax: 01892-667432

Email: [info@amorc.org.uk](mailto:info@amorc.org.uk)

Web: [www.amorc.org.uk](http://www.amorc.org.uk)

### EDITORS

Bill Anderson

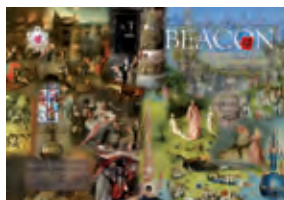
Shirley Elsby

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Richard Bonwick

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## Cover spread

Hieronymus Bosch and Catharism



# The Afterlife

Would scientifically  
proving its existence  
change the world?

by *William Hand*



**A**SK MANY people in the street whether they believe in an afterlife and you'll get a variety of responses. Generally though they will fall into three categories:

- Those who believe in an afterlife or survival of consciousness.
- Those who don't know or aren't prepared to say.
- And those who dismiss the whole notion of an afterlife as nonsense.

All of the above is down to belief and, in the case of

religious people, faith. But what if science could prove, beyond all reasonable doubt, that a form of consciousness survives bodily death? Would the world change, and if so how? It's this question that I would like to explore in this short article.

Although it's being challenged, the standard mainstream view of science is that once the body dies, particularly the brain, consciousness closes down for good and that's it. No more awareness, no more individuality, just a state of nothingness that's extremely hard for a



conscious mind to imagine. It's this unimaginable state that causes some people to fear bodily death so much that they refuse even to mention it in normal conversation. The mainstream view also helps to promulgate a materialistic outlook on life in which one has a relatively short time in which to do all one wants to, and one therefore lives life to the full.

There's nothing wrong in living life and achieving of course, but unfortunately that drive causes some people to strive to acquire things at the expense of other people. If you think you have a finite amount of time to do all you want to, is it any surprise that some people will take any action necessary to achieve their goals? Even if it means other people will suffer?

This approach suits powerful individuals down to the ground. If you can keep putting out the message through media outlets that the body is everything and it will all end when you die, then you can take advantage of the urgency with which people will strive to get perceived advantages. I'm not talking about a conspiracy here, just natural behaviours in a materialistic framework. Unfortunately these behaviours can lead to war, conflict, suppression, excessive use of world resources, etc.

## Consciousness

Of course there are many in the world today who take an agnostic stance on the survival of consciousness. For them it's a matter for religion and they generally take the view that they will live their life as best they can and then discover whether they survive or not when death comes. However, if death really is the end, they'll never know it! This is certainly a balanced view and in my experience probably the most dominant, despite the position of mainstream science and most of the world's mainstream media. However, the arrival of the Internet in recent years has certainly opened up enquiring minds to numerous possibilities on the subject of death.

Returning to the first group, namely those who believe completely in life after death, for people in this group, death is a transition from one state of existence to another. However, the expected form of the afterlife varies greatly according to religious faith. For many Christians one remains 'asleep' until the 'day of judgement.' For Hindus reincarnation is on offer. The Spiritualist churches speak of the departed as though they were always around us, 'in another room.' The common thread running through these beliefs is that the state of existence after bodily death will be different to that experienced here on Earth.

The Rosicrucian view was succinctly expressed by the first Imperator of the AMORC Dr Harvey Spencer Lewis in his book "*Mansions of the Soul*", where he put forward

in great detail how consciousness and personality survive bodily death in a spiritual realm awaiting reincarnation. This process according to Dr Lewis operates using natural cyclical laws. Therefore, we can see that within this broad group the afterlife is accepted, though its manifestation varies widely, and sadly it's often a source of unnecessary argument and conflict. Because of this it's perhaps understandable that the whole possibility of survival is dismissed as nonsense by many people.

The only way to convince the whole world (or at least 99% of it) that survival of consciousness is true, is to prove it scientifically beyond all reasonable doubt. In science no negative can be proven. It's not possible to prove that there is no afterlife since that would require an infinite number of avenues to be explored. However it only requires a finite number of pieces of good reproducible evidence to prove that it does exist. So the onus is very much on willing scientists to prove survival of consciousness. As I write this piece, there are many scientists around the world seeking to do just that, and exceptional progress is being made, often in the face of harsh treatment from sceptics and lack of funding from established grant systems. This new evidence will be the topic for future articles.

## Proof

So I now return to the main theme of this article. If science could prove the afterlife exists beyond reasonable doubt, what then? Firstly by proving it, its form of manifestation would be established and religious faiths would have to adapt to the new findings in much the same way the medieval church adapted to the scientific discoveries in the Renaissance. Secondly the peoples of the world would have to adapt to a different vision of life, a life which does not end with the death of the body but continues to offer opportunities afterwards.

People would learn that killing or harming others has consequences for themselves above and beyond material justice. It's possible that the world would, even for this reason alone, become a more relaxed and happier place with fewer wars and a deeper appreciation of the need to take care of our planet. Who would continue trashing our beautiful planet if they knew they would still be around to witness the consequences for their children decades later? So to summarise: scientifically proving the existence of some form of afterlife would I believe undoubtedly make the world a far better place than it is now. Good food for thought; let's start thinking!

## Reference

1. "*Mansions of the Soul*" by H S Lewis is available from *The Rosicrucian Collection* online store at <https://www.amorc.org.uk>.



# The Power of One

*by Shirley Elsby*

**W**HATEVER IDEAS, ideals and ambitions you hold, one truth prevails: *You have to start where you are and not where you would like to be.* It's so, so frustrating for those of us who like our visions big and our efforts small. Yet, the law holds as firmly as gravity and apples, or the one about



resistance being matched by temptation. Luckily, as many writers have observed, you can invariably get 'there' from 'here', regardless of where 'here' and 'there' happen to be. The answer lies in many small actions toward the goal, one after another, persistently applying pressure, steadily, cumulatively and always in the general direction of 'there.' It's the only foundation solid enough to support a castle in the air, and I call it the *Power of One*: one step at a time, many steps making the whole. Continuous pressure in a single direction can have amazing, even magical effects. Remember when the Grand Canyon was just a groove in a rock? You'll find the rest of the story in the Akashic Records.

Important events happen around the globe almost daily. News bulletins tell us of momentous decisions by our movers and shakers, of breakthroughs in science, of the incubation of wars and the less well-heralded efforts to bring peace, of dastardly crimes and gross injustice, of secrets revealed and crises under development, etc., etc. The great, the good, the hopeful and the downright seedy shape our world and set our agendas. Many of us have experienced feeling small and pathetic, controlled and coerced, swirled along by a deluge of work, or irritated like a blister on an ill-shod foot. We have felt acted upon rather than in charge, dutiful instead of joyous, careworn, not carefree, badgered, harassed, disappointed, helpless, forlorn, worried and trapped. But it's open to any of us at any moment to take back the reins of this glorious vehicle we call life and start steering for ourselves.

**But losing the first two of those pounds may well have seemed like fighting a pack of hungry wolves.**

What's most important for the evolution of humankind is for you the very next thing you do. Yes, that's you yourself personally, here in this moment in which you are reading these words. Perhaps there's some great thing you can do today that could ripple into a momentous result for the world over, like eradicating hunger or ending religious conflict. You may be working on a cure for cancer, a philosophy of world peace, a self-perpetuating water source to irrigate the deserts. If you have something of this sort in mind, do please make a start, remembering always that many great things are achieved 'little by little' rather than all at once, including, it would seem, the whole of creation, the Bang Maximus!

More likely you'll seek some way of making your own life and that of your inner circle of friends and family in some way more pleasing, positive or fulfilling. Perhaps that improvement will feed into other people taking



their lead from you, wanting what you have and taking steps to get it. You may be seeking to learn a new skill, harmonise relationships, build a fortune, move house, start a business, achieve enlightenment or play a part in saving the rainforests..., or all of the above. Whatever aims you have in mind, the only possible starting point is always here and the timing is always now. Lao Tzu, the Chinese sage and founder of the beautiful and mysterious philosophy of the *Tao Te Ching*, 'The Way', penned it with breathtaking beauty and simplicity with the words: "*A journey of a thousand miles begins beneath one's feet.*"

The scale of an ambition varies from person to person, depending on their individual starting point. A man from Leicestershire once ran 1,000 miles in 20 days, that's 50 miles per day on average, or two marathons-worth at a time; of course not counting the extra time spent running to the corner shop once he'd set up camp, or taking detours to see the sights. His mother suffered from arthritis and once set herself a painful goal of walking 10 miles for charity. They both achieved what they had hoped for, but their perspectives were rather different.

Once someone has achieved an initial goal, the goalposts might well move further away. For someone who has run 1,000 miles, it might seem quite doable to walk 10,000 miles. A person who has slimmed from 30 stone to 15 might think nothing of losing the last couple of pounds to an ideal weight, while losing the first two of those pounds may well have seemed like fighting a pack of hungry wolves. The view from where you are as the new, improved you, may enable you to fashion more ambitious dreams and bring those too into being by means of the Power of One.

There are those who have made a science of improvement by manageable increments. One such school of thought favours the one per cent improvement, an approach made famous by David Brailsford when he was manager of the UK's professional cycling squad, Team



Sky. It calls for 'the aggregation of marginal gains', a one per cent improvement in everything you do. Brailsford looked for small improvements in every aspect of the team's performance, from the ergonomics of the saddles to the use of pillows to optimise the competitors' sleep, which were duly taken to hotels with them. He found ways to make minor improvements in everything from the training schedules to the hand-washing regime, so as to minimise the potential for infection.

Having aimed to win the Tour de France, the world's toughest cycle race, in five years, team Brailsford did it in three, with Bradley Wiggins taking the yellow jersey in 2012 and later becoming a Sir. The team dominated the Olympic cycling events, winning an unprecedented haul

**He found ways to make minor improvements in everything from the training schedules to the hand washing regime.**

of medals. In an article about the extraordinary success, behavioural scientist James Clear wrote: *"So often we convince ourselves that change is only meaningful if there is some large, visible outcome associated with it. Whether losing weight, building a business, travelling the world or any other goal, we often put pressure on ourselves to make some earth shattering improvement that everyone will talk about. Meanwhile, improving just one percent isn't notable (and sometimes isn't even noticeable), but it can be just as meaningful, especially in the long run."* (From [jamesclear.com/marginal-gains](http://jamesclear.com/marginal-gains)).

The idea of small, sustained improvements has also been widely adopted in business, especially in the east. The Japanese car manufacturer Toyota long ago adopted the practice of *kaizen*, or 'good change', encouraging everyone in its workforce to participate in the quest for improvement in order to increase productivity and reduce waste, and make suggestions to help the company to continually become a leaner, more efficient producer of top quality cars.

In business again, expectations determine the standard set. There is an oft-quoted tale about the computer giant IBM ordering parts from a new supplier in Japan, stating that its acceptable level of quality allowed for 1.5% defects. The supplier duly sent the order with a letter beginning as follows: *"Dear IBM, As we did not understand why you want 1.5% defective parts, we have, for your convenience, packaged them separately."* (Quoted from Ron Lembke, University of Nevada).

While many people fall short of the vision, commitment or nerve to make major changes in their lives, almost everyone can make those marginal gains and start

totting up to a life-enhancing switch toward something that steadily improves. We all have our starting points and our sticking points, the things we would like to improve and the reasons why we find it hard to do so and why we resist. After all, we have allowed these adversities to take shape in our personal world in the first place, whether they are bad habits, unpleasant feelings, negative conditions or limitations of any kind. It follows then that we also have the power to transform them into something more palatable.

The same power can be used to help others in need. Mother Teresa, who worked among the destitute and dying of Calcutta, knew the Power of One and applied it to her selfless mission to bring comfort to the poor.

She said: *"I can only love one person at a time, just one, one, one. So you begin."* And: *"Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest to you."* The Power of One enables us to add something every day which is beneficial, or consistently take away something that is negative,

setting up a new and better habit, fostering a more hopeful expectation, cutting a path through the undergrowth of restriction, bringing love into an empty life.

The Power of One can be used by anyone, anywhere, any time. It is part of the fertile power of the universe. By harnessing it you can transform your own state and that of others. You can take the Power of One, plant it in the rich soil of your life and grow it to a whole new level: *One to the Power of Infinity*.








# Journeys of Hope

*by Rosemary Knight*



**A**S LONG as people suffer sickness and distress there is a percentage of them who will journey to holy places around the world where miracles are said to occur, places of pilgrimage where hope outweighs helplessness and faith overcomes fear. There are many such sacred sites, including the River Ganges, Mecca, the site of the Bodhi tree in northern India where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment, Lourdes in France, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the Portuguese city of Fátima and of course Santiago de Compostela, the tomb of St James in northern Spain.

Pilgrimages involve making a journey for spiritual purposes, perhaps for healing of the self or others, perhaps to find answers to life's big questions, but also to





## Lourdes

find solutions to deeply personal problems. Pilgrimages demand personal effort and a conviction that something good will emerge from them. The travellers are often far from perfect themselves, as depicted in *The Canterbury Tales*, the rich and ribald account of one determined group making their way to pray at a sacred site, penned by the early English author Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400).

Sometimes the traveller finds satisfaction in the journey itself, especially if, like the Camino (the most often used road to Compostela), it is long and arduous and reflects the individual's path through a lifetime of struggles. Frequently they experience some change in their understanding, their attitudes, the shaping of their inner experience by this unique and special undertaking; and occasionally, they find an actual miracle. The following tale is a true account of a none-too arduous pilgrimage I took many years ago, long before becoming a Rosicrucian. Names have of course been changed.

### Mick's Miracle

Chuckles trilled on the lips of listeners whenever Mick was crafting his long, winding tales. He was a true raconteur, master of the story teller's art, taking his few grains of truth and baking them to a pleasing loaf's worth. A small crowd would gather as he warmed to the task of amusing the care-worn after-work crowd at the *Dog and Donkey*, easing into a mood of merriment by the end of the second

pint and working it to a zenith of laughter as he delivered the last line at the end of the fourth pint. The tipplers would depart happy and ready to face their humdrum evenings home in better humour.

I used to go out with him, sort of. We spent private time together, went here and there and gravitated to each other when paths crossed, sharing talk and trivia. Then he went away, working who knows where, and the crossings stopped. One evening years on I met him in another pub, not far distant but nevertheless outside both our routines. We exchanged chit-chat, caught up on wheres and whens, but this night he was not laughing. His face was unusually troubled.

**It was a shock to see this 6 foot 4 inch smile-maker brought to tears, seemingly sentenced to an inevitably rapid end.**

Probing over a comradely lager I found that he had been for several medical tests recently and had that day visited the hospital to receive the prognosis: it was not good. He had lumps everywhere, lumps in the armpits, lumps in the groin, lumps in the throat, and with moist eyes which welled to an overflow he said: *"I'm riddled with cancer."* It was a shock to see this 6 foot 4 inch smile-maker brought to tears, seemingly sentenced to an inevitably rapid end. He came home with me, serious without irony, empty of the usual so, so ready wit. After more drinks and





*Walsingham*

still more heart-searching he fell asleep on the settee, spent of anything more to say. He was gone when I awoke next morning and I never saw him again.

### Journey to Walsingham

The evening's revelations touched and troubled me, and in anguish I prayed for guidance. What to do? How to react? Fleeting, the answer came back on the chilly bedroom air: "Go to Walsingham." Walsingham? I'd heard of it of course, knew it to be a place of pilgrimage on the east coast of England, somewhere around Norwich perhaps, or maybe King's Lynn. So, two days later with directions secured, I headed there on a personal mission, a pilgrimage of sorts, but in the comfort of a car and none of the privations which beset the travellers of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, nor any of the story-telling which

engaged either them or Mick's impromptu audiences.

All I knew was that Walsingham was a place of miracles and that Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragón went there on a quest to conceive a child, although the results of that outing were probably not the best advertisement possible for the famous shrine of 'Our Lady of Walsingham.' The most important though was that I knew deep inside that I had to go there and it had to happen immediately. The journey was pleasant enough, uneventful and a straightforward 150 miles ending in an unprepossessing village. What few shops were there were shut as I parked up and walked the short distance to the church, gathered leaflets about how to go on. Not too impressed so far, I entered the replica Nazarene house presided over by the glumest, sternest image of Mother Mary I had ever seen. Unaccustomed to Church protocol I duly wandered around the Stations of the Cross in the garden before alighting again on the inner sanctum where Our Lady glowered down at me as if to say: "*What earthly right have you to be here asking favours of me? Where have you been the other 25 years of your life?*" Nevertheless I had made the journey, and feeling entirely that I was meant to be there, I duly risked the wrath of the virgin mother by stating my business, requesting healing for my friend in the most awkward word form possible, before furtively, almost ashamedly, making my way out of the chapel and over to the fountain where the holy water spurted forth with its promise of healing and miracles.



*Mecca*



## Holy Water

I had imagined the hallowed H<sub>2</sub>O would be on sale in litre bottles, labelled like Evian and with a price to match, but no, you were supposed to take your own receptacle. Not to be thwarted, I walked half a mile back to the car, emptied a bottle of lemonade partly down my throat, partly down a drain, took it to the church and filled it up. I say this now with a slight dose of humour, but that day, there was no humour in me at all, for I dearly wanted my old friend to be healed completely, and I felt this fervent wish with every fibre of my being.

**I had imagined the hallowed H<sub>2</sub>O would be on sale in litre bottles.**

On the way home though, I felt uncomfortable, worrying that I had asked for more than I could possibly have deserved, and then became work-woman-like, settling into the pleasant enough business of driving home, job done and guidance followed. There I left it. I never saw Mick again but I did hear of him and I did, several years later, meet his father, Sean.

*"How's Mick?" I asked. "He's fine," said Sean. "Married now and living in Dronwell. He's very well indeed."* I took in the words but needed to check. *"Is he?" I asked. "Is he really well? Last time I saw him he said he was very ill with cancer."* Sean immediately understood and smiled with understanding. *"Oh yes," he said, "the doctors said the tests showed he had cancer. He had a lot of pain and it was a big worry for us all. But it was alright in the end, his condition suddenly cleared a few days before he was due to start chemo, so it must have been a wrong diagnosis. He's never been in hospital since."*

Well, objectively I can't say if a miracle had occurred or I had been on a stern Mary chase. But inwardly I know what happened and I'm deeply grateful that I followed my inner imperative.



*Wailing Wall*



# A Life Transformed

## A Loving Reminder from Mum

*by Susan Ayles*

**A**T AGE twenty-four I was one day abruptly abandoned by my thirty-two year old husband who had found a pretty sixteen year old girl and moved abroad with her, no doubt to start a new life on a sunny beach, out of reach of the law and the burden of a family. Our only child, a girl, was a precious three and a half year old bundle of energy and light and I can't to this day understand how anyone could have walked away from such a perfect gift of life.

Having been engaged full-time in raising her, I had little work experience, few friends other than immediate family to call upon. But now I faced the immediate need of finding the funds to pay the monthly bills and keep myself and my child together. The prospects of my being able to survive on my own were not good. My husband had worked as a house renovator, usually taking his income in cash in order to avoid income tax. We (or rather he) had a nest-egg of around £7,000 in cash in a safety deposit box



in the flat around the time he left, but all this he withdrew and left me with £500 and the great worry of needing to learn quickly how to survive on my own.

It was only through the support and assistance of my father and brother that I was not turned out onto the street. And in the end it was predominantly the kindness of an aging philanthropist that made it possible for me to return to full-time employment and a part-time education that eventually led me to a Masters Degree and a successful career in psychiatry, an area of study I had at age 22 never even heard of.

While my father and brother, neither of whom could afford much, did all they could to assist me and my girl with our most important material needs (they were truly wonderful in this respect), the sudden emptiness of no longer having a partner to love and a father for my child, completely devastated me inside. During those first few months I went through the deepest, most agonising depression I could ever imagine a human could endure. Daily I had to grit my teeth and struggle to keep my spirits up, even if for no other reason than to keep my daughter from being affected by what had happened. Nothing was more important to me than providing the best I could for her.

As many a wealthy individual can attest, having one's

**Through tear-filled eyes I could see the room still half flooded with the rays of a welcoming early morning sun.**

material needs well cared for does not guarantee a state of happiness. And having my immediate material needs taken care of by my loving father and brother, did not satisfy the great inner emptiness I felt all the time. One summer's morning, very early, after a night of agonising inner turmoil, I came to the realisation that if I was to survive at all, I would have to find something beyond the material world to pull me through. I was deeply distraught, and without knowing quite what I was doing I sat down in abject humility and asked in a soft whisper for help.

Although my father was a gentle, loving man, he had never displayed anything more than utter contempt for anything that smacked of religion. And my brother was neither against spiritual inclinations nor for them, they were surplus to his needs. So, having spent my entire adult life in their company, spiritual matters had not been particularly important for me either. I had no idea therefore that there was a possible avenue out of my dilemma that morning when I whispered my plea for help. It was a heartfelt, spoken prayer, even though I had no idea who or what I was appealing to. In desperation I simply asked and I could never have been prepared for what happened next.

Having uttered the plea, the room suddenly went quiet in a way utterly out of this world, as though I had unleashed something awesome and beyond my ability to control, like a sorcerer's apprentice using the wizard's wand without permission to unleash the biblical ten plagues and not knowing how to stop them. I was taken aback, literally aghast at the sudden change of tone and vibrations in the room. Through tear-filled eyes I could see the room still half flooded with the rays of a welcoming early morning sun. They beautifully illuminated the room in warm, comforting rays as a fathomless, indescribable emotion of sorrow swept over me. Great tears welled up and I howled with grief about something I could not even begin to comprehend.

I could easily have dismissed this up till that moment as being an emotional reaction to the raw deal I thought life had dealt me. Certainly with my present profession as a psychiatrist that is still the most rational explanation medical science would arrive at. But then something incredible happened. Over a period of a minute or two at most, the sunlight streaming into the room changed its appearance completely, and the entire room became brightly illuminated in the most calm, comforting 'silent' light I have ever experienced. It was as if in an instant I had been transported out of this world to parallel room in a parallel world, looking exactly the same but *feeling* utterly different in every way I could think of. It was something completely other-worldly and more serene and restful than I had ever experienced.

Before me, and looking straight at me in broad daylight and with unfathomable kindness, I saw my mother who had passed away when I was eight years old. Her death had occurred after a brief illness and left me devastated and lonely throughout my teens, until I fell in love one day with my future though only temporary husband. The brief happiness I had enjoyed with him, and especially in the comfort and security of being able to raise my daughter unhindered by the pressures of having to feed the family, had been wonderful. Although that was all gone now, I had before me a link to a happy past I had completely forgotten, a past in which I remembered how my mother had put me to bed as a child always with a small prayer she made me solemnly recite with her. It was a small formality which brought me childhood stability, comfort and the knowledge that my mother loved me more than anything on earth; as much, I realised, as I loved my own little girl. All this I had forgotten up until that moment.

Her image did not remain long, but long enough for me to know that something extraordinary was happening to me. Something unfathomable passed between us in mere moments, and with tears of gratitude and regret at



having all but forgotten her deep love for me, I broke down sobbing again, thanking her over and over for all she had done for me. It took me half an hour to calm myself down, the tears went and I sat for a very long time in complete silence, calmly looking with wonderment at even the most trivial things in the room. During those precious few hours, I saw what I can only describe as the very substance of life in all things. It was the calmest, most serene time of my life, and the overwhelming feeling was one of security and the certainty that all would be right again one day, and despite my present difficulties, things were in fact on track precisely as they should, exactly down to the last atom as they were meant to unfold.



And then I remembered fully the words of the simple prayer I had recited with my mother all those years ago each evening, and which in an extraordinary way had brought me such warmth and comfort:-

*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
And if I should die before I wake  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

This prayer, originally printed in *The New England Primer* in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, must have been repeated by millions upon millions of children in English-speaking parts of the world over the centuries. Although the words are probably a bit too childish and simplistic for most adults to bother with nowadays, they had deep meaning for my mother, and no doubt especially so when she saw how much they comforted and enveloped me with her love. That morning, they had an especially deep meaning for me too, and from then on my life completely changed

**It was as if a hand had lifted me up and showed me what beauty and happiness still awaited me if I would but let life unfold as it was meant to.**

utterly, as though a whole new chapter of optimism and hope had begun. My mood and inner vision changed radically. It was as if a hand had lifted me up and showed me what beauty and happiness still awaited me if I would but let life unfold as it was meant to. I was filled with gratitude and joy, and resolved to lead a life of kindness and charity to all people to the greatest extent I could, and to leave my unhappy past behind me for good. “*Who am I*”, I said to myself, “*to be anything but grateful for all I have been given?*”

Within a week, and with very little effort, I had

found a clerical job, just enough to make ends meet. My father moved in to assist with caring for my girl, and within another three months, one of the old partners in the firm ordered me in the kindest way possible, to return to part-time studying. Two years later I found a wonderful new partner in life, we got married and had a little boy. It took another eight years of intense effort of part-time studying to get my Masters degree while all the time juggling between the demands of my budding career and raising our two children. Life had presented new challenges but all of them were attainable and most of them were a pleasure to meet.

I often think back to that morning when my mother appeared before me, radiant with happiness and bathed in a spiritual aura exuding a love that exceeds anything I have ever been able to give myself. As a professional psychiatrist, I cannot say objectively and with certainty if the appearance of my deceased mother and the beautiful spiritual experience it triggered in me was a true visitation from the dead, or something internally generated by the stress and turmoil I was undergoing at the time. My eventual training as a psychotherapist would clearly indicate the latter, but my longer and much deeper training as a human has left me in no doubt that the experience was real, that it was of the highest form of spiritual assistance I have ever experienced, and is something I would wish for everyone to experience in some form or other before the end of their days on Earth.

The feeling of overwhelming love that surrounded me for months after that morning meeting come flooding back to me every time I enter my private home sanctum and turn my thoughts and devotions to my Creator and to the wonderful mother I was privileged to have for my first eight years of life. Love was the overwhelming message that day, and remains for me the most important revelation I have received, either from beyond the grave, or from the magnificent workings of my all too human mind.



# Freedom, Give or Take

by *Benigna*



**F**REEDOM IS one of the most valuable qualities people can have in their lives, but too often they don't realise how important it is to them until they lose it, or give it away. A few people, although a worryingly substantial few, hurl it away by leading criminal lives and literally getting locked up in prison, where even choices like bedtimes, clothing and things to eat, which are present in even humble homes are no longer theirs to decide.

Frequently people give away their freedom by making poor choices about their spending, building up debt, perhaps slowly at first, but then alarmingly, until the credit bubble bursts and they find they are forced into unpleasant limitations about what they can and cannot do or have, where they can go and the kind of lifestyles they can lead. Yet others give away their freedom by entering into unwise relationships, which again take a downturn and leave them trapped in all manner of negative consequences.







*A stressful, unfulfilling job can take away your freedom.*

People give away freedom by taking jobs which give money but little satisfaction; by giving away their honesty so no-one trusts them; by speaking and judging harshly so they lose friendship and support; or perhaps by putting the needs of others far above their own, so their inner being suffers constant subjugation. Sometimes it seems people lose freedom by the seeming 'hand of fate' (good excuse that), suffering illnesses which take their mobility, energy or thinking faculties. They may even be hospitalised.

Other times, a person or group or people will take freedom from others either by force, as in times of war or strife, and in some circumstances even here in Britain, people may be born and raised without a taste of what freedom really is about. Some people have guilty secrets and lose their freedom to blackmail. And in other cases the taking of freedom occurs in less obviously brutal ways, like employers changing work conditions unfairly, demanding more effort for less return, or lenders raise interest rates on loans at the worst possible times in order to force foreclosure and a windfall return.

But the one freedom that is open to everyone with their faculties intact is however the freedom to think. In a quite remarkable 1959 book "*Man's Search for Meaning*", psychiatrist and author Victor Frankl tells how he managed to stay alive in the death camps of the Nazi holocaust, quoting Friedrich Nietzsche as saying: "*He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.*" The preface to his book explains that moments of comfort do not establish a prisoner's will to live unless they help make sense out of suffering.

*"In the concentration camp every circumstance conspires to make the prisoner lose his hold,"* he says. *"All the familiar goals in life are snatched away. What alone remains is the last of human freedoms, the ability to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances."* This ultimate freedom, recognised by the ancient Stoics as well as by modern existentialists, takes on vivid significance in Frankl's story. The prisoners were only average men, but some at least, by choosing to be "*worthy of their suffering*" proved man's capacity to "*rise above his outward fate.*"

People need meaning in their lives and they need freedom to spend their lives doing what gives them meaning, a sense of purpose bigger than themselves. So, with that introduction to freedom over, read now the following fairy tale that was fashioned after contemplation one evening on the profound value that freedom should have in the heart of every living person.

## Freedom Genie

A girl found a bottle on the beach, stoppered by a cork. In it a genie hammered on the glass, shouting: "*Let me out! I'll grant you three wishes if only you'll let me out!*" Without hesitation the girl tugged out the stopper, and the genie, now released, slithered free and stretched himself luxuriously.

"*Thank you so much,*" he said to the girl. "*I've been in there for 100 years. I was tricked inside before I could gather the magic around me after I refused to work the wishes of an evil tyrant. Being unable to breathe freely I was unable to regain my usual power but now I have my breath back again I can feel that my potency is quite restored. By the law of my kind I am now compelled to repay the debt by working your will three times. So please tell me, what is your first wish?*"

The girl was amazed and fascinated to meet a real genie face to face, and deeply compassionate about him having been robbed of his freedom for so long. She was touched by his explanation and his gratitude at being released. She was also heartily pleased at being able to make such a difference in his life. "*I have only one wish that I want you to enact,*" she said. "*I wish you to take your freedom and enjoy it.*" The genie was astonished. "*You..., you don't want anything for yourself?*" he asked. "*It is my great pleasure and good fortune to set you free,*" said the girl with a broad smile, meaning it with all her heart. She had rarely felt so splendid inside. The genie smiled and disappeared in the conventional puff of smoke.

Being redundant and full of magical power, the genie had no need ever to work again. But it's in a genie's nature to grant wishes and so, even though he appeared to go away and was never seen again by the girl, he became her devoted full-time servant, gently smoothing her generous path through the world and materialising not only three times but every time he discerned her to have a wish. Many commented that the girl, who became a woman of great influence and integrity, appeared to live a charmed life, and so she did, without even knowing it.

The genie too lived a remarkable life, helping the girl become the best she could be, for by doing so he was working his own purpose and enjoying every moment of his freely made decision to serve the girl who became a woman, and by that means to play a part in the greater good.



# Mò Zǐ

## FORGOTTEN TEACHER OF CHINA

by Allan Tullio

安居也，我無安心也。非無足財也，我  
，眾人自易而難彼，君子進不敗其志，  
彼有自信者也。是故為其所難者，必得  
其所惡者也。是故偏臣傷君，諂下傷上。  
之下。分議者延延，而支苟者諂諂，焉

**N**ORTH CHINA 400 BCE, the gaunt, dusty man paused briefly and looked up at the royal palace looming before him. The finely dressed townspeople stared disdainfully at his tattered clothes and bloody, rag-wrapped feet. He pushed on, heedless of their stares, for now, after ten days and nights of walking, he had reached his destination. He

might yet stop the impending invasion, if only the king would listen to him. "In war", he reflected "the calamity to the people and the world is tremendous. Yet the rulers enjoy doing it. This means they enjoy injuring and exterminating the people; is this not perversity?"<sup>1</sup>

His name was MòZǐ, and this was only one of many such missions of peace. In honour of his compassion,





*The rough terrain of the state of Sòng.*

wisdom and dedication to peace and service to all, he was known to his contemporaries as ‘Master Mo.’ His age was not unlike our own, a time of war and upheaval, a century that saw the map of China, a collection of warring states, redrawn many times as larger states swallowed up smaller ones. That period of China’s long history was marked by political anarchy, constant warfare between competing states, and general social and moral degeneration.

MòZǐ’s own birthplace, the small state of Sòng, was considered fair game by its larger neighbours, and the memories of a terrible time, centuries before, when the natives of the capital city were reduced to cannibalism by a long siege, lingered even into MòZǐ’s day. Out of the strife and chaos of a dark night can arise an earnest desire for greater understanding, a desire to return to a constructive society based on the ideals of peace, justice, and harmony.

The great thinkers of that calamitous age sought answers to end China’s long anguish. Amidst the violence and confusion of that paradoxical age there came into being the “one hundred schools of philosophy”, each one seeking answers to the burning questions of the time: *How can incessant warfare be ended? How can lasting peace, happiness, and stability be achieved?*

### The Confucianist Answer

Confucius (551-479 BCE) was one of those thinkers who struggled with the great questions of how to reconstruct society. His answer was to convince the rulers of each state to emulate the wise and virtuous kings of China’s deep and ancient past. The people would then emulate their own rulers and all would cultivate courtesy and kindness, respect for the elderly, veneration for the dead, and practise elaborate ceremonies and music.

The Confucianist system infused the political and social institutions of China with concepts of moral

order. Through a process called the ‘rectification of names’ Confucius established a system of moral and ethical standards governing all actions in society. In the confusion of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries BCE in China, this new system of moral order was revolutionary, attempting to bring order out of chaos.

MòZǐ was born into the generation immediately following Confucius’ death and was educated by disciples of that great teacher. As a child he learned by heart all the great books of China’s rich intellectual past. He learned to deeply revere his parents and ancestors, to obey without question his superiors, to be courteous to all, but to love his own family more than anything else.

### MòZǐ Questions the System

Even as a young student however, the inquiring mind of young MòZǐ began to reach out beyond Confucianism for answers to his many questions. While he revered Confucianism for its constructive qualities, he raised many questions regarding some of its particular concepts. He eventually came to the realisation that the Confucian ideal of ‘partial’ love, love of one’s own family and country above all others, was part of the problem of interpersonal and international disharmony. “*All the calamities, strifes, complaints, and hatred in the world,*” he wrote, “*have arisen out of want of mutual [universal] love.*”<sup>2</sup>

Thus universal love, love for all without distinction, became the heart of MòZǐ’s message to humankind, the foundation upon which he hoped future generations would build an era of peace, security and happiness. Universal love was, simply put, the ability to “*regard the state of others as one’s own, the houses of others as one’s own,*



*Confucius*



*the persons of others as one's self.*<sup>3</sup> MòZi became an itinerant preacher, travelling about the troubled countryside spreading his gospel of love. He attracted many followers like himself who were striving for peace and organised them into a closely knit, well-disciplined band, well versed in his teachings and prepared to follow him into danger, even at risk to their lives. And he did indeed put their lives and his own life at risk on many occasions.

On one occasion, MòZi learned that the large state of Chù was planning to invade his native state of Sòng. The king of Chù was urged on by an opportunistic court strategist who had designed a secret weapon called 'cloud ladders.' These, he was sure, would guarantee the invasion's success. MòZi summoned his courage and travelled to Chù, where he gained an audience with the king. The meeting was tense and the philosopher used all the arguments he knew in an attempt to dissuade the king

**War is morally wrong, war is wasteful, war is destructive to both victor and vanquished, it is against Heaven's will.**

from his plans: War is morally wrong, war is wasteful, war is destructive to both victor and vanquished, it is against Heaven's will. But all these arguments were to no avail, for the king was already convinced of the outcome of his aggression.

### The Brave Philosopher

MòZi then changed his tactic. Taking off his belt, he laid it on a table and shaped the belt into a rough square, resembling the walls of a city. He then called upon the 'cloud ladder' strategist, Gongshu Ban, to attack his little 'city', while the philosopher would defend it against all the invader's stratagems, using a small stick as his only weapon. With the fate of his own state of Sòng hanging in the balance, MòZi skilfully turned back all attacks, completely frustrating his opponent.

Refusing to accept defeat, the embarrassed Gongshu Ban revealed: "I know how you could be defeated, but I won't tell you." Master Mo said: "I know what you have in mind, but I won't tell you either." The ruler of Chù asked what it was. Master Mo replied: "Gongshu Ban thinks that if I were murdered, then there would be no one to defend Sòng... But in fact, three hundred of my disciples... supplied with all my implements of defence, are at this moment waiting on the walls of Sòng for bandits from Chù. You may murder me, but you can't get rid of them." The ruler of Chù said: "Very well, let's give up this idea of attacking Sòng."<sup>4</sup>

And so it is said, Sòng was saved for the moment,

and the contingent of 300 of MòZi's followers waiting on the walls could be called back. However, it was their duty to remain ready to march at a moment's notice if war threatened. The brave philosopher's impartiality mandated that his disciples be ready to defend any state about to be unjustly attacked. If the king of Chù had called MòZi into service to prepare the defence of that state from aggression, he would have gone.

### A Guiding Principle

Behind all of MòZi's actions was a single principle: *promote welfare; remove evil*. To do this he examined each situation with an eye for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Today we would perhaps call this 'utilitarianism.'

While MòZi's peace activism may seem contemporary enough for us, it was another of his ideas that startled later Christian missionaries arriving in China more than two thousand years after the philosopher's death. MòZi believed in a loving, universal god who watched over the world with great sorrow at his creation's unloving ways. This god, the foremost of the Chinese pantheon, was called *Heaven*, and Heaven he said, desires "...people having energy to work for each other, those knowing the way to teach each other, and those possessing wealth to share with each other."<sup>5</sup> In terms that seem to foreshadow the Christian message, MòZi concluded: "Now Heaven loves the whole world universally. Everything is prepared for the good of man. Even the tip of a hair is the work of Heaven. Substantial may be said to be the benefits that are enjoyed by man. Yet there is no service in return. And they do not even know this to be unmagnanimous and unfortunate."<sup>6</sup> MòZi urged that man return the service of his creator by following the 'Will of Heaven' and loving all without distinction.

In MòZi's depiction of a loving creator god, he was unique in China's long roll of eminent thinkers. Indeed, he has been called China's first true 'religious' teacher, because he so closely approached what the western world recognised as religious thinking. But he was no monotheist. For MòZi and most other Chinese thinkers, the celestial realms were peopled by a vast assortment of deities and spirits worthy of respect, awe and sacrifice. Among his contemporaries, MòZi was more attentive to the invisible world than most others, though all agreed that pleasing and placating spirits was an important way of keeping one's life safe and the world in harmonious balance. Like the ancient Egyptian imperative to uphold at all costs the rule of Maat (truth, right order, right





Zhuāngzǐ

action), so too was there a Chinese imperative to keep the universe [the world] in a state of delicate harmony between opposites.

Despite the controversy his ideas created among China's intellectual community, MòZǐ's philosophy struck a responsive chord with many. During his lifetime, he gained thousands of followers, and his ideas continued to sway many more after his death. For perhaps a century his school rivalled that of Confucius in popularity. The 'Mohists' (followers of MòZǐ's teachings) lived simple, stoic lives, sacrificed to a loving Heaven, treated all people respectfully, and endeavoured to put the principle of universal love into practice. They read the great Chinese histories assiduously to learn of the 'Will of Heaven' from the actions of the ancient emperors, and they learned all the skills of defence so carefully developed and taught by MòZǐ in order end all wars.

His critics argued that his lifestyle was unnatural and far too difficult for the average person to follow. In the words of another of China's great sages, Zhuāngzǐ, the Taoist mystic: *"Men want to sing but he [MòZǐ] condemns singing; men want to mourn but he condemns mourning; men want to enjoy music but he condemns music. Is this truly in accord with man's nature? Any teaching that would have men toil through life and be content with a bare funeral at death is too austere. It makes men sorrowful and dejected. Its practise would be difficult. It is contrary to human nature and few people can stand it."*<sup>7</sup>

There may be much truth to Zhuāngzǐ's criticism as witnessed by the fate of Mohism in China. Although serious rivals of the Confucianists in the century after their master's death, the Mohists were completely eclipsed shortly thereafter. Their difficult path of love, simplicity and devotion to Heaven and man that MòZǐ had hoped would lead to a peaceful, prosperous, and populous China, was far too steep for most people to follow. Confucianism regained its prominence, and was only barely relinquishing

during the long and harsh rein of Chairman Mao after the conclusion of the Second World War.

The well-known 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese writer Lin Yutang conjectured on the disappearance of MòZǐ's teachings: *"Persecution could not do it, and there was no report of persecution. One explanation is the rise of Mencius, who powerfully combated its influence. Another explanation is that the Han Emperors made Confucianism into almost a state religion. A very possible explanation is that the warrior evangelists simply perished in the wars of the First Emperor of Qin. Which brings us to the truest explanation: Quixotic heroism and extreme altruism did not appeal to the native Chinese common sense."*<sup>8</sup>

So complete was the Chinese rejection of MòZǐ that his book of teachings was neglected until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and all of its ancient commentaries are lost. To gain an estimation of MòZǐ from a near contemporary, I turn again to the Taoist Zhuāngzǐ, who while rejecting MòZǐ's teachings, still had lavish praise for the man: *"Mo Tzu was a truly fine man, of whom only too few are to be found. Despite all personal hardships, he held fast to his ideal, a man of excellence indeed!"*<sup>9</sup>


## Footnotes

1. Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of China and India* (New York: The Modern Library, 1942) p. 801.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 794.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 795.
4. H.G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao TseTung* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953) p. 55.
5. Lin, op. cit., p. 803.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 804.
7. William Theodore De Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960) p. 80.
8. Lin, op. cit., p. 787.
9. De Bary, op. cit., p. 81.



Lin Yutang





# Cathar Influences on the Paintings of Hieronymus Bosch

by Robert Scarles

*The Cathars were a Christian group that lived in the Languedoc region of France during the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries. They blended the Dualism of Middle Eastern religions and philosophies with Christian doctrines and managed to create an outlook far in advance of its time. The compositions of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century painter Hieronymus Bosch capture some of the forbidden knowledge of this once severely persecuted religion.*

**T**HE FAR SOUTH of France during the time of the Cathars was very different from what it is today. Together with the northern borders of Italy these were regions that in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy were historically difficult to control and decidedly not easy on their efforts to bring the unfaithful back into the flock. Due to its geographical

isolation from Rome, the south of France in particular was a region where the Gnostic influenced spiritual outlook of Cathar dualism could flourish.

There have been many Dualist religions<sup>1</sup>. It is believed by some that the Cathars were descended from the Bogomils<sup>2</sup> of Bulgaria who in turn were descended from the Paulicians<sup>3</sup> who originally came from what is

now Southeast Turkey before the Byzantines moved them en masse to present-day Bulgaria. Although such a descent lineage is not proven beyond all doubt, it seems quite likely. On the other side of Europe, the natural bulwark of the French/Italian Alps secured the eastern side of the land in which the Bogomil migrants and their descendants the Cathars finally settled. And the decentralised state of the nobility in Southern France at the time made it difficult for any form of concentrated power base to emerge which could have been coerced by the Church into keeping dissent and heretical thought in check.

This combination of geographical and social factors was favourable to the adoption by many of the Cathar dualist principles. To the East they were geographically shielded from unwanted papal attention, while the social nature of life in the Languedoc meant that although other deviations from Church doctrine were present, none of them formed a symbiosis with what was even for its time an archaic form of governance. The large power bases of Europe saw the Languedoc and the Lombardy region of Italy as lands with far too many heretics and ungodly, heathen people to be tolerated. By modern standards these 'heretics' were anything but ungodly and were in fact deeply devout in their spiritual beliefs and practices. In Papal eyes however, they had made some decidedly radical departures from the orthodox teachings of the Church, and that warranted nothing less than a 'final solution' on a Hitlerian scale.

The people of the Languedoc saw themselves as an independent series of interlocking realms with related languages and customs but quite separate from the French monarchy further North. These small, independent fiefdoms shared a common language known today as Occitan in reference to their region of Occitània. So, lying between modern France to the north, modern Spain to the

south and modern Italy to the East, was a group of people that saw itself as a separate land with a unique identity, language and even a superior form of religious belief.

Interestingly, the Kingdom of France had never really bothered with Occitània due to the many wars it had waged with the Angevin<sup>4</sup> Empire (England and the Aquitaine). Occitan identification as an informal refuge for spiritual thinkers living freely outside the clutches of the Church's stifling orthodoxy had however earned this region much frustrated attention from the Papacy. Finally the inevitable happened: in 1163 at the Council of Tours, the Cathars were formally declared heretics who were to be forcibly deprived of all their possessions and sentenced to death if they did not repent and renounce their faith. Terrible times were about to begin!

## View from the Past

Reading this article in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the actions of the Church during the 13<sup>th</sup> century may seem militant and belligerent. But what has to be taken into account is that as a society, we have seen significant progress in our understanding of the human mind. Things that we take for granted today, especially the giant strides that have been made in gaining a rational, psychological insight into the workings of the mind and the very basis for religious belief, would have seemed like the stuff of creation's wildest musings to the medieval mind. The reaction of the Pope to the continued Cathar presence in 'his' domain should of course therefore be seen in the context of the medieval mindset. But to a point only, for even by the violent standards of the day, the Papal reaction was exceedingly brutal.

Broadly speaking the mind of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century was just beginning to adopt the mass agricultural output of farming arable land into an economic language called 'taxation', and a great deal of arable land in Europe was directly or indirectly owned by the Church. Furthermore, no rational debate existed about principles of religious belief, what is fair, what is right and what is wrong. What the Church did was by default right, and to question its authority on even secular matters was courting an early death. For everyone, nothing less than an extreme form of fundamentalist Christianity was the law of life..., and death!

During this time small groups of craftsmen met regularly at town fairs and led eventually to the creation of guilds which in time would evolve into the industries of



*Bogomil migration routes and re-settlement during the 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries.*



the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. From this we can extrapolate that what we would consider as laughably provincial nowadays, was the reality of the medieval mind-set at this point in European human evolution. Hell was a reality everyone was convinced of, and they understandably wished to avoid it at all costs. The Church, and the Pope in particular, had the keys to Heaven, and it was best to stay on the right side of the afterlife divide, just in case it came earlier than expected.

It just so happened that God in all His mercy had created a rigorous system of administration overseen by his appointed Church legates headed by the 'Vicar of Christ', the Pope. All other forms of spirituality simply did not exist in this system, and only apostates of Satan and the heathen of certain and inescapable damnation, would ignore their sole chance of redemption by not fully yielding to the supreme authority of the Church. The

**Presiding over this state of affairs was a demiurge, a sub-god who brought about the creation of the planets, Earth and humankind.**

Church therefore saw nothing wrong in blending secular power with spiritual authority in an attempt to keep open the conduit they believed Christ had created as the new covenant for all people, whether they wanted it or not.

In keeping with their dualist heritage, Cathars however subscribed to the view that all hierarchical power was inherently evil and beyond reform, as it was bound to the nature of the material world. At the very best they saw secular power as an undesirable though necessary evil that reflected the imperfections of Man. As Christians, the Cathars studied the same holy scriptures as the Church, though fatally for them, distinct divergences existed. Whereas Catholicism at that time saw the Gospel of Matthew as the most important of their holy scriptures, the Cathars considered the Gospel of John the Evangelist as their favoured gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew is written with careful attention being paid to the details of Christ's actions and movements. In keeping with monotheism in general, purity of action and the observance of social codes were very important. The Gospel of John however concerns itself ontologically with the nature of Christ and is a great deal deeper than Mathew. The Cathars believed that Christ was a being of divine origin, rather than a being incarnated through divine command. This meant that Christ, though incarnated in flesh, was in fact completely spiritual in nature and had no physicality of the sort that ordinary humans have. It was therefore not possible for Christ to have been crucified in the nature

celebrated by the Church. A major point of departure from the Church's teachings was the instrument of Christ's suffering, the crucifix. In Catholic theology the crucifix is seen as a symbol of the sacrifice that God and his only-begotten son made in order to redeem humankind after its fall from grace, and it became an object of veneration because of this.

## **The Cathar View of God and the Demiurge**

The Cathars saw Christ's crucifixion in a very different light. The material plane was inherently evil, and anything made of matter was therefore also evil. Since Christ was not evil, He was not made of matter and could therefore not have suffered on the cross in the manner taught by the Church. God was a divine and genderless emanation

moving out in waves from the central point of It's existence. As these emanatory waves moved further from their point of origin they became weaker and weaker until, near the outer edges of their manifestation the material realm itself appeared.

As a result of this, some of God's sons, regarded as angels, had been seduced by the material realm as they were too far from God to maintain their orbit in a state of perfection. As a result they fell into matter and inadvertently divested the material realm of its Godliness. To a modern mind, the argument may seem trivial, picky and illogical, and certainly pointless. But to both the Cathars and the Church, it was a deadly serious duel over who was right and deserving of Heaven and who was wrong and destined for Hell.

It doesn't end there either, for presiding over this state of affairs was a Demiurge [originally a Platonic concept], a 'sub-god' who brought about the creation of the planets, Earth and humankind. This Demiurge or 'world-artificer' reigned over the material realm and sought to ensnare the divine sparks of the angels that had fallen out of God's orbit and become incarnated as humans. The Demiurge used the physical senses of the body to delude people into believing that they were devoid of the divine sparks that animated all people and gave them their innate and rightful divine natures. The material world therefore was a spiritual prison, a system of belief not only present in Catharism but also a part of a pedigree of spiritual thought going back to Persia and ancient Greece, as well as Manichaeism<sup>5</sup>, Gnosticism<sup>6</sup> and Zoroastrianism<sup>7</sup>.

This history of spiritual belief was the bedrock of the Cathar outlook. Cathars saw the crucifixion of Christ as an attempt by the Demiurge and the evil nature of secular





power to trap and murder a divine spirit who was ultimately 'not of this world.' Venerating the final device of Christ's arduous and painful torture, namely the cross, was seen as a way of keeping the soul drunk or asleep as it focused the worshipper's mind on Christ's physical, sensual pain, rather than assisting the worshipper to see Christ as a divine emissary. This was a source of deep irritation for the Papacy, but not nearly as much as the Cathar insistence that the immaterial nature of Christ ensured that the crucifixion could not have occurred the way the Church taught.

A second point of theological difference was that the Cathars had no interest in the Sacraments<sup>8</sup>. Cathars had ambivalent attitudes towards some of Sacraments, believing they had to be adhered to if the need arose, but not at all times. For example, they considered it important for a newborn child to have a stable home in which to grow up, and the simple Christian ceremony of baptism was therefore recommended in order to cement the relationship between the child, its parents and their obligations to give their child a good upbringing. However the sacrament of Holy Communion (the Eucharist)<sup>9</sup> was absent in Catharism, as it was considered a holdover from a more archaic age of ritualistic magic which they saw as an anachronism obscuring the more profound unfolding of spiritual realisations that were brought about through deep reflection on the nature of sanctity.

Such openly individualistic practices were of grave concern to the Church and a clergy that needed their flock for temporal power as much as their flock needed them for spiritual redemption. In his work *"The Great Heresy"* Dr Guirddham<sup>10</sup> writes: "...one must allow that a considerable mass of priests were genuinely terrified at the challenge to their beliefs, which however misguided they may appear by modern standards, were genuinely held and, as it were, mixed with their archetypes." (Guirddham 1977). Whereas the Papacy was deeply irritated by it all, the ordinary clergy saw Catharism as a direct threat to the very existence of Christianity, and thereby a threat not only to their temporal powers over their assigned congregations, but to their chances of redemption and eternal bliss in Heaven.

Catholic beliefs were deep-rooted and had the authority of a thousand years of continuous existence. They were the expression not only of Christian ideals but also of the importance of using rituals in order to organise human behaviour in a world where most nations were little more than sovereign city states. Priests fervently believed their function was to administer rituals guaranteeing that



*The Seven Sacraments by Roger van der Weiden (c 1448).*

*The seven (Church sacraments were rituals which when performed correctly ensured the presence of God opened channels of His grace to those participating in the ceremonies. The seven rituals were 'Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion (the Eucharist), Confession (Penance), Healing (Anointing the Sick), Holy Orders and Matrimony.*

Hell, which could quite literally appear at any moment, could not claim the faithful of their flock. Not only this, but from a less idealistic standpoint the Church was the choice of the poor, and in outward appearance at least, it was a church for the poor. The clergy believed they had a sacred bond with their congregations, and although materially exploitative in many ways, their rituals were for them meant as a spiritual means of ensuring that their congregations would in the end appear in Heaven rather than in Hell. Performance of the prescribed rituals was therefore essential.

And quite apart from any spiritual notions they may have held, both men and women of ability that came from peasant stock could be educated and lead a good, fattening life away from warfare and civil strife, a very useful path to tread in an era of almost constant though lethal petty strife. A direct challenge to the hegemony of the clergy that was successful and arguably just as enlightened as anything the clergy could offer, was in the end simply bad for business and had to be stopped. Catharism was therefore a grave threat to a monolithic religious hierarchy that brooked no opposition and was prepared to go to any extent to stamp out heresy wherever it was perceived to exist.

## Cathar Life

Catharism taught that the soul purified itself through multiple incarnations in the world. Their society was divided into the 'believers' who led relatively routine lives, and the 'Parfaits' (the Perfects) who were the highly-schooled equivalents of Catholic priests. The Parfaits practised extreme forms of asceticism and studiously brought about a gradual transformation in their lives from a physical, material state to a state more attuned with their



innermost sanctity. But unlike the priests of the Church, they were expected to pursue normal occupations and work while they upheld their daily disciplines. They were not exempt from the daily challenges faced by virtually everyone except the clergy.

The Cathars had to have trades that benefitted the community in which they lived. They therefore embedded themselves within the mundane, working world while at the same attempting to uphold, not always successfully, the highest standards of abstinence. The prospect of having to work in ordinary trades while at the same time carrying out their ministry and manifesting lives of perceived holiness was a challenge that many in the Catholic hierarchy considered a step too far. Ascetic practices were of course known to the clergy who practiced them in much more moderate forms; the hardship of fish only on Fridays for example. But the extremity of the Parfaits' regime was more than the average priest could be reasonably expected to embrace. The Cathar concept of the world as an inherently evil place

**Cathars viewed the human as a bird with a broken wing. Capable of flight, it was but temporarily disabled and needed to be healed.**

takes its basis in the notion of being cut off from God. A former harmony that existed between humans and their divine source was lost and had to be recovered at all costs, regardless of the extreme rigours of ascetic practice carried out by the Parfaits.

One of the most striking concepts that Cathars had of the individual was that of a bird with a broken wing (see Harris, 1985). Flying and rising to great heights is natural for a bird; but if injured, it can't fly and has to heal itself before it can do what is innate to its avian nature. It is clear then that we have two types of Christianity with completely different social evolutions; two forms of Christianity perceived by some as complete polar opposites, yet living side by side for a long time in peace. This transpired as the political climate of the Languedoc naturally favoured the Cathars' laissez-faire attitude to their laity. The Church on the other hand, was perceived as a top-heavy, heavily regimented organisation corruptly wed to secular interests that sought to control the independent noble houses of the region. The Church did of course have some genuine following in the Languedoc, but it lacked the muscle of the secular French Crown which had considerable worldly experience fighting one war after another with the Angevin empire which the Plantagenets<sup>11</sup> had brought into being.

When Innocent III became Pope, the papacy of his



*Pope Innocent III (1160 - 1216)*

predecessor Celestine III had left the church in a state of confusion and bereft of the financial clout needed to protect its interests. Celestine had come to an uneasy peace with Muslim sheiks after they had successfully taken Jerusalem; and he had excommunicated King Alfonso IX of León<sup>12</sup> (one of the Christian kingdoms of Spain). At the same time he had been vigorous in defending Catholic marriage laws, but suffered many abuses from the Holy Roman Emperor<sup>13</sup> Henry VI who had conquered the Kingdom of Sicily without the Pope's consent while using the false promise of raising a crusade. Innocent III was therefore inheriting a much diminished church, and the noble houses of the Languedoc were still non-committal at best, though in some cases openly supportive of the heretical Cathars in their lands.

## The Albigensian Crusade

The Papacy of Innocent III signalled a huge paradigm shift. A Spanish priest by the name of Dominic of Osma [later canonised as Saint Dominic<sup>14</sup> and founder of the Dominican Order] established a monastery in the Languedoc. He and his friars made a point of openly debating in public with the Cathars. Bold as this was, it backfired badly. The Church was humiliated by Cathars who came across as far more pious than these legates from Rome. Undeterred, Dominic continued his efforts to proselytise the region, going so far even as adopting in his Order some of the ascetic practices of the Cathars. But his efforts were in vain and there are even accounts of him being openly jeered in the streets.

The Papacy eventually ordered the Dominican monks to stop debating in public, and instead to begin spreading the word that failing to heed the will of Rome





*Massacre of the inhabitants of the town of Lquaur in 1211 led by Simon de Montfort, most brutal of the Papal leaders of the Albigensian Crusade.*

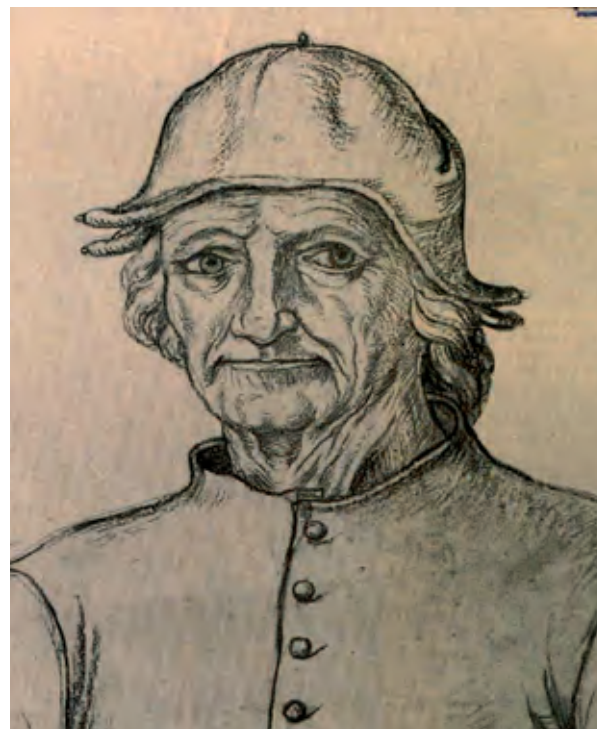
would lead to violence. The tensions of this situation culminated in 1208 with the murder of the Papal Legate Pierre de Castelnau. This was the spark that ignited the tinderbox, and Innocent III declared a crusade against the Christians of the Languedoc: the *Albigensian Crusade*. In July 1209 a large Papal army sailed down the river Rhône and sacked the town of Béziers mercilessly. Men, women, and children, whether Cathar or Catholic, were slaughtered in one of the worst atrocities ever heard of in the courts of Europe. It took another 20 years of brutal fighting however before it was all over. In fact it wasn't until 1271 that the Languedoc in its entirety was completely subsumed into the 'safe hands' of the French Crown.

The major cities of the Languedoc capitulated quickly, often surrendering to the besieging armies after the water supplies to their fortresses had dried up or become contaminated, leading to outbreaks of disease. The Cathar campaign to defend their homeland was uncoordinated, with the independent nobility fighting for what was theirs without presenting a united front against the Papal advance. They seemed to be dogged by 'bad luck' as well, and anything that could go wrong for them often did. What is clear is that the laissez-faire attitudes of the Languedoc nobility had not bred glory-hungry warriors, and Papal authority was therefore eventually fully restored.

The Papal armies on the other hand had been gathered through the granting of extensive indulgences, the two main ones being the forgiveness of all sins past and present, and the cancelling of debts owed to Jewish creditors. But it was only in 1224 when the French king got involved that the Cathars and noble houses of the

Languedoc were crushed with any sense of finality. The early victories of the Church in the summer of 1209 had however without doubt broken the morale of the Languedoc as a whole, and it was clear they would never take back what had formerly been theirs.

Warfare lasted for 20 years. During this time there would have been ample opportunity for Cathars to flee and many clearly did so, establishing secret communities in other parts of Europe and, it is reputed, in the British Isles as well. The survivors of this terrible period would have learnt quickly how deadly and ruthless the extermination of their creed was going to be, especially after the unanticipated and brutal attack on Béziers in 1209 and others in following years. That Catholics were massacred alongside Cathars in Béziers demonstrated that the Church was after economic control of the region, much more than the spiritual hegemony they also sought. The Papal armies were led with a simple fanaticism similar to the extremists that gave rise to World War II (Guirdham, 1977). If your enemy is ruthless, determined and winning, it is imperative to flee. And if successful in getting away, then staying alive and out of trouble would be the next most crucial imperative. Everyone wishes to live as he or she believes best, and where this is simply not possible in an open and free manner, clearly the only alternative is to go underground. That almost certainly is what happened to many Cathars.



*Fig 1 - Bosch self portrait.*

## Survivors of the Inquisition

There are rumours of Cathars persisting in the spurs of the Alps for centuries afterwards, but others moved even further East and either settled in or moved through Lombardy to other parts of Europe. Although things went very quiet from the survivors of this crusade, Cathars (genuine or not) were still being unmasked by the Church in the Languedoc for a long time after the fighting had ended. Denying their faith was anathema to the Parfaits and conceding defeat to what they considered the evil of the material realm was out of the question.

Although the Inquisition had been temporarily established in the Languedoc in 1184, it was not until 1229 that it obtained formal and permanent Papal recognition, opening the way for what quickly became the most brutal and inhuman instrument of religious oppression the world has ever seen. It is understandable therefore why so many Cathar survivors remained silent, and the whole movement literally disappeared from the face of the earth, both through extermination and by going underground.

It was not until relatively recent times that scholars began to realise the extent to which Catharism had managed to go underground and survive! The Church had successfully suppressed most of their liturgical writings, and the basis of the Cathar world view, and dualism was overshadowed by the firm and brutal imposition of Church Law by Innocent III. The Cathar elite, the Parfaits, were 'Trojans' when it came to work, often running workshops and educating others in secular professions. Blending in would therefore not have been difficult for



Fig 2 - Chalk Portrait of Bosch



them, and as their main skills were textile weaving and paper making, they would have been in demand.

If Cathars lived by any maxim it would be from their least favoured holy scripture, the Gospel of Matthew: *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”* (Matthew 10:16). The uniquely dualist/Christian worldview of the Cathars was subtly embedded in a culture that remains to this day in sculpture and art for anyone willing to see evidence of it beyond orthodox interpretation. It was something that would not have been difficult for a people who were used to hiding in plain sight. There is an increasing amount of evidence today to show that Cathar views and teachings did survive the holocaust of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and in fact spread throughout Europe to be resurrected in later times and in different places, and particularly in the realm of art.





*Triptych of the Temptation of St Anthony - by Hieronymus Bosch (c 1501)  
Housed at the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon.*

## Post-Renaissance Art Hieronymus Bosch

Artistic culture during the medieval period, and right up to the end of the Renaissance, flourished primarily in the form of Christian art. Forms of representation steadily improved as scientific knowledge advanced and spread into the artistic process. But most of the images from the great artists were monotheistic and devotional. It is not until the work of the Flemish master Hieronymus Bosch<sup>15</sup> that we start to see however the familiar canon of imagery being subjected to what is often written off as mere whimsy or fantasy.

Bosch lived and worked in the small town of s’Hertogenbosch, the capital of the Dutch province of Brabant. Very little is known of his thoughts about his work or of his personality, and there are only a few known

portraits of him. One of them (Fig 1, p25) is an austere drawing made in 1550 and attributed to Jacques Le Boucq as part of a broader work known as the *Compendium of Arras*, a collection of drawings of famous and important cultural and aristocratic persons of the time. Another engraving of Bosch (Fig 2, p26) was part of a series of engravings of artists called “*Pictorum aliquot celebrium praecipue Germaniae Inferioris, effigies*” (literally “*Effigies of some celebrated painters of Lower Germany*”) published in 1572 by Dominicus Lampsonius.

Bosch’s work is seen as a puzzling and enigmatic iconography that resists complete interpretation. It is an erroneous standpoint however which only arises if his work is seen as relating to the canonical thoughts of the Pauline church. There are too many commonalities shared across the entire body of his work for something as random as mere fancy to be the basis of the eccentricity





*Painting by André Masson (1896 - 1987).*

and uniqueness of his artistic achievements. Bosch is often mistakenly seen as a proto-surrealist on the basis that his work is so uncanny and strange. However the core component of surrealism<sup>16</sup> as a visual arts movement is the use of unresolved double imagery to provoke an automatic unconscious response in the viewer; see the work of André Masson<sup>17</sup>.

There can have been no desire in Bosch's work to explore the intricacies of the human mind, for such did not exist in his lifetime. Not only this, but the traumas of the First World War, the chief conductor of the surrealists' need to explore the unconscious, were a long way off as far as Bosch's lifetime was concerned. Bosch's work is fascinating and exquisitely rendered in a series of Hieroglyphs with no keystone other than a standard monotheistic reading.

A critical reception and reading of Bosch's work is left frustrated as the viewer has figuratively one arm behind the back when viewing this old master, as did Bosch's contemporary audience. His work is dualistic and undeniably represents Cathar or Gnostic theology, which is why he may have been directly related to survivors of the Albigensian Crusade, or could have married into a Cathar family. Any surviving Cathars at this time knew that the Inquisition was still very active, brutal and constantly on the lookout to root out the last remnants of the Cathar heresy, long after everyone else thought it was a dead issue. The Inquisition was so fanatical in fact that on occasion it dug up the mortal remains of those thought to have been heretics and put their bones on trial.

Those believed to have been inheritors and practitioners of Catharism, even centuries after the Albigensian Crusade, would be summarily tortured to extract confessions and burnt as soon as the confessions had been made. So devoted had the Albigensian heretics been that the Pauline Church<sup>18</sup> would constantly be on

the look-out for survivors. Any person who still practised Cathar and Gnostic theology would have to be very careful indeed.

## Dualism

To perceive, albeit faintly, the currents of Cathar theology running through Bosch's work, the brief grounding already given in dualist belief earlier in this article will now be explained in relation to two of his paintings. The Cathar world view was essentially Gnostic at its roots. The true God was a God of light and Christ was the only emissary of light in the Cathar world view. This demonstrates just how sharp the contrast between light and dark was in the Gnostic world view that Catharism perpetuated.

One of the chief characteristics of the Gnostic outlook was that the god of the Old Testament was actually the Demiurge attempting to ensnare human souls. Two of the books of the Old Testament *Proverbs* and *The Wisdom of Solomon* are believed to be from sources inherited by Gnosticism and which in very broad terms can be considered as predating the Hebrew concept of Monotheism<sup>19</sup>. Arguably Monotheism grows out of Gnosticism which places its emphasis on purity of action and stringent social order.

This typifies the confusion that many people have when they encounter the Gnostic worldview for the first time. Without preparation and a proper historical context, it is extremely perplexing. A mind-set in which theocratic and secular power can only act as servants for the world-creating Demiurge, and that salvation is an inner spiritual act of the gradual transmutation of primitive behaviours, requires some getting used to. However, dualistically secular power and theocratic power also end up making the individual aware of their own shortcomings and their intrinsically corruptible nature. In the Gnostic and Cathar view, the structuring of the world in terms of its politics and economics is an ever changing sea of uncertainty which could only be mitigated through personal development, a long process which would eventually free the soul from its sensual attraction to earthly life.

The central method of Gnostic/Cathar enlightenment was gradual and born through many incarnations, in contrast to the early Pauline church in which Hell was prevented from consuming the world through the observance of prayer and ritual. Bosch's work fulfils the criteria of monotheistic Christianity by adhering to accepted canons such as the depiction of saints and biblical events, which is partly why he survived without being burnt at the stake. But his work



also conceals a strong strain of dualism, a dissonance created by the Cathar/Gnostic content in his work that makes his output seem so fantastic.

An important facet of Cathar/Gnostic views was that the soul gradually ascended through different stages on its path to inner enlightenment, a matter thoroughly at odds with the Catholic Church. The early Gnostics believed that the soul passed through three broad stages of multiple incarnations during its journey towards enlightenment. They were known as the *Hylic*, *Psychic* and *Pneumatic* stages of awakening (Martin 2006).

The first, the *Hylic* stage, was regarded as the 'sleeping' stage of the soul in which the personality or spirit of the soul was interested in purely materialistic gain and sensual indulgence. The second or *Psychic* stage demonstrated a partial awakening where the spirit was aware of the soul but needed the ironclad discipline of religious dogma for that spiritual awareness to flourish. The final stage, the *Pneumatic*, was where the soul became fully awakened. It was a state in which the spirit and the soul perfectly synchronised with each other to create a state where the individual could receive the divine knowledge of Gnosis.

This arduous struggle for awareness is embodied in many of Bosch's works where evil is seen as an intrinsic quality of earthly life rather than something that humans create from the agency of their improper actions. This can be seen in the '*Triptych of the Temptation of St Anthony*' which Bosch completed in 1501.

## Triptych of the Temptation of St Anthony

In this painting (p26/27), what the viewer observes is a soul passing from the *Psychic* stage of soul development into the *Pneumatic* stage. For each individual this process of soul awakening required many incarnations, and the transitional points that had to be traversed could be arduous and lengthy. In many ways St Anthony is what the Cathars would have referred to as 'a bird with a broken wing.' He is spiritually developed enough to know that the world is inherently corrupt and that many Hylics will never develop beyond their baser material urges. The resultant despair has driven him into an ascetic existence where he tries to free himself from a debased world.

What he fails to realise however is that for as long as he is materially incarnated, the world and its challenges are inescapable, and he has to both face and eventually master them. On the left hand panel St Anthony can be



*The Flight of St Anthony - top left panel of the Triptych.*

seen riding on a flying demonic figure while praying. At this stage of his soul development his spiritual states are still supported by the demonic servants of the Demiurge, the 'world-artificer.'

Rather than being tainted by evil, St. Anthony's exalted spiritual states are still enmeshed within the realm of materiality. And although he achieves a degree of autonomy by pressing the demon into giving him flight, he is still reliant upon the servants of the Demiurge. In this sense he cannot achieve full flight from the material and so is destined to plummet to the Earth in much the same way as a bird with a broken wing. While the bird has the ability to fly, its current material condition prevents it from soaring into the heavens.

The main focus of the *Triptych* is however the broken column of the central panel, for it leads the viewer into a small dark alcove which rests a third of the way down from the top and two thirds in from the left. Within the alcove



*Central column-closeup.*



we see the image of Christ immolated on the cross which stands upon an altar, while another Christ stands gesturing the dualism with two fingers of his right hand next to the Crucifix. The alcove is heavily recessed and may well be secret. St Anthony gazes out at the viewer, gesturing as well the dualism of Christ the crucified and Christ the



Central column region - St Anthony points with two fingers at the dualism of the Crucified Christ of the Demiurge and the Living [immaterial] Christ of Catharism.

risen with two fingers of his right hand at the alcove and the mystery it represents. The hidden meaning of the dualism may however also have been Christ the material servant of the world artificer, and Christ the spiritual and never material true saviour, the Living Christ. None of the other entities around him pay any attention to him and do not understand the meaning of his gesture. This is clearly a depiction of what the Cathars referred to as 'the Living Christ', a concept that grew out of the notion that in venerating an image of torture and murder on the cross, the Pauline church was an agent of the Demiurge that wished to keep souls trapped in its own material domain. Instead of worshipping the immaterial Christ standing beside the Crucified Christ, the church of the Demiurge duped its flock into worshipping an image that was sensual and violent. This small image highlights the extreme worldview held by Cathars, mild to the point of

trivial discussion in modern terms perhaps, but which for Cathars was a belief that separated eternal life from eternal death.

Catharism saw the actions of the Church as an attempt by the Demiurge to get the Christian faithful to worship a *dead* saviour, and by implication a saviour that had failed, thereby trapping the flock into a permanent state of mourning. The Cathars saw themselves as inheritors of the *living* Christ, one who had survived the crucifixion and been freed into his true and divine form, and in this painting stands next to the cross pointing to the dead saviour. The debased actions of secular power had in fact been instrumental in this process. In literally shedding his skin through being crucified, Christ was now free to become a living link between humans and God.

For the Cathars, the perverting of Christ's true nature turned Christianity into a death cult that venerates the power of evil to annihilate its adversaries. The Gnostic roots of Cathar theology would have also pointed out that the *Psychics'* need for ironclad dogma may ultimately lead them to being cheated out of their own spiritual destiny. Their over-reliance on the Gnostic-inspired *Psychic* phase of soul development may actually serve to permanently trap them in the cycles of birth, life and death. Cathar theology constantly tried to make its listeners aware that the Demiurge wished to permanently trap them within materiality, and that soul development may be arrested at any point of development. The sculptural reliefs on the broken column clearly demonstrate this cosmological cycle in which the Demiurge wished to trap every person.



Broken central column containing at least four important scenes with Cathar meaning.





The lowest part of the column's relief is a thin band depicting a deer entangled in vegetation. The method of representation that Bosch uses is similar to that of Bosnian *Stecci*<sup>20</sup> (Harris, 1985) which were the tombstones of Bosnian Cathars. Bosch's imagery on the column is directly related to Psalm 42, in which the



*Lowest part of the central column depicts deer entangled in vegetation.*

soul is compared to a thirsty deer: “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*” This foundation on the imagery of the column demonstrates that all souls are trapped in the material realm and that all of life's tribulations are a testament to this.

The second level depicts two figures carrying a large bunch of grapes from which wine will be made, which will in turn lead to intoxication and other sensual



*In the second part of the central column, just above the deer, Bosch paints two figures carrying a bunch of grapes for the making of wine and the inevitable intoxication and other sensual indulgences that will follow.*

indulgences. This image relates to the Old Testament book of Numbers (13: 17-29): “*When they reached the Valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. That place was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.*”

The third band on the column shows a creature, half dog, half pig, being offered a swan in worship. A well-established symbol of hypocrisy, the plumage of the swan is white though its underside feathers are



*Moving up to the third part of the central column, the Demiurge in the form of a half dog, half pig creature is seated upon a temple while being worshipped by followers of the orthodoxy of the Church. By offering a swan, long a symbol of hypocrisy, they betray their own insincere intentions.*

black. This dog-pig is clearly the Demiurge being worshipped by those at the *Hylic* stage of human development.

The fourth level shows a calf standing on the top of a mountain with figures cavorting around it, a reference to the golden calf in the book of Deuteronomy. The image suggests that many people are happy to acknowledge the Demiurge as the universe's true power and worship



*Moving up to the fourth part of the central column, we see people dancing and cavorting before a golden calf atop a mountain, representing the Demiurge.*

it in the form of a golden calf. But when seen from a Cathar perspective, it is clear that St Anthony is again attempting to escape Earth and the ‘ungodly’ activities around him as he reaches up offering a book to a divine hand reaching out from the heavens.



In the lower part of the left hand panel of the Triptych, St Anthony is being carried back to the column and ruined building, the latter of which is a representation of the earthly House of God, the realm of the corrupt Vicar of Christ, the earthly Pope and prime representative of the Demiurge. All manner of creatures have congregated around these two areas, oblivious that they are worshipping the World Artificer and not the true God. Exhausted by his efforts to escape, St Anthony ends up being unable to leave the *Psychic* stage of soul



*St Anthony is carried back to the central column and ruined building.*

development yet again. His attempted flight from the *Psychic* phase in the upper part of the left panel (p29) is matched by his later being carried back in defeat.

The background of the centre panel makes reference to the broader cycles of time. God's will is permissive as well as intentional, and will therefore tolerate the imperfections of the Demiurge's creation. But the trapped souls will suffer. In the background the imperfections of human nature bears its fruit, peacetime passes into suffering and warfare, the resultant devastation designed to engender a sense of hopelessness that leads to a turning away from true spiritual development.



*Burning landscape.*

The circular broken pillar is suggestive of these cycles of time as it is the circularity of the pillar that links the background to the foreground in the painting.

The burning landscape on the left side of the central panel (p27) is the Languedoc of the Albigensian Crusade, which for Bosch may have been the main historical event that informed his world view.

The building and column represent a church, and in particular the edifice represented by the leader of the Church, the Pope. The figures in the congregation should not be mistaken for demons, as they are clearly engaged in human activities. In the Cathar 'secret book', fallen angels were divided into two distinct forms of entity. Those in one form, the worst, were turned by the Demiurge into mountains, oceans, forces of nature and the creatures that reside therein. Those in the other group were turned into birds, namely, human souls.





*The figures in the broken building surrounding St Anthony are humans who have embraced the realm of the Demiurge fully and have turned from true spiritual development. With hope he looks out at the observer, wondering how he is ever going to leave this inferno of deceit and pass on from the Psychic stage he has repeatedly tried but failed to leave.*

The demons in Bosch's work inhabit the water and the air within the painting. The figures in the broken building surrounding St Anthony are humans who have embraced the realm of the Demiurge fully and have turned from true spiritual development. As Lynda Harris observes in her work *The Secret Heresy of Hieronymus Bosch*: "The cursed were those souls which had become so enmeshed in Satan's world that they were no longer able to overcome their attraction to it." (Harris, 1985)



*St Anthony stares out, wondering what he can do.*

This truly is the church of the cursed, and the reliefs on the broken column inform us that this is so. Despite St Anthony's valiant attempts to break free of their hold, his struggle is in vain; for his freedom relies on the knowledge of Gnosis rather than the overpowering of powers greater than himself. Instead he stares out of the central panel wondering what he can do to end his suffering. As we will see in the next painting, St Anthony fails to grasp the ultimate cycle he is caught in..., reincarnation!

One final comment about Bosch's *Triptych of the Temptation of St Anthony*. Like all sacred paintings of the time, they were meant to be viewed only on special occasions, and were mostly kept covered or closed at all other times. The same applies to the Triptych which had on the back of the left and right panels images from the

crucifixion of Christ, so that when the main painting was closed, the crucifixion was all that was visible.



*Triptych of Temptation - back sides of the two outer panels. This is as the painting would have looked liked when 'closed', which would have been most of the time.*

## The Garden of Earthly Delights

Bosch's audience was not of his own time. The form of spiritual worship he followed had been ruthlessly crushed, and any suspicions of Catharism was still dealt with in the most vicious of manners. For an educated man like Bosch these were dark times, for what he saw as a true form of spiritual worship was leaving the Earth. His entire output can be seen as an attempt to encompass Cathar and Gnostic thought within a unified symbolic language expressing itself over the course of his many large-scale works.



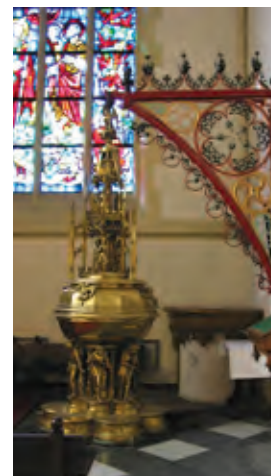


*The Garden of Earthly Delights - by Hieronymus Bosch. Completion date is unknown but is believe to lie somewhere between 1490 and 1510.*

The need for deception makes his work seem at least partly orthodox. But his skill at hiding dualistic philosophy in 'eccentric' imagery is truly masterful. To the monarchs that owned his work, Bosch's pictures were as fascinating as they were impenetrable, but clearly beyond their level of comprehension. The last of Bosch's compositions is also his most captivating one: *'The Garden of Earthly Delights'* (1490 - 1510), which I will refer to as 'the Garden' for the remainder of this article. For many viewers this painting above all others typifies both the



depth and the strangeness of Bosch's work. The left panel shows a sparsely populated Earth in which Adam and Eve are close to a realisation of their true nature, for Christ is with them. The fountain in the water above them, and its semi-organic architectural strangeness owes itself to two influences. For most viewers the structure of the fountain may seem fanciful and has often been written off as being so. The first point of reference for the fountain is however the brass font of the Cathedral of St. John<sup>21</sup> in his home town of s'Hertogenbosch (Harris, 1985). This large font would have been a familiar sight to Bosch as he would have attended the cathedral regularly in order



*'Brass font of the Cathedral of St John.*





*It has been housed in the Museo del Prado in Madrid since 1939.*

to appear as a pious Christian. The font is ostentatious and displays the extreme wealth and power of the Church, a very effective piece of propaganda indeed.

The second influence is far more esoteric and relates to Cathar theology and how they perceived matter. The Cathars believed that evil and material development occurred alongside each other simultaneously. Matter was born from trapped aeons which had strayed too far from the central divine emanation. As evolution gathered pace, mineral evolved into vegetable, vegetable into animal, animal into man. From a universal cosmological perspective, the process marks the attempt of the trapped aeons to make its way back to the divine source. At the point where creatures and plants begin to predate upon each other, evil begins to make its presence felt. This predation within nature was what fuelled explosive levels of sexual reproduction, as it made every form of life acutely aware of life's finite nature.

The fountain in the centre of Bosch's Garden on the left panel is a visual synthesis between carnivorous vegetation being mixed with a crustacean element, while the font at the Cathedral of St. John is intended by Bosch to act as a visual symbol for the nature of evil. All of these qualities combine to create the sense that evil is a parasitic and sessile infestation of nature. Remember that evil is not born from action but rather embodied by it in the Cathar world view. Evil is a form of ignorance that prevents living things from apprehending the correct notion of their true spiritual nature. Its purpose is not to torture or cause pain but rather to capture through enmeshing and ensnaring.

Evil is, as its ignorant nature implies, indifferent to suffering. The fountain in the left panel is a monument to the Demiurge's intrusion upon the material realm and its presiding over materiality. So, rather than the Demiurge being a red, scaly beast intent upon torture and mayhem, it is a spiritual presence wishing ever to be seen as the true creator. But it is unable to understand the suffering and predation that its imperfect kingdom has created.

The suffering of the material world is enough to drive anyone away from it and this is where a key element of the Demiurge's deception comes into play. The central panel of 'the Garden' depicts a place still connected spiritually with the Earth where souls are guided to immediately after death. The realm of the Demiurge exists as a literal place, the Earth, but is also a debased spiritual realm, the Garden of Eden. This realm is still in complete accord with the physical realm, as the innocent pleasures of those in the garden are simply an unfettered reflection of earthly pleasures that carry no unwanted consequences. Clearly the lack of cause and effect and responsibility would be heaven to un-insightful or wanton *Hylies*.



*Grapes, berries and happy hedonists in a temporary afterlife mirroring the Garden of Eden.*

The grapes and berries carried by the happy hedonists in the bottom central panel are reminiscent of the representation of grapes on the column in 'The



*Temptation of St. Anthony*' as is the scene of cavorting dancers paying homage to the golden calf mirrored in the dainty merriment of those in the garden. The aim of this 'after place' still connected to the Earth, is to encourage people to see a delightful reprieve from the imperfections of the Earth, and to be lulled back into incarnation after they have had their fill or have forgotten the tribulations of their former existence. The pleasures of 'the Garden' are sensual and reliance upon them will lead to a further enmeshing within Satan's [the Demiurge's] realm.

Although the Garden is incorporeal, it still feeds into a reliance on sensuality, and an exalting of sensuality over spirituality. Here we see that one of the most effective methods the Demiurge brings to bear on humans is the perceived division of humankind's duality into two realms that have no coincidence. In light of this, reincarnation can trap humans as much as it can serve to release them (Harris, 1985). In the Cathar text *'The Secret Book'*, the Demiurge made bodies of clay and ordered two fallen angels into them. The two bodies are of course those of Adam and Eve. The progenitors of the human race fulfil the dictat of the Old Testament Demiurge: "go forth and multiply." The command is issued by the Demiurge for good reason. While the total number of people in existence still consists of only Adam and Eve, the nature of the two angels that the Demiurge orders to inhabit them is potent and undiluted. If Adam and Eve multiply, they divide these Angels further and lessen their potency, namely their ability to realise their true divine nature.

Here we see that reproduction is seen as a negative thing by Cathars and Gnostics. Further duplication through reproduction facilitates the further enmeshing of humanity into the realm of the Demiurge, and people eventually become so enmeshed they are no longer capable of or interested in transcendence, and the scene of Hell in the right panel becomes their fate, one from which they will be incapable of escape.

Seeing 'The Garden' as a sequence, the left panel depicts the original placement of the two cosmological souls into human bodies. The central panel depicts the dissolution of these two Angels into the throng of hedonistic humanity, which uses a brief reprieve from physical hardship in Eden to indulge in even more voracious pleasure seeking. In the third panel we see that humankind has diluted its spiritual potency to such an extent that it has sealed itself off from its ability to move beyond the material realm. The world that is left no longer needs to enmesh souls through sensual seduction, and the result is a rude awakening for the pleasure seeking masses of the central panel.

The top third of the central panel in the Garden



*Pool of women: the 'breeding stock' of the World Artificer.*

depicts a pool of women surrounded by men riding goats. The symbolism is painfully obvious, and it is astounding that no one until modern times managed to see the significance of this. In looking at the prominently placed breeding pool, what the viewer sees is the 'engine' that perpetuates the spiritual dissolution of humankind.

## Epilogue

Within these two masterpieces we can discern a criticism of the Catholic Church in *The Temptation of St. Anthony* and a castigation of paganism in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. For the Cathars, insight is not gained through the worship of a God who abates hell, but rather comes about through mastering one's fears regarding phenomena one cannot control. This is easier said than done, and Cathar and Gnostic thought can be criticised as being difficult, ambiguous and depressing. It takes considerable time to get to grips with anything based on Gnostic traditions, let alone traditions based on it such as Catharism and Bogomilism.

Anything truly Gnostic expresses itself through poetry and metaphor, and making any attempt at achieving common clarity seem like attempting to unscramble eggs. While the content of these obscure medieval theologians may seem to qualify them for rigorous psychotherapy, there is also an undeniable sophistication in their refusal to see things in terms of binary absolutes. Not only this, but we have to remember that the human mind of the past lived under completely different paradigms, world views we would consider irrational and extreme in modern terms.

In addition to this the Cathars, as well as other Gnostic communities, believed that only the truly dedicated should attempt to live up to the demands of sensual abstinence. Not everyone was expected to live like this in gnostic communities, and only those nearing the successful end of their cycles of reincarnation would feel the need to extol the spirit in such dramatic fashion.



## References

- '*The Secret Heresy of Heironymus Bosch*' by Lynda Harris (1985) - published by Floris Books.
- '*The Gnostics*' by Sean Martin (2005) - published by pocket Essentials.
- '*The Cathars*' by Sean Martin (2006) - published by pocket Essentials.
- '*The Great Heresy*' by Arthur Guirdham (1977) - published by Neville Spearman.
- For many close-up details of Bosch's painting go to <http://www.hieronymus-bosch.org>.

## Footnotes

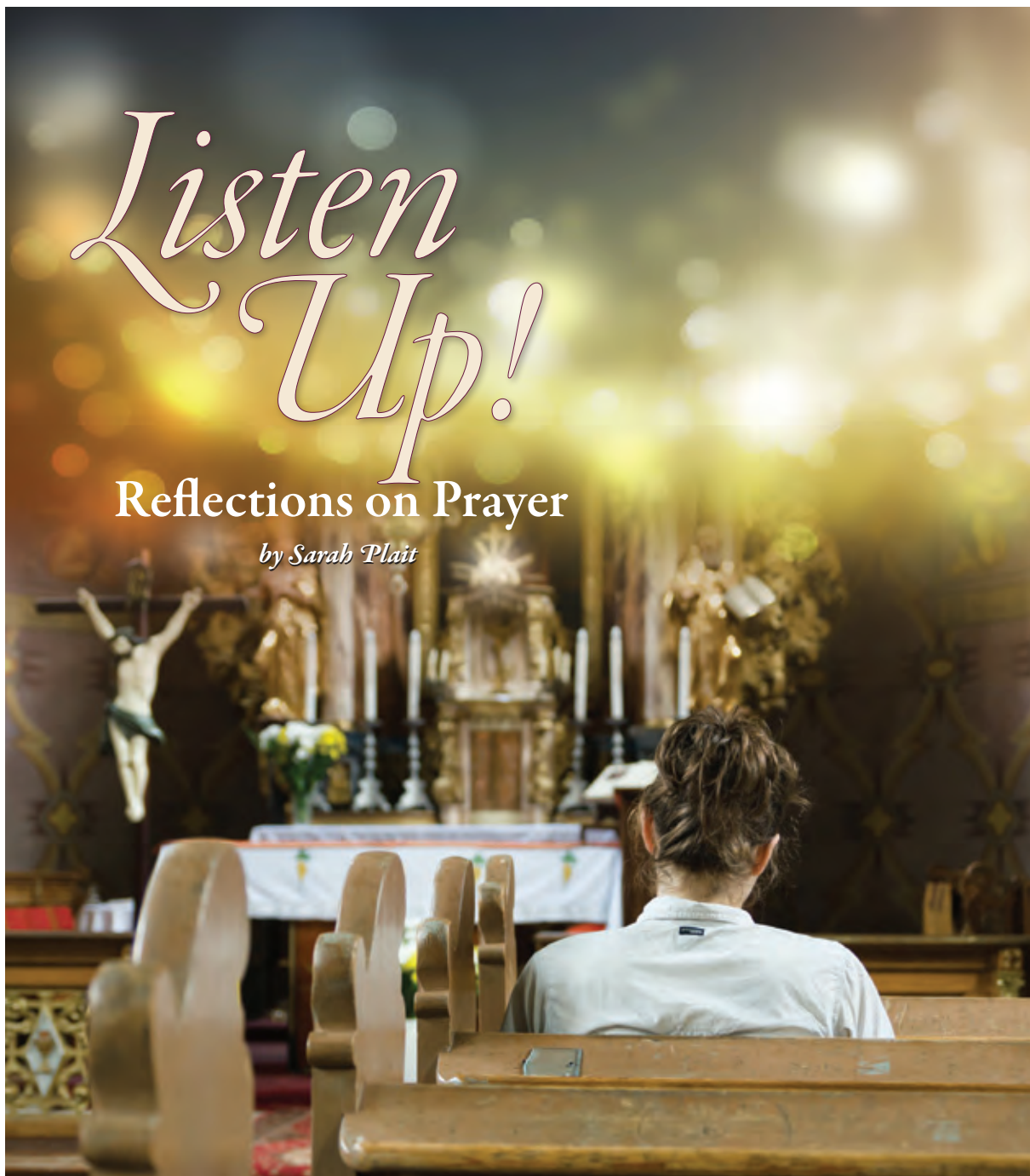
1. Dualism: a religious belief that the universe was created by two deities or spiritual forces.
2. The Bogomils were a Gnostic sect founded in the Bulgarian Empire by the priest Bogomil in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. It most arose as a response to the social stratification that occurred with the introduction of feudalism and as a form of political movement and opposition to the Bulgarian state and the Catholic Church. They called for a return to early Christianity, rejecting all ecclesiastical authority.
3. The Paulicians were a Byzantine Gnostic Christian sect who believed that the universe, created through evil, exists separately from a moral God. They originated in Southeast Turkey in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, when Constantine of Mananalis, basing his message solely on the New Testament, began to teach that there were two gods: the good God who had made men's souls, and the evil God who had created the entire physical universe including the human body. His followers, who became known as Paulicians, led perfectly normal lives, despite their belief that the world was evil, and were renowned as good fighting men.
4. The word Angevin is used collectively for the three English monarchs - Henry II, Richard I and John of the Angevin dynasty.
5. Manichaeism was a major Gnostic religion that was founded by the Iranian prophet Mani in the Sasanian Persian Empire. It taught an elaborate dualistic cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness. It spread into the Roman Empire and as far away as China.
6. Gnosticism (from Ancient Greek: gnostikos = "the learned" and gnōsis = "knowledge") describes a collection of ancient religions whose adherents shunned the material world created by the Demiurge and embraced the spiritual world. In Gnosticism, the world of the Demiurge is represented by the lower world, which is associated with matter, flesh, time and more particularly an imperfect, ephemeral world. The world of God is represented by the upper world, and is associated with the soul and perfection.
7. Zoroastrianism is an ancient Iranian religion and a religious philosophy and was once the state religion of the Persian Empire. Their prophet was called Zoroaster and his ideas led to a formal religion bearing his name by about the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, though possibly a lot earlier. The true origins of Zoroastrianism are not known but there is evidence to suggest it emerged several thousand years earlier in the Zagros mountains of Iran. It has however had a deep influence on later religions including Judaism, Gnosticism, Christianity and Islam.
8. The Sacraments are a set of Christian rituals recognised as of particular importance and significance. There are seven according to the Catholic and Orthodox churches (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Penance, Extreme Unction, Matrimony and Holy Orders), while Protestantism generally only recognises two: Communion and Baptism.
9. Eucharist is another name for Holy Communion in the Christian Churches.
10. Dr. Arthur Guirdham (1905–1992) was an English physician, psychiatrist, novelist, and writer on Cathar, alternative medicine, ESP and reincarnation.
11. The House of Plantagenet was an English royal dynasty that came to prominence in the High Middle Ages and lasted until the end of the Late Middle Ages. Within that period, some historians identify four distinct royal houses: Angevins, Plantagenet, Lancaster and York. After the Wars of the Roses, the Tudor dynasty ruled the English kingdom.
12. The Kingdom of León was an independent kingdom situated in the northwest region of the Iberian Peninsula. It was founded in 910 CE. The County of Portugal separated to become the independent Kingdom of Portugal in 1139 and the eastern, inland part of León was joined to the Kingdom of Castile in 1230.
13. The Holy Roman Empire was a multi-ethnic complex of territories in central Europe that began in 800 CE when Charlemagne was crowned in Rome by the Pope in opposition to the Byzantine (Roman) Emperors in Constantinople. The empire developed during the Middle Ages and continued until its dissolution by Napoleon in 1806. The core and largest territory of the empire was the Kingdom of Germany, though it included at times the Kingdom of Italy, the Kingdom of Bohemia, and the Kingdom of Burgundy, as well as numerous other territories.
14. Saint Dominic (1170 – 1221), was a Spanish priest and founder of the Dominican Order.
15. Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450 – 1516) was an Early Dutch/Flemish painter. His work is known for its use of fantastic imagery to illustrate moral and religious concepts and narratives.
16. Surrealism is a cultural movement that began in the early 1920s, and is best known for its visual artworks and writings. The aim was to resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality. Artists painted unnerving, illogical scenes with photographic precision, created strange creatures from everyday objects and developed painting techniques that allowed the unconscious to express itself through an idea or concept.
17. André Masson (1896 – 1987) was a French artist.
18. Pauline Christianity is the Christianity associated with the beliefs and doctrines espoused by Paul the Apostle through his writings.
19. Monotheism is the belief in the existence of one god or in the oneness of God.
20. *Stećak*; plural: *Stećci* is the name for monumental medieval tombstones that lie scattered across Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the border parts of Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, although almost exclusively following the borders of the medieval Bosnian Kingdom.
21. The Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Evangelist, or Sint-Janskathedraal in Dutch. Originally, the cathedral was built as a parish church and its construction is thought to have started in 1220 and was finished in 1340. Around 1340, building began to extend the church, from which its current gothic style emerged. Construction of the gothic St. John was finished about the year 1525.



# Listen Up!

## Reflections on Prayer

*by Sarah Plait*



**V**ISITORS WANDERING into a city cathedral to admire the stained glass windows, monuments and architecture came upon a young woman in ardent, vocal prayer and tip-toed away from the area so as not to disturb her. Twenty minutes later a cleric quietly approached the five sight-seers and invited them to join the evening service taking place a few minutes hence, leading them

up stairs to elevated seats directly overlooking the woman who continued her evidently urgent business with the Almighty 10 feet below, seemingly unperturbed and even unaware of the intrusion. She carried on, her voice rising and falling dramatically as she offered up and repeated forcibly the details of her discontent, pleas for divine intervention and direction and ‘please, please, please.’

The five watchers sat in the kind of discomfort they





might have felt had they stumbled upon a confessional where someone was disclosing the most terrible transgressions, or into a doctor's consulting room during an intimate examination. Their awkwardness was great, yet it would have felt unseemly and rude for them to move, having been placed by a cleric clearly delighted to have extra listeners at her spoken prayers.

The woman continued on and on until the vicar intervened, inviting her to shut up or ship out, although somewhat more politely phrased. She then left, having apparently been so deeply one with her outspoken and heartfelt expression of prayer that she hadn't noticed the visitors, despite their bustling entrance, embarrassed throat clearing and hushed conversation. She doubtless felt she was engaged in the deepest of divine conversations. Yet, despite asking for numerous answers and solutions from on high, she never once stopped talking. She wouldn't, couldn't have discerned God's guidance if he had addressed her from the pulpit in a voice of thunder.

Prayer is a special form of communication and it is a two way process. One part is the praying person saying, mentally or out loud, what they want to say to God. The other part, totally indispensable and vital to any kind of positive outcome, is listening. It may be worth remembering here the old saying that we have only one mouth but two ears, all the better to listen twice as much as we speak. I'm sure we have all had conversations where we felt we couldn't fit in a word without a hammer and chisel, and where the other person wouldn't hear a syllable even if we hammered all day. How much more important it is to keep the channel of communication clear and free when approaching the Divine, so as to hear the response when it comes.

In Rosicrucian circles we tend to use the term 'meditation' a lot more often than prayer. This is not because there's anything wrong with prayer, it's just that the word has become so commonly used that it doesn't mean the same thing to all people, whereas meditation is, well..., known to be a quiet and sacred affair. Except for purests who can accurately distinguish between the two, for most people meditation is a form of prayer, though a great deal less personal and much more universal than common prayer. But for the non-purists, the two terms are interchangeable as they involve an individual deliberately contacting the universal consciousness which is responsible for all creation, is all-seeing, all-knowing, ever present and basically has all the answers, no matter what question, problem or dilemma we may have.

The key necessity for communication to take place is for the praying person to come into attunement with Divinity (the Cosmic), just as they need to tune in a radio to pick up the signal for the channel selected. Unfortunately there is all manner of interference which

can block this Divine contact..., anything from rowdy children outside to a distracting inner nag about the waiting 'to do' list, especially as Divinity speaks to us almost always only in the hushed tones of the still, small voice of our deeper self, the always patient and mostly silent 'Master Within.'

Attunement requires that we lift our own consciousness to a level where it escapes the confines of objective reality, the reality which is largely governed by our five dominant senses of hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste. In so transcending the mundane world, we allow the connection to be made, and enter a fertile mindscape in which we may plant our prayer with the certainty that it will be responded to in the fullness of time.

Like working a muscle, the process is made easier, quicker and more effective through practice and repetition; hence the reason that one of the first tasks suggested to anyone joining the Rosicrucian Order is to mentally create their own 'Celestial Sanctum', a personal sanctum sanctorum where all things sacred can be dealt with in a calm, unhurried and undisturbed manner. This is an individualised, beautiful and serene environment outside the troubles and concerns of the material world, a fitting and sacred place in which to contact our concept of the Divine and provide the conditions for a fruitful outcome.

There are two important phases to communication with the Divine. One is the active phase in which we articulate as clearly as possible our prayer, wish, request or message. The other is the passive phase in which we need to be quiet and inwardly receptive to the response which will come. Theologians have categorised some of the most common prayers as follows:-

1. Intercessions, in which we ask the Divine to intercede or step in on behalf of someone other than ourselves. It may be a plea for a better outcome than seems likely for one person suffering illness, poverty or some other challenging condition, or it may be for a group, a nation, all people with a particular anxiety or indeed all humankind, as practised frequently at Rosicrucian meetings.
2. Petitions, which are prayers for the things we personally feel we want or need, whether material belongings, opportunities, good outcomes or the qualities we need to develop as spiritual beings, as in the ubiquitous but anonymous: "*Pray not for lighter burdens but for stronger backs.*" Our visualisations for desired circumstances may be seen in the light of structured prayers, vividly imagined and then released to the Cosmic.



3. Confessions, in which we seek forgiveness for what we have done that we shouldn't have, or not done that we should have. We seek the cleansing of heart which comes when we are shown the way to make recompense, mend our ways or salve our conscience.
4. Consecrations, when we dedicate something such as ourselves, our belongings or perhaps particular places, to God's purposes, as we do when we first create our home sanctums.
5. Thanksgiving or praise, which are genuine prayers of worship which acknowledge the goodness of God in its manifold versions with no intention or request to receive anything back in return. The Psalms of David in then Old Testament contain some of the best known, as does the Hermetica, the body of wise and beautiful hymn/poems attributed to the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus.

**Something changes in their understanding of what is being prayed for and what can reasonably and equitably be expected.**

The Rosicrucian teachings offer many measures to ensure the efficacy of our prayers, including those of preparing properly by washing our hands and drinking water to signify the specialness of the contact to come, ensuring that there is always at least some unselfish element in our prayer that will result in a good outcome for others and won't benefit only us. And of course it goes without saying that we must be sincere and truthful in all we say.

It's clear though that not all our requests are granted, even when they're for what seem to be undeniably worthy causes. We don't yet have anything approaching a state of world peace, and our loved ones succumb to all manner of unpleasant conditions and circumstances however much we wish it otherwise. Being on a path of spiritual development however, we acknowledge freely that we don't always (or even often) know best; what we think would be good could frequently be damaging to us, both in material terms and in the realm of karmic consequences.

Frequently it turns out that the things we felt hardest to bear or most difficult to handle offer the greatest learning or benefits we never dreamt of enjoying. Similarly, situations we thought we'd welcome turn out to be horrendous. Ask anyone who has followed the path from true love to disastrous divorce, been promoted beyond their capabilities into a state of stress or won the lottery only to find themselves forced out of home by bags

of begging letters.

Even when prayers are answered, the outcomes don't usually arrive as a sudden and complete package like a genie granting a wish or a fairy godmother turning a pumpkin into a carriage. Certainly they can transform lives and situations in what seems like a magical fashion, sometimes very quickly, as numerous biographies can attest, but generally there is a time-lag and a requirement for action, and vitally, a change of heart and mind. Something changes in the heart of the person praying or the people prayed about. Something changes in their understanding of what is being prayed for and what can reasonably and equitably be expected.

We receive an influx from the highest form of Divinity we are able to reach, and we are given an appropriate form of enlightenment which then inspires and instructs us on how to effect the changes needed. And those changes can relate to anything from healing ourselves or others, to calming down a worrisome neighbour with whom we have no option but to coexist. When we bring ourselves in line with our spiritual path and purpose we're given the means to change everything.

What we can't do is upend natural and karmic laws and generate different outcomes from the same attitudes and behaviours which brought about the situations in the first place.

Many notable people have said words to the effect that *"...all prayers are answered when one realises that sometimes the answer is no."*

## Oh Great Spirit

*by Lakota Sioux (Chief Yellow Lark (ca 1887)*

*Oh Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds,  
and whose breath gives life to all the world,  
hear me, I am small and weak,  
I need your strength and wisdom.*

*Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes  
ever behold the red and purple sunset.*

*Make my hands respect the things you have made,  
and make my ears sharp to hear your voice.*

*Make me wise so I may understand the  
things you have taught my people.*

*Let me learn the lessons you have  
hidden in every leaf and rock.*

*I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother,  
but to fight my greatest enemy - myself.*

*Make me always ready to come to you  
with clean hands and straight eyes;  
so when life fades, as the fading sunset,  
my Spirit may come to you without shame.*





# SACRED PLACES

*by Stella Dartington*

**M**ANY HOLY 'hot spots' exist around the world, some of them breathtaking places of nature, others stunning examples of human creativity and yet others apparently ordinary locations transformed by the events which happened there. Between them they attract many millions of people every year, from the desperate to the devout, of all faiths and sometimes none.

All of them have their devotees and their stories of mysterious healings and mystical events, and some of them double up as tourist attractions. Some have been revered since ancient times, others added to the sacred calendar within our present lifetimes. Here is a selection of the best known and those which you really should see before you give up your mortal coil - at least see them in pictures!



1. The Golden Rock of Mount Kyaiktiyo in Burma is a giant boulder perched on the 1100 metre summit, clad in gold leaf which is added carefully, and sometimes perilously, by visiting Buddhists, so it may gleam ever more brilliantly in the sunlight. The rock is supposedly balanced on a single hair of the Buddha's head, and appears to defy gravity.

2. Borobudur Temple on the Indonesian island of Java is an architectural masterpiece with a structure designed to represent the Buddhist concept of the universe: a stupa built in three tiers around a hill; a pyramid base with five concentric square terraces and a cone with three circular platforms, the whole topped by one massive stupa.

The temple was built in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE but then abandoned and lost to the jungle until its rediscovery in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and subsequently restored. Visitors climb the monument, noting the instructional stories of the many carved reliefs before reaching the summit and, they hope, achieve a spiritual awakening.

3. Uluru, the great Australian sandstone monolith known from countless tourist brochures, is sacred to Aboriginal people and also known as Ayers Rock. This astonishing rock in the outback is famous for turning different colours depending on the light, notably bright red at dusk and dawn. The traditional Aborigine landowners, the Anangu, believe it to be inhabited by the spirits of their ancestral creator beings. Towering up from the desert sand and scrub, it was first settled at least 40,000 years ago.

4. The River Ganges in India is sacred to millions of Hindus who gather at Allahabad on the Ganges for the annual Kumbh Mela, the world's largest human gathering. They bathe in the sacred river undeterred by health concerns from the dirt of thousands of bodies, human and animal, dead and alive, and light candles to the chosen of their many deities.

5. St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican is the beating heart of the Roman Catholic faith, home of the Pope and reputed resting place of Jesus's closest friend and confidante, Peter 'the rock.' Popes wear the Fisherman's Ring in memory of this martyr who is commemorated by an ornate and much visited shrine within the basilica.

6. The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, the western wall of

what remains of the temple built by King Solomon to be the earthly House of God. The temple was destroyed in 70 CE but the remains of the retaining wall around the site where the temple once stood, is the most sacred site of Judaism. The faithful write their prayers on paper which they roll up and press into the nooks and crannies of the rocks.

7. Mecca in Saudi Arabia is the holiest site of Islam. Muslims are urged to make at least one pilgrimage to this city which was the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed and each year an estimated two million people make the trip, known as the *hajj*, taking part in at least five days of rituals in the city's Grand Mosque.

8. Stonehenge, the iconic cluster of impressive stones grouped on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire is reputed to have been sacred to the Druids of old, among others. The megaliths are aligned with winter and summer solstices and the site remains popular and sacrosanct to modern day Pagans.

9. At Lourdes, a French town in the south of France, a peasant teenager, Bernadette Soubirous, saw visions of the Virgin Mary. By following Mary's instructions the girl unearthed a spring which has since been credited with many miracle cures for the visiting faithful who have travelled to this saintly spot.

10. In Britain, no place is quite so steeped in mystery and magic as Glastonbury Tor. The area is revered by nature lovers, Wiccans and especially those who look to the female power of the goddess tradition.

The tor itself carves a remarkably female form on the landscape and few visitors in reasonable health can resist walking its tiered path round and up to the monument at the top. Close by are sacred wells reputed to have healing powers, while the whole area is linked to the legendary King Arthur and his wizard right-hand man, Merlin.



*Chalice Well situated at the foot of Glastonbury Tor*



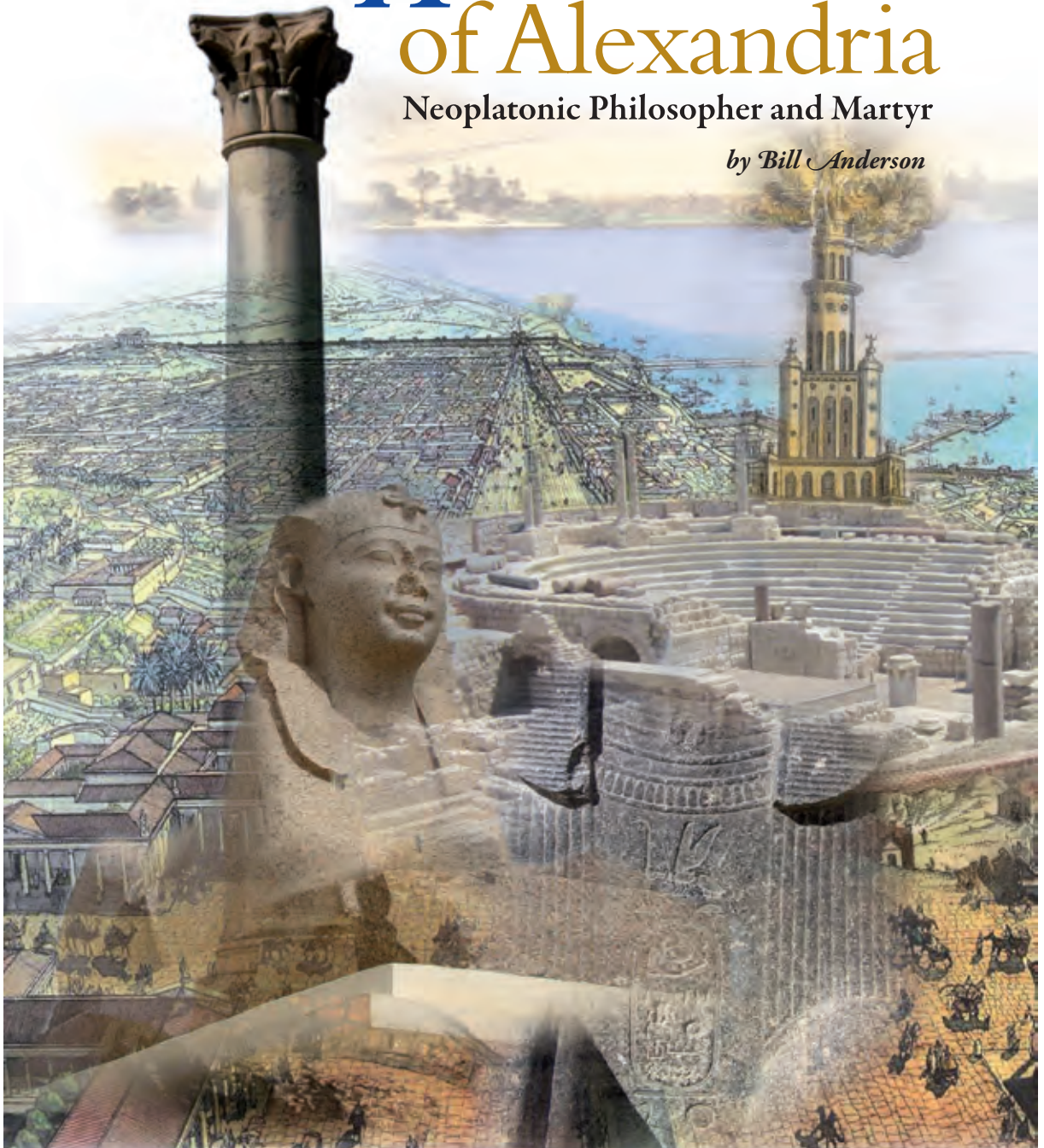


# Hypatia

## of Alexandria

Neoplatonic Philosopher and Martyr

by *Bill Anderson*



**T**HE FLIGHT from London to Cairo passed quickly, compared to some I'd been on. It was my second trip to Egypt, a country with which I felt a great affinity, and still do. Ever since I was young, I had always felt that Egypt was my spiritual home and had been drawn to it for as far back as I can remember. The feeling of anticipation grew inside

me as the pilot called 10 minutes to landing and my heart leapt as I stared out of the window at the land below.

I had flown here to join a Rosicrucian Tour of Egypt, which was due to start in a couple of days, but I wanted to get there first to settle in with some alone time, and also take the chance to visit Alexandria, which, while not on the tour itself, was one place I really wanted to see. Having





*Pompey's Pillar in Alexandria.*

done a course on Greek Civilisation at university, where I first became aware of how Alexandria was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world, a centre of culture and civilisation for nearly a thousand years, I was anxious to see how much of the ancient city was still there.

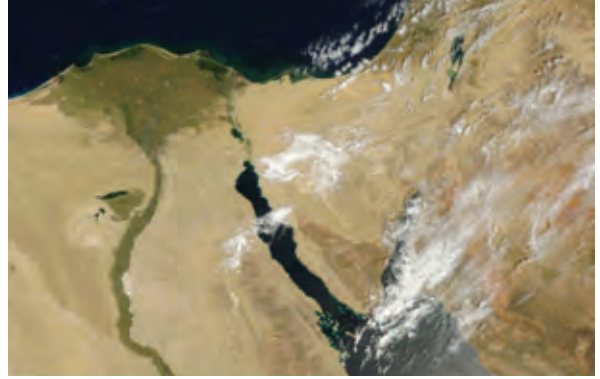
Arriving at the hotel near the Pyramids in the suburb of Giza, I paid the taxi driver and went to reception for my room, but also to ask about taking a trip to Alexandria the next day. It was quickly arranged and I went to my room to relax. I had been up early that morning and needed time to meditate and consider the next 10 days in Egypt. While meditating, I fell asleep, I was so tired. Some might say that I needed to sleep more than I needed to meditate: probably true; and there would be plenty of time for meditation later on.

I usually don't sleep for long, so that evening I went for a walk in the hotel gardens. It was peaceful and serene and I was enveloped by a multitude of delicious scents. I gazed at the nearby pyramids, letting my mind wander, wondering what the Great Pyramid really was. Was it simply a massive tomb for a long-dead pharaoh, or was it used as a place of initiation into higher states of consciousness? In the West was a crescent moon, hovering above the pyramids and a red-tinged western horizon; an omen from the ancient past perhaps?

The beauty of the lord Khonsu Neferhotep inspired me. As the third member of the Theban Triad of gods, Khonsu was the embodiment of the moon as it sailed across the sky, bringing healing wherever he went. Far from his home in Luxor, 500 kilometres to the south, he would have been a welcome sight to the ancient Egyptian priests, gazing into the night sky just as I was that evening.

## Journey North

The following morning, I set off for Alexandria. The bus picked up fellow Egyptophiles, or should it be



*Nile Delta from space.*



*Map of Nile Delta.*

Hellenophiles, from a couple of hotels and then we headed northwards. As the tour bus passed through the Nile Delta with heart stopping recklessness, the guide calmly reminded everyone that Lower Egypt had played a vital part in Egyptian history as one of the Two Lands.

But the river channels had silted up many times and the Nile and therefore changed course often through the ages. Ancient cities that once stood proudly by the river bank now found themselves high and dry, some under the ubiquitous green fields, some under modern towns and some, incredibly, still visible, though not more than scant ruins. In my mind I pictured Alexandria as it once must have been: the broad, colonnaded avenues; the famous Museum and Great Library; the Pharos or Lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; the Soma, the mausoleum where the body of Alexander the Great lay in state; and boats filled with revellers on the canals to Canopus and Eleusis.

I should have expected though that reality would come as a bit of a shock. Alexandria, the second city of Egypt, is a modern, bustling metropolis. It's a large seaport and industrial centre, but then again, so it was in





*The Corniche of Alexandria.*

ancient times too. Sometimes we raise our expectations too high, and when we're faced with reality it seems such a let-down. But it's not a let-down really, for nothing stays the same; it's just that our perception has changed and it has opened up an opportunity for new experiences, and that's always good. Despite the noisy hustle and bustle all around, the ancient city is still there if we are prepared to see between the gaps of activity and modernity. It wears a new set of clothes, but the essence, the very soul of the city is still there; it hasn't changed and it's still a vibrant and exciting place to be.

The arranged tour of Alexandria followed well-trodden paths. We saw plenty of ruins, but most of ancient Alexandria lies under the present city; indeed a lot of it is on the sea floor. Later we stopped for a refreshment break, so I found myself sitting in a café ordering a coffee and croissant, and trying out my pidgin Arabic. I may struggle with it, but the fact that anyone makes the effort was worth it. It's a way of making new friends too. I was sitting outside with a view across the Corniche at what used to be the Great (now Eastern) Harbour. It was here that the ships bearing thousands of books destined for the Great Library of Alexandria had docked. And on the far side of the harbour had been the royal palace complex from which Cleopatra had ruled.

Interestingly, Arabic scholarship refers to Cleopatra as 'The Virtuous Scholar', and cites scientific books written by her as the definitive works in their field. This is understandable considering the cultural milieu she grew up in and is in stark contrast to the prevailing Western view of a hedonistic, deceiving and over-ambitious ruler. Away over to my left was the Western Harbour that was anciently known as *Eunostos*, which can be glossed as 'Happy Return' or 'Happy Homecoming', an apt phrase indeed for my Egyptian 'homecoming.'

And I thought, how much history this city has seen, how many of the world's greatest minds have trodden the

streets of the bustling Mother City of Western civilisation! Everyone knows the story of Anthony and Cleopatra, but after their deaths and after Egypt had become part of the Roman Empire, what became of the city? What about the Therapeutae? What about the great Neoplatonic philosophers who made Alexandria their home? I fell into reverie about the brightest flame of the late Roman Alexandria – a woman, a philosopher and a great soul called Hypatia.

### Fount of Wisdom

*"In the starry expanse that has no dwellings: forces of the universe, interior virtues, harmonious union of earth and heaven that delights the mind and the ear and the eye, that offers an attainable ideal to all wise men and a visible splendour to the beauty of the soul..., Hypatia."* (Charles Leconte de Lisle, 1857)

Hypatia of Alexandria (370-410 CE), was the daughter of the famous mathematician and geometrician Theon, one of the most illustrious scholars of his day. According to her contemporaries, Hypatia, having been taught by her father, eventually excelled him in both mathematics and astronomy. The child was a savant, an early master of



*Hypatia - from a biography on her by Elbert Hubbard - 1908.*







*The Roman Provinces of Egypt.*

everything her mind turned to.

It was in the Platonic school that she developed her ideas, based on the teachings of her Neoplatonist predecessors Plotinus and Iamblichus. However, by providing them with a scientific and methodical dimension, she immediately attracted a greater reputation for herself. The courses she taught were an unqualified success and her reputation as a woman of great wisdom spread far and wide. The Platonic school had enjoyed and was to continue to enjoy a great reputation for learning for centuries more due to the quality of its teachings. Hypatia's students were numerous and enthusiastic, and were attracted to her not only for her knowledge and depth of thought, but also because of her exceptionally radiant personality, her beauty and the purity of her morals. It was said that she displayed an impressive authority combined with extreme modesty and humility.

Unfortunately, none of her writings survived the destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria. In the turbulence of the period, Christian fanatics attacked non-Christians who had been suppressed over the preceding three centuries due to their new and radical religious belief in a messiah with all the answers from Judea. All that remains of her works are the titles of a few of her major treatises. Thanks to the written testimonies of some who knew her, aspects of her character were captured; in particular the letters from Synesius of Cyrene, her disciple of about the same age, overflowing with respect and affection for her.

What survives from Hypatia's teachings indicate a decidedly mystical orientation to her thoughts. Glimpses of her spiritual views have survived in the letters of her disciples, which speak of "*the eye buried within us*," and a "*divine guide*." As the soul journeys ever closer to union with the Divine, this "*hidden spark which loves to conceal itself*" grows into a flame of knowing. Hypatia's philosophy was concerned with the "*mystery of being*," contemplation of Reality, rising to elevated states of consciousness, and

*"union with the divine,"* the One.

Hypatia gave Alexandrian Neoplatonic philosophy its most brilliant hour. Although she drew to herself devoted disciples, among whom were Herculianus, Troilus, Hesycheus, Olympius, Synesius and his brother, she decided not to establish a permanent school centred around herself. Synesius worshipped her, and she warmly supported and counselled him even after he became a Bishop of the early Christian Church. She concentrated her attention on public teaching and exercised an extraordinary influence upon the cultured populace of Alexandria. Among close associates and students she used a variety of means to direct their attention to philosophy.

Youthful students were drawn to her because of her charm, grace and beauty. Rather than reject them for their mixed motives, she practised therapeutic methods reminiscent of Pythagoras and Apollonius. She is said to have calmed one student's emotional fervour by playing music that permanently cleared his mind. She shocked another who idolised her physical beauty by suddenly showing him her own soiled undergarments and pointing to the illusive nature of the physical plane. Yet she cast no one out, and sought instead to heal the soul and nurture the aspirations of all who came to her.

Her lectures attracted large numbers of people who were inspired by her eloquence and mastery of dialectic. Admired for her wisdom as well as her counsel, she became a friend and confidant of Orestes, the Augustal Prefect (Governor) of Egypt based in Alexandria. Born into the ancient religion of Greece, he had been baptised a Christian, and as Augustal Prefect deployed his considerable political skills in an unsuccessful attempt to establish harmony in Alexandria by containing the temporal ambitions of the Church. Hypatia's interest in society and politics, as well as her intimate connections with centres of power in Alexandria, and

**Rather than reject them for their mixed motives, she practised therapeutic methods reminiscent of Pythagoras and Apollonius.**

her uncompromising Platonic and Iamblichian teachings, eventually drew the wrath and viciousness of the Church hierarchy upon her.

Although she offered advice to governors and magistrates, Hypatia was not a political figure in the narrow meaning of the word: she applied the Platonic dialectic to society and science alike. And even while struggling to preserve the wisdom of the Academy,





*The Canopic Way.*

she retained her interest in science and engineering. Towards the end of her tragic life, she sent Synesius detailed instructions for the construction of an astrolabe and a hydroscope.

## Synesius

Hypatia came to symbolise learning and science which the early Christians identified with paganism. However, among the pupils who she taught in Alexandria were many prominent Christians. Many of the letters that the aforementioned Synesius wrote to Hypatia have been preserved and we can see in them a person filled with admiration and reverence for her learning and scientific abilities.

Synesius, her greatest disciple, was born into a wealthy family in the eastern half of the Roman Empire. At 20 years of age he accompanied his brother to Alexandria, where he became an enthusiastic Neoplatonist and disciple of Hypatia. For four years between 395 and 399 he spent some time in Athens. He was not just an average student with a crush on his teacher; he was a recognised man of authority who was not afraid of giving moral lessons to the Roman Emperor Arcadius, and who was entrusted with the military organisation of Cyrene and the Libyan Pentapolis, the five Greek cities around modern-day Benghazi in Libya.

He was no fool and didn't give praise to just anyone. Although a layman, he was, perhaps for political reasons, offered the position of Bishop of Ptolemais in 410. This made him one of the most important and influential men in the Libyan province. But he imposed two conditions on his acceptance of the episcopate: he wanted to stay

married to his wife, whom he adored, and he reserved the right to retain his belief in the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul and the eternity of the world, which Hypatia had taught him. Oddly enough, this was accepted by the Church.

Synesius was a prolific writer in his own right, and in some of the 159 *Epistolae* or *Letters* still extant he mentions Hypatia, *To the Philosopher (Hypatia)*: "I am dictating this letter to you from my bed, but may you receive it in good health, mother, sister, teacher, and withal benefactress, and whatsoever is honoured in name and deed." In another letter he wrote: "If it were true that the dead lose memory of each other, I would still retain memory of Hypatia with whom I have had so much friendship." It seems he was an interesting and sympathetic person who had some quite progressive views for his time, most

importantly the view that a person who has money, power and privilege has a duty to speak for and to defend those who are less fortunate than himself. He tried his best to follow this maxim throughout his life.

In another letter he wrote: "*To the Philosopher (Hypatia)*: There was a time when I too was of some use to my friends. You yourself called me the providence of others. All respect which was accorded to me by the mighty of this earth, I employed solely to help others. The great were merely my instruments. But now, alas, I am deserted and abandoned by all, unless you have some power to help. I

**Her uncompromising Platonic and Iamblichian teachings, eventually drew the wrath and viciousness of the Church hierarchy upon her.**

*account you as the only good thing that remains inviolate, along with virtue. You always have power, and long may you have it and make good use of that power. I recommend to your care Nicæus and Philolaus, two excellent young men united by the bond of relationship. In order that they may come again into possession of their own property, try to get support for them from all your friends, whether private individuals or magistrates."*

## Extinguished is the Candle

In 412 Cyril (later St Cyril) became Patriarch and Pope of Alexandria. However the Roman Augustal Prefect Orestes was his bitter political rival as Church and State fought for control of the country. Hypatia was a friend of Orestes and this, together with prejudice against her





*The Roman Theatre in Alexandria.*

philosophical views which were seen by Christians to be pagan, led to Hypatia becoming the focal point of riots between Christians and non-Christians. Hypatia, it was said: *“by her eloquence and authority..., attained such influence that Christianity considered itself threatened.”*

Orestes enjoyed the political backing of Hypatia, who had considerable moral authority in Alexandria, and extensive influence wider afield as well. Many students from wealthy and influential families came to Alexandria expressly to study privately with Hypatia, and many of these later attained high posts in government and the Church. Several Christians thought that Hypatia’s influence had caused Orestes to reject all reconciliatory offerings by Patriarch Cyril, but modern historians think that Orestes had cultivated his relationship with Hypatia in order to strengthen his ties with the pagan community of Alexandria, as he had done with the Jewish community, so as to handle better the difficult political life of the Egyptian capital.

The encyclopaedist Suidas reported that Damascius, the *“last of the Neoplatonists”* recounted the specific circumstances of her death. Patriarch Cyril knew that Hypatia, restricted to giving public lectures on Aristotle and mathematics, met in private with small groups of disciples to study the teachings of Pythagoras, Plato, Ammonius and Plotinus. One afternoon in 415

he came to Hypatia’s house and, finding several officers of the guards and prominent patricians gathered around the door, enquired as to the reason. They told him that Hypatia was conducting a philosophical meeting, and with that, Patriarch Cyril flew into a rage. Then and there he decided that she should die.

According to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century historian Socrates, when Hypatia was returning from a ride, a mob of Christian Nitrian monks attacked her chariot and pulled her from it. Without losing her calm or uttering a word, she was dragged into the Caesarion Church, stripped naked at the altar, and flayed and battered to death with pieces of broken pottery. Her bones were scraped clean with oyster shells and the flesh was burnt to ashes. It seems

**Orestes had cultivated his relationship with Hypatia in order to strengthen his ties with the pagan community of Alexandria.**

hardly believable in our modern era with the Christian virtues of tolerance, love, kindness and compassion so well advertised, that such barbarous behaviour could have been orchestrated by the Church itself. But the facts are clear.

John, Bishop of Nikiu in the Delta, giving the Christian version of her death wrote: *And thereafter a*





*Ancient Alexandria at the time of Hypatia.*

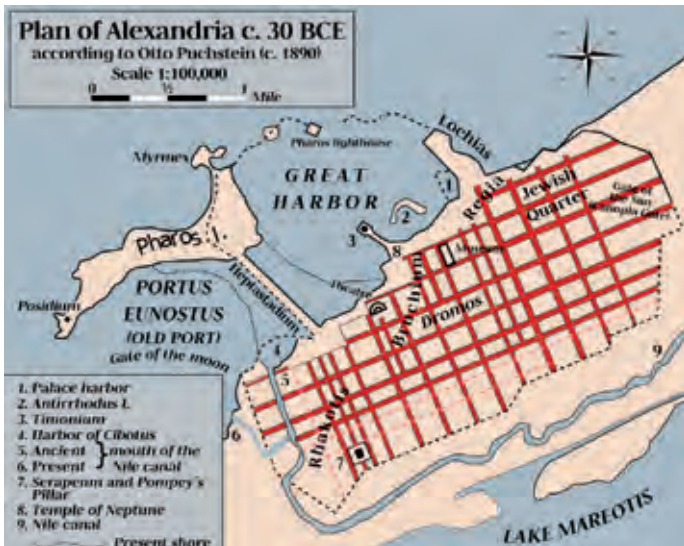
*multitude of believers in God arose under the guidance of Peter the magistrate -- now this Peter was a perfect believer in all respects in Jesus Christ -- and they proceeded to seek for the pagan woman who had beguiled the people of the city and the prefect through her enchantments. And when they learnt the place where she was, they proceeded to her and found her seated on a (lofty) chair; and having made her descend they dragged her along till they brought her to the great church, named Caesarion. Now this was in the days of the fast. And they tore off her clothing and dragged her [till they brought her] through the streets of the city till she died. And they carried her to a place named Kinaron, and they burned her body with fire.*

Thus Hypatia was killed and the last remaining light of Alexandria was extinguished. Synesius, her devoted disciple had maintained a lively correspondence with her until the end, and the fact that he died in the same year led more than one ancient author to suspect that his death was the response of a heart broken by news of her assassination. What certainly seems indisputable is that she was murdered by Christians who felt threatened by her

scholarship, learning, and depth of scientific knowledge. Why is it that the Abrahamic religions, who outwardly profess peace and love for all people, find it necessary to attack and kill all with whom they disagree? The terrible things perpetrated in the name of religion are a stain upon all humankind. Whatever the precise motivation for her murder, the departure soon afterward of many scholars marked the beginning of the decline of Alexandria as a major centre of ancient learning.

The journey on the bus back to Cairo was a lot more sedate and gave me a chance to consider all that I had seen. Alexandria, the multicultural world-city where many different peoples mixed, had been the point of departure of ancient Egyptian traditions for centuries, and was as well infused with Greek and Christian ideas. Each recipient of the perennial tradition sees it as a scintillating and iridescent mantle. Each wearer may only sense that the mantle is of one colour, but for those who stand apart, they can appreciate the totality of the light. It is not just a mantle, it is a veil, a veil that is a portal between the worlds. It attracts true seekers to pass beyond its elegant portals, to begin a journey into tomorrow, a journey into the deepest realms of Self.

From Alexandria, the perennial tradition, this long path, spread across the whole of Europe and the Middle East. We, who live today and benefit from this tradition, are its heirs and protectors, and have the great responsibility of carrying it forward safely for our descendants to benefit from. Finally with I must admit moist eyes, my thoughts returned to the great lover of wisdom Hypatia, a woman of such grace, eloquence, beauty and wisdom, a mystic and spiritual being in all but name. She was born before her time, and she died before her time, leaving the world a much sadder place.



*Rachel Weisz plays Hypatia in the 2009 film "Agora."*





# Looking after Lawns

**H**AVE YOU ever thought that Nature is best left alone? Here's an imaginary conversation between God and St Francis, which an unknown someone penned to amuse themselves and their friends. It may have lessons for those of us who insist on following the norms of the modern developed world rather than living as nature and her faultless creator intended.



God: Frank you understand nature better than most, and I know how much you love it. But what in heavens name is happening with my garden plants down there? I came up with a perfect garden plan, zero maintenance required, with thistles, dandelions, violets, clover, daisies and all sorts. They grow in any kind of soil and keep producing new generations without ever tiring. Left alone, they get on really well. Their nectar attracts butterflies, bees, songbirds, you name it, everyone loves them. I expected to see vast areas of colour by now but I keep seeing these boring old green rectangles.

Francis: Oh yes those, ahem, yes those green rectangles are what people plant when they live in the suburbs. I don't know exactly happened but some bright spark decided one day that your lovely flowers were undesirable and arranged to have them official renamed as 'weeds.' Now people go to great lengths to get rid of them and then replace them with grass in rectangular patches they call 'lawns.'

God: Why grass? It's not that pretty, just the one same old colour and it doesn't attract anything; no butterflies, no birds and no bees. Good for a lot less than those magnificent flowers. Why do these suburban people want just grass, why just that when there's such a variety to choose from?

Francis: I don't really know Lord, but they go to enormous lengths to grow it and keep it green, starting in spring when they spray fertiliser on it, stuff that poisons all other plants that try growing in their lawns.

God: The early spring rain must make the grass grow really fast though. That must make them happy.

Francis: One would think so, but no, as soon as it grows a bit they use a machine to trim it back again, sometimes twice a week. They've invented special equipment just to do that.

God: Okay, so they cut it. What then, do they bale it like hay and use it for other things?

Francis: No, they mostly rake it up and put it in bags.

God: What? Why do they bag it? Do they sell it?

Francis: No, they don't, and I can't understand that either. In fact, they even pay to have someone take it away.

God: Hold it, hold it, are you telling me they go to all that

cost and bother of fertilising the grass so it will grow, and when it obligingly grows, they cut it off and pay someone to throw it away?

Francis: Yes, I'm afraid that's what they do.

God: That's weird. But they must be relieved though in the summer when I cut back on the rain and send in the sun. It must slow down the growth and save them all that work.

Francis: No, it's not like that, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast they bring out hosepipes and sprinklers and pay even more money to water the grass so they can continue cutting it back.

God: What the..., that's balmy! Still at least they kept some trees. Trees in gardens are really good. They grow leaves in spring to provide beauty and shade in summer, then in autumn the leaves fall off and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the plants including the grass, the shrubs and the trees themselves. As the leaves rot, they form compost to enhance the soil, making a perfect life cycle. It couldn't be better, a perfect example of re-cycling.

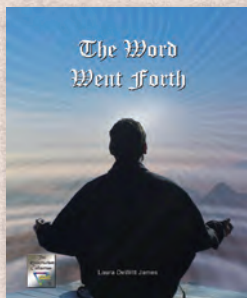
Francis: I'm really sorry to have disappoint you again God, but the gardeners have created their own cycle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them up and have them taken away. Then they go out and pay more money to buy what they call 'mulch', which they then spread around their gardens in place of the leaves.

God: Where, for goodness sake, do they get the mulch?

Francis: It's made from trees they cut down, grind up and mix with dead leaves, old grass cuttings..., and the like.

God: That does it, I'm getting too old for this. I thought I made them bright, I really did. But it's clear they're as dense as planks..., and that's being charitable!





### The Word Went Forth

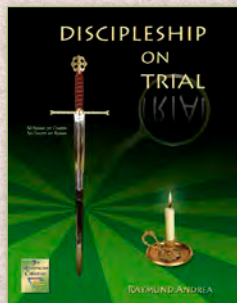
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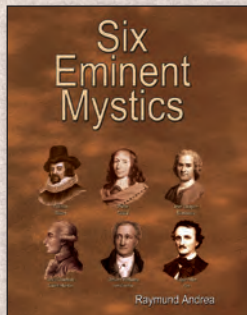
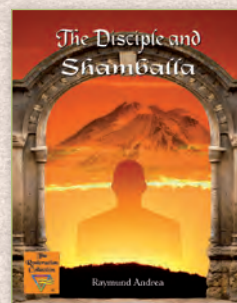
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Reserve your right to think, for  
even to think wrongly is better  
than not to think at all.

-- Hypatia of Alexandria