



Thoughts Poems and Reflections in a Time of Pandemic.

11. Religion

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At the present time the news is dominated by two things, the rapidly increasing number of deaths from the Corona Virus Pandemic and the disruption it creates. The social isolation forces us in on ourselves and makes us face up to our personal thoughts, fears, and challenges that we might otherwise have hidden away. In these *“Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a time of Pandemic”*. I describe some of these, and how through facing them we may find fulfilment in the lives we seek.

Religion today is often given a very bad name. People see its misuse in the reinforcement of tribal, gender, sexual and racial discrimination and their identities, its use in supporting genocide, the hypocrisy of people claiming to practice a gospel or mission of love yet doing the opposite in the action they take. Also, the ways in which it is used to defy science in pursuit of partisan aims, and its use as a tool for damnation against people who do not support the aims or agendas of its own tribal, social or religious group.

Religion may be sacred or secular. In both cases it becomes a religion when it places the doctrines it believes in for its own moral justification above anything else. My view of religion is that contains the powers for the greatest of evils as well as the power for the greatest of good. In my poem on “Religion” I explore both these areas.

RELIGION

What religions profess is a goodness and power
Through sharing with others, it asks who we are
Then uses our innermost thoughts in our minds
To fulfil and give peace to those lives it defines.

Its existence is something no science can test
For it's found in our minds, in love in each breast
But science and logic give methods which check
The goals which they follow are truly correct

With a goodness too great for us to achieve
Its acts come from faith and the will to believe
For some it is observed as the essence of love
For others; its viewed as a power from above.

Thus, heaven must lie in a place outside time
Beyond what our minds could search to define
So, stories and parables become what we seek
To endorse creation and make life complete.

But this also entraps in the guilt and the blame
For the goals we would seek but could not attain
In Christian tradition, Christ's death on the cross
Gave that forgiveness which came at great cost.

This welcomes all people, whoever we are,
For no person's denied its love and its power
But we betray its meaning; and what it's about
When creeds we decree then keep people out

We distance ourselves by facades we enforce
Which hide our true selves in lives we endorse
So we also trap others through hurt and the pain
By destroying esteem in the lives they'd attain.

And evil that comes from misplacing its force
Can become even worse in lives we'd endorse
For claiming these views have divine command
Brings greatest of evils the world can withstand.

These evils are what we are called to reject
When we live our lives true to its loving effect
That also needs courage to stand and embrace
The truth of a message that puts love in place.

For some we may picture religion's true force
Through an image of God in a place we endorse
For others it come through the essence we seek
In a Godhead of Love that makes life complete.

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REFLECTION

One of the features that often occurs in times of crisis is that people turn more towards religious belief. At these times we will often come together to seek a common good in communities which involve everyone in seeking the solace which religion can bring. In situations where people perceive that religion is creating the greatest of evils, the greatest of good is often being expressed by those within the same communities, who work for reconciliation and peace. That range of experience is reflected in this poem. Religion is also much more than the stories and beliefs that are found in the sacred texts, for these are just ways of expressing the deeper truths which cannot be expressed in images or words. In these poems and reflections, I use material taken from the Christian gospel and traditions to make these points. These tell of the history of Israel and Christ's divinity, and the searing conviction of the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus, as seen by the Apostles, after it had occurred. Other religions have their own stories to tell.

We do not create good and evil alone. Evil is created when our actions attack or destroy the wellbeing of our own communities and groups which we deem to be outside them: Good is created when these are supported. Instead of treating religious belief as a moral arbiter for our own lives, it becomes the common moral arbiter for the whole community. That imposes authority over every person in the community and we shape ourselves to conform to its beliefs. When that is set by purely secular values it is more easily disrupted by any tensions that occur. I make very extensive use of Christian texts in this compilation, but I have not presumed a belief in a divine being, or that heaven exists, even the poems on the Music Trees and Heaven do not do that. It has also been said that if God did not exist, we would need to invent him, her, or it, to justify our beliefs. In the Epistles Paul declares that Christianity would be in vain if the Resurrection had not taken place. But arguments about this are separate from the message it brings. This message is about the power of faith and belief to maintain the constancy of the Gospel of Christian Love and the ethics it presents against disruptions that take place. Even if these stories were not to be true in the literal sense, the power of the Resurrection story and the message of Christianity, as it means to us, should stay just the same. In this poem I try to show that for everyone, believer in any religion or believer in none, the message that is presented seeks the same true place. This is a story of conviction, of self-sacrificing love, loving our neighbours as ourselves, a love that we all should share without any exception, and with the same intensity, for the goodness, the care, and the support which it brings to all of the world.

Regardless of what we can achieve the only demand that is placed on us is that we keep our commitment to this message. In the well-known "*Serenity poem*" we read "*Give us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference*". Concepts of self and self-identity are never static, they always change, and depend greatly on how we relate to others. I use the description of true selves in this poem. By referring to true selves and identities I am referring to those features which we find we cannot change and those which can. It our acceptance of these, our attempts to fulfil them, and the certain knowledge that we are accepted as we are, which makes us able to touch most closely our inner selves and bring peace to our lives.

According to our own beliefs we ask or pray that we may truly become aware of that conviction of goodness and self-sacrificing love which is present in all religious beliefs and traditions. Provide us with the strength and courage to work to bring that same love into the world so that all people of all races, ethnicities, creeds, sexual orientation, gender identities and different abilities, who seek to live lives in ways which are true to their own identities may work and live content and in full inclusion with all, for this goodness and peace.

The complete collection of reflections is available is available at: www.com.tgdr.co.uk/articles/001C-PandemicThoughts.pdf