

LIFTING THE VEIL: IMAGINATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD
LECTURE 3 OUTLINE

CHRIST AND THE ARTISTIC IMAGINATION (CONTINUED)

“I’m not saying that poetry itself utterly restores the transfigured vision—only God can lift the veil, and it is only lifted in Christ. I am saying that poetry can get us ready for it and help us to see what is coming and get a glimpse over the event horizon.”

-Malcolm Guite

- Passion: “The Agony,” George Herbert
 - Note: “Philosophers” refers to natural philosophers, the term “scientist” hadn’t been coined yet.

The Agony

Philosophers have measur’d mountains,
Fathom’d the depths of seas, of states and kings;
Walk’d with a staff to heav’n and traced fountains:
But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove;
Yet few there are that sound them – Sin and Love.

Who would know Sin, let him repair
Unto Mount Olivet; there shall he see
A Man so wrung with pains, that all His hair,
His skin, His garments bloody be.
Sin is that press and vice, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruel food through ev’ry vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay
And taste that juice which, on the cross, a pike
Did set again abroad; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like,
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood, but I as wine.¹

- A discussion of the immense spaciousness of our interior, which we have lost.
 - “One of the unfortunate consequences of the materialist and “immanent frame” view is that we think that the big dimensions are out *there*, and the tiny dimensions are in *here* (gesturing toward his head) because we have physicalized our consciousness and think of it as just in the round concavity of our skulls.”
- “Walked with a staff up to heaven” refers to a staff with a measuring device for measuring the stars for navigation.
- “And” is an important word in George Herbert’s poetry.
- Juice, cross, pike: daring poetic metaphors that help you to understand the atonement, get you closer to the atonement.
 - “I am saved by the atonement; I’m not saved by subscribing to any one model of the atonement.”
- Father Guite mentions two other Herbert poems in this section; they can be read here:
 - [“Vanity”](#)
 - [“Bittersweet”](#)
- Resurrection: “Easter 2020” Malcolm Guite
 - An example of the poem knowing more than the poet.
 - Begins with a question because he truly had a question that he needed to answer.

Easter 2020

And where is Jesus, this strange Easter day?
Not lost in our locked churches, anymore
Than he was sealed in that dark sepulchre.
The locks are loosed; the stone is rolled away,

¹ George Herbert, “The Agony,” in *The Temple*, 1633.

And he is up and risen, long before,
Alive, at large, and making his strong way
Into the world he gave his life to save,
No need to seek him in his empty grave.

He might have been a wafer in the hands
Of priests this day, or music from the lips
Of red-robed choristers, instead he slips
Away from church, shakes off our linen bands
To don his apron with a nurse: he grips
And lifts a stretcher, soothes with gentle hands
The frail flesh of the dying, gives them hope,
Breathes with the breathless, lends them strength to cope.

On Thursday we applauded, for he came
And served us in a thousand names and faces
Mopping our sickroom floors and catching traces
Of that corona which was death to him:
Good Friday happened in a thousand places
Where Jesus held the helpless, died with them
That they might share his Easter in their need,
Now they are risen with him, risen indeed.²

- Transfiguration
 - The transfiguration as a resurrection narrative.
 - The lifting of a veil.

² Malcolm Guite, unpublished.

Transfiguration

For that one moment, “in and out of time,”
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.
Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.³

CHRIST AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION: INTRODUCING PARABLES

“The way Christ quickens and appeals to our moral imaginations is by inviting us to imagine we were somebody else or inviting us to imagine ourselves into a story.”

-Malcolm Guite

- Introducing the parables
 - Parables work on the basis of parallels.
 - The most basic parable: unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it bears no fruit; but if it does die, it produces a great harvest.
 - We immediately understand the parallel between the outward visible thing, the process, but we understand it as an image or picture or emblem or symbol that happens to perfectly express an aspect of our inner life.
 - Pause for a moment and recognize that. It’s extraordinary that there are so many things out there that speak so directly to what is in here—all of which are ready-made, beautifully shaped, infinitely suggestive, living symbols.
 - Think of all the metaphors that can be made regarding a tree.

³ Malcolm Guite, “Transfiguration” in *Sounding the Seasons* (London: Canterbury Press, 2012).

- If we accept the dominant narrative that everything is objectively material, random, without meaning, then there would be no looking out at the world and finding mirrors of ourselves.
- Coleridge argues against Kant, that there is an eternal act of creation, and all the phenomena are being spoken as a poem into being by God, and he has awakened in us the little logos, the consciousness that knows how to read the poem. If that is the case, then of course we would expect what we actually find, which is that everything is drenched in meaning and is continually suggestive of something; everything allows itself to become our vocabulary.
- In the Incarnation the poet comes and explains his poetry.
- [C.S. Lewis essay, “The Grand Miracle”](#)

From “Frost at Midnight”:

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.⁴

From *Biographia Literaria*:

The imagination then, I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation.⁵

⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Frost at Midnight,” in *Poetical Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), lines 54-64.

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 7, *Biographia Literaria* (two volume set), ed. James Engel and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).