

LIFTING THE VEIL: IMAGINATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD  
LECTURE 6 OUTLINE

## WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION

“Dostoyevsky says that beauty will save the world. I’m not sure about that, but it’s a good start.”

-Malcolm Guite

- Resources
  - Fr. Guite’s selections are appended to this document.
  - View the full plates of different editions in photographic form [here](#).
  - A YouTube video with a recitation of the poem and photos of Blake’s plates is [available here](#).

*Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* in context:

- Industrial revolution just taking hold.
- Britain’s imperial ambitions were only too clear.
- The country that could have been—that was, perhaps—blessed by the countenance divine, was indeed full of “dark satanic mills.”
- “Dark satanic mills” refers, of course, to the mills of the industrial revolution, but Blake also refers to universities and educational systems this way as well.
- Blake is consistently and deeply steeped in the Bible, particularly the prophetic and apocalyptic; it becomes a natural mode of language for him.
- Blake reads the Bible allegorically.
- What is Jerusalem?
  - A gift that is given once
  - A city
  - A person
- Albion
  - One of the oldest names for Britain
  - Legendary sleeping giant under Britain whose dreams are the source of events in the world
  - Albion is not only representative of all of Britain, but all of humanity.
- Blake is unveiling something:
  - This country has just finished divorcing itself from its own soul and has traded its entire spiritual life for mercantile gain and the oppression of its own people and the peoples of the world.
- Britain was then, as it is becoming now, apostate.

- Blake was writing before the great revivals.
- Plot summary
  - Albion has fallen into the sleep of worldliness.
  - He has abandoned Jerusalem, and she has been taken captive by the entire industrial machine.
  - Part of Jerusalem's distress is her separation from Albion.
  - Jesus comes to comfort Jerusalem and awaken Albion.
  - In the middle four stanzas, the poem contains messages about the mystical Christ: one for Deists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims.
- Guite reads selections and discusses the poem (text appended)
- Concluding remarks
- From the final question-and-answer session, some thoughts on a church that attempts to overcome subjective/objective divide:
  - Not afraid of imagination
  - Preaching that bodies forth the gospel in vivid, living images
  - Extremely friendly toward and open to the artists among them
  - Expect it to have an interest in art that is both transformative and challenging
  - Expect it to notice Jerusalem in her captivity
  - Must endeavor to really *be* in the place it is in, embodied, incarnate, not living on flat screens
  - A church that takes this seriously isn't going to replicate the modes of consumption of the western world (the church is not theater).

### **Preface to *Jerusalem***

Trembling I sit day and night, my friends are astonish'd at me.

Yet they forgive my wanderings, I rest not from my great task!

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes

Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity

Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination

O Savior, pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love:

Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Blake, *Jerusalem – the Emanation of the Giant Albion*, from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman (Oakland: University of California Press, 1982), 147, plate 5, lines 16-22.

Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination  
(Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus. blessed forever).<sup>2</sup>

I see the four-fold Man. The Humanity in deadly sleep  
And its fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow.  
I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once  
Before me; O Divine Spirit, sustain me on thy wings!  
That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose.  
For Bacon & Newton sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors hang  
Like iron scourges over Albion, Reasonings like vast Serpents  
Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations<sup>3</sup>

I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe  
And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire  
Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton. Black the cloth  
In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works  
Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic  
Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which  
Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace.<sup>4</sup>

Awake! Awake, O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! Expand!

I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:  
Fibres of love from man to man thro Albion's pleasant land.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Blake, 148, plate 5, lines 58-59.

<sup>3</sup> Blake, 159, plate 15, lines 6-13.

<sup>4</sup> Blake, lines 16-20.

<sup>5</sup> Blake, 146, plate 4, lines 6-8.

but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible  
is light. Therefore, it says,

“Sleeper, awake!  
Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”<sup>6</sup>

But the perturbed Man away turns down the valleys dark;  
Phantom of the over-heated brain! Shadow of immortality!  
Seeking to keep my soul a victim to thy Love! Which binds  
Man the enemy of man into deceitful friendships;  
Jerusalem is not! Her daughters are indefinite.  
By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith.<sup>7</sup>

But Jerusalem faintly saw him, clos'd in the Dungeons of Babylon.  
Her Form was held by Beulah's Daughters. but all within unseen  
She sat at the Mills, her hair unbound, her feet naked  
Cut with the flints: her tears run down, her reason grows like  
The Wheel of Hand. Incessant turning day & night without rest  
Insane she raves upon the winds hoarse, inarticulate:  
All night Vala hears. She triumphs in pride of holiness  
To see Jerusalem deface her lineaments with bitter blows  
Of despair.<sup>8</sup>

For in Blake's vision, Jerusalem, even in her exile, is not alone:  
But the Divine Lamb stood beside Jerusalem. Oft she saw  
The lineaments Divine & oft the Voice heard, & oft she said:

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<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5:13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Blake, 146-7, plate 4, lines 22-28.

<sup>8</sup> Blake, 210-211, plate 60, lines 39-47.

O Lord & Savior, have the Gods of the Heathen pierced thee?  
Or hast thou been pierced in the House of thy Friends?  
Art thou alive! & livest thou for-evermore? or art thou  
Not: but a delusive shadow, a thought that liveth not?  
Babel mocks, saying, there is no God nor Son of God  
That thou, O Human Imagination, O Divine Body, art all  
A delusion. but I know thee, O Lord, when thou arisest upon  
My weary eyes even in this dungeon & this iron mill. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Thus spake Jerusalem & thus the Divine Voice replied.  
Mild Shade of Man, pitiest thou these Visions of terror & woe!  
Give forth thy pity & love. Fear not! Lo, I am with thee always.  
Only believe in me that I have power to raise from death  
Thy Brother who Sleepeth in Albion:<sup>10</sup>

O Lord & Savior, have the Gods of the Heathen pierced thee?  
Or hast thou been pierced in the House of thy Friends?<sup>11</sup>  
  
Art thou alive! & livest thou for-evermore? Or art thou  
Not but a delusive shadow, a thought that liveth not.  
Babel mocks saying, there is no God nor Son of God  
That thou O Human Imagination, O Divine Body art all  
A delusion.<sup>12</sup>

But I know thee, O Lord, when thou arisest upon

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<sup>9</sup> Blake, 211, plate 60, lines 50-59.

<sup>10</sup> Blake, lines 65-69.

<sup>11</sup> Blake, lines 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> Blake, 211, plate 60, lines 54-58.

My weary eyes even in this dungeon & this iron mill. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Lo, I am with thee always.

Only believe in me that I have power to raise from death

Thy Brother who Sleepeth in Albion:<sup>14</sup>

O what is Life & what is Man? O what is Death? Wherefore  
Are you my Children, natives in the Grave to where I go?  
Or are you born to feed the hungry ravens of Destruction  
To be the sport of Accident! to waste in Wrath & Love, a weary  
Life. in brooding cares & anxious labors, that prove but chaff.<sup>15</sup>

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I have forsaken thy Courts  
... thy Gates of Thanksgiving thy Windows of Praise:  
Thy Clouds of Blessing; thy Cherubims of Tender-mercy  
Stretching their Wings sublime over the Little-ones of Albion<sup>16</sup>

O Human Imagination, O Divine Body I have Crucified  
I have turned my back upon thee into the Wastes of Moral Law:  
There Babylon is builded in the Waste. founded in Human desolation.<sup>17</sup>

The Breath Divine went forth upon the morning hills. Albion mov'd  
Upon the Rock. He open'd his eyelids in pain; in pain he mov'd  
His stony members, he saw England. Ah! shall the Dead live again.

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<sup>13</sup> Blake, 211, plate 60, lines 58-59.

<sup>14</sup> Blake, 211, plate 60, lines 67-69.

<sup>15</sup> Blake, plate 24, line 16.

<sup>16</sup> Blake, plate 24, lines 17 and 20-23.

<sup>17</sup> Blake, plate 24 lines 23-25.

The Breath Divine went forth over the morning hills Albion rose<sup>18</sup>

Then Jesus appeared standing by Albion as the Good Shepherd

By the lost Sheep that he hath found & Albion knew that it  
Was the Lord the Universal Humanity. & Albion saw his Form  
A Man. & they conversed as Man with Man. in Ages of Eternity  
And the Divine Appearance was the likeness & similitude of Los<sup>19</sup>

Recognizing the signs of the passion Albion asks Jesus:

Cannot Man exist without the Mysterious  
Offering of Self for Another. Is this Friendship & Brotherhood  
I see thee in the likeness and similitude of Los my Friend<sup>20</sup>

And Jesus replies:

Wouldest thou love one who never died  
For thee or ever die for one who had not died for thee?  
And if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself  
Eternally for Man, Man could not exist. For Man is Love:  
As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little Death  
In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood.<sup>21</sup>

Fear not, Albion; unless I die, thou canst not live.

But if I die, I shall arise again & thou with me <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Blake, plate 95, lines 2-5.

<sup>19</sup> Blake, plate 96, lines 3-7.

<sup>20</sup> Blake, plate 96, lines 20-22.

<sup>21</sup> Blake, plate 96, lines 23-28.

<sup>22</sup> Blake, plate 96, lines 14-15.

“I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination.”<sup>23</sup>

Savior, pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love:  
Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Blake, 231, plate 77.

<sup>24</sup> Blake, lines 21-22.