

RELIGION REVISITED

BY SHARON MCIVER

**“HE SPREADS OUT THE NORTHERN SKIES, OVER EMPTY SPACE;
HE SUSPENDS THE EARTH OVER NOTHING.” Job 26:14**

I like starting work with someone else’s words – it provides inspiration and cohesiveness, and sometimes you feel as if the hand of the person who wrote it is guiding you.

I’m not sure whether GOD is in the house right now, but to the scribe who painstakingly put quill to parchment so that centuries later I could use these words to write about my relationship with religion, I am grateful – just as I am grateful to all the muses who inspire me to set down some thoughts.

The magic of creation is evident to anyone who undertakes such a challenge. At times it can be exhilarating, and other times tedious. Bursts of inspiration often precede long periods of tortuous introspection as you decide whether what you have sculpted is unbelievably brilliant, or a big pile of cack.

The trick is to make the most of the moments when the muse is in the house. Hence, I am starting with a verse from the bible – and not just any bible – the Thompson Chain Reference edition of the New International Version that I was given when I was a teenage Christian considering a career in the ministry. Two decades of serious dis-use later, I can still find a suitable reference within seconds.

Dismissing ‘sustainability’ and ‘environmentalism’ as terms that are too modern for this mid-1980’s number, I look up ‘earth’ in the concordance and quickly scan the first few words of each entry. The Job one stands out and I flick through the Old Testament, mentally ticking off each book – genesis, exodus, Leviticus, numbers, (Word just loves capitalisation of anything biblical – only

words with double meanings escape). Exact recall has disappeared over the years, but I can still remember up to Nehemiah (from now on I’m going to let the laptop capitalise what it wants), which is conveniently not far away from job.

Even more conveniently, somebody has neatly underlined the verse using a ruler and red biro. Me. Now, I have no idea as to why my teenage self highlighted such a passage, but it reminds me of just how passionate I was about Christianity back then. Despite being excruciatingly embarrassed by the street marches and open-air meetings which were requisite in the salvation army, I still remember being pretty hell bent on saving the world.

So, little change there. What has changed is my annotation style – now academic books are messily underlined, and pencilled ‘Yes!’s and ‘bollocks’ appear in the margins. What has also changed is how, why and who I worship.

How and why I worship has become an integral part of everyday life; if you look hard enough, most days are packed with reasons to be thankful. For something more ritualistic, I find a nice long shimmy under a moonlit sky to some deep and dirty drum and bass will do the trick. The ‘who’ I worship is something that I consider to just be *there*, a giant amorphous entity with no end or beginning, but there.

There in our oversized telescopes, and in the spine-chilling brush of air when you walk across a tapu beach. There in the dirt that grows our food, and the ‘bastard’ mountains that we like to ‘knock off’ (unfortunately literally, in some cases). No matter

how important we humans consider ourselves to be, there is always something bigger to remind us of just how insignificant we really are.

What I like to think of as karma, but you might like to interpret as divine intervention, or Maradona’s hand of God, or whatever.

“He suspends the earth over nothing.”

Is that why we are constantly trying to weigh her down? Because we feel the magic of the earth being suspended in space? Because no matter how scientific the theories about how the ‘conditions’ of this busy star were just right for life as we know it to flourish (and flourish and flourish), we’re still essentially overawed by the mystery of creation? We know that nothing we can invent will ever be as jaw-droppingly stunning as those moments on earth that we attempt to capture with technology that is still a long, long way from recreating the multi-sensory nature of nature.

Essentially we are overwhelmed by the earth – especially now that we’ve managed to munt it so spectacularly. Perhaps, that’s why it seemed easier to remove deities from their accessible earthly thrones and transfer them to some faraway entity called heaven that can only be reached upon death. We don’t like our gods to build their mansions on our crap heaps.

And although I’ve replaced my belief in the trinity with an unshakable faith in something that I don’t even want to try and label, I believe that the only way that we’re going to get out of the mess we’re in, is to have faith in something.

So here’s to belief – belief in something, as long as you don’t use it as an excuse to abuse the other entities sharing this planet (including people with different belief systems to yourself). Belief in some sort of deity – whatever you call it – is essential, especially if we are going to stop devolving the way we have been for the past millennia.

For some, a little reversal may be necessary – a reversal of Sunday morning mall worship would be a start. So at the risk of being struck with a lightning bolt, I’m prepared to try a reversal of my own, and rearrange the biblical quote I thought so much of at sixteen:

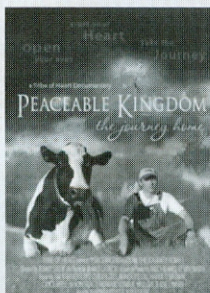
“she spreads out the southern skies, over a space filled with endless mystery; she suspends the earth over everything.” Now that I can believe in.

SUSTAINABILITY FILM SERIES

Thursday 6th of August, 7pm in the International Room, upstairs in the UCSA Building
- Hosted by SAFE, All Welcome!

Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home

This film offers a touching portrait of five animal farmers struggling with the ethical tensions inherent in their way of life. On the one hand, the forces of economics and tradition dictate



that the animals on their farms be valued by the income they produce, their purpose being fulfilled when they are sent to market. On the other hand, their humanity asks them to respect the animals they care for as individual beings, to acknowledge they have relationships with one another and the people who care for them, and a strong will to live.

Interwoven with the farmers’ stories is the dramatic animal rescue work of a newly-trained humane police officer whose sense of justice puts her at odds with the law she is charged to uphold. With strikingly honest interviews and rare footage demonstrating the emotional lives and intense family bonds of animals most often

viewed as living commodities, *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home* shatters stereotypical notions of farmers, farm life, and perhaps most surprisingly, farm animals themselves.

For more information, links to film websites and other sustainability-related information, go to the Film Series website on www.sustain.canterbury.ac.nz/sfs or join the UC Sustainability Community on UCLearn.

NEXT WEEK:

A selection of short films hosted by all clubs