

Service 20110206 Adrian Worsfold
Theology of Increasing Entropy

[Track 06 Magna Carta *Old Man*]

We light this chalice
Knowing that as the fuel converts its energy
And the bright light goes outwards
The fuel itself goes down.
The light that lights us on our way
Is but a moment
And an opportunity
To value that fleeting point of time
And then to move on.
Always, and always, in just one direction:
The light goes outwards
And the fuel goes down.

[Light the chalice]

You must be true yourself If you the truth would teach; Your soul must overflow, if you Another's soul would reach. To overflow of heart of heart it needs To give the lips full speech.	Think truly, and your thoughts Shall the world's famine feed; Speak truly, and each word of yours Shall be a fruitful seed; Live truly, and your life shall be A great and noble creed.
---	--

[H. Bonar, modernised language]

[Track 07] All the hymns today are from *Sing Your Faith* (2009), London: The Lindsey Press. The First **hymn** is number 42 by Jason Shelton and Mary Katherine Morn where we follow the music of 'From the Light of Days Remembered' by Jason Shelton as helped by a choir. [Hymn number 42](#).

Prayers

Hearts and souls are open to the one we imagine knows all our desires and from which we can keep no secrets; and with such in mind we cleanse ourselves in thoughts and deeds for our ongoing progress in life's pathway so that love may be released towards all that we encounter.

And in such process we must first declare that we are sorry for what we have done that we should not have done, and sorry for what we did not do that we should have done. If we are sincere in such sorrow, then we can move on and tackle life with greater clarity.

We might say that:

O source and Sea of Love, O Spirit That makes now every soul akin, The Comforter whom we inherit, We turn and worship as within! To give beyond all dreams of giving, To lose ourselves as this in us, We long, for this, a fount of living As lost in evolution thus.	How shall we serve, how shall we own this, O breath of love and life and thought? How shall we praise, when cannot see this How shall we serve, when are as nought? Yet though these words remain unbroken The silence of their awful round, A voice within our souls has spoken That we who seek have more than found.
--	---

[Rewording A. Mary Robinson (Madame Duclaux), *Hymns of Worship*, 106, London: The Lindsey Press]

[Track 08] For the 'Lord's Prayer' we have the version to listen to in Rick Wakeman's *The Gospels*.

[Track 09] Now another **hymn** which is number 21 in *Sing Your Faith*, again with the support of a choir, written by Shirley Erena Murray with a Lewis Folk Melody. **Number 21**.

For a **reading** I wanted to include the book Jasmin bought me as a thanks for helping her with her academic work. It is *A Trilingual Selection from the Nahjol-Balaghah in Arabic, Persian and English* translated by Tahereh Saffarzadeh, of the writings of Ali - the lead Imam of Shia Islam as established and practiced in Iran. The book itself is riddled with typological and grammatical errors. It's actually very difficult to find a suitable reading, given the disciplinarian nature internally and oppositional nature externally of much of Islam, but there is something that can be used. This is from a letter

of Ali to al-Harith al-Hamdani:

Never wish your own death unless you are sure that through obedience to God's commands you are going to have a better life in the other world.

Avoid every action which the doer likes for himself but dislikes for believers in general.

And avoid any action performed in secret but where shame and disgrace is felt when it becomes open.

Also, avoid any action about which if the doer is questioned he himself regards it as bad or apologises for it.

Do not let your honour become the subject of backbiters.

Do not relate what you hear to others (since it may be a lie) which could then include you among the liars.

Do not suspect news heard as being untrue, as this is a sign of ignorance.

Suppress your anger.

And be forgiving at the time you have acquired the power to punish.

Show forbearance in a moment of rage.

While in full power, pardon people for their mistakes as through such a manner you will arrive at a good end.

Be grateful to what God bestows in order to keep this permanent.

And do not waste the blessings that God has bestowed on you due to ingratitude.

The signs of God's bestowals should be seen by your conduct.

Obviously that was sent to someone of political power, but it can apply to many of us.

[Track 10] Now a bit of a **diversion**. We are now going to hear a favourite

version of mine of *Jerusalem*. It is a little different from the hymn because it comes from the era of punk, but the singer is properly trained. As a singer she is known as Suzi Pinns, although she was called Jordan when she worked in Vivienne Westwood's King's Road boutique. Her actual name is Pamela Rooke and is now a veterinary nurse. [Suzi Pinns](#) sang this version of *Jerusalem* within [Derek Jarman's fantasy film Jubilee](#), where Queen Elizabeth I and a few of her court comes forward in time to survey the rather depressing sub-cultural scene of 1970's Britain. Suzi Pinns also sang *Rule Britannia* within the film which was also given the punk treatment, but we'll stick with *Jerusalem*.

Now a [reading](#) from a book called [The Cosmic Code](#) written by [Heinz R. Pagels](#) published by Penguin back in 1982, 112-113.

In the course of discovering the thermodynamic laws, physicists discovered yet another macroscopic variable which described a bulk property of matter - entropy. Entropy is a quantitative measure of how disorganised a physical system is, [being] a measure of its messiness. This concept of entropy is extremely important for our understanding of the relation of the microworld to our understanding of human experience. Have you ever noticed how hard it is to keep things neat and organised? Your frustration is not an accident but a consequence of one of the fundamental laws of thermodynamics - entropy or messiness always increases for a closed physical system. You are fighting the second law of thermodynamics....[as] For any closed system the entropy always increases...

When I was a college freshman my roommate and I decided we were tired of cleaning up the single room we shared and allowed it to go to a state of 'maximum entropy'. The room became a complete mess, much to our satisfaction. If we moved anything we couldn't help cleaning it up, but the next move would recreate the mess. The cleaning problem was solved, but another problem arose - we couldn't find anything. Several minutes would be spent looking for the things we needed. Eventually we decided that the state of maximum entropy was not saving us time and effort and we returned to a more conventional lifestyle.

The law of entropy increase is manifested all around us. The phenomenon of material deterioration is an example. Everything eventually falls apart - buildings crumble and fall into ruin; we age; fruit rots.

[Prayers \(Intercession\)](#)

We offer prayers now for all the people of faith, hoping that the different religions can come together in dialogue, understanding and peace. We pray for Unitarian Churches here and around the world, forming a vision of freedom and liberty, and offering the world the social gospel of difference together.

We pray for the world, and particularly the chaos and strife in the Middle East as its population strives for freedom. Ever since the First World War, and the collapse of the Caliphate, Muslim countries in the region have been colonised, faced national socialist dictatorships and monarchs, and grown considerable chips on their shoulders in their awkward relationship with the West and especially after the founding of Israel. And Iran had its Shia revolution producing an authoritarian theocracy that faces the suppressed demonstrations of its young population. We hope that this whole region can find stability and peace, and not descend into the increasing entropy of nuclear instability.

And we pray for those who we may know that are ill and have been ill [pause] and we think those who have died, and I would mention again the life of Trevor Jones who has had such an impact on a generation of British Unitarians [pause].

[Track 11] Some music for meditation and this is a version of the Nunc Dimittis.

The next hymn was chosen for its closeness to my sermon. Not having access to the second set of Sing Your faith CDs, it is one I've had to write out. Perhaps if you turn to number 28, *Dear Weaver of our Lives' Design*, written by Nancy Dorian and music by Nikolaus Herman arranged by J. S. Bach, I can talk through the process I went through of finding some suitable music. First of all, the Australian provider, Clyde McLennan, played Lobt Gott Ihr Christen, but if you follow the tune you can see that it doesn't fit easily, and that's because ours is 8 6 8 8 6 and his is 8 6 8 6 6, the second to last line proving to be rather awkward.

[Track 12] LobtGott example 01

Now there were three midi samples available on the Internet at the right meter, each being similar to the other, and because this is computer generated and digital, a music writing program can import the file and display

the music score. If it can do that, it can generate the tune in better instruments and in different formats. But here is the problem:

[Track 13] LobtGott example 02

It is just too high. [Track 14] So there was nothing for it. I had to write it out from the book, and the computer generated instruments are harpsichords. I also added a little extra echo. We hear a verse right through and then we sing the three verses. So it is [hymn number 28](#).

Sermon

Along with some others here I attended the YUU meeting that had Bill Darlison recommend that sermons should be about life as through the fires of thought. So this sermon is an attempt at that.

The principal experience of life surely is that of ageing. We all do it, none of us can avoid it, and it all ends in the same place unhappily or happily depending on the totality of your life. We all go in one direction only, and that means we have a randomness of living going forward, with forks in the road where we go down one road or the other, but, when looking backwards, we can tell a story of our life so far, and then it has a narrative.

But imagine, what if we were to travel backwards in time. Let me give an imaginary suggestion of what this might be like in my case, and also some general observations.

So here I am at 51 years of age, soon to be 52, and instead of reaching 52 the clock goes into reverse. So how is my life going to go backwards.

One of the first things I am going to do, certainly, is move house. My friends come along and I leave Chamberlain Close and find myself in a larger but much tattier house in New Holland. In fact, it is so bad it has a hole in the kitchen ceiling. Living over on the other side of the river, I attach myself in part to the Church of England over there because it is a broad minded parish church of the liberal Anglo-Catholic variety.

Soon the water pipe in the bathroom sucks in a lot of water that appears and the kitchen ceiling is restored. In fact, day by day the house improves that little bit, so it looks like it will be a nice house to live in.

After a funeral, my mother comes into existence in Derbyshire, and by all accounts she is very confused and has a number of behavioural problems. I

take some difficult journeys over to Derbyshire and my mother visiting New Holland is hardly aware of the house that is in her name. Eventually there is quite an argument that is passed by, and she has moved in. What's more, although she is in a disturbed condition this lessens over time, and the possibility of a sensible conversation increases until, really, things are rather good.

Also I have been talking over the Internet to a woman in Reading, who is unemployed and rather in a complex situation herself, but after unloading a statistics course until ending up with blank sheets of paper, she comes to live in New Holland, though for a time she is getting the rough end of my not long there mother. So, being shocked at our education system, Elena ends up in Portsmouth for a time, to get rid of her useless PGCE qualification.

It won't be long before I get rid of mine too, and although I have some immobility my back is getting more flexible and I start to lose weight, although I go through some years of back muscle spasms until the very last twinge in the middle of Hull. Elena is with me then. Relations between her and my mother are very good now, and I'm driving everyone around as my driving wisdom lessens but technically I'm very good.

But soon Elena's visits to Russia is followed by her coming for just so many weeks. that was quite intense, but then she is gone, with just a few frustrating emails as her English language becomes terrible. In fact a point arrives at which there is one more message only between An email contact list and her university. Elena herself has lost much weight and indeed, it won't be too long when Mr Yeltsin is in power that she will be as thin as a rake.

I am getting fitter and fitter too, and soon I have lost more weight. I've stopped coming to the Unitarians now, but it is not long before my now fully functioning mother and myself come again, together, and in fact I reduce my attendance at Barton, especially once David Rowett is in Grimsby.

Gosh, I am thinner still and with local dentists back in the NHS I even go and have some fillings taken out for my teeth to restore themselves.

All sorts of disputes at the Unitarian church pass by and the numbers attending increase again, and also I feel less marginal in what I do. But I have given up driving, and my mother is getting better at driving the car with more experience. She was a bit shaky at first and limited herself to local trips. I now get on a motorbike. I also shed my theology MA and soon it is time to leave a quite attractive house and live to Derbyshire, and in effect stop saying hello to you folks again. My time in Derbyshire includes a happy period with Western

Buddhists, good relationships at the local C of E and its self declared 'religious humanist' Rector, and a frustrating time for periods at Upper Chapel Sheffield. And indeed there is a period with no religious involvement at all, for about one and a half years, followed abruptly by a rough interview that gets me into Unitarian College for about a year, as I experience an increasing number of churches who will deal with me until the point when I am no longer there. Indeed that is when I am back here. All the time I am slowly losing information about the Unitarians.

Now at this point my hair is thicker, and I am much thinner. Indeed at there is no ringing in my ears and I am in really good health. My mother too is in fine health. I no longer get on a motorbike, and it is far healthier to cycle. And I cycle all over Hull. The traffic is less too so it actually safer, despite the cycle lanes disappearing. I give up a bound book that is my Ph.D thesis and it is not too long before it is ideas in my head and various visits to churches and ministers. Eventually it is only an idea in my head, and not quite the one I pursued. Soon I will not be in this building again, but instead considering ministry with the Church of England, and then my rural church experience goes, and the University Chaplaincy, and eventually my clearer agnosticism gives way to indifference.

So a whole narrative of religious identity across institutions is lost, and that leaves just an ordinary degree to get rid of. My writing is becoming more of a struggle. Now time seems to travel slower, but still there is just a year before I am in school, soon in school having to sit in rows and more clearly doing as I am told. School is a place to lose what you once knew. The friends I once grumbled with in pubs are now coming out to play; they are alcohol-free like me and everyone is optimistic. Now I am really shedding some knowledge, and life is getting sweeter. The girls are fascinating; and the learning is simple and straightforward but difficult, but abstract learning gives way to more concrete learning, and eczema has appeared and I don't like wearing short trousers. Parents and teachers assume every greater importance and attention. Soon I am combining learning with play.

Time is ever more slowing down, but there is so much that is so simple happening. Words escape me; soon I give up trying to walk and now I just enjoy images and the feelings of the green of trees and fresh air and faces looking at me, simple thoughts but positive experiences. These are ever more fleeting and dependent, and yet then comes a blackness as in the depths of a liquid container matters are dark and strange with pulses of sound beyond and then there is no consciousness and no sense of experience at all.

You might try this experiment yourself. It has been done by others about

general history. There is a novel, *Time's Arrow* by Martin Amis, where vast numbers of Jews appear from the concentration camps and go and populate Eastern Europe and speak Yiddish.

So there is life lived, and, following Bill Dalrymple, we ask what is the theology? Well, it starts with science. Stephen Hawking can say we can theoretically go back in time, but we cannot go backwards in time. It was asked, once, if the universe starts to contract not expand, does time go backwards? What stops us going backwards is increasing entropy, that left to itself everything decays and disperses. Concrete bits do not assemble themselves into blocks of flats - well, probably not. There is just this quantum possibility of very very occasional random reversals. But, put it like this, the moment we are born is the moment we start to die. The mind that suffers from dementia does not stay in one place, and nor does it get any better. The brain does try to reroute what it loses, but dementia soon takes that away.

The theology that follows on from entropy is that of transience. It is in the Buddhist instruction - Buddhist theology, if you like - not to become attached to what cannot be permanent. However, once you have grasped the transience of all things, you can value all of these fleeting moments and existences.

One of my most longstanding friends is battling with his mother's Alzheimer's condition. He like me lived with his mother a long time, though he set up his own flat before I did anything similar - in fact, going to Unitarian College was my beginning away. Now, of all the siblings, he is doing the most to try and keep her from a residential home and he has in effect moved back. He is now with his mother again, and having had a thousand deaths she is utterly different from the mother he once lived with (his father died relatively young). His herculean effort worries me because it is constant and sapping his energy, and he has already gone from full to part time employment. His mother is long past sensible conversations and actions, and she is utterly dependent. She does crazy things around the house, so that he once found his underpants in the fridge and she kept ringing the police until the phone was disconnected.

Yet you imagine yourself inside that kind of mind. You try to have conversations and occasionally you do. In my case there was a violence that had to be managed, but you still see the humour in the blackness. So does he, and he always did. It is at times like these when a reciprocal obligation to your near family, despite it being so frustrating, comes through, and we see the same with us as being among friends and wider too in a community. Our obligations rightly press upon us; and in a sense it is like this: if we can be

spiritually developed, if we have a right outlook, then we will do no other than try to meet these obligations. The point is this: even the dementia person experiences, and we meet their experience with our own, and we value the transient, even when it seems to be a transient through a lot of dark and only a tiny bit of light.

[Track 15] Christ tune extract [collection] Notices.

[Track 16] The final hymn is number 96 and is choir assisted again, called 'Lord of Our Growing Years' to the well known tune of Little Cornard by Martine Fallas Shaw with these words by David Mowbray. Number 96.

[Track 17] Burgon *Nunc Dimittis*