

The Mixture of Faith

(But this I know)

April 2024

A MIXTURE

- My faith I guess is a mixture of what I don't really understand – such as
- The Trinity,
- When God steps in or not with a miracle, and
- How Christ dying on a cross at Calvary can annul the sins of us all and offer us a path to eternal salvation and
- Are we the only souls to save in the entire universe and all of his creation?
- How can God give us free will to do whatever we want and at the same time achieve his purposes for humanity and our world?
- If God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, how can he change his mind as is often documented in the Old Testament?

So I have all these which I need to accept in faith to keep living a Christian life things that I don't completely understand – things which are clouded in a veil of mystery. And because of these mysteries we need to proceed in faith, believing, like St Paul did, that it all will be made clear to us in the end.

“Then shall I know even as I am known”

Yes, it is a mixture of what I don't really understand and what I know for sure!

- Christ did indeed live like us and walk the Holy Land.
- Christ stands out unique from all men and women who have ever lived,
- God can be very close to us at all times to strengthen and support us and give us confidence, wisdom and vision, a support I have experienced personally on quite a few occasions!

One other thing I know for sure is that Christianity can turn people around and make them new again.

Here's an example from Chuck Colson whose life really was turned around after spending 7 months in jail for “obstruction of justice” following Nixon and the Watergate scandal.

“Perfect Freedom”

Humaita Prison is in Sao Jose dos Campos in Brazil. Formerly a government prison, it is now operated by Prison Fellowship Brazil as an alternative prison, without armed guards or high-tech security. Instead, it is run on the Christian principles of love of God and respect for men.

Humaita has only two full-time staff, the rest of the work is done by the 730 inmates serving time for everything from murder and assault to robbery and drug related crimes. Every man is assigned another inmate to whom he is accountable. In addition, each prisoner is assigned a volunteer mentor from the outside who works with him during his term and after his release. Prisoners take classes on character development and are encouraged to participate in educational and religious programs.

When I visited this prison, I found the inmates smiling, particularly the murderer who held the keys, opened the gates and let me in. Wherever I walked, I saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas. I saw people working industriously. The walls were decorated with motivational signs and Scripture.

Humaita has an astonishing record. Its recidivism rate is a 4 percent compared to 75 percent in the rest of Brazil.

I saw the answer when my inmate guide escorted me to the notorious cell once used for solitary punishment. Today, he told me it always houses the same inmate. As we reached the end of a long concrete corridor and he put the key into the lock, he paused and asked "Are you sure you want to go in?"

"Of course" I replied impatiently "I've been in isolation cells all over the world". Slowly he swung open the massive door and I saw the prisoner in that cell – a crucifix beautifully carved with Christ hanging on the cross.

"He's doing time for the rest of us" my guide said softly.

So maybe Christ was "Doing Time" for us on that Calvary cross – maybe he is still "doing time" for us in some special way?

Yes, there is no doubt that Christ can turn people around into a brand new future!

Dora Greenwell was an English poet who lived in Durham, England in the 19th century, a devoted Christian whose logo in the front of her poetry books said, in Latin, "I Hold and I am Held"

She wrote one of my favourite hymns which is unfortunately not included in Together in Song. It encapsulates what I am trying to say that our faith is a mixture of the things we don't really understand and what we know for sure

from our everyday experience. Although not in “Together in Song”, it can be found in the old Methodist hymn book.

I am not skilled to understand
What God hath willed, what God hath planned,
I only know at His right hand
Stands One who is my Saviour

I take God at His word and deed,
Christ died to save me, this I read;
And in my heart I find a need
Of Him to be my Saviour.

And was there then no other way
For God to take? I cannot say,
I only bless Him day by day
Who saved me through my Saviour.

That He should leave his place on high
And come for sinful man to die,
You count it strange, so do not !!
Since I have known my Saviour.

Yea, living dying, let me bring
My strength, my solace from this spring,
That He who lived to be my King,
Once died to be my Saviour.

Dora Greenwell.

The reason there are so many things we struggle to understand is that our minds are limited by time, space and scope. We worship a God who is not limited by any of these things. He can be anywhere and everywhere, very far and very near. Present in our past memories, in our everyday living and in the future that awaits us. He can simultaneously hear the prayers of all eight billion people on this Earth, listen and respond. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of those in Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, of those searching and of all those who are suffering and dying. No wonder we struggle and our minds give up when we strive to take all of this on board! Said in another way,

if we could understand all of these things, our God would be no bigger than we are!

My second point this morning is to say that although we may not fully understand something, this need not stop us from drawing benefit from it.

We all drive and enjoy our modern cars!. They have become increasingly luxurious over the years. I can remember when we would open the windows for “air conditioning”! These days you don’t even have a winder to open the windows – just a hammer to smash the windows when trapped in a river. Interestingly, the only driver to survive the Baltimore bridge disaster as seven cars plunged into the Patapsco river was in an old car where he could manually wind down the windows! They have also become increasingly more complicated to the point where the NRMA cannot help you on the roadside for the very modern cars – all they can offer is a tow to the dealership. Nevertheless, we can own them, drive them and enjoy them !

Who would doubt the importance of electronics generally and the digital revolution in particular. It is a revolution that has brought in staggering changes in communication, data analysis, digital processing and artificial intelligence. It is probably one of the greatest revolutions in the history of mankind. And yet, and yet it is probably true to say that no-one really understands completely what an electron actually is. The most common and simple particle there is - the building block of all electronics. I can tell you that it has a charge (1.6×10^{-19} Coulomb) and a spin (half a quantum unit) and a mass (9.1×10^{-31} kg) but in some contexts it behaves like a little bullet and in some contexts it behaves more like a wave or a ripple. To the limits of our vision, it looks as though it has no internal structure at all! But, yet, any charge at all concentrated at a point would mean an infinite energy? The electron is busy emitting and absorbing virtual particles even in a vacuum and there is an infinity of such scenarios. These processes continually violate energy conservation one of the bastions of classical physics. No-one has ever seen an electron yet we still go out and buy our electronic appliances and use them happily and benefit from them!

I have some doubts about the Harbour Bridge. How long it took to build, how wide is the road, how long it takes to paint it etc. This does not however preclude me from using it and experiencing its strength and reality. There are things I could not prove about that bridge but I have faith in it that it will hold me up each and every time I go across it!

Sure we will have doubts about our faith and our God. How He operates here, why He doesn't step in there. How He gives us free will and still works out His eternal purposes.

But none of this need preclude us from experiencing His reality. And in drawing near to Him we can come to know Him and His strength and love and grace.

And we can draw close to him and experience His strength peace and comfort whenever we choose. Even today! Even right now!

Dora Greenwell was right! Our faith is a glorious mixture, and as we grow and learn and understand a little more as we go along: we will increasingly see just how glorious it is.

Thanks be to God,

Amen.