

Chapter Twenty-Five

TOFFEE OR CEA?

Saturday 6th May

Carindale

As Mary brought a plate of food to the occasional table, Stephanie looked up at her. 'I was so sorry to hear about that nasty business Mary. Had any more threatening calls?'

Mary put down the plate and turned to Stephanie. 'Not lately, thanks for asking. The police had assured us that we wouldn't but I'd feel a lot better if they could finish their investigation and charge someone.' Mary indicated the coffee pot. 'What'll you have to drink Stephanie?'

Stephanie raised her eyebrows apologetically. 'If it's not too much trouble, I'd rather have tea.'

'Would a tea bag be all right? We don't even own a teapot.'

Stephanie waved one hand. 'Oh! That'll be fine, thanks.'

Mary turned back to the kitchen.

'Isn't it funny,' said Kevin, picking up his own cup of coffee, 'how we call it afternoon tea but many of us have coffee.'

'English is a strange language.' Stephanie nodded in agreement.

'Of course,' said Kevin leaning towards Stephanie with a wink, 'if we all drank coffee we could call it afternoon coffee.'

Stephanie picked up on the teasing comment and carried it on. 'Of course, neither coffee nor tea represents ultimate truth. Maybe both coffee and tea are only reflections of reality.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Kevin, enjoying the verbal jousting with her. 'But what is the truth behind both? Is it Toffee or is it Cea?'

Stephanie laughed a rich deep laugh, responding to his humour. 'Maybe both are true and we have to 'switch' from one to the other.'

James grinned at the gentle dig at his theory and added, 'Choosing between Coffee and Tea is a bit like the gulf between the personal and the impersonal. Berger says the seeker after truth has to choose one or the other as a matter of faith.'

'Well,' said Kevin indignantly. 'That's a defeatist attitude if ever I heard one. You don't know which one is true so you take your pick and hope for the best.'

'It's not a very satisfying answer.' Stephanie glanced at James. 'I like your theory better James. At least this way, both sides can feel they have access to truth even if it's from a different angle.'

'That's a good way of putting it. I like that.' James smiled as he sat back. 'Are we ready to continue? We can all have refills if we want, can't we dear?' James looked at Mary.

'Sure.' She lifted her cup. 'Just ask and I'll get it for you.'

Stephanie acknowledged Mary's offer as she put her cup down. 'Now, I need some clarification. Before we adjourned, we established that we could compare the present inward state of the mystic with the future deified state of the theist. Can we explore that idea a bit more?'

James nodded his head. 'Yes. I've been giving it some thought. In mystical 'vertical' time, let's make a separation in our minds between the outward, 'extrinsic'

or natural state and the inward, 'intrinsic', essential state. The mystics would say that their inward, 'intrinsic', essential state is divine - one with Ultimate Reality...'

Stephanie interrupted, 'but we say their outward extrinsic state is not'.

James pointed at Stephanie. 'Right. The mystic has an out-of-time experience of this intrinsic state, recognises it as divine, but reverts, or should revert, to the extrinsic state when he or she is back in the ordinary world of time and space.'

'Bravo!' Stephanie clapped her hands. 'I see it now. As Joseph Campbell said in his television broadcast 'The Power of Myth' 'If you think, 'I here, in my physical presence and in my temporal character, am God,' then you are mad. You are God, not in your ego, but in your deepest being, where you are one with the transcendent.'

Kevin nodded. 'That makes sense. Good old Joseph Campbell.'

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James looked from one to another. 'Then, are we ready to 'switch' to 'linear' time?'

'Yes.' Stephanie said and the others nodded. James continued. 'Good. In the 'linear' time world-view, it's the future, glorified state that's divine, as we've already said.'

Stephanie completed the 'switch'. 'So then, the future, glorified state of the theist corresponds to the inward, 'intrinsic', essential state of the mystic?'

James nodded and narrowed his eyes as he worked it through. 'That's right. In 'vertical' time we talk about outward and inward. In 'linear' time we talk about present and future.'

Kevin joined in. 'Now I understand the distinction.' Kevin held up his mug to Mary for more coffee. 'OK, we've dealt with enlightened mystics. Now what about converted theists - Christians for example?'

James accepted the challenge. 'OK. A Christian is regarded as having become a child of God, which is a new 'status' before God, but is still in a sinful 'state'. So I think we need to distinguish between 'status' and 'state'. OK with that Steph?'

Stephanie nodded. 'Yes. I'm familiar with that terminology.'

'Good. It's fairly standard, traditional Christian doctrine.' James looked back at Kevin. 'Now, you asked about converted theists. Converted Christians usually say their status has changed but they don't normally think they've become perfect. Unless they ascribe to Wesley's 'sinless perfection' doctrine, they don't expect to have their 'glorified', 'deified' bodies until after death.'

'OK.' Stephanie seemed puzzled. 'We've compared the 'converted' Christian and the 'enlightened' mystic but we seem to have three stages in linear time but only two in the other. How can that be?'

James frowned. 'It shouldn't be. If we 'switch' properly, we should have three possibilities in each world-view. Let's work it through again. From the 'linear' point of view of Christians for example, the first stage - the unconverted - is a natural state but no divine status; the second stage after conversion is a natural state and a divine status; and the third stage is the future, divine state after death, or at the resurrection. These are stages in linear time.'

'OK I follow that.' Stephanie said. 'But there seems to be only two in the 'vertical' world-view?'

'No.' James shook his head. 'From the 'vertical' point of view, the first possibility - the unenlightened - is a natural state and a divine state unawares; the second possibility - the enlightened - is a natural state and an awareness of the divine state; and the third possibility is the divine state after death.'

Stephanie's eyes lit up. 'So, in 'vertical' time, the mystics don't think of it as a change in status, only a change in awareness?'

James smiled with relief. “That’s how I see it. You are really ‘switching’ now Stephanie.’

‘She might be but I think I got lost in the ‘switch’ at one point.’ Kevin looked at Mary. ‘How’re you coping Mary?’

‘Oh!’ Mary shrugged her shoulders. ‘I’ve heard a lot of this before, you know.’ She looked across at James with a smile and a sigh. ‘But I must admit I’m getting a bit confused today.’

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They went over the comparison of the ‘converted’ Christian and the ‘enlightened’ mystic until the ‘switching’ procedure was firmly entrenched in all their minds and then Stephanie asked James a question. ‘You’ve succeeded in paralleling the different world-views of divine status but not in synthesising them.’

James shrugged his shoulders. ‘Maybe it’s not possible to synthesise the two views without distorting one or the other, like the two map projections, and we might just have to live with that.’

‘Well done,’ said Stephanie warmly. ‘Now you can’t be accused of that naughty process of ‘syncretism’ can you?’

He grinned at her. ‘No. I don’t think I’m mixing the two together. I could be oversimplifying each view though, so it’ll correspond neatly, but you and others will have to judge me on that.’

‘We’ll do our best,’ Stephanie answered for the others. ‘But you have a good insight into your own biases.’ She continued to question the group. ‘Have you tried to apply the ‘switching’ technique to any other issues?’

‘The doctrine of creation when I was talking to the chief...’ James corrected himself in deference to Stephanie. ‘...to Peter.’

Stephanie nodded and looked into the distance. 'He told me about that. He found that helpful.'

James realised that Stephanie and Peter must've done a lot of talking last night.

Stephanie looked at her watch. 'How about a tough one to finish up on?'

Kevin had a suggestion. 'What about the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation? Is that tough enough for you?'

Stephanie asked. 'You mean God taking human flesh?'

'Right. Becoming a person in Jesus of Nazareth,' Kevin added.

'OK.' Stephanie raised a finger. 'Now let's hear you apply your 'switching' to that doctrine.'

Kevin looked at James and smiled knowingly. 'Stephanie, I think the exercise has already been done for us in a theological debate during the 1970s called 'The Myth of God Incarnate'.'

'That's right.' James looked at Kevin with narrowed eyes. 'That's probably why he suggested it.'

Stephanie screwed up her eyes. 'I've read about that debate. Now you've got me intrigued. Are you saying that your theory resolves an unsolved twenty five year old debate?'

'I suppose it does.' Kevin looked at James and smiled. 'I hadn't thought of it that way.'

Stephanie spread her hands. 'All I know about 'The Myth of God Incarnate' debate is that it was a collection of essays that challenged the traditional interpretation, whatever that is.'

James accepted the challenge. 'The traditional interpretation is that Jesus was divine and unique and that there is no continuity between him and the rest of us who are merely human.'

‘So what did the others say?’ asked Stephanie.

Kevin answered. ‘They tended to see Jesus as the revelation of a time-less truth - the truth about the true nature of all human beings. The Christ event for them was an example of the relationship with the divine that is already ours in essence.’

‘Intrinsically,’ Stephanie raised a finger triumphantly.

‘Exactly.’ James agreed. ‘So, for the ‘mythographers’ as they were called, the main difference between Jesus and others is that he was fully aware of his intrinsic divine state and others were not.’

‘Enlightened,’ said Stephanie. ‘That certainly sounds like the mystical world-view to me.’

‘To us also.’ James leant forward. ‘But Steph, the ‘mythographers’ don’t seem to have been aware that their interpretation was based on the ‘vertical’ view of time. They certainly didn’t make it explicit. This debate went on and on, back and forward for ages, with no agreement.’

Stephanie sat back and smiled. ‘So your solution would mean that they were both right from their own point of view?’

‘Yes.’ Kevin agreed. ‘But working with different world-views without realising it.’

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Stephanie nodded slowly as she considered these new ideas. ‘And what do the mythographers say about the cross?’

James answered. ‘Same idea. They said the cross didn’t so much effect change in the structures of reality but revealed time-less truth about the structures of reality. His death revealed a truth beyond itself.’

‘The ‘vertical’ view again.’ Stephanie raised her eyebrows at Kevin. ‘As you said before, our ‘switching’ job has been done for us. So your solution would be that they were both partly right?’

‘Yes.’ Kevin answered raising a finger. ‘But working with different world-views, whether they were conscious of it or not. I believe that both sides of the debate had their advantages.’

‘And disadvantages.’ Stephanie looked from one to the other. So both interpretations are necessary for our fullest understanding?’

James responded. ‘Once again, we believe so. This proves how important it is to recognise and distinguish between the two different world-views. Neither interpretation on its own is free of problems. Both together cover most, if not all, of the difficulties.’

Stephanie cocked her head on one side. ‘True, but our logical Western minds find it hard to hold them together.’

James nodded in agreement and then remembered something. ‘But one of the writers in the debate did harmonise the two views.’

Stephanie looked quickly at James. ‘I’d like to hear how he did that. Then I must go.’

‘OK. John Taylor it was. He suggested that what God did through Jesus Christ is the one act which it was always necessary that he should accomplish in time and at the right time...’

‘Linear time.’ Kevin interpreted.

‘Yes...’ James acknowledged and then continued. ‘If He was to be the God who throughout time is accessible and present to every human being in grace and truth.’

‘Vertical time.’ This time Stephanie supplied the interpretation, sat back and shook her head in wonder. ‘Talk about reconciling opposite viewpoints.’

James smiled happily. 'Yes. It's one of my favourite quotes.'

Stephanie stood up. 'Thank you James, Mary, Kevin. It has been very 'enlightening'. Now, if you don't mind, I must go. James, I'll go over all this again at home, get it sorted out in my own mind and then I'll get back to you about a possible interview on my programme, if you're still interested?'

James noticed Mary glance at him in surprise. He had forgotten to mention Stephanie's offer to her. 'I certainly am, if you are.'

'Good. See you all again soon I hope.' She smiled warmly as they accompanied her to the front door.

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Tuesday, 9th May

Daily Mail, Bowen Hills

The Religion Report

Last week I said that the personal God is generally experienced within normal, historical, 'linear' time, as we understand time. On the other hand, the Impersonal Absolute is usually experienced in mystical contemplation along with a sense of timelessness.

If both understandings are valid within their respective time frameworks, then both understandings are necessary for a fuller truth. This week we will look at ways of keeping a balance between the two world-views in daily life using a sort of mind game.

If we call the time-less view 'vertical' time then there is a possibility of switching back and forth between linear time

and 'vertical' time. The technique is difficult to explain but I can give you an example of how it can be applied.

Today I will compare the Christian doctrine of Creation in linear time with the same doctrine in 'vertical' or time-less time.....

Peter Preston finished reading and then looked up at James. 'This is good stuff. I like it.'

James was pleased. 'Thanks Chief.'

Peter's face changed as he lowered his eyes. 'Unfortunately, a lot of the feedback from our readers is becoming less positive.'

James' face fell. 'I've noticed that too. In fact I was 'roasted' last week by a clergyman who was extremely hostile to anything unorthodox.'

Peter frowned indignantly. 'Who was that?'

'Pastor Adrian Markwell.'

'I've heard of him.' The Chief shook his head sadly. 'Don't worry. Nothing but a traditional hard-line would satisfy him.'

'I suppose not, but it was very unpleasant. Especially when he finished up using the same phrases as our mystery telephone caller.'

Peter's jaw dropped. 'Surely you don't...?'

James waved one hand dismissively. 'No, I don't think it was him, but it was really weird.'

'I'm sure it was.' His boss looked at James and paused as if he were trying to decide what to say. Then he asked, 'Would you and Mary be able to come to dinner next Saturday night?'

'I think so, Chief. Whereabouts?'

‘At our place, if you don’t mind traditional roast dinners.’

‘Not at all. We don’t have too many traditional roast dinners.’ James wondered why the Chief was so solemn. He had been trying to say something but couldn’t bring himself to say it, or so it seemed to James, but he said, ‘Thank you. We’d love to come.’ Mary’s advice about not getting into a pastoral relationship with the boss came into his mind but, *if Mary was invited, it would have to be a social occasion wouldn’t it?*

The Editor stood up but was still holding the article. ‘Is this a copy?’

‘Yes Chief. You can keep it. I’ll check with Mary about Saturday and let you know straight away if there’s any problem. Otherwise, we’ll see you Saturday night.’

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James was about to leave his office when Janelle rang through and said, ‘James, it’s the police. A Sergeant Taylor to speak to you.’

James took the call, listened for a while and breathed a sigh of relief. ‘Thank you very much Sergeant. That’s a load off our minds.’ He pressed the disconnect button briefly and then rang his wife at work. ‘Mary. Great news. They’ve charged our mystery caller with a number of offences.’

‘Oh that *is* good news.’

‘Apparently, when they challenged him directly, he admitted it and started preaching at them - ranting and raving, they said.’

‘I’ll really be able to sleep well now. Is that all?’

‘Yep. See you tonight.’

James had just hung up when reception rang. ‘Pastor Markwell here to see you, James. He says it’s urgent. ... Sorry, James.’

James was in a good mood. ‘That’s OK Janelle. Send him in.’

When his visitor entered James stood and motioned him to a seat pleasantly.
'Well, Adrian. What can I do for you?'

The Pastor had a handkerchief in his hands and was twisting it. 'I came to tell you, the police have caught the person who's been pestering you and your wife.'

James was puzzled. 'Yes. They've just rung me but how could *you* know that?'

The visitor hung his head. 'He was one of my...' Then he looked up directly at James. 'Mr McGregor, I'm so sorry.'

James' eyes narrowed. 'Sorry about what?'

'I've just come from the police station. The man was one of my own parishioners. He's been having psychiatric problems and he was quoting my sermons as his authority for his actions. I'm truly sorry.' Adrian Markwell shook his head slowly from side to side.

'So am I Adrian. So am I.' James stood and showed the pastor out without another word.

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Carindale

Mary threw her arms around James as soon as he walked in. 'When you rang me today I felt a great weight lifted from my shoulders. Let's do something to celebrate.'

He took both her hands in his. 'That wasn't the end of it. Pastor Adrian Markwell came in to see me again, straight after I called you.' James then gave her the outline of the conversation.

'You mean you just let him walk out of there?' Mary exploded.

'Well, he was very contrite and I didn't think it was right to kick a man when he was down.'

Mary could not believe her ears. 'James you are far too charitable. Don't you realise he's just as guilty as his parishioner?'

'He wasn't the one who rang us,' he protested.

'No,' agreed Mary, 'but he made the bullets and 'nut-case' fired them, don't you see? He was inciting hatred just as much as the Muslim extremists.'

'I see what you mean. Well, I didn't say anything to make him feel better. I just accepted his apology and showed him the door.'

Mary slumped and shrugged her shoulders. 'Well, maybe that was the best thing to do but I'd have given him a piece of my mind for all the anguish he put us through.'

James put his arm around her as they walked to the lounge. 'I just hope it's taught him a lesson about his theology of hate, but somehow I doubt it.'

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After hearing about Peter Preston's invitation Mary stood up and checked the calendar on the wall. 'Saturday night's free for us. It sounds exciting.'

James looked down. 'Actually, his attitude was a bit strange.'

'Why?' asked Mary, sitting back down on the lounge.

'He tried to say something and couldn't. Then he commented on the feedback on my column.'

Mary looked at him quickly. 'What about it?'

James sighed. 'It's got more hostile over the last few weeks. Maybe I'm too radical or the readers are too conservative.'

Mary took his hand. 'I'm sure there are plenty who aren't.'

James put his head in his free hand. 'I don't know. Maybe I'm going to get the boot.'

‘James, don’t be silly.’ Mary grabbed his arm. ‘Surely he wouldn’t invite us to dinner to terminate your employment. You’re just getting into one of your negative moods.’

James raised his head. ‘I hope you’re right.’

‘Of course I’m right.’ She stood up and smoothed her dress. ‘Now about that reason to celebrate, let’s go out for dinner and then come home and watch a movie.’

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