

29th April 2021

Clever

**“The Devil whoops, as he whooped of old:
‘It’s clever, but is it Art?’”**

Rudyard Kipling, The Conundrum of the Workshops

Ernő Rubik, a Hungarian sculptor and professor of architecture, invented a 3-D combination puzzle in 1974 which quickly took the world by storm. Originally called the “Magic Cube”, when it was licensed to be sold by *Ideal Toy Corp* it was marketed under the name of the “Rubik’s Cube”, and, to date, more than 350 million cubes have been sold worldwide.

The original Rubik’s Cube has six faces covered by nine stickers, white, blue, green, yellow, red and orange. The coloured squares are all jumbled up, and the idea is to twist and turn the faces to get only one complete colour on each side. The world record for solving a 3x3x3 Cube is 3.47 seconds. The record average time the best three of five goes is 5.53 seconds. There’s a one-handed world record of 6.82 seconds, and other records for solving it with your feet, blindfold and in the fewest moves.

Back in the 1980s, I tried to show the children in my church how clever I was. I’d got someone to set up a Rubik’s Cube with only three moves left for completion – all of which had been carefully explained to me. The children were wide-eyed. Who is this clever minister? What amazing skill has he to show this week? I can’t now remember what point I was trying to make, but I *do* know that I got the puzzle completely wrong! The more I tried to remedy my mistakes, the worse it became, till the Rubik’s Cube was as far from being solved as you could imagine. I had failed! Everyone laughed. I can feel the embarrassment even now ...

Did it diminish my standing with my adoring followers? Did the Devil whoop at my “artless” attempt at cleverness? No! The clever Mr Gordon wasn’t as clever as he thought he was, *but* he was prepared to admit it, and the children of his congregation were willing to forgive.

The Rubik’s Cube never saw the light of day after that, but acceptance, understanding and tolerance were on view for all to see. Who knows? Maybe *that’s* the point I was trying to make in the first place ...

A prayer for today

*Clever? Not me! The Devil can whoop as much as he likes, as he’s whooped of old.
But I’m happy to leave the cleverness to the Art of God’s Grace. Amen.*

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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