

10th September 2021

Reflections

“A soul without reflection, like a pile without inhabitant, to ruin runs.”

Edward Young, Night Thoughts (1742)

Thumbing through a poetry anthology of religious and spiritual writings, I was surprised how many poems in the section “Youth and Age” were written in the 20th century. Themes such as “In Touch with God”, “Nature and Landscape”, “Sickness and Suffering” and others had poems from medieval times through to the present day. Why, then, was there a preponderance in the “Youth and Age” grouping of modern poems?

Indeed, when I looked further, I discovered that subsections such as “Death and Beyond”, “Presences Unseen” and “Heaven” were mostly made up of recent poetry too. What is it about our present times that causes this to be the case? Does it come from a society which has become uncertain in itself? And what, one might ask, would be the balance if poems were added from the 21st century, especially those influenced by Covid?

Two thoughts to ponder ... The first is that we are clearly more open and reflective than we have been for generations. Since the 1960s, we’ve largely been cushioned from mass pain and suffering, and, indeed, have lived more comfortable and secure lives than our forebearers have ever done. Added to that, we have a healthcare system which keeps us alive longer and protects us from many ailments which would have severely shortened life expectancy in days gone by. But does that offer us peace of mind? We’re beginning to realise that we need to think about that.

And the second thought is that we are becoming more spiritual, more engaged with what might be considered the important questions of life and death, meaning and purpose, hope and fulfilment. Perhaps for too long we have laid aside such explorations. But no longer. Spiritual things are, I believe, higher on society’s agenda than they have ever been. “A soul without reflection, like a pile without inhabitant, to ruin runs.”

And where will this take us? I have no idea. Perhaps to future anthologies of poetry further skewed to contributions from the spiritual and reflective culture of our present age? But would that be a bad thing?

A prayer for today

As I reflect, may I find more meaning in life and death than I have done before.

As I reflect, may my spiritual life bring me the hope and peace I crave. Amen

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