

Our debt to imagination

By Michael R. Miller

There is a phrase in the Lord's prayer that is familiar to many of us: "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." This is great advice if you know what you owe and to whom you owe it. There is one debt that we as a society are hardly aware of — that is, what we owe to human imagination.

For without this marvelous gift we would not have survived as a species nor developed our human nature with all its potential for good or evil. Perhaps I am biased as an imaginative artist; after all I have this habit of composing music. I believe, though, that imagination plays a much larger role in our personal and communal lives than we realise.

It is by no means limited to young children, pathological liars, and artists. It seems to me that imagination is the leaven that gives life to science, technology, art, and *religion*, heretical though it might appear to some. The historical connection between art and religion runs wide and deep, even though the arts have been restricted by religion from time to time. This apparent control masks what to me is obvious: that religion is itself a *communal art work*, developed over time by a certain culture in a similar way to a distinct language. Generally though, the influence of

individuals is much easier to trace in the evolution of religion than in the case of language.

Unfortunately, either political, cultural, or ethnic rivalries tend to encourage religions to assert their own view of the Divine as the only way to salvation. This often leads to serious abuses too familiar to us in today's world. Until recently some historians favoured monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, praising them as religions of "the book," because they had a high regard for scripture of one kind or another.

Be that as it may, I think that the greatest mistake that these three religions make is *not* to realise that their holy book can become as much of an idol as any graven image. We become as guilty of idolatry as the ancient Jews in Exodus if we turn scripture into a kind of golden calf. Inspired by God or not, it is still imagined and interpreted by fallible human beings.

Of course the most we can do is to form an image of God. No problem with that, unless we forget that this image is as much our doing as God's. God is basically unknowable except through our mind and experience, imperfect and incomplete though we may be. Why can't we accept our imperfection and that of the Universe by

forgiving God for making it imperfect? Instead of relying so much on imaginary worlds like the Garden of Eden, Heaven, and Hell to make moral sense of our lives, why not look for the good in ourselves and in our world? Start from where we are. There's plenty for our imaginations to do right here and now! ✨

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Please God forgive me

My dear God, I owe you all,
You do help me when I fall!
I must never miss your call
From behind the space-time wall!

I do now appreciate
When my hand you kindly take,
Whether conscious or awake
You're a balm for every ache!

When I doubted your existence
Concentrating on renascence,
You poured Love and Oh such
patience
On my soul that seemed senescent!

Let this cry come from my own lip:
You, I know, I must now worship,
Let me board your lofty flagship,
Which space-time does softly
unclip.

You did send us Jesus Christ
To perform His sacrifice,
His act did indeed suffice
To break space-time in a trice!

Please forgive my many failings
All my sins and many strayings,
I have loved too many earth-things
I now need what love of God brings

— Zoltan Dienes, Annapolis Valley MM