

**Scribbles
on
Love and Religion**

Bev Floyd

What should we think about Religion and belief?

1. Do we need to believe?

- *Certainty appeals to us. It helps us feel secure. It creates a bond in society when many people believe the same thing. It appears to be a normal reaction of the human condition to make sense of the world by seeing it in terms of 'Religion'. The presence of agreed beliefs can help society control harmful behaviour. The corollary to this is that it can also muzzle new ideas for example, the place of women in the world. Hmmm.*
- *On the other hand, it is possible to believe in not believing—to trust oneself to not knowing; to float over a sea thousands of feet deep and to carry on; to be 'agnostic'; to keep options open.*

2. Is it helpful to believe?

- *It can be. We feel part of a cohesive group. We 'understand' the world from an agreed perspective. We find meaning and purpose for our lives. We are stronger by virtue of associating with others of the same views.*
- *On the other hand, when doctrine becomes skewed or people allow too much of their autonomy to be taken, then dreadful things can happen in the name of religion and belief. Religion **can** be a curse.*

3. Is a positive belief better than a negative one?

- *Hmmm. Depends on the outcomes. Even apparently positive Religious ideas can carry a message to denigrate the self excessively—take the examples of ‘sacrifice’; obedience; chastity—all of which can have hidden negative outcomes if not applied with good sense and wisdom.*

4. How should we decide what to believe?

- *This is a very difficult question. Usually we start by believing what our parents and significant others tell us. Then we find that some of these messages are not correct or, if correct for others, do not suit our particular circumstances. If we’ve had religious instruction we may be asked to put our faith in one of three sources of authority:*
 - i. the Bible or other religious book*
 - ii. the organisation—church or committee*
 - iii. the Spirit*
- *The Bible, Koran and other revered religious books, despite containing a marvellous wealth of wisdom and inspiration, are flawed as a source of authority. They are subject to interpretation; they have been tampered with and there is no certainty even about the text; they are the product of many minds over many years and cultures and ideas; they contain ideas that are counter-productive to a good life e.g. ‘smiting enemies’. Hmmm.*
- *Although many acts of beauty, courage and helpfulness have been done in the name of the church, and on balance the world may be a better place for it, Church, Pope or other religious leader(s) are also not an adequate or reliable source of authority. Ideas have been stifled; dissenters have been killed; women have been relegated to second-class citizens as a result of mistaken ideas within organised religion.*

- *Relying on ‘the Spirit’ can lead to beautiful lives of selflessness or lives of absolute stupidity—take the example of sects and cults. There is really no way of knowing for sure if what one person says ‘the Spirit’ is leading them to do is any better than what another says. Hmmm.*
- *What does that leave as authority?*

5. Should we believe what we’re told?

Depends who tells us. We need to develop personal canons of ‘who’ and ‘what’ is likely to be a reliable source of information--an example of this is the way we find a tradesman or medical person to help us. It is trial and error, but informed by search, discussion, comparison etc and then by noticing how effective the outcomes are.

6. Should Reason be our guiding principle or should Faith?

- *I’d say Reason. The Scientific method has been one of the world’s great ‘inventions’ over the past few hundred years. It is a process by which we can test our ideas carefully and logically; it builds in critical analysis (not just in the process, but by others external to the process); it emphasises the need to be continually open to new ideas.*
- *On the other hand, it is possible for ‘Science’ to mask bias—against anything that cannot be proven (yet!); to make life appear lifeless; to reduce the world and its amazing diversity to a mechanical operation without feeling or virtue. Perhaps this happens because some of the people attracted to scientific tasks prefer order to imagination. Hmmm.*

7. Do we lose something by trusting Reason rather than Intuition?

- *Many of the world’s greatest scientists have used Intuition as well as Reason. There is no need to discard Intuition because we use Reason as our guiding principle.*

8. What are the indications that belief is reasonable or unreasonable?

A check-list could be drawn up to show the effect people's beliefs are having on their own lives and the lives of people around them. Generally speaking, if our beliefs enhance our lives, the lives of others and the condition of society, then they could be considered reasonable.

Drawing up such a check-list wouldn't be a simple matter, but could be done—in fact someone may have already done it!

9. What can we believe?

Anything we like—until we speak or act on what we believe. Then the power of friends, family, society and culture will force us to reconsider. In the face of opposition we may stay firm to our beliefs or we may decide that discretion is the better part of valour and conform to the ideas of others.

10. Is one of the World's major religions to be preferred over another?

That's not something I am in a position to know. I happen to like many of the Christian ideas, because they have been part of my life since childhood and intimately connected with my struggle to grow in wisdom and understanding.

11. Is 'Religion' the same as 'Belief'?

For many people 'Religion' means a set of doctrines and behaviours that must be complied with. My idea is that 'Religion' is a search for meaning, which makes it possible for me to continue to redefine what I believe and (possibly) improve my understanding.

12. When traditional beliefs are questioned, how should we behave?

- *If we are of the opinion that 'Religion' is a set of unchanging doctrines and behaviours then it is understandable that we would want to defend those views. Our social cohesion, our security would fall apart if these beliefs were shown to be flawed.*
- *On the other hand, looked at with 'modern' eyes, this is a dereliction of our duty to follow truth wherever it may lead us. It ignores the great gift of scientific method in favour of obscurantism.*

13. How reasonable is the Christian God?

Which one? I'm not being facetious. There are almost as many Christian Gods as there are people. My own view, processed for many years has moved from a 'vengeful God' to a 'loving God' to a 'Hidden God'.

14. How can we know what God is like?

The same way as we choose a tradesperson or a medical advisor—by our experience. Some people claim to have mystical experiences of God. Certainly, there are 'religious'/'mystical' experiences that bring about substantial and almost miraculous changes to an individual life. I have experienced something of that nature and there is no doubt that it changed my outlook on life—but did it tell me what 'God' is like. Hmmm.

I have to consider the possibility that these experiences are natural but something that we don't yet fully understand. They could be compared to the changes experienced by 'brain-washing'—not that they need to be any less good for that, but rather they may be a phenomenon that can be useful for either good or evil (whatever that is!).

15. How can we possibly defend some of the things we find in the Jewish and Christian Bible or some of the things done by the Church over the years?

The simple answer is that we can't—and we shouldn't try. If something is clearly immoral, unreasonable or the result of social/cultural ignorance, we should admit it while at the same time trying to hold on to any essential truths that may still reside in the text or the actions despite the flaws.

A major problem Christianity faces in the modern world is its inability to move on; continuing to defend the indefensible; being unreal; being illogical; lacking faith in the essentials. I always think that if 'God' is worthy of being 'God' there shouldn't be a problem of testing that worth by asking questions.

16. Has religion done more harm than good?

I don't think there is any way to know the answer to this question. It will be like the sheep and the goats—only decided when (if) there is a reckoning at the end of Time.

17. Do all of the World's religions have something special to offer?

I would think they do, but with the same reservations as in the case of Christianity.

18. Could we figure out a way to amalgamate our world-wide beliefs?

It wouldn't feel like a 'revealed' religion—but perhaps, in time, and if it were based on the best wisdom of the world, it could satisfy the deepest intuitive and spiritual needs of people who hunger for certainty.

19. Would 'God' mind us asking all these questions?

Nah!

20. Should we try to turn this discussion the opposite way around and look it from 'God's' point of view?

How can we do that? We're mortal and limited. We do what we can from that perspective.

*Don't stop reading—I've put on my poetry hat
and the results appear below...*

Jesus

As a baby he was loved
and wanted
Magi came..
A star meandered
across the sky
Everyone wondered why
but he didn't know then
It was only when
he began to grow
that he came to know
the truth

'What is the truth?'
said Pilate when
Jesus was about to die
The truth—an innocent
man
brought to trial not for
crime..
not for what he was or
what he'd done
but because the 'powers
that be'
could not abide the truth
he told
His boldness....

In Pilates hall that stormy
night
did he look back or turn
aside?
Did he deride the hand of fate
or turn his hate on Pilate?
No.. not then.. or ever
He persevered..
Maintained his truth
His truth.. that all
should be as one
That none should be despised
Gentile and Jew
You and me and them..
no longer at odds
but incredibly.. unpredictably
needing each other..
accepting each other..
loving each other..
This was his truth..
that love would eventually
overcome all barriers..
all hatreds (whether old or
new)
and win the day...

The prophets of old

Have the prophets reached
their use-by date..?
Are they redundant..
superfluous
outmoded
Erroneous?
Or is there still a place
for bitter truths
that people would prefer
not to hear?

They tore the prophets
to pieces
Threw them to the lions
Starved and killed them
Ignored the words they spoke
Why did the prophets
not give up
and go away?
Why did they persist
even as their tormentors
continued to resist
their every word?

False prophets

Then we hear as well
of prophets who were false
and here again
the question is to know
what should be done
Can truth be won
from such uncertainty?

Modern day prophets

So feel the way
Say just enough
Be brief..
sure-footed..
wise.. cautious..
ready to respect
the changing views..
the clues to action..

Perhaps the prophets
we know of old..
so bold
need to become the
men and women of this age
in knowledge and truth
enlarged
but still as firm and true..

Wait.. surely there is some
tiny part of life
to know.. to really know
But even in the smallest thing
we are dismayed by the
complexity of it all
A butterfly's wing..
The ripple of the
softly-passing breeze
is incontestably unknowable
Each small feature of our lives
if magnified
could then be magnified again
No end to the innocent detail
we would find

It takes then.. a steady mind
to find some order
and some balance
in the infinitesimally
teeming Universe
ripe with things to see and
know
Where will I throw my hat?
What boundaries should I set
to my inquisitiveness?

I want to believe..

Although it's
Biologically proven
that all there is..
is flesh and blood
and dreams and visions
are no more than the store
of perceptions
in the brain..

Yet.. I want to believe
in something bigger..
the trigger as it were
for this wonderful world
A hope is in me that
we weren't just hurled
into space for no reason
that.. in fact..
our season on earth
from birth to the end
meant something
It wasn't without a purpose
and doesn't just finish
as our brain tissue
starts to diminish

Proof of meaning

Is the number of things
in the Universe
and their complexity
proof of meaning..?
Proof that this world has
worth?

I think not...

Mere numbers or
complexity
is just vastly meaningless

I seek a sign...

that in the midst of
all these things..
the history
the mystery..
there is some reason
to keep on living

But I faintly know
that certainty
cannot be sought
from anywhere else
but in the centre of myself
The secret of meaning lies
within....

What if life..

What if life..
is the meaning of life..
that the journey
is all there is?
What if all lovely things
last only a moment
in time
What if rhyme is all
that lasts
while everything else
passes and fades
What if the soul
lives only for now
How would that feel?
What if nothing
we see
is real...?
What if?
What if?
What if?
Why would it matter
this endless chatter
to try to discover
the meaning of it all....?

What if the rose..

were to say
I intend to stay
the way I presently am..
Unless I can discover
the meaning of life
I don't intend
to move a muscle
No buds..
No delicate petals..
No wasting my scent
on the desert air..
Unless I am clear
what it's all about
all this growing
is out of the question..
It's only knowing
that matters
I want to know
what it means
to be alive
*'to strive.. to seek..
to find.. and not to yield'**
and until I do
you won't see me
bloom....

27.79 * Ulysses by
Lord Alfred Tennyson

A big myth

A big myth
A solid.. substantial
framework
on which to build
Yes.. something firm
on which to stand
Something to hand on
to our young
Something to bind us
wind us.. distract us
from the dreary
singleness we bear

Something to be ahead
and draw us on
Almost anything..
we cry with longing..
to give us a hope
of belonging..
Something bigger..
more substantial
larger than ones or twos

Maximisation of
winding truths
Going back and forth
South and North
until no one can tell
how well-united they are

All is forgotten
in the grateful roar
of contentment
and we close the door
on just being one.. alone
divided.. ill-content

It was never meant
to be so
We were meant
to be greater than
simply ones and twos

This knowledge grows
in every breath we take
and we make ourselves
over to be part of a
greater whole..
a deathless unity....

A laser of love

Love as a weapon..
an energetic force field..
a stunning.. cunning
way to overcome hate..
to abate cruelty
Directing molecules
not to scatter
apprehensively
or to act defensively
Focussing a ray
of protection..
Activating the detection
of sham and hypocrisy
Calling into being
a new way of seeing
Creating light
which night
cannot extinguish
Making us wish
to be One
and have done with
pretension....

Renewal

The rising serpent
energy of the world
is coiled..

All over.. skins are
splitting
Vessels too paltry to
contain
the growing surge
give way to pain..
The urge for renewal
is let loose and
is ready to strike
Like a thousand suns
colliding..
imploding..
exploding..
Unpent force..
Inexplicable source
of change and growth
Outgrowing outworn
garbs
Coming with barbs
that pierce our skin
and letting the energy
within
emerge....

Going together.. growing
Knowing the world's
wisdom

Holding on for the
Hair-raising ride
Siding with the universe
Waiting to see when it
ends
Hoping to survive the
journey intact
Expecting it will be so
Knowing somehow
that despite the
unspeakable force
there's a certain truth
and governing love
behind it all

The crashing waves
and the gnashing
tectonic plates
are subject to the law of
love
And there's nothing
above the force of love....

REFRAIN

The rising serpent
energy of the world
is coiled..
ready to strike
with demented force..
All over.. skins are
splitting

Vessels too paltry to
contain
the growing surge
give way to pain..
The urge for renewal
is let loose..
outgrowing outworn
garbs..
coming with barbs
that pierce our skins..
letting the energy within
emerge..
A world snaky and lithe..
shiny new..
dangerously bright..
emerges from the skin
that held it tight



We're mortal

and when we approach
the portal of death
and our breath
is about to depart
we're not quite sure
that this is a door
we want to go through

There's not much
can be done
about this
Crying doesn't
stop dying
It still goes on...

While we're still here..
alive
(or appear to be)
We must strive to come
to terms
with the fact that one day
worms will destroy
our flesh
Yet maybe.. just maybe
we'll see some part
of the life we've led..
extended...

We only can taste a piece

of the pie
We can't have it all
Beauty touches our lives
now and then
but we move on
Life is a journey
upon which we ponder
We want to feel
that it all
belongs to us
but moments of fleeting
beauty
come and go
and we know it for a
moment
and move on
It is gone
and one day we also
will pass
Like grass and the flowers
our hours will have
come and gone

Is there a way to have it all

Forever?
To never need to know
an end to the beauty..
and the joy..
and the love..
To feel the peaceful wings
of the dove
on our face
and to trace our yesterdays
and todays
on the map that has
no edges..
no beginnings..
no endings..
no rough and smooth..
just endless joy
and love and beauty
Is there a way?
Or does everything decay
and dissolve and revolve
endlessly..
Mindlessly?

I'm inclined to think not

What will it mean

that we've been on earth
for a span of years?
Will it help the world
on its way?
I'd be content to believe
my life has meant that..
I'd be flattered
to be a part
of the heart of things
A vein in a butterfly wing
A skein of wool on a cat
A tooth in a bat...
Or perhaps to mingle with
brain cells
And tingle with ideas
of the universe expanding
I'd like to understand
something of a grand plan
To be a part
of the heart of things
Butterfly wings..
How the butcher bird sings..
And many. .many other
such beautiful things...

A wise old owl

is on the prowl
around my bed
It speaks to me of death
and letting go that one last
breath..
It says 'it's not so difficult
to die'
And really I have no
suitable reply...

'Why?' is a question on
my lips
and at my finger tips
But an owl doesn't have
to answer
such foolish questions
It just flies away..
and leaves us to ponder
(with a sigh)
why it is that things must
die...

Why you and I
will come to an end
How death will rend
the breath from our body
leaving it limp..
and lifeless..
and motionless...

I confess I don't really like
the idea of dying
although I've been trying
to expand
my understanding

Perhaps it's not real
Perhaps we just feel
upset and bereft
when a loved one
has left...
and that's all there is...or

that we recycle
Come back in another form
warm and more human
than before
If so.. wouldn't it be nice
to know for sure

Oh it's very queer to have
to die and personally
I think I'd like..
to understand why....

Maybe there's a chance

In the beginning

And at the end
as I wend my way
through this life of mine
Living each event
fully
But only understanding
dully
what it's all about
Will I have achieved
something worthwhile?
Will I have lived
with style
and beauty?
I'm rather interested
in beauty
just now
and how to improve
the amount
that surrounds me
How excellent
it would be
to constantly
live in a way
that brought beauty
into being...

Each day is a little death

Each day is a brand new
breath
Each step of the way
Is a mystery
Of life
And death
And decay
That can sometimes be
Quite confusing-bruising

It isn't a vase

but a burial urn
and flowers
stricken...
severed from life
await the final
cut
The long, lingering
death
by degrees...
'til drooping
petals withered
drop down dry
and sere
No longer a thing
of beauty
and joy
to behold
but weary death
in life
Fit only for exclusion
decayed
rotted
green
and caked with slime
It wasn't a vase
But a burial urn...

Love and death

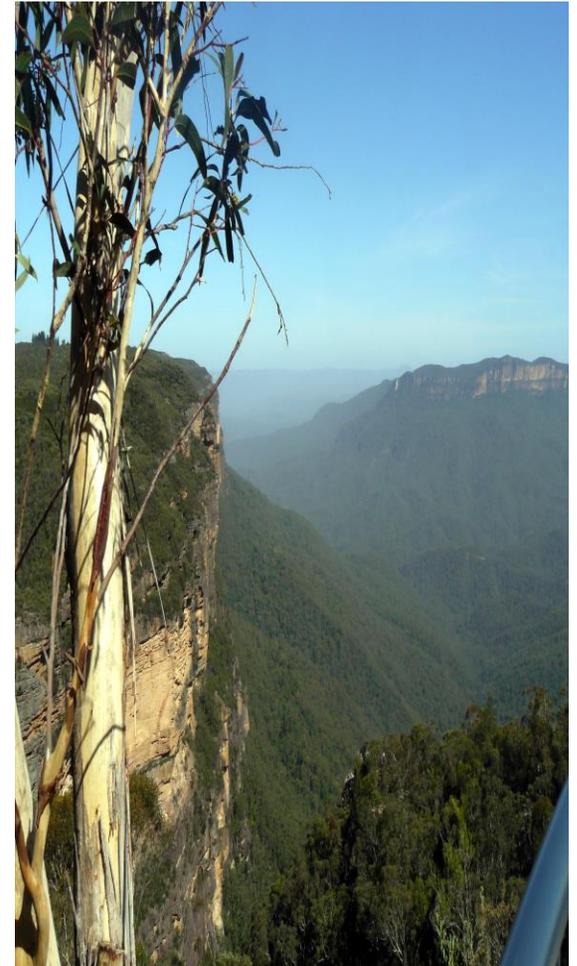
Breath and void
are sometimes hard
to reconcile

A beginning
and an end
Something to bend
the mind
wherein we find
a difficult truth

Are we
ready to understand..?
ready to expand creation
if that's what it takes..?
Ready to fit
through the crack..?
to enter the black hole
of despair
and come out
the other side
of hope..
having found
the capacity
to cope
with the daily rounds..
to experience
the ground of being...

When I'm just about to die

I'd like to be carried out
under the sky
(the beautiful blue sky)
And I'd like to look
for one last time
at the breeze moving
in the fronds of the trees..
Hear the birds fluttering..
chattering..
Watch the green goodness
of leaf and limb..
Enjoy a last whim to reach
out and touch the clouds..
It's what I love most..
The Holy Ghost moves
into my soul
I feel whole
and connected..
Not subjected to all
the inconvenience
of daily experience
That's how and where
I'd like to die..
Under the beautiful wide.. blue
sky...



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The New Commandments

1. Speak the truth.
2. Take time to understand people.
3. Go out of your way to help people in need.
4. Learn the value of respect for self and others.
5. Do your work as well as possible.
6. Have enough of everything but not too much.
7. Care for the environment.
8. Help build up your community.
9. Love yourself then you will be able to make a more positive contribution to society.
10. Bring up children well.
11. Take responsibility for making humane and intelligent decisions in your community, organisation and workplace.
12. Be joyful

A Liturgy for 21st Century Christians

This world is our home. We enjoy all its material benefits.
We experience its joys and its woes.

We will die eventually but while we live, we will struggle and grow to meet its many challenges.

We are thankful for all the men and women who have lived before us:

- for those who have lived good lives;
- for those who have designed and built and added to the welfare we now enjoy;
- for those who have explored the mysteries and honed the wonderful truths that make our lives richer.

Even though in many respects they conformed to their own times and lacked the knowledge we now have, we honour them for their honest efforts to make a difference to the world as they found it.

We are grateful for friends and contemporaries who enrich our lives:

- for loved ones;
- for relatives;
- for people who work to provide our food;
- for nurses and doctors;
- pilots and drivers;
- for politicians and scholars;
- for children

We are amazed by nature:

- its resilience;
- its beauty;
- its adaptability;
- and its power.

We acknowledge, with pleasure and gratitude, the animals and other creatures that call this world their home and that provide us with many benefits.

We are sad to think that we have not always been sensitive to their needs or realised our absolute inter-connectedness with them in the scheme of things.

We accept that we need to combine our efforts to make this world, our home, a better place for all who live here:

- to preserve its beauty, adaptability and its power;
- to ensure that everyone and everything that calls Earth, 'Home' is given the opportunity to thrive and to live to their full potential.

In order to achieve this goal, we realise that we need to understand God as:

- the 'Ground of our Being';
- the life-giver;
- the joy of life;
- the well-spring of all creative endeavour

We want to open ourselves to the ‘Breath of God’; the inspiration and the comfort and the sustenance that we have sometimes felt but which we want to be aware of in our lives as a constant presence.

Just as Jesus went among his own community filled with a spirit of love and power, we want to be empowered to live lives that make a difference in our community and among those we meet each day.

We will commit ourselves to each other in a spirit of love and wholeness to:

- support and encourage;
- play with and enjoy;
- admonish suitably.



