

Two Poems

by

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PANTOCRATOR

Christ Almighty!

How you stare at me

From ceilings walls and screens

Of every Cypriot church.

'Just 'cos you're paranoid' you say

'Does not mean I can't get you'

Silent witness, ever-present listener.

Iconoclastic, I –

Could scratch your eyes out –

Try to block your ears

To stop your verdict.

I - would come before some local magistrate

You - would come again in glory!

Defeated, I ask you

Please pull back the veil

Dividing me from your more wholesome Self

And let the sunlight in.

The literal translation of the Greek 'pantokrator' is 'ruler of all', which might equate to the English 'Almighty'.

This poem is about the most important religious icon in the Orthodox Church, which I encountered on holiday in Cyprus as the dominant image in every church building. It faced me with the question 'Is He watching me or

watching out for me? Is the eye of God a persecution or a comfort or maybe both? The poem effects a transformation in mood. I am aware that 'surrender' might have been a more spiritually enlightened position than defeat. That may be a work in progress!

OLD TIME RELIGION

'Let the light in' said the preacher
With the bible under his arm
On the grey street in Belfast,
As the evening crowds rushed by.
'Open your hearts to the Lord!' he roared
 'Salvation is here!
For those who share my view
The Truth shall make you free
 To be like me ...'
And the rain fell on his shoulder,
 And the hardened populace
Went on with their squalid war,
 As the light slowly faded
And dawned in another place.

I come from Ireland and have both orange and green in my background. This poem is about the tragedy of sectarianism and the narrow mind. People can be passionate about religion while remaining blind to its reconciliatory message, and betraying its true spirit. On another level the poem is about the isolation of the narcissistic individual whose personal world cannot be enriched by the other. Perhaps sectarianism is a sort of institutional narcissism.

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