

## Immortal Longings (Gordon Andrew Dulieu RIP)

**“God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in man’s heart; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” (Eccles 3.11) + In the name...**

There was a certain spiritual restlessness about Andrew, still remembered by many of us as Gordon. Perhaps it was because a few months after he was born in 1950, he was adopted, albeit by very loving parents whom he adored.

And by ‘spiritual restlessness’ I don’t just mean his pilgrimage through Anglicanism, to Orthodoxy, back to Anglicanism then back to Orthodoxy and finally last year to the Roman Catholic Church. As one of his good friends remarked affectionately on hearing of his death: “at least he won’t have to make up his mind which part of the church he belongs to now!”

Andrew was so intelligent and multi-talented that he was often spoilt for choice in what to do with his life: a gifted school teacher; a versatile actor from Rep to the BBC Radio Drama Company to the Royal Shakespeare Company; many TV appearances including *Poirot* and *Allo Allo*.

He was an accomplished musician and singer. I shed a tear or two last night watching Gordon in the 1983 TV Film *Pride of our Alley* - there he was, handsome, smiling and jolly accompanying Gracie Fields – all immortalised now on YouTube!

His voice was mellifluous and versatile and will be listened to for years to come in the many audio books he recorded, both commercially and for the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

He was a spiritual and respected iconographer commissioned by individuals, parishes and institutions.

In 1990, there was another restless change - he became the Communications Officer for the Diocese of Southwark and the Bishop of Southwark's Press Officer. He had a way with words. He knew how they sounded and used that gift to create scripts, speeches, conference addresses and publications for a bewildering array of organizations in the 90s and on in to this century.

There was huge breadth in his academic studies as well. His PhD at King's College London with a dissertation on *Seventeenth Century Women Dramatists* made him ideally suited to become Head Server here at St Mary's.

Gordon regarded Peter Jones as an extension to the sacristy, and I remember on one occasion when the cry went up throughout the Department Store ‘The Bishop is coming and they’ve lost the ostrich feathers at St Mary’s!’

He had of course a wicked sense of humour: a truly catholic sense of humour, insofar as he would make gentle asides, and let’s be honest, sometimes not so

gentle asides, about everyone and everything indiscriminately.

But of course, like so many intelligent, talented and humorous people, Gordon had dark corners, and self-doubts; inner fears and demons with which he fought.

In many ways he epitomised Augustine's "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee?"

It is a part of the human condition to be absorbed by longings and desires.

And as we follow in the way of Christ, we begin also to realise that behind all our desires and longings, there is a deeper longing; at once both inescapable, and unquenchable.

In our text, the preacher in Ecclesiastes tells us: "God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in man's heart; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." (Eccles 3.11)

The Roman Catholic Philosopher-priest Fergus Kerr who has often preached here, wrote a fine book with the intriguing title: *Immortal Longings*. (SPCK, 1997)

It looks at the philosophy of Martha Nussbaum, Martin Heidegger, Iris Murdoch... and others, through Barthian spectacles.

He examines the various ways in which philosophy has struggled with this universal human longing for transcendence – the sense that 'there must be more to life than just this!'

It is as ancient as the Psalms: "Like as the hart desireth the waterbrook, so longeth my soul after thee, O God."

Even in the best of times, when all is well with the world, the moment is often touched by an inner pain an indistinct longing, intimations of eternity.

We look at a sleeping grandchild or a sleeping lover and know the desire for the moment to last forever, and the pain of knowing our mortality will not allow this. And it produces an un-named longing.

As CS Lewis says "All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasizes our pilgrim status, always reminds, beckons, awakens desires. Our best havings are wantings." (*Letters*, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1959)

Restless, in his early 50s, Gordon was awarded a First Class degree in Art History. He knew there was a deep connection between aesthetics and religion – part of that divine restlessness and this immortal longing.

It was partly why he was so meticulous in all that he did to enhance the beauty of liturgy and worship. No plastic covered missals were good enough for the sanctuary. The books must be lovingly made works of art to match the majesty and potency of the words.

The sublime mystery of art, music and the glories of the natural world produce a yearning to comprehend their magnificence and experience them more perfectly and deeply; a longing that is again at times almost painful.

Of course Gordon knew the danger of worshipping the created rather than the Creator; following the *Line of Beauty* in a curve that turns in on itself.

The Scriptures make clear that everything that stifles immortal longings and turns beauty, mystery, love and sex into objects of their own end, fosters ugliness, bitterness, hatred and even violence – and the eclipse of our true selves. This was Freud's *mortido*.

So Adam and Eve grasp the **object** of desire that they might become like gods. Their longing is not for God himself, but to usurp his power.

All the Saints of God have had immortal longings. St Paul sees these immortal longings as satisfied partially in this life, but only as we look with hope towards a greater fulfilment in eternity.

Paul doesn't see satisfaction as coming from **perfection** in this life. Rather he sees our imperfections as fuelling this longing and leading us to a better life here and in the world to come, where, in Edmund Spenser's words to be sung in our communion motet, there will be 'such endless perfectness'.

We can all echo the words of Alban who knew Gordon better than any of us: "Gordon was a man of great

integrity, courage and faith. He was clever, talented and funny and a marvellous friend to many."

Yet Alban knew, as many of us who had those serious moments of engaging with Gordon about his inner life and faith, that Gordon, Andrew, struggled with immortal longings, with the unfathomable eternity that God had set in his heart and with its outworking in his life.

At his most contented, he was happy simply to trust in the redeeming work of Jesus; to believe in the Holy Catholick Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of Sins; the Resurrection of the Body; and the life everlasting.

Here at this Holy Table, this altar of the Lord, the veil is thin, and we draw close to that innumerable host who have entered into the perfect rest of God.

*Requiescat in pace. Amen.*