

# Along the track

## Being Fantastic

Recently I went looking for a book in one of Melbourne's biggest bookshops. Over many years, I don't think I have ever been in there without buying something. I was looking for a rather interesting book reviewed in *The Age* that promised to ask 'The Big Questions' about philosophy, doctrine and religious practice. After some time I found it, and other religious books..... in the Fantasy Section!

Initially it was a bit of a shock to discover what I find so inspiring, so energising, so motivating, so intriguing, so challenging (at the same time as being so exasperating and vexing) relegated to fantasy. Spiritual resources have been banished into the wilderness. Or have they?

Fantasy has its roots in what is and what might be. It requires a good dose of realism at the same time as creativity and imagination. They are its essential ingredients. Faith also requires having our feet on the ground, being able to read the signs of the times as well as the gifts of creativity and imagination. Our faith is full of paradoxes. It is not easily explained, it is not set in stone. It challenges us and calls us to question, to go deeper, to discover more, to imagine what might be.

Our faith teaches us that we have an immortal destiny yet all that we experience has a beginning and an end. It asks us to believe that we have been created in the image of God, that we have a divine spark within us but we experience frustration, anger, disappointment, jealousy – in other words, we experience being very human. Faith has an element of nostalgia about it, but it also calls us to be forward looking, to read the signs of these times we live in, to discern where God might be calling us. At times we are weighed down by the suffering and sadness in our world, the cruelty and indifference, yet we believe we live in a world created by a loving God. Faith asks us to believe in an extravagant love story, to step out into the deep, to trust when all around us people demand the facts, they demand certainty. But atheism also demands faith, as does belief in God.

Imagination is not about escaping from reality; it is not fantasy but rather a creative ability we all have, it helps us to make sense of life. Some commentators suggest that the biggest human failing of our time is a lack of imagination. For example, at the heart of empathy is being able to imagine yourself in another's shoes. Once that happens, their suffering

becomes, in part, our suffering. Hence Jesus' story of the Last Judgement – when you fed the hungry or cared for the sick or visited the lonely, you did it to me.

It is the stories of people we remember, getting into their shoes. Stories help us to understand them, where they are coming from, what life is like for them. When we come to understand their plight, step into their shoes, we feel for others and become troubled by their situation, we want to do something about that. Why else suppress the incredible stories of those heroic and heart breaking journeys that asylum seekers make? We dehumanise them when photos are prohibited, names suppressed.

Our faith invites us to an afterlife but challenges us to work to bring about the Vision of God for our world. Yet we don't seem to be able to get our minds around some of the biggest issues facing us – they are too complex, too big, too easy to ignore yet in some cases too awful to contemplate. So what kind of a world do we want to create? We have to be able to imagine what the world might look like if we continue to ignore these issues and what the world might look like if we do something about them. It is hard to imagine what life must be like for those without food or clean water, inadequate shelter and no health care. Sci fi films have helped us to imagine a world of the future, even a world following environmental catastrophe, a world at war. If half what they portray comes to pass, it is very, very scary.

They also help us to imagine a world at peace where justice and fairness are commonplace. So do the Gospels. If faith and religion have been moved to the fantasy section, that may be a reminder of the challenge we are faced with – what kind of a world do we want to create? Imagine that!

Regards  
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