

Through a glass darkly

“For now we see through a glass, darkly” 1 Corinthians 13 V12.

I woke from a dream, not a vivid, full coloured dream; but a muted, shadowed vision. It was a gathering of old university friends, not as we are now but as we were thirty years ago, a memory not full of life but glimpsed shadows. The soundtrack, an echo of remembered laughter and gay, carefree conversation. Even the place of the meeting was not a concrete physical reality but an amalgam of jostled memories; a favourite place on [campus](#), a jolly pub in the city, a seat on a patch of sun lit grass outside a lecture hall.

Unbidden, a phrase from the Letter to the Corinthians sprang to mind, one that that had been read at our wedding, of seeing our current world through a glass darkly. Recollection of one of [Colin Gunton's](#) last [sermons](#) flowed from my reflection on that passage, He spoke of a piece of writing by CS Lewis, who talked of heaven as being like earth – but so much more so, the light more vivid, the grass greener, the sunlight brighter. We know we live our lives “through a glass darkly.’ We cannot know God’s plan, his intentions for us are beyond our comprehension. We seek meaning and structure in our lives and yet what we live now is but a shadow of what will be in heaven. By one of those strange coincidences that invade our consciousness, Colin spoke in the same sermon about the philosopher [Michael Polanyis](#), who I had studied at university. Colin had, a few days before the sermon, been at a conference that talked about his philosophy. Polanyis was both a relativist and a Christian. What had caught Colin’s ear was the comment that we have to develop a frame of mind “in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it may conceivably be false”. We believe absolutely and passionately in our God and in his son Jesus Christ, but both intellectually and spiritually we must, as I suppose, a tenant of our faith, understand that we may be wrong, That is because we see the world and God, through a glass darkly. Search as we might we can never find that Plato’s perfect table. We can never know, absolutely, God’s path for us, nor even, dare I say it, of his existence. We believe absolutely in his being, but it is through a glass darkly.

Like my melancholy reverie – sad not because of its content – which was full of fun, fellowship and fond memories; but because it was a dream; our lives can never be fully complete, fully real until we enter the kingdom of heaven. We make the best of our lives as they are today, in the shadow of God’s grace, but knowing we live them through a glass darkly.

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