

**Wonder and Children**  
**(From the sermon on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2018**  
**by the Rev Prof June Boyce-Tillman)**

*The Lamb from Songs of innocence* by William Blake

Little Lamb who made thee  
 Dost thou know who made thee  
 Gave thee life & bid thee feed.  
 By the stream & o'er the mead;  
 Gave thee clothing of delight,  
 Softest clothing wooly bright;  
 Gave thee such a tender voice,  
 Making all the vales rejoice!  
 Little Lamb who made thee  
 Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,  
 Little Lamb I'll tell thee!  
 He is called by thy name,  
 For he calls himself a Lamb:  
 He is meek & he is mild,  
 He became a little child:  
 I a child & thou a lamb,  
 We are called by his name.  
 Little Lamb God bless thee.  
 Little Lamb God bless thee.

Source: *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David E. Erdman (Anchor Books, 1988)

The sense of wonder  
 That is the sixth sense  
 And it is the natural religious sense.

D H Lawrence from an essay 'Hymns in a man's life'. Mayne, Michael (2008), *This sunrise of wonder, Letters for the journey*, London: Darton Longman and Todd, p23

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting.  
 And cometh from afar:  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God, who is our home:  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close

Thomas Traherne

Jane [eight-year-old daughter] with the liberation of childhood, without rationality or expectation, sees an anarchic landscape in which anything is possible and many things are provocative. She wrestles with language, scans advertisements, shop-signs, logos on vans and trucks. She pays professional attention to the children, in the way that animals are most sensitive to their own species. She searches out things that tether her to a known world, the hoarding that proclaims her favourite brand of chocolate. Volkswagen cars that are like her father's. Hers is a heliocentric universe, and she is the sun. She is fettered by a child's careless egotism, but freed from adult preconceptions. Matthew, her father] perceived for an instant the perpetual now of childhood, the interminable present from which, eventually, escape and which we can never retrieve. We co-habit with these mysterious beings who occupy a different time-zone...[and] whose vision is that of aliens – anarchic, uncorrupt and inconceivable. We talk to them in our language, impose on them our beliefs, and all the while they are in a state of original harmony with the physical world, knowing nothing and seeing everything...It is children alone who experience immediacy; the rest of us have lost the ability to inhabit the present and spend our time in anticipation and recollection.

Lively, Penelope (1992), *City of the Mind*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp86-9, 183

I tried to create an atmosphere in my institution, giving it the principal place in our programme of teaching. For atmosphere there must be for developing the sensitiveness of the soul, for affording mind its true freedom of sympathy...In educational organizations our reasoning faculties have to be nourished in order to allow our mind its freedom in the world of truth, our imagination for the world which belongs to art, and our sympathy for the world of human relationship. This last even more important than learning the geography of foreign lands.

Tagore, Rabindranath and Elmhirst L.K. (1961), *Rabindranath Tagore: Pioneer in Education; Essays and exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L. K. Elmhirst*, London: John Murray p 64

### **Siegfried Sassoon**

I know a night of stars within me;  
 Through eyes of dream I have perceived  
 Blest apparitions who would win me  
 Home to what innocence believed.

I know a universe beyond me;  
 Power that pervades the fluctuant soul,

Signalling my brain it would unbond me  
And make heart's imperfection whole.

I, the chance-comer from creation,  
Blind subject to defending day;  
I, this blithe structure of sensation,  
Prisoned and impassioned by my clay.

”  
This making is a mystery. Me He made  
And left to build my being as best I could:  
A child afraid who for protection prayed,  
Worsted by wrong, but wanting to grow good,

A man betrayed yet blessed by circumstance,  
Seeking self-knowledge, learning through mistake,  
To shaped experience half compelled by chance.  
What work was His, where mind itself must make?

*It is He that hath made us, and not we,  
Ourselves. One moment's aftercome I live,  
Flawed with inherited humanity,  
And fooled by imperfections wrought through race.  
This He first fashioned; this He can forgive  
When granting His unapprehended grace.*

Young children are enchanted and curious with the world; everything is to be explored by taste, touch, smell, hearing and seeing. There is an awe and wonder in this exploration. It is clear that for many children this is an experience of the beyond. How do we support that? In my experience it is done first of all by giving both time and value to this activity and appreciating the magic of it without words - as valuable as teaching the child the correct way to hold a beater or to sing in tune.

H.M. Evans on Wonder

### ***The Tyger* from *Songs of Experience* by William Blake**

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,

Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?