

Friday Night Theology – Friday 20th February, 2009

The Fear

Everyone it seems is a bit scared these days. Duffy, who won 'best female solo artist' at this week's Brits has told us:

I'm scared to face another day
Cos the fear in me just won't go away.
In an instant, you were gone and I'm scared.

Similarly, Paul Weller, who won 'best male solo artist' has sung:

Above the clouds, what's to be found,
I have to wonder - Will I be around.
As my anger shouts - At my own self doubt,
So a sadness creeps - Into my dreams
When you're scared of living - But afraid to die
I get scared of giving - And I must
find the faith to beat it

At least, though, the kind of fear that Duffy and Paul feel is understandable. In Duffy's case, it's the fear of being left alone; in Paul's the fear of death and what lies beyond. But such anxiety seems now to represent the Zeitgeist. Lily Allen released 'The Fear' just a couple of weeks ago, and in the process captured the mood of many:

I want to be rich and I want lots of money
I don't care about clever I don't care about funny
I want loads of clothes and f***loads of diamonds
I heard people die while they are trying to find them
And I'll take my clothes off and it will be shameless
Cause everyone knows that's how you get famous
I'll look at The Sun and I'll look in The Mirror
I'm on the right track yeah I'm onto a winner

*I don't know what's right and what's real anymore
And I don't know how I'm meant to feel anymore
When do you think it will all become clear
Cause I'm being taken over by the fear*

If you ever wanted an example of where secular ideology has got us then this is it. What's the point of life asks Lily? Well, it's about money and image and consumption, and on the one hand, says Lily, that's great, it's 'f***ing fantastic'. But actually, at the same time, she knows it's not. She knows it's empty, it's pointless, it's shallow and meaningless – and that's where *The Fear* comes in. She's left wandering in an amoral universe with no sense of direction, no sense of what matters, and so no wonder she is scared.

In his famous parable of the madman, Friedrich Nietzsche foresaw all of this. Writing just over a hundred years ago, he asks where is God, but then declares, "We have killed him – you and I." He goes on,

All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were

we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?

In the absence of God, then, we are left in a vacuum.

In [Prospect magazine this month](#), Phillip Blond made the point that the selfish individualistic capitalism often associated with Thatcher was in fact born in the 60s when, under the guise of permissiveness, the selfish sexual agent, free of all moral boundaries, was invented. He writes, "The liberal idea of man is then, first of all, an idea of nothing: not family, not ethnicity, not society or nation. But real people are formed by the society of others. For liberals, autonomy must precede everything else, but such a "self" is a fiction." And the great irony of such individualistic liberalism, as C.S.Lewis has pointed out, is that the person entirely free of all constraints is someone alone floating in space. This is Lily Allen's experience, and so no wonder she feels fear.

The fact is we need boundaries, we need a compass, we need direction, we need something or someone beyond ourselves who knows us intimately, cares for us deeply and can and has provided that direction. At the end of the day, that is our choice: my fallible, selfish, misdirected and ill thought-out whims – or God. I for one will continue to choose the latter, and in the process not feel *The Fear*.

Justin Thacker, Head of Theology