

**Reto Scheiber**

# **Light and Darkness**

**MA Fine Art  
Research Paper**

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**Reto Scheiber  
MA FINE ART 2007**

# **Contents**

**Summary / 3**

**The Beginning / 4**

**The Legacy of Atheism / 13**

**The truth of Christianity / 19**

**Science and Religion / 26**

**The Sublime / 33**

**The Godhead / 43**

**Conclusion / 48**

**Images/Figures / 50**

**Sources/Books / 52**

**Sources/Internet / 53**

**Appendix (for information only) / 54**

## **Summary /** The concept behind my Research

Paper is to explore light and darkness and the many ways in which they are manifested in our society. On the one hand I am interested in light and truth in the context of a religious belief system or a spiritual experience, on the other hand, how non-belief through the history of Atheism has also significantly influenced our culture.

Western and Eastern cultures have been formed over centuries, through the interrelationships between beliefs, philosophy, art and science resulting in different worldviews.

With the increasing tendency towards a global village – the relationship between the different systems of thought are becoming more important if we are to live together on a small planet.

Where do we go from here?

Is the world just a physical end product of colliding atoms or is there a spiritual realm?

Is there such phenomenon as spiritual light and spiritual darkness? How does it manifest itself in our visible world?

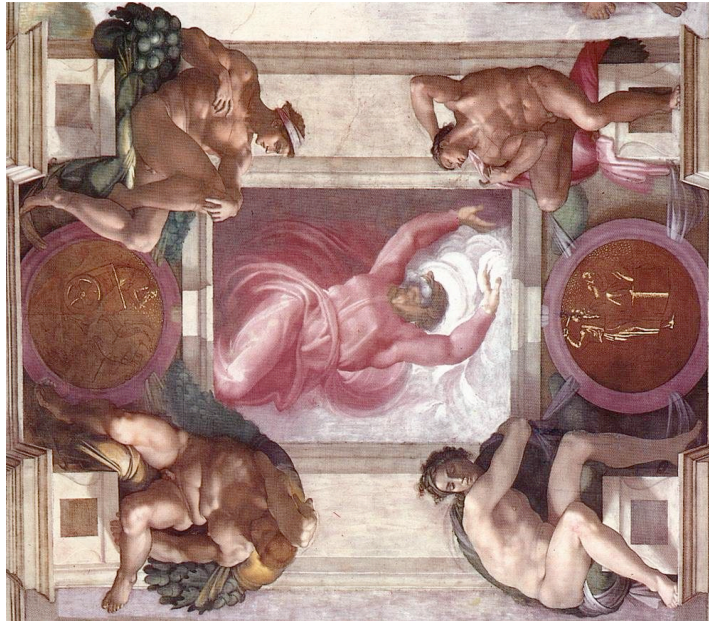
**The Beginning** / <sup>3</sup> *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.* <sup>4</sup> *God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.* <sup>5</sup> *God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.* (Holy Bible, Genesis 1: 3-5, NIV)

Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) was an English statesman, scholastic philosopher, theologian and bishop of Lincoln. His interpretation of Genesis 1: 3-5 according to David Park is:

*Before the Creation, the world was empty, featureless, and dark. Insofar as it lacked the plenitude of inclination toward action it was empty; insofar as it lacked useful action it was featureless...Lacking action ordained by light, it was dark, that is, unformed and unfinished.' Note that dark does not mean that you could not see anything. This was darkness at the root of being, and when the command was spoken and there was light, it was not the light the eye sees. That came three days later with the creation of the sun and moon. (David Park, 1997. The fire within the eye, p. 103)*

This means that it was a light, which has nothing to do with natural light. Rather, it was a spiritual light, which has

been shining since the beginning of creation. What's more, it is still shining today – for many, this is the light of the world.



**Fig. 1 Michelangelo,**

*The separation of darkness and light*, 1512, Ceiling fresco, Sistine Chapel, Rome.

Michelangelo's painting (Fig. 1) on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which took him four years to complete, represents the Creation, the Downfall of Man and the Promise of Salvation through the prophets and Genealogy of Christ. Michelangelo originally commissioned to paint the 12 Apostles, protested for a different and more complex scheme. *The separation of darkness and light* (1512) shows the Father God in his very first act of creation, as he separated the darkness from light.

According to David Park's analysis, this was more than a physical act, it also represented a spiritual and invisible act which suggests it can only be understood in spiritual terms if we consider the idea of two kingdoms; Light and Darkness, Black and White, Good and Evil. The composition made visible what actually is not visible to our natural eyes, because it has nothing to do with the natural light sources like the sun, stars and the moon. So it is more to be understood in the biblical sense, as the visualisation of something very basic, as we are linked to the spirit of God and thus able to see the invisible world.

If we look to the New Testament, the bible continues the theme of the Old Testament by writing about light and darkness. The gospel of John says in chapter 1, verse 5: *'The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.'* (Holy Bible, John 1:5, NIV) Another translation renders this verse, *'And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.'* (Holy Bible, John 1:5, KJV) To comprehend means to understand but in this case the darkness cannot appreciate the intrusion of the light, because it is not visible to our natural eye. This light is from another world, from another level of reality. This biblical concept helps to explain an experience I had on a specific night when I

gave my life to Jesus. I felt like I was in another reality, taken away from this world, going on to the next. I felt it was a transformation from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light. I became a son of light that night and I could see with eyes newly sensitised to this invisible world, to what the Kingdom of light might look like. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians verse 13:12; *'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.'* (Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:12, NIV)

I started my Video Animation *Jesus, 2007* (Fig. 2) with John 1:5; *'The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.'* (Holy Bible, John 1:5, NIV) This text is very philosophical and it helps to read it more than once to understand it fully. It symbolises a fight between light and darkness which started before time began and more fully when Jesus came to earth 2000 years ago. As he came, he brought the Kingdom of Light into a fallen and dark world, called the Kingdom of Darkness. The world did not understand what he spoke about and what he taught, because he came from another world.





**Fig. 2 Reto Scheiber,**  
*Jesus, 2007, Video Animation, The Interim Show at the*  
Bargehouse, London

Orthodox Christian belief asserts that Jesus was crucified on a Friday (Good Friday) and rose again on a Sunday (Easter), i.e. on the third day. In the interim he had to fight the devil and his Kingdom of Darkness – a fight which he won. He was the first person who rose from the dead and through him we gained the possibility to live eternally.

Through his Holy Spirit whom he sent to the very first believers on the day of Pentecost we are guided on earth to do his will and live according to his plan for us. At his ascension he went back to the Father and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. The story of Paul tells us that Jesus is the light and that he can open up our spiritual eyes to the Kingdom of Light. On the night of my own conversion I experienced something similar to Saul on his

way to Damascus to arrest and imprison believers there, when a vision of the resurrected and glorified Christ appeared to him and he became the apostle Paul. As we can read in Acts 9:3-6:

*As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting", he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Holy Bible, Acts 9:3-6, NIV)*



**Fig. 3 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio,**  
*The Conversion of St. Paul, Oil on canvas, Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome*

Caravaggio's painting (Fig. 3) *The Conversion of St. Paul* (1600-1601) depicts the dramatic conversion of Saul, as he became St. Paul. This experience of 'epiphany' was the confrontation of light and darkness. It had to do with being overwhelmed on the one hand and on the other being able to see into other dimensions. Balaam, a prophet from the Old Testament was also overwhelmed as his donkey started to speak.

We can read in Numbers 22 verses 27-30:

*When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"*

*Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."*

*The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. (Holy Bible, Numbers 22:27-30, NIV)*

The word *epiphany* means a manifestation, usually of divine power. Thus in Christianity the actual appearance of God or a moment of divine revelation can be called an epiphany.

The composition of Caravaggio's painting (Fig. 3) shows that he was a real master of his time. The back of the horse seems to fit perfectly into the left corner above. If St. Paul were still sitting on the horse, this composition would not be possible. The back of the horse creates something like a frame for the painting. It also creates something very natural and archetypal. The other man standing on the left is holding the horse with his strong hand. At the same time he is trying to protect St. Paul from the hoof of his horse. His face looks down to the ground, confused by St. Paul's fall. With one hand he is holding the bridle of the horse and the other hand is on the horse's nostril. He is also looking a little bit worried about St. Paul who is lying, overwhelmed by the experience of the divine power of Jesus, on the floor. The light of Jesus already blinds St. Paul and his eyes are closed. He cannot move his body and is looking very helpless. His arms are outstretched towards heaven and he seems to hear the voice of Jesus very clearly. The light above him is also stronger than in the rest of the painting. Caravaggio's composition is very centered and he creates almost a physical light-situation in the middle of the painting where the invisible embodiment of Jesus is. The white part of the horse also helps to make the appearance of Christ more visible to the viewer. It is remarkable how the painter works with light and darkness

and how he is trying to demonstrate the invisible presence of Jesus. Caravaggio, who pushed Chiaroscuro - the study of light and darkness within a painting, to new limits, pushes it even further in this picture from physical phenomena to one, which is manifestly spiritual. Everything seems to be balanced and the dramatic situation is portrayed clearly through the painting. Caravaggio was a master of light and darkness and there is probably no better realization of the conversion of St. Paul than his version.

## **The Legacy of Atheism /** Following my

previous look at light and darkness from a biblical and art history perspective, I would like to reflect on the relationship of the two different Kingdoms suggested by this study. I would like to explore them in the context of our Western culture and in their visual outworking.

My questions are: Why has our Western culture and society become so self-centred, so egotistical and individualistic? Why are we so fixed on material things? Why do we not share more communitarian values? Why are we trying to be our own centre, our own gods, living in our own world in our own system ignoring God? Is it because we have lost something in our society, in our culture, which places value on people, either collectively, or the individual? Is it because we are trying to live without God? Is it because we are trying to eliminate God from our system, to kick him out of his own creation? Is it because we are a lost world, a fallen creation, still separated from the very first light that guides us home to the Father?

The author, Alister McGrath, is professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University and Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and his book, *'The twilight of Atheism, the rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world'*, discusses in the third chapter, 'the intellectual foundations: Feuerbach,

Marx and Freud,' who he says, are still cornerstones of our Western intellectual culture. To some degree this book provides some answers as to why our society is so self-centred and cold. Alister McGrath writes there:

*As the clerical power began to decline in the eighteenth century, Western society began to look to others for moral vision and intellectual inspiration. It found such leaders in the growing community of intellectuals. (Alister McGrath, 2004. The twilight of Atheism. The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world, p. 49)*

According to Ludwig Feuerbach's ( Fig. 4) *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) which is quoted in Alister McGrath's book,

*God is far from being our master, should be our servant. But did we really need such a servant in the first place? Can we not dispense with such an outmoded belief altogether, and realize that we ourselves are the only gods? (Alister McGrath, 2004. The twilight of Atheism. The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world, p. 58)*

But can a society and a culture without God, as Feuerbach was trying to create, in reality exist?



**Fig. 4 Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach**  
(July 28, 1804 – September 13, 1872) was a  
German philosopher and anthropologist

Materialism seems to be our new god. Advertisements promise us happiness if we buy this or that product. You can have it immediately, take it now, and pay tomorrow. It is possible to get credit for everything to look good in the eyes of today's society. Another quotation from McGrath; *'The notion of materialism is fundamental to Marxism,'* or thus Marx argues that *'religion is just the imaginary sun*



*which seems to man to revolve around him, until he realizes that he himself is the centre of his own revolution.'*

(Alister McGrath, 2004. *The twilight of Atheism. The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world*, pp. 63-64)

I was depressed for a considerable time in my life. I was trying to find answers and went to see psychologists who had probably studied Freudian theories. Comparing this experience of psychiatry, with my more recent experience of spiritual awakening, I now feel that a psychologist or psychiatrist who has no connection with God and his forgiveness is not able to do an effective job! Furthermore, the focus of my therapy was to discuss my past life. But as long as professional psychiatry ignores the concept of forgiveness into a past godless life, there can be no freedom from the curse, which allows a depressive illness to continue indefinitely. Alister McGrath wrote:

*Philosophical and scientific progress had conclusively eliminated God from the World, with any vestiges of faith in God being seen as little more than remnants of old superstitions or psychological defence mechanisms to cope with a perplexing world. Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud all offered "scientific" explanations of the origins of religious belief that subverted any idea that they were to be regarded as privileged or authoritative pronouncements on the nature of things. (Alister McGrath, 2004. *The twilight**

of Atheism. The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world, p. 77)

Friedrich Nietzsche was also an existentialist like Soren Kierkegaard (Fig. 5). A short quote from Kierkegaard's, *A guide for the perplexed*:

*It is also interesting to consider that European philosophy in the twentieth century, and perhaps also today, has been shaped above all by two nineteenth century writers who were ahead of their own time: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Whereas Kierkegaard insists that becoming a Christian is the highest path available to a person, Nietzsche attacks religion as both a symptom and source of spiritual corruption.* (Carlisle Clare, 2006. *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 6)

The Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz (born 1911) who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1980 wrote:

*The Marxist creed has now been inverted. The true opium of modernity is the belief that there is no God, so that humans are free to do precisely as they please. Life can become our privately scripted and controlled story, without any impeding thought of "a scale to weigh sins and good deeds."* (Alister McGrath, 2004. *The twilight of Atheism. The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world*, p. 153)

So it is not my aim to say that Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and other atheist philosophers are the reason why our world has turned out as it has. But looking at events in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it is not difficult to conclude that their ideas did not change our world for the better. Their philosophy, that a world without God would bring us peace and freedom, brought us the two biggest wars ever, the First and the Second World Wars.

## **The truth of Christianity /** If we look at

Kierkegaard's '*A Guide for the Perplexed*', we read:

*1838 was an important year for Kierkegaard. On 19 May - shortly after his twenty-fifth birthday – he had a profound spiritual experience, “an indescribable joy” that changed his sense of himself and of his place in the world. This experience gave him a renewed religious inspiration: he wrote in his journal that ‘I will strive to come into a far more inward relationship to Christianity; for until now I have been always standing outside it, have contended for its truth; in a purely outward way I have borne Christ’s cross.*

(Carlisle Clare, 2006. *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 9)

This statement suggests to me that you have to experience the presence of Christ, not only know about him, before you can truly begin to understand his Kingdom. *‘Kierkegaard insists that the most important aspect of a human being is not reason, but passion.’*

(Carlisle Clare, 2006. *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 1)



**Fig. 5 Søren Aabye Kierkegaard**

(5 May 1813 – 11 November 1855) was a Prolific 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian.

Since my spiritual experience related earlier, I have become a member of a church, which is part of the Pentecostal movement.

What is the Pentecostal movement? *'A modern section of the Christian religion which began in the US in 1901, whose members believe that everything written in the Bible is true.'* (1) (22.05.2007.)

When I became a Christian believer, I received the gift of speaking in tongues. One night, I woke up at three o'clock in the morning and began to speak in a language, which I did not understand. To speak in tongues is like a secret language to worship God without words of one's own. The first Christians received that gift at the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on them to fill them with the Spirit.

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the*

*blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Holy Bible, Acts 2:1-4, NIV)*

The first Christian church was very alive, powerful and the people of the time respected them because of the way they lived their lives for God. Like a new culture in unity, every person had the same rights irrespective of their status in society. Alister McGrath wrote, *'As Christian writers such as John Henry Newman (1801-90) have consistently stressed, Christianity is a living organism, still in the process of evolving and developing.'* (Alister McGrath, 2004. *The twilight of Atheism. The rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world*, p. 192). If your belief is not alive, it will become traditional or even institutional, something that has frequently been seen in the history of the Christian church. In Europe, we do not recognize what is happening around the globe concerning that Pentecostal movement. Our newspapers are filled with sex, crime and death. Traditional European Religion has become an irrelevant institution, which speaks of oppression, control, and manipulation, far from the teachings of Christ. Coupled with the influence of

secularism arising from atheist philosophy, Europe is currently spiritual speaking one of the darkest places on earth. I believe that this culture is a result of our decision to be our own gods and our own centre. Sociologists have largely ignored Pentecostalism until very recently.



**Fig. 6 El Greco,**  
*The Pentecost (1596-1600) Oil on canvas,*  
Museo del Prado, Madrid

El Greco's painting *The Pentecost* (1596-1600) (Fig. 6) is a wonderful illustration of the day of Pentecost. The Apostles including Marie the mother of Jesus and Marie Magdalene were waiting for and expecting what Jesus told them. They were waiting for the Holy Spirit, which would guide them in all the truth and light of the Father and the Son. In the middle of the composition we can see the mother of Jesus. I don't think that she was the centre of her group. Her position in that painting is probably more dictated by the Catholic Church in that Century. The 12 Apostles and Marie Magdalene surround her. The Holy Spirit enlightens the whole group of the first Christians, which is above all of them. We can also see flames falling down on the disciples and they began to speak in tongues. The environment in the black tomb is perfect to visualize a spiritual event like the Pentecost. El Greco's dramatic and expressionistic style was very unusual at that time. He was living at the same time as Michelangelo, but he didn't want to follow the style, which Michelangelo created. El Greco is also regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism. His figures were unusually slim and to some extent he also reminds me of Alberto Giacometti's sculpture and painting. He is also a master of light and darkness as we can see in this painting. The wings of the dove fit perfectly into the cleft of the rock and



they seem to become longer than they are. El Greco is creating in this scenario of Pentecost an overwhelming atmosphere of light and darkness, which reflects the love, and light of God through the Holy Spirit.



**Fig. 7 C. S. Lewis**

(29 November 1898 – 22 November 1963) was an Irish author and scholar.

Clive Staples Lewis (Fig. 7) commonly referred to as C. S. Lewis, was an Irish author and scholar. His conversion to Christianity had a profound effect on his work, and his wartime radio broadcasts on the subject of Christianity brought him wide acclaim. He was an atheist before he became a Christian and I am specifically

interested in his view on the truth of Christianity. In Philip Van der Elst's book, *C.S Lewis, A Short Introduction*, we read:

*Christianity claims to give an account of facts – to tell you what the real universe is like. Its account of the universe may be true, or it may not, and once the question is really before you, then the natural inquisitiveness must make you want to know the answer. If Christianity is untrue, then no honest man will want to believe it, however helpful it might be: if it is true, every honest man will want to believe it, even if it gives him no help at all. (Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics, pp. 81-2 / Philip Van der Elst, 2005, C.S. Lewis, A short Introduction p. 37)*

## **Science and Religion /** With this chapter I

try to reflect my view on science and religion in a contemporary context and how it influences my work. I also try to ask the question what belief system most influences our western culture? How do we now view science – does it have all the answers? Do we have room for a belief in anything beyond materialism? What about a spiritual realm?

The Roscoe Lecture given by The Prince of Wales upon receiving an Honorary Fellowship from Liverpool John Moores University, St Georges Hall, Liverpool, explains more about his view on these questions:

*I often wonder, for instance, how many people in today's world feel a niggling sense of instinctive unease at what they are called upon to do in their working lives, or as a result of the pressures of conventional custom and outlook? If they do, but dare not express it for fear of being thought old-fashioned or out of touch, then they are experiencing the inner resonance of what I have been referring to as universal principles – or even “perennial wisdom”. This is because the physical world is not the whole of reality. Another element of “reality” exists and they are, perhaps unknowingly, responding to the mysterious fact that each one of us mirrors its nature. The fact that this is so is surely, and ever has been,*

*the mark of what it means to be truly civilized and to be part of "a civilization"... (2) (23.04.2007)*

Charles Darwin was a British naturalist and was one of the most significant natural scientists. He developed the theory of a natural principal of evolution through gradual variation and natural selection. He is the founder of the theory of evolution. His work was a watershed for the understanding of the creation, but encouraged the trend towards a secular understanding of the world.

In *New Religion*, Damien Hirst's new exhibition in the Wallspace Gallery in London (7 March to 4 April 2007), he continues his longstanding preoccupation with belief, art and death. *New Religion* highlights the conflicts between science and religion, art and belief. Damien Hirst reflects with 50 silkscreen prints and four sculptures his view of the '*New Religion*'. What is also evident to me is his more catholic based background, which I could see in works like '*The Stations of the Cross, 1-14, 2005*'. In an interview in his new catalogue *New Religion* with Sean O'Hagan I read:

Sean O'Hagan: *Why did you call the new show New Religion?*

Damien Hirst: *Well, I just can't help thinking that science is the new religion for many people. It's as*

*simple and complicated as the reality.* (Damien Hirst, 2006. *New Religion*, p. 5)

I think that Damien Hirst's answer is very contemporary and significant. Especially in our Western culture, we probably trust more in our pharmaceutical industry (Fig. 8) than in God's supernatural power of healing. But this also makes us slaves of the pharmacy industry, through medical over prescription and drug abuse, which is continually growing.

Darwin's theory of evolution became very popular, but it does not bring us any closer to God. Moreover, it claims that everything happened by chance. The big bang story is a story in which we are not responsible for the things we do. It is a story of an atheist who thinks there is no God!



**Fig. 8 Damien Hirst,**  
*Two Pills, 2004, Oil on canvas,*  
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

Scientists like Richard Dawkins are very strong believers. They believe that there is no God and they attempt to provide the evidence for the non-existence of God. They manipulate our society in the same way Ludwig Feuerbach did, 200 Years ago. We might call it the spirit of atheism, which is still influencing people, mostly highly intelligent, academic people.

According to Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, which is quoted in Alister McGrath's book *The Dawkins Delusion*; '*If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.*' (Alister McGrath, 2007. *The Dawkins Delusion*, p. 7)

Alister McGrath wrote in his book *The Dawkins Delusion*:

*Underlying the agenda of The God Delusion is a pervasive belief that science has disproved God. Those who continue to believe in God are simply obscurantist, superstitious reactionaries, who are in complete denial about the victorious advance of the sciences, which have eliminated God from even the most minuscule gaps in our understanding of the universe. Atheism is the only option for serious, progressive, thinking persons.* (Alister McGrath, 2007. *The Dawkins Delusion*, p.13)

Mark Wallinger is a British artist who works with religious themes in a contemporary context. He was invited to

present Britain at the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in the Year 2001. *Ecce Homo* (1999), Wallinger's life-sized sculpture of Jesus Christ (Fig. 9), occupied the pavilion's main gallery. *Ecce Homo* also made its public debut, in 1999, among the patriotic monuments of London's Trafalgar Square in Charing Cross Road. Wallinger showed Jesus in the position of a political prisoner and victim of religious persecution in the last abject moments before his execution. *Ecce Homo*, the title of the sculpture, means 'Behold the Man' and did Pilate utter the words as he presented Christ for judgment.

The video projections, *Threshold to the Kingdom* (2000) and *Angel* (1997) were also shown in the British pavilion. In *Angel* Wallinger repeated forwards and backwards the verses 1-5 of chapter 1 of the gospel of John:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (Holy Bible, John 1:1-5, NIV)*

He walked down the stairs at Angel tube station wearing big black glasses and carrying a white stick like someone



blind. A demonstration and a performance of light and darkness.



**Fig. 9 Mark Wallinger,**  
*Ecce Homo*, Secession 2000

In *Threshold to the Kingdom* (2000) we saw a slow motion procession of travellers as they emerged from a London airport's passport control. Wallinger wanted us to imagine the scene to be a group of new arrivals to the Kingdom of Heaven. The video work appeared unreal and outside our mortal world because of its dramatically slowed down speed. Like going from one world to the next, to the eternal kingdom of heaven.

## **The Sublime /** My first MA project, which I

eventually abandoned 'the colours of the sky', was to be an installation with 81 banners, which would have represented the colours of the sky in their entire spectrum. I did not get permission from the London street owner to proceed with this installation and so I had to think of a new project. As I was sitting on the Jubilee Line on one occasion heading homewards back to New Cross Gate, I saw a sculpture of light before my spiritual eyes (Fig. 15). It was like a short movie, very detailed and precise, comparable to an almost real daydream. Also, I had been praying for a couple of days for a new project, and what I saw in the tube was God's answer. God does not treat me to this daily and it was a vision that opened a completely new horizon and perspective for my MA Fine Art year in London.

The following day, I went to the college shop in St. Martins and bought different materials for creating the model, which I needed to visualise and realise the vision I had seen. It was an overwhelming new start for me and I slowly started to realise what would be included in this new project and how I would describe it in my Study Proposal and my Research Paper. Moreover, from my

point of view, that vision was the spiritual *sublime* at the right time to develop my work together with a film project, called Jesus (Fig. 2), in an unusual new direction.



**Fig. 10 Rembrandt van Rijn,**  
*Return of the prodigal son*, 1669, Oil on canvas,  
State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1669) (Fig. 10) shows a scenario of forgiveness and love of the Father for his lost son. To me, this painting symbolises the love of the father, which he has for every person who is seeking his presence from the bottom of his heart. It symbolises hope for a lost world. I shall try to create a similar atmosphere, but in a very modern and abstract way. I shall use the language of the contemporary art world and I shall put it in a spiritual context. The arms of the father are on the shoulder of his prodigal son. The father was waiting for a considerably long time and he was probably confused and full of pain during that time of waiting. But he did not give up hope and he was expecting that one day his son would come back. In the father's hands I can see love and acceptance for his younger son. There is no rejection, no bitterness and no frustration. There is only love and joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. He is reflecting the perfect father, full of grace and truth and in him; there is no darkness at all.

The son is on his knees in a humble position and he is receiving the love and acceptance of his father in full. He knows that he was lost and he knows how it is to live without a father. But now he has come back into the arms of his father and he feels comfortable, secure and

protected. Rembrandt was well known as a painter of biblical scenes. Over the years, biblical themes have still been depicted often, but emphasis has shifted from dramatic group scenes to intimate portrait-like figures. In his last years, Rembrandt painted his most deeply reflective self-portraits, and several moving images of both men and women in love, in life, and before God.

The Tate Modern Turbine Hall, with its cathedral-like proportions reinforces the sense of luminosity by its choice of exhibitions, such as *The Weather Project* (Fig. 11) by Olafur Eliasson. Art has the power to engage: psychologically, socially, politically, spiritually and emotionally. The increasingly large number of people visiting the art galleries in London at the weekends testify to the underlying quest for a non-rationalist, spiritual, shared experience. *The Weather Project* (2003) is in my opinion also a good example for the creating of the sublime. Olafur Eliasson creates a warm, overwhelming atmosphere of light.

*In The Weather Project, the fourth in the annual Unilever Series of commissions for the Turbine Hall, Olafur Eliasson takes this ubiquitous subject as the basis for exploring ideas about experience, mediation and representation. (3) (02.03.2007)*

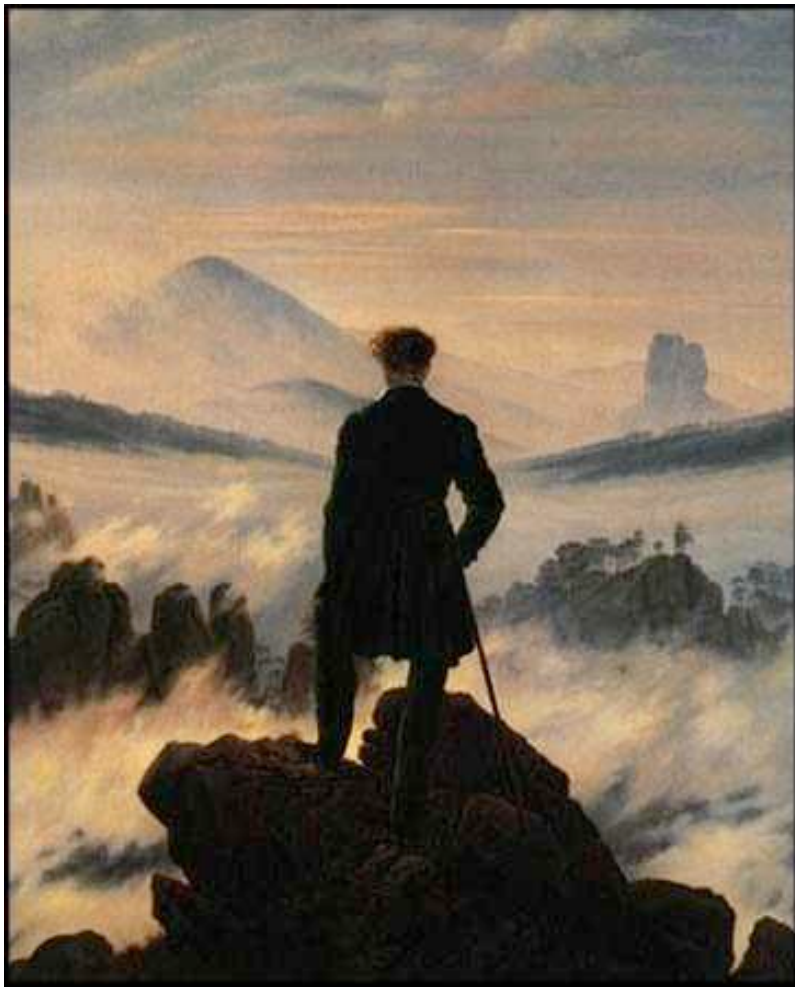


**Fig. 11 Olafur Eliasson,**  
*The Weather Project, 2003,*  
Tate Modern, Turbine Hall, London

The reality of sublimity is mostly connected with something  
overwhelming, something that is much bigger than



oneself. This could be the amazing view from the top of a huge, majestic mountain. Another example could be, if you were lost in the desert, in the middle of nowhere, and you suddenly realise just how small and insignificant you are. But it could also be a spiritual vision which you are not able to understand or imagine how it would be if it became reality.



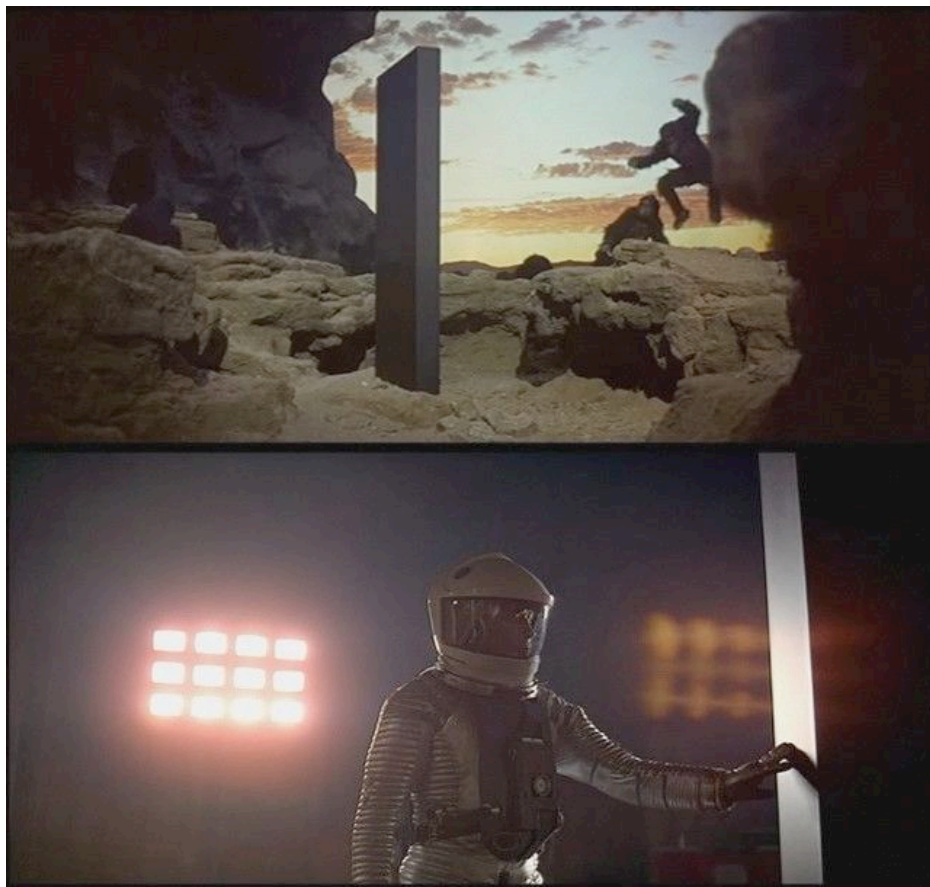
**Fig. 12 Caspar David Friedrich,**  
*The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog, 1818,*  
Kunsthalle, Hamburg

Caspar David Friedrich's famous morbidly romantic painting *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) (Fig. 12) is a perfect example of the sublime. A man standing in the midst of mountains, surrounded by the amazing view of the Alps. Friedrich's masterpieces were almost forgotten by the general public when in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century he was discovered by Symbolist painters for his visionary and allegorical landscapes.

In my video piece 'Jesus, 2007' (Fig. 2) , I worked initially with a model of the light sculpture. The projection involves 320 moving images. The video projection in principle shows a sculpture of light that moves about in a dark room; sometimes close up sometimes far away. Because the 320 photographs are the source of the animation, different layers and different shapes are created. Some sequences of the video remind me very strongly of the American abstract painter and art theorist Barnett Baruch Newman (1905-70). (*He is also known as a painter and theorist of the sublime*). Especially the close-up sequences of my video, the layers and the shapes, the vertical lines and the different thicknesses of the fields in the black-grey-white spectrum, remind me strongly of Barnett Newman's abstract paintings. The abstraction and



the simplicity of my piece in one hand, and the fast movements and the strong contrasts of light and darkness in the moving images in the other, makes my piece into an abstract piece of an animated film. Different people came up to me after our exhibition *the Interim show* in Bargehouse and told me that my video reminded them strongly of Stanley Kubrick's *Space Odyssey 2001* film (Fig. 13). On my side, it was impossible to have been influenced by that film - I had not seen Kubrick's film beforehand.



**Fig. 13 Stanley Kubrik,**  
*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968

Philip Shaw also wrote about Barnett Newman:

*For Newman, the effect of this warping of time and space is profoundly spiritual. As he writes in his influential essay *The Sublime is Now* (1948), the intention is to 'reassert ... man's natural desire for the exalted, for concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions. (Philip Shaw, 2006, *The Sublime*, p.121)*

Barnett Newman's paintings like *Abraham*, (1949) *Adam and Eve*, (1951-2) or *Uriel* (1954) impressed me as soon as I saw them for the first time. The experience of a pure, abstract colour field painting like *Voice of Fire*, (1967) (Fig. 14), related to biblical characters overwhelmed me in a special way. There is something archetypical, something real or something truthful in that combination of the painting and the title of the work. In *The Sublime is Now* (1948), Barnett Newman wrote:

*You must realize that twenty years ago we felt the moral crisis of a world in shambles, a world devastated by a great depression and a fierce world war, and it was impossible at that time to paint the kind of paintings that we were doing - flowers, reclining nudes, and people playing the cello. At the same time we could not move into the situation of a pure world of unorganized shapes and forms, or colour relations, a world of sensation. (4)*  
(21.02.2007)



**Fig. 14 Barnett Newman,**  
*Voice of Fire, 1967, Acrylic on canvas,*  
National Gallery of Canada

## **The Godhead /** So far my work at Central St.

Martins College of Art and Design has followed a very singular idea based on a dramatic experience I had a number of years ago. Looking back, this has created for me a very black and white context for my thinking: The Kingdom of Light against the Kingdom of Darkness.

In my Research Paper I have written about light and darkness and the many ways in which they are manifested in our society. In my practical work I will create a very modern, minimal and abstract visualization of the Godhead. The analogy C.S. Lewis used to explain the Godhead was that of the cube:

*On the human level one person is one Being, and any two persons are two separate beings – just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one-figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you find them combined in new ways, which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being that is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we cannot fully conceive a being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. (Mere Christianity, pp. 138-9 / Philip Van der Elst, 2005, C.S. Lewis, A short Introduction, p. 39)*

Also *the book of Revelation* speaks about a cube, when it describes *the New Jerusalem*, which will come down from heaven to earth in the very last days of the world. It is a huge, transparent complex of glass, precious stones and gold. The New Testament describes it in the book of Revelation chapter 21 verses 15-27 as follow:

*The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia (2'200 km) in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits (65 meters) thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.*

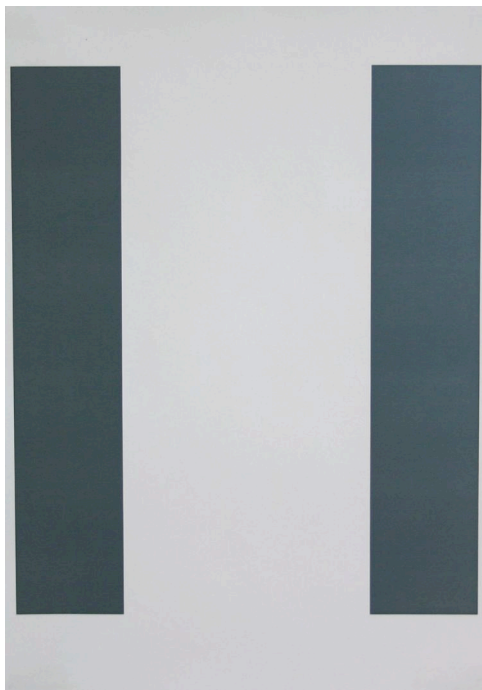
*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be*

*brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Holy Bible, Revelation 21:15-27, NIV)*



**Fig. 15 Reto Scheiber, *The Godhead*, sculpture 2007**  
*(Model), Cardboard and Perspex,*  
Central St. Martins College of Art and Design, London

In the sculpture *The Godhead* (Fig. 15) you can see a rectangular light-box in a horizontal position. This could symbolise the duality of God, who became a human Being as he was living among us on earth. It could also symbolise the believers, who are already connected to the spirit of God through Jesus Christ. The black box stands for our world, which is fallen, and needs the forgiveness of Christ. It is also a manifestation of the Kingdom of Darkness, which is still established on earth. This sculpture was also used as a model to produce my Video Animation, *Jesus*. The fact that I use the same form to create a sculpture is that of the Trinity itself. The three are one the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.



**Fig. 16 Reto Scheiber,**  
*The Godhead, painting 2007, (First Draft)*  
Central St. Martins College of Art and Design, London

The last part of *The Godhead* (Fig. 16) will be an abstract, minimal painting. Also here we cannot say concretely what it actually symbolises. It is a front view of the light-box and it is extremely reduced. It will be a painting on canvas, painted with oil on many layers. The layers reflect the eternity, the never-ending kingdom of God. The composition is vertical and the vast majority is white. It is also connected to my Video Animation and could be understood as a sequence of it. A still image, which reflects peace and harmony, quietness, purity and eternity.

The Video Animation, the sculpture and the painting are all created by one basic form. One simple form as a starting point to explore the modern version of *The Godhead*. The Kingdom of Light in his fullness, reflected in a modern, minimal and abstract way.

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Holy Bible, Matthew 28:19-20, NIV)*



**Conclusion /** It has been my intention to explore the notion of light and darkness and how this is manifest in our society. I have also sought to explore how this relates to belief systems both religious and secular.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the idea of a belief system, in particular Christianity as the primary western religion belief has completely fallen from the art agenda in favour of a secular perspective.

The subject of 'Christianity' as belief re emerges from time to time as in the work of Damien Hirst and Gilbert & George. But usually this is in an ironic manner.

My intention has been to explore whether there is still room for an orthodox belief to be the subject of a contemporary art piece in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I have taken a subject familiar to much of pre- 20<sup>th</sup> century art, that of God as understood in terms of the Trinity and have sought to express this subject in the context of an understanding of contemporary art.

I feel that my work only begins to deal with this subject,  
but I hope in such a way as to give some legitimacy to  
bringing faith and belief into contemporary art in a non-  
ironic way.

## Images/Figures

**Fig. 1 Michelangelo**, *The separation of darkness and light*, 1512, *Ceiling fresco*, Sistine Chapel, Rome.

**Fig. 2 Reto Scheiber**, *Jesus*, 2007, *Video Animation*, The Interim Show at the Bargehouse, London

**Fig. 3 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio**, *The Conversion of St. Paul*, 1600-1601, *Oil on canvas*, Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome

**Fig. 4 Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach** (July 28, 1804 – September 13, 1872) was a German philosopher and anthropologist

**Fig. 5 Søren Aabye Kierkegaard** (5 May 1813 – 11 November 1855) was a prolific 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian.

**Fig. 6 El Greco**, *The Pentecost* (1596-1600) *Oil on canvas*, Museo del Prado, Madrid

**Fig. 7 C. S. Lewis** (29 November 1898 – 22 November 1963) was an Irish author and scholar.

**Fig. 8 Damien Hirst**, *Two Pills*, 2004, *Oil on canvas*, Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

**Fig. 9 Mark Wallinger**, *Ecce Homo*, Secession 2000

**Fig. 10 Rembrandt van Rijn**, *Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1669, *Oil on canvas*, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

**Fig. 11 Olafur Eliasson**, *The Weather Project*, 2003, Tate Modern, Turbine Hall, London

**Fig. 12 Caspar David Friedrich**, *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, Kunsthalle, Hamburg

**Fig. 13 Stanley Kubrik**, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968

**Fig. 14 Barnett Newman**, *Voice of Fire*, 1967, Acrylic on canvas, National Gallery of Canada

**Fig. 15 Reto Scheiber**, *The Godhead*, sculpture 2007 (Model), Cardboard and Perspex, Central St. Martins College of Art and Design, London

**Fig. 16 Reto Scheiber**, *The Godhead*, painting 2007, (First Draft), Central St. Martins College of Art and Design, London

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## **Appendix: My personal journey from darkness to light.**

Since I have been able to think, I have always been interested in supernatural things. I remember, when I was 13 years old we had a party at my parents' home. We drank a lot of beer and we were listening to the Slayers, 'Reign in Blood' record. I also remember that I asked Satan to manifest himself. At once, I could feel that a spirit of witchcraft slipped into my body. From that night on I had the power to see and to manipulate people's hearts with evil. Whatever I wanted I would get immediately. Furthermore, I played with that 'gift' till the age of 18 years. As I look back to my past, I realise that with this game I destroyed many friendships. Moreover, that I broke many girls' hearts.

One year later, I was 19, I applied to an Art School in Lucerne and they took me on for a foundation course in Fine Art. Another reason for this step was to escape from my past. Although, I was trying to become a better person, it was impossible to break away from these dark times. The more I tried to become a better person, the more I became deeply depressed. However, this was the start of a long process and a time of deep depression in my life. I felt I was still separated from the light. God calls it

darkness. It was not like lying in a psychiatric clinic without doing anything. I could still work and I was playing the drums in different rock bands in my hometown. After my foundation course in Fine Art, I applied to the University of the Arts in Lucerne, but they did not give me a place. This was another reason why my depression became worse than ever before.

Years later I went to see a psychologist. I continued this therapy for three years, but the psychologist did not have the right answers for me. I also visited various spiritual healers, magneto paths, clairvoyants, homeopaths and alternative medicine doctors. I also read books from Dale Carnegie, the might of positive thinking and different esoteric authors. I took the 'Lischer test' and went to a psychologist from Basle, which was very much into anthroposophy. But my life was without hope, completely dark; everything I started was under a curse. In spite of the fact that I decided to change my first job because of my depression, nothing changed. I started to work as a restorer and I was still depressed. There was no way out of this dilemma. What is more, the only wish I had deep down was, to die. At that time, I was living in an apartment. The apartment was on the 5th floor in a block of flats. I had very concrete plans to jump from the



balcony, however this was not the plan for my life! That night I heard for the first time a disembodied voice saying: "I must be reality in your heart"!

A couple of weeks later I had an experience which completely changed my life. One night in my flat I was laying on my bed, candles were everywhere and I decided to give my life to Jesus. Nothing happened, but I was still waiting and expecting something supernatural. Three days later, it was in the evening, a presence, which was not from this world, entered my bed-living room. It began by manifesting itself at the door and gradually filled the whole room very slowly with a very thick invisible substance of love. It was like swimming in a very big glass of honey and I was lying on my bed, the whole time feeling distraught - yes, I was sorry for those lost 28 years of my life! I felt like a very dry sponge, which was soaking up this liquid-thick love of Jesus. At the same time I felt something like a laser-beam operating on my bitter, dark and frustrated heart. That laser-beam knew exactly where my really dark, hidden sorrows and angers were and could penetrate to the deepest most hurt parts of my heart. This was the work of the Holy Spirit. After about two minutes it felt like I was being picked up by God and placed in a stream of very clear and fresh water. I could also see a mountain and fresh spring flowers on both sides of the river. All the

bitterness and hate against God, the world and me were washed away in this stream of clear water. I could also stand under a waterfall and in the end God took me in his arms, dried me with a towel and told me again and again that everything was different to what I thought. He told me that he had loved me from the beginning and that he was waiting for me to return to his house. The whole experience was not just a momentary light; it was the whole 'programme' from heaven to restore me in just one night.

After that night when I gave my life to Jesus I was completely healed from my depression and I ceased seeing the psychologist. I was telling everybody what had happened and began to read the bible. It was a bit like reading a children's book, I could understand everything. It felt as though that book had been written especially for me. I read the whole bible in three months and was filled with that amazing sweet love of Jesus. It was like having had my eyes covered for 28 years and then being able to see the next moment. Not only that, it was like living in a hole without light and standing immediately on the top of Mount Everest with a 360° view. It is still a mystery to me and a miracle what happened on that particular night. Moreover, I still try to find out more about this light shining in the darkness. I experienced God in a black and white

scenario and I know 100% that he and his Kingdom of light exist.

The Gospel of John says in Chapter one, verse five; 'the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.' Another translation renders this verse, 'And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' To comprehend means to understand something but not fully, because it is not visible to our natural eye. It is from another world, from another level or another reality. This is almost what I felt when I had that experience with God on that specific night. I felt like I was in another reality, taken away from this world, going on to the next. It was a transformation from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light. I became a son of Light that night!