I Remembering in the Face of Exile

“If the twentieth century the age of the expatriate, the refugee, the stateless and the wanderer?, asks Elie Wiesel.1 Yes, replies Edward Said, “our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism and quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.”2 Ours is an age of exile, both Said and Wiesel agree, wherein exile is “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.”3 For neither Wiesel nor Said is exile something available for postmodern valorization. There is no romantic appeal to this “discontinuous state of being” says Said.4 The temptation of such an exilic and homeless state, says Wiesel, is forgetfulness. Exile is perpetuated by a cultural amnesia because “one who forgets forgets

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.
everything, including the roads leading homeward. Forgetting marks the end of
human experience, and of longing too.”

Bruce Cockburn is an artist of remembering in the face of exile. Over his
thirty five year career and twenty-seven albums, Cockburn has demonstrated
that he is an artist committed to opening up human experience, giving voice to
human longing for homecoming in the midst of displacement, and that he will
do so by facing head on the essential sadness of exile with both prophetic critique
and a spirituality of hope that takes most of its cues from biblical metaphors and
images. Insofar as exile is never simply a matter of physical displacement from a
homeland, but more perniciously a captivation of the imagination that leaves the
exilic community lost in amnesia, forgetting the way home, then Cockburn’s
artistry could be said to be driven towards a liberation of the imagination
towards homecoming.

There is nothing innocent about exile. If ours is an age of the exile, the
expatriate, the forced migration, the unhealable rift between the self and a native
place, the self and its true home, then there must be forces that have rendered us
homeless. Forces both within and beyond ourselves. Those internal forces

5 Wiesel, p. 25.

6 For an overview of the religious significance of Cockburn’s early work see, my earlier
article, “The Christian Worldview of Bruce Cockburn: Prophetic Art in a Dangerous

7 For a reading of Cockburn’s work in terms of overall themes of home and homecoming
28-32.
Cockburn once described as “fascist architecture of my own design” – an internal architecture that keeps “love confined” in a self-enclosed fortress. Such a well-constructed edifice of home can only result in homelessness, Cockburn concludes. But this paper is more concerned with the external forces of homelessness.

Cockburn has had no difficulty in identifying those forces with the hegemonic power of western culture, with its genocidal treatment of aboriginal peoples, its ecocidal destruction of the earth, and its domicidal perpetuation of displacement. Whether his gaze is directed to Latin America, Africa, Asia, or downtown Toronto, he discerns similar dynamics;

padded with power here they come
international loan sharks back by the guns
of market hungry profiteers
whose word is a swamp and whose brow is smeared
with the blood of the poor

who rob life of its quality
who render rage a necessity
by turning countries into labour camps
modern slavers in drag as champions of freedom

sinister cynical instrument
who makes the gun into a sacrament
the only response to this deification
of tyranny by so-called “developed” nations’
idolatry of ideology

8 “Fascist Architecture,” from the album Humans ©1980 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

9 For a reading of Cockburn’s work as a prophetic voice of alternative imagination see my book, Subversive Christianity (Seattle: Alta Vista College Press, 1984), chapters 3 and 4.
IMF dirty MF
takes away everything it can get
always making certain that there’s one thing left
keep them on the hook with insupportable debt

With prophetic clarity, in this 1985 song Cockburn sees through what passes as
democracy and development, and, in the tradition of the biblical prophets,
identifies the religious legitimation of such injustice with the “deification of
tyranny by so called ‘developed’ nations’ idolatry of ideology.” Deification,
idolatry, ideology – the making divine what is a human construct, the idolatrous
reification of ideology so that its constructed, particular and self-interested
character is disguised as simply the way things are. This is always the strategy
of empire, whether it be Babylon, Rome or the Pax Americana.

II Capitive Imaginations

Captive imaginations cannot conceive of life outside of the constrictions of
normalcy. Cockburn takes it to be the artist’s calling to see otherwise, to be able
to see through the lies, the reifications, the false sense of normality that will

10 “Call it Democracy,” from the album World of Wonders ©1983 Golden Mountain
Music Corp.

11 I have discussed idolatry at further length in “Late/Post Modernity and Idolatry: A

12 This analysis is indebted to Walter Brueggemann’s discussion of imagination in The

13 See his song, “People See Through You,” on album World of Wonders © 1985 Golden
Mountain Music Corp.
leave us numb, “paralysed in the face of it all,”\textsuperscript{14} with a defeated sense of resignation before the inevitable. As Cockburn sees it, the trouble with normal is “it always gets worse.”

Callous men in business costume speak computerese
Play pinball with the 3\textsuperscript{rd} world trying to keep it on its knees
Their single crop starvation plan puts sugar in your tea
And the local 3\textsuperscript{rd} world’s kept on reservations you don’t see
“It’ll all go back to normal if we put our nation first”
But the trouble with normal is it always gets worse\textsuperscript{15}

International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programs, third world debt, agribusiness monocropping, the politics of panic, moratorium on rights, fashionable fascism – all of this, Cockburn insists, is “the grinding devolution of the democratic dream”\textsuperscript{16} in the face of the ineluctable “progress” of global capitalism.

Global capitalism is the socio-economic and geo-political name given to the historical development of a borderless economic order ultimately ruled by transnational corporations. Under the guise of “trade liberalization” this is an

\textsuperscript{14} A line from Cockburn’s song, “Gavin’s Woodpile,” from the album \textit{In the Falling Dark} ©1976 Golden Mountain Music Corp. In a recent interview Cockburn describes his art in relation to political and economic forces this way: “State powers are interested in keeping us numb and asleep. We need to stay awake. Part of my job is to help people stay awake - and to help myself stay awake – by looking at these situations and writing songs about them. It’s up to the listeners what they want to do about it, but I need to be a witness.” Greg King, “In a Dangerous Time,” \textit{The Sun} (June 2004) read online at: http://cockburnproject.net/front.html

\textsuperscript{15} “The Trouble with Normal,” from the album \textit{Trouble with Normal} ©1983 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

\textsuperscript{16}A line from the third verse of “The Trouble with Normal.”
economic order that moves vast sums of capital around the world everyday in cyberspace, and allows capital to invest in and exploit the human and natural resources of any nation if such investment and exploitation will increase the profit bottom line. Global capitalism, so defined, is a cultural force that “promises nothing less than the blossoming of a new civilization that will eventually bring an end to international conflict, resolve hitherto intractable problems like poverty and environmental degradation, and produce increased prosperity for all ....”17 Cockburn believes that this is a hollow promise and an ideological cover for violence, oppression and injustice. His appraisal comes to forceful expression in “Trickle Down;”18

Take over takedown big bucks shakedown
Schoolyard pusher offer anything-for-profit
First got to privatize then you get to piratize
Hooked on avarice – how do we get off it?

This agenda of privatization, corporate takeovers, and trade liberalization is ultimately about transporting throughout the world a consumerist worldview wherein new markets will be available for our products because more and more people will be taken captive by the insatiability of avarice. Cockburn wants to help us kick the habit. If it is true that globalization “isn’t just an aggressive stage in the history of capitalism … [but] a religious movement of previously unheard-

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18 “Trickle Down,” from the album, You’ve Never Seen Everything ©2004 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
of proportions,” wherein “progress is its underlying myth, unlimited growth its foundational faith, the shopping mall ... its place of worship, consumerism its overriding image, ‘I’ll have a Big Mac and fries’ its ritual of initiation, and global consumerism its ultimate goal,”¹⁹ then Cockburn’s art is self-consciously entering into a spiritual battle zone, struggling with the principalities and powers of our age.

No wonder Cockburn found it necessary to employ prophetic imagery to describe the geo-political and cultural-economic realities of a culture driven by neo-liberal economics in the Reagan era:

In the bar, in the senate, in the alley, in the study
Pimping dreams of riches for everybody
“Something for nothing, new lamps for old
And the streets will be platinum, never mind gold”
Well, hey, pass it on
Misplaced your faith and the candy man’s gone
I hate to tell you but the candy man’s gone²⁰

This secularized faith, with its technologically achieved eschatological hope, is a misplaced faith akin to the whoring after idolatry so graphically depicted in prophets like Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and Amos.²¹ And this kind of misplaced faith will always result in displaced persons. Aboriginal peoples relegated to

¹⁹ Walsh and Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed, p. 30.

²⁰ “Candy Man’s Gone,” from the album, Trouble with Normal ©1983 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

²¹ In “Call it Democracy” Cockburn describes the local third world dictators who serve the interests of global capitalism as “open for business like a cheap bordello.”
apartheid style reservations systems, Latin American refugees and shanty-dwellers struggling against brutal dictatorships, the proliferation of landmines that makes the land of home deadly, ecological despoliation that threatens to render this “blue green ball in black space” fundamentally hostile to human habitation – all of these socio-economic, geo-political and cultural-ecological dynamics have indeed made late twentieth century global capitalism a culture of the refugee, the wanderer, the exile.

What was true in the 1980’s is only intensified in the twenty-first century.

Brand new century private penitentiary
Bank vault utopia padded for the few
And its tumours for the masses, coughing for the masses
Earphones for the masses and they all serve you

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22 See “Stolen Land,” from the album, Waiting for a Miracle ©1987 Golden Mountain Music Corp., and “Indian Wars,” on the album, Nothing but a Burning Light ©1991 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

23 See “Rocket Launcher,” “To Raise the Morning Star,” “Dust and Diesel,” and “Nicaragua” on the album, Stealing Fire ©1984 Golden Mountain Music Corp.


25 “Planet of the Clowns,” on the album, The Trouble with Normal ©1983 Golden Mountain Music Corp. See also “If a Tree Falls in the Forest,” and “The Gift” on the album, Big Circumstance ©1988 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

26 Perhaps Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus helps illuminate Cockburn’s critique. For Bourdieu a habitus is “a way of being, a habitual state … and … a disposition, tendency, or inclination” to behave in particular ways. [Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D. Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 18 (italics in original).] Cockburn could be interpreted to be saying that the dominant habitus of western culture, the habitus of global capitalism, has a disposition to dispossess, it is a habitus not for habitation, but a habitus for homelessness. Steve Bouma-Prediger and I discuss these issues at greater length in Beyond Homelessness (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, forthcoming).
Trickle down give 'em the business
Trickle down supposed to give us the goods
Cups held out to catch a bit of the bounty
Trickle down everywhere trickle down blood

This, Cockburn insists, is the captivity of our time; this is the spirit of our age, “the wind in which all must sway.” And in the face of such a spirit “all sane people die now/ be lifted up and carried away” because “you’ve got no home in this world of sorrows.” Here is the spiritual heart of our exile. It is not just that the forces of global capitalism render so many people socio-economically, ecologically and geo-politically homeless, it is also that when such a home-destroying ideology dominates the spiritual landscape, when it creates such a world of sorrows, all sane people, all people with vision, will experience a profound homelessness, will experience life as exiles in their own homes.

III Hope in the Darkness

But Cockburn has “seen the flame of hope among the hopeless/ And that was truly the biggest heartbreak of all/ That was the straw that broke me open.”

Hopelessness is acquiescence to the empire, the powers of normalcy, and it is a luxury only afforded by those who will take their comfort from the empire. The


28 “All our Dark Tomorrows,” Ibid. For an analysis of capitalism as a cultural ethos and spirit see Bob Goudzwaard, Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

29 “Last Night of the World,” from the album, Breakfast in New Orleans, Dinner in Timbuktu ©1999 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
hopeless, those who are victimized by the empire, those who are the pawns in
the moves of global capitalism, cannot afford such a luxury. In the face of the
death squads, there can be no postmodern ambiguity, no ethical undecidability.
“If you think there’s no difference between right and wrong,” sings Cockburn,
then “just go down to where the death squad lives.” Because “without the could-
be and the might-have-been/ all you’ve got left is your fragile skin/ and that ain’t
worth much down where the death squad lives.”30 Or as he sings in his 1996
song, “Night Train”:

And in the absence of a vision there are nightmares
And in the absence of compassion there is cancer
Whose banner flies over palaces and mean streets
And the rhythm of the night train is a mantra31

Note that this is a “night train.” Cockburn’s lyrics are often preoccupied
with vision in the dark – “Night Vision.”32 And so in “Birmingham Shadows” he
writes,

Head full of horrors

30 “Where the Death Squad Lives,” on the album, Big Circumstance ©1988 Golden
Mountain Music Corp. J. Richard Middleton and I have discussed Cockburn’s work as an
alternative voice to postmodern paralysis in “Theology at the Rim of a Broken Wheel:
Bruce Cockburn and Christian Faith in a Postmodern World,” Grail: An Ecumenical
Journal 9,2 (June 1993): 14-39; and “Dancing in the Dragon’s Jaws: Imaging God at the
End of the Twentieth Century,” The Crucible 2,3 (Spring 1992): 11-18. See also the way
in which we employ Cockburnian insights in Truth is Stranger than It Used to Be:
Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

31 From the album, Charity of Night ©1996 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

32 Night Vision is the title of Cockburn’s fourth album, released in 1973. It should also be
noted that many of Cockburn’s songs are situated in the night time. It would appear that
the man suffers from insomnia. I am indebted to Lisa Chisolm-Smith for this insight.
Heart full of night
At home in the darkness, but hungry for dawn
I can only remember scenes, never the stories I live...

Perhaps it is difficult to keep a story-line straight in the dark, perhaps the memories of horror makes a coherent narrative impossible. Cockburn is at home, however, in the darkness, even as he is hungry for the dawn. He can find his way in the dark, but he is not prepared to accept such horror-filled darkness to have the last word. Indeed, in his most recent album Cockburn sings,

I can see in the dark it's where I used to live
I see excess and the gaping need
Follow the money – see where it leads
It's to shrunken men stuffed up with greed...

If you have eyes to see, if you have lived long enough in the dark to acquire "night vision" then the dark cannot hide the distortions of global capitalism.

And now it becomes clear that Cockburn actually can see more than just scenes in the dark – there is a story to be told here of excess, gaping need, shrunken men and greed. Moreover, even if he can't quite put it all together, there is nonetheless a story that gives him night vision, a story that dares to hope that out of this darkness there will be a dawn, light out of the darkness.

IV Hope for Homecoming

Such a hope is nowhere more powerfully voiced than in his 1985 song, "Santiago Dawn." Recounting revolutionary opposition to the Pinochet regime

33 “All our Dark Tomorrows,” from the album, You’ve Never Seen Everthing ©2004 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
in Chile, ten years after the CIA supported overthrow of Salvadore Allende’s elected government on September 11, 1973, Cockburn sings:

At the crack of dawn the first door goes down
Snapped off a makeshift frame
In a matter of minutes the first rock flies
Barricades burst into flame

First mass rings through smoke and gas
Day flowers out of the night
Creatures of the dark in disarray
Fall before the morning light

Bells of rage -- bells of hope
As the ten-year night wears down
Sisters and brothers are coming home
To see the Santiago dawn

Santiago sunrise
See them marching home
See them rising like grass through cement
In the Santiago dawn

In this Isaian vision of homecoming, dawn is possible, the ten-year night can be dispelled by a dawn of new beginnings, darkness can be “dead and gone,” sings Cockburn, because homecoming is an ineluctable force in human life, “Santiago sunrise/ see them marching home/ see them rising like grass through cement/ in the Santiago dawn.”35 But note which bells are ringing, calling the people home in the face of the forces of homelessness – “first mass rings through the smoke

34 “Santiago Dawn,” from the album, World of Wonders ©1985 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

35 To catch the Isaian overtones, see Isaiah 40-55; and 60.4-22. On second Isaiah as a vision of homecoming see Walter Brueggemann, Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), ch. 5.
and gas/ day flowers out of the night/ creatures of the dark in disarray/ fall
before the morning light.” These “bells of rage – bells of hope,” these bells of
homecoming, are the bells of the mass. Perhaps it is dark, perhaps it is difficult to
keep a story-line together, but there is in the very ringing of these bells a call to a
subversive story of liberation, a eucharistic narrative of day flowing out of the
night. When Cockburn is looking for the language of hope, when he is looking
for symbols and images to fund an alternative imagination, his most consistent
source is the biblical metanarrative.36

V Biblical Imagery and Narrative

We have already noted how Cockburn’s socio-economic critique is rooted
in a biblical understanding of the bad fruit that idolatry bears in human life, now
we explore briefly how biblical themes of creation and spirit are integral to his
iconography.37

a) Creation Theology

36 On “funding the imagination” see Walter Brueggemann, Texts under Negotiation: The
Bible and Postmodern Imagination (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1993), and
Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox,
1997). See also Walsh and Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed.

37 Cockburn acknowledges that his understanding of Christianity “has been enlarged by
the wisdom of other faiths and also shaped by experience.” And will go on to say, “I owe
as much to the Sufis or to Hinduism as I do to the Bible.” [Quoted in the Greg King
interview, “In a Dangerous Time.”] While the expansive nature of Cockburn’s spirituality
is not the topic of this paper, the reading of his work that I am offering is clearly
theologically motivated. I am tracing various kinds of biblical themes and images in his
work. Perhaps it is a limitation of my frame of reference, but it also seems to me that
there is more influence from the Bible to be discerned in Cockburn’s iconography than
from either Hinduism or the Sufis – Cockburn’s self-understanding notwithstanding.
Cockburn’s vision of life is located somewhere between apocalyptic dread and creational delight. In “Lovers in a Dangerous Time” he sings, “One day you’re waiting for the sky to fall/ the next you’re dazzled by the beauty of it all.” 38 But it is creational delight that makes the darkness so apocalyptically dreadful for Cockburn. It is the sheer joy of the Creator’s declaration, “It is good, quite delightful,” that makes the distortion of creation so painful in Cockburn’s worldview. While the epistemological arrogance of modernist control gives us a world where “the skin around every city looks the same/ miles of flat neon spelling well-known names/ USED TRUCKS DIRTY DONUTS YOU YOU’RE THE ONE/ fat wheeled cars squeal into the sun,” 39 Cockburn’s is a more humble worldview – “weavers’ fingers on the loom/ patterns shift too fast to be discerned/ all these years of thinking/ ended up like this/ in front of all this beauty/ understanding nothing.” 40 The question is whether the world is conceived as the autonomous construction of modernist hubris or a beautifully complex tapestry woven by a divine weaver.

Cockburn opts for a richly biblical understanding of creation. Because creation is sung and danced into being by an ecstatic Creator;

38 “Lovers in a Dangerous Time,” from the album, Stealing Fire ©1984 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

39 “Silver Wheels,” from the album, In the Falling Dark ©1976 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

40 “Understanding Nothing,” from the album, Big Circumstance ©1988 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
you were dancing
I saw you dancing
throwing your arms toward the sky
finger opening
like flares
stars were shooting everywhere
lines of power
bursting outward
along the channels of your song
mercury waves flashed
under your feet
shots of silver in the shell-pink dawn,\(^{41}\)

Cockburn is free to sing a hymn of praise to the Creator:

\[
\text{Lord of the Starfields} \\
\text{sower of life} \\
\text{heaven and earth are} \\
\text{full of your light} \\
\text{Voice of the nova} \\
\text{smile of the dew} \\
\text{all of our yearning} \\
\text{only comes home to you} \\
\quad \text{O Love that fires the sun} \\
\quad \text{keep me burning.}^{42}\]

And when humans miss the ecstasy, don’t join the dance, fail to sing their praise and don’t notice that the almighty, deafening voice of the super nova is as gentle and as inviting as the morning dew – that is, when there’s all this “glory shining around and we’re all caught taking a dive,” – then it isn’t surprising that “all the

\(^{41}\) “Creation Dream,” from the album, \textit{Dancing in the Dragon’s Jaws} ©1979 Golden Mountain Music Corp. The influence of C.S. Lewis’s creation story in \textit{The Magician’s Nephew} (New York: Harper Collins, 1955) in which Aslan sings creation into being is clear.

\(^{42}\) “Lord of the Starfields,” from the album \textit{In the Falling Dark} ©1976 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
beasts of the hills around shout, ‘such a waste/ don’t you know that from the first
to the last we’re all one in the gift of Grace!’”\(^43\) And when we fail to share
Cockburn’s Augustinian insight that “all of our yearning only comes home to
you” then our ingratitude to the Gift-giver and our insistence upon reducing this
world to a “cold commodity culture”\(^44\) will render us most fundamentally
homeless and we will engage in culture construction that will result in
displacement.

In another of his early creation hymns Cockburn sings, “we’re given love
and love must be returned/ that’s all the bearings that you need to learn/ see how
the starwheel turns.”\(^45\) But we must learn those bearings, Cockburn insists. We
must allow the very love that birthed all of creation to set our course of life
through this creation. We must return this love in the kind of careful stewardship
that we practice in our culture-forming, our homemaking. Cockburn is tapping
in here to the deepest meanings of covenant in the biblical tradition. But that is
precisely where things have gone wrong. If earlier we have seen that modernity
has embraced a misplaced faith, then the more primordial problem, according to
Cockburn, is that we have broken covenant through a displaced stewardship of
creational gifts.

\(^{43}\) “In the Falling Dark,” Ibid.

\(^{44}\) “The Gift,” from the album, *Big Circumstance* ©1988 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

\(^{45}\) “Starwheel,” from the album, *Joy Will Find a Way* ©1975 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
Way out on the rim of the galaxy
The gifts of the Lord lie torn
Into whose charge the gifts were given
Have made it a curse for so many to be born
This is my trouble –
These were my fathers
So how am I supposed to feel?
Way out on the rim of a broken wheel

If we do not follow the navigational direction of love, how does the starwheel turn? It bumps along on a broken rim, while creational blessings transposes into the curse of covenant-breaking, and the creational home becomes a homeless wasteland.

Such a theology of creational gift and its distortion provides Cockburn with both an intense sensitivity to creational homelessness and a profound source of hope. Rooted in creational delight, Cockburn laments the “green brain facing lobotomy” of rain forest clear-cut logging which results in species extinction and ozone-thinning. And the ecological tragedy of the Chernobyl disaster takes on new meaning when seen in the light of covenant:

they’re hosing down trucks at the border under a rainbow sign
the raindrops falling on my head burn into my mind
on a hillside in the distance there’s a patch of green sunshine
ain’t it a shame …
about the radium rain

46 “Broken Wheel,” from the album, Inner City Front ©1981 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

47 “If a Tree Falls,” from the album, Big Circumstance ©1988 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

48 “Radium Rain,” Ibid.
Maybe the rainbow tells us that God will never destroy the earth again, but that doesn’t mean we can’t.

When one’s imagination is funded by images of creational harmony and coherence, it is not surprising that one faces the fragmented culture of late modernity with an intensity of pathos: “Civilization and its discontents/ When all’s been said and all the money spent/ Trying to beat the system of the world’s events/ Gets you nowhere.” And if one understands the creation as a response to the life-engendering song of the Creator, it is not surprising that the cry of distress in the face of violence and oppression should be a source of profound disorientation and anger: “Hear the cry in the topic night/ Should be the cry of love but it’s a cry of fright/ Some people never see the light/ Till it shines through bullet holes.”

A biblically rich and evocative creation theology is also the foundation of Cockburn’s hope. At the end of “Gavin’s Woodpile,” the tensions of the song come to resolution in a sacramental view of creation:

a mist rises as the sun goes down
and the light that’s left forms a kind of crown
the earth is bread the sun is wine
it’s a sign of a hope that’s ours for all time

49 “Civilization and its Discontents,” from the album, The Trouble with Normal ©1983 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

50 “Tropic Moon,” Ibid.

51 “Gavin’s Woodpile,” from the album, In the Falling Dark ©1976 Golden Mountain Music Corp.
And in an album in which Cockburn will record prophetic songs like “Call it Democracy,” “People see Through You,” and “Santiago Dawn,” the title track will breathe new life of hope because we live in a “World of Wonders.”

moment of peace like brief arctic bloom
red gold ripple of the sun going down
line of black hills makes my bed
sky full of love pulled over my head
in this
world of wonders ...

Against most of the evidence, and with his eyes wide open, Cockburn still can see a sky full of love, he can still receive this world as a gift, and therein is the religious foundation of his deepest hope and his most liberating dreams.

b) A Crisis of Spirit

The crisis of our age, Cockburn insists, is a spiritual crisis. Our “unbelievable indifference shown life/ spirit/ the future/ anything
green/ anything just” is rooted in a devotion to a golden calf because “greed twists eternal in the human breast.” And so when Cockburn gets to thinking about the depths of our distortion, our evil, our violence, he confesses:

52 “World of Wonders,” from the album, World of Wonders ©1985 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

53 Consider these lines from “A Dream Like Mine:” “Beautiful rocks – beautiful grass/Beautiful soil where they both combine/Beautiful river – covering sky/never thought of possession but all this is mine.” From the album, Nothing but a burning light ©1991 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

54 “You’ve Never Seen Everything,” from the album, You’ve Never Seen Everything ©2004 Golden Mountain Music Corp. In a recent interview Cockburn has said, “Without some understanding of our spiritual connection with the universe, humanity will become a failed experiment.” Greg King, “In a Dangerous Time.”
And this is too big for anger
it’s too big for blame.
We stumble through history so humanly lame.
So I bow down my head,
say a prayer for us all.
That we don’t fear the spirit
when it comes to call.55

If the crisis is spiritual, then it is to the Spirit that we must turn. Evocatively working with biblical imagery, Cockburn seems to be saying that there is no light, no dawn of new creation, without the illuminating and enlivening power of the Spirit.

But can we hear the Spirit? Can there be hope in exile? Can we be animated by a liberating imagination that will set us free from our imperial captivity? Only if we don’t forget, Elie Wiesel has counseled. Only if we have liberating and life-giving memories that can shape a vision of a better future.

And so Cockburn, an artist of remembering in the face of exile, persistently calls us to memory:

Amid the rumours and the expectations
and all the stories dreamt and lived
Amid the clangour and the dislocation
and things to fear and to forgive
  Don't forget
  about delight
  y'know what I'm saying to you ...56

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55 “Postcards from Cambodia,” Ibid.

56 “Don’t Forget About Delight,” Ibid.
In the amnesia of exile, with its rumours of wars, failed stories, fear and dislocation, there is still a liberating memory, a memory of delight.

Amid the post-ironic postulating
and the poet's pilfered rhymes
Meaning feels like its evaporating
Out of sight and out of mind
  Don't forget
  about delight ...

Even in the face of postmodern meaninglessness, despair and anxiety, Cockburn wants to remind us of delight. What memory is this? Might it go all the way back to the Creator's delight in the very goodness of creation? Might this memory of the Creator giggling his joy in creation, "It is good ... quite delightful," be Cockburn's most foundational and most liberating memory? Against all the evidence, against all that has been seen, there is still a more primordial vision - the eye of God, now filled with tears of sorrow but then filled with tears of joy.

Might our vision be renewed to see again with joy? Cockburn ends his most recent album with these lines:

    Messenger wind swooping out of the sky
    Lights each tiny speck in the human kaleidoscope
    With hope^57

This wind that hovered over the waters at creation, led Israel in exodus liberation, spoke through the prophets, anointed Jesus and fell upon the church at Pentecost, still sheds light and brings hope in our exile. Cockburn is an agent

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^57 "Messenger Wind," Ibid.
of that hope, a voice of homecoming in the face of global homelessness, an artistic servant of that Messenger Wind.