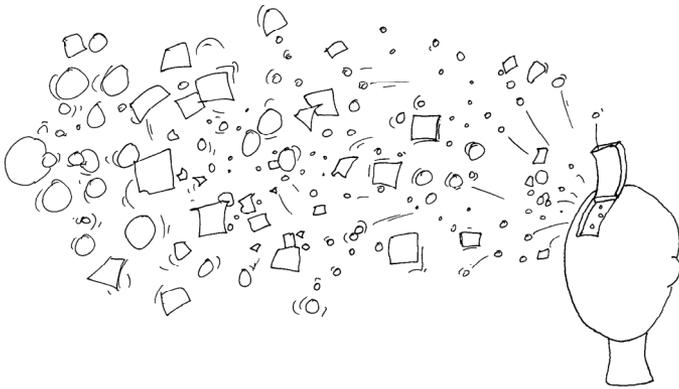


# MINISTRY OF IDEAS



Marcel Currin



## Beer with Jesus

Halfway through the sermon I kissed my wife on the cheek and told her I was going outside for some fresh air. Truth is I felt like a beer. I sat on the steps in the sun wondering why we stuff ourselves indoors on days like this. Then I heard the familiar clink of cold green glass. I looked up and Jesus was standing in front of me holding a couple of lagers.

Don't ask how I knew it was Him. You'll know too, when God Incarnate turns up with a beer. Monteiths, I noted, and he nodded. No point skipping church for Lion Ice, he said. Cheers.

We drank for a while. I asked him, shouldn't you be in church? He said straight back, shouldn't you? (Being Jesus, he answers every question with a question.) I shrugged. You tell me, I said, it's your church. He didn't respond, just looked over the bottle at me with his volcanic brown eyes.

You don't look much like any of the pictures I've seen, I said. He replied, I don't think that's ever been your problem. No, I said, I don't suppose it has.

The sun was hot, the beer was perfect, cold and lightly perspiring on the bottle. Beautiful day, I said. Thanks, said Jesus. I laughed and took another swig. The questions I'd always wanted to ask had suddenly ducked their cowardly little heads.

I said to Jesus, you know that I don't much believe in you any more, don't you. He said, that may be the case, but you're still drinking my beer.

## Doomsday

The end of the world totally sucked. Think of those movies where aliens blow the shit out of everything, it was like that, but worse. There was no time for resistance, it was straight to business, they just turned up in their big spaceships and started melting us with horrible, silent guns. One slow sweep across the land and everyone melted. The entire human race: soup.

Although, it was kind of funny that they started in Timaru. Who knows why. They flew all the way across the galaxy and came to ... Timaru. In the midst of all the melting we had to laugh at the Americans who were indignant that the aliens hadn't gone straight to Washington D.C. It was worth getting a Sky subscription in those final moments just to see the White House journalists scratching their heads. An awful way to end the human race, but satisfying too, from that perspective.

## Unborn poem

I told her there was a poem growing in my head. She asked to see it. I don't normally show them half formed, I said. But I let her lean in.

It's very dark in here, she said. Wait, I can see the poem. It's very faint but the start of a heartbeat illuminates it. I can't tell the shape exactly, it keeps shifting like a cloud. Or like silk in a gentle breeze. The longer I look at it, the more colours I see. Gentle, gentle colours blooming and fading. It is such a small thing struggling against the darkness. The darkness is so vast. It's beautiful, she said.

The poem? I asked. Or the darkness?

The poem in the darkness, she replied.

## No laughing matter

My brain scan glared at me from the illuminated display board. Not good news I'm afraid, said the doctor. You have a condition we call Early Onset Wit Loss. This section of your brain is deteriorating. You've already noticed that you're no longer as funny in social situations.

He paused. You need to know that the condition is degenerative, there's nothing we can do to stop it. So it's going to get worse, not better. I'm sorry to tell you, you will never be funny again.

How long do I have? I asked quietly.

It could be months, it could be years, he said.

I shook my head. Is there nothing I can do?

He said, the best advice I can give is: don't try to be funny. If you hope you are about to be funny, you probably won't be. Most importantly you should avoid puns. Many people with your condition slip into a bad pun habit. Remember, puns are never funny.

But I'm funny, I said. I know I am funny.

He said gently, of course you are, but this is a medical condition, you can't fight it. Perhaps now is a good time to re-brand yourself as a quiet font of wisdom.

I grinned. I've never been that font of wisdom, I said.

My God, said the doctor. It's worse than I thought.

## Application for a hangover

The woman behind the bar said, that's your fourth drink, if you want any more you'll need to apply in writing. She handed me a clipboard with a piece of paper. An application form? I said. She shrugged. New rules.

I took the form back to our table to show everyone. They want me to apply for my next drink, I said. I have to agree to a partial or entirely unproductive day tomorrow. I have to agree to a cycle of sweat and fever-like symptoms, waves of nausea, thirst, dizziness and probable headache. I also have to agree to possible gastrointestinal effects including but not limited to the excessive evacuation of too fluid faeces or violent ejection of matter from the stomach through the mouth.

Everyone said, eeeww! The bar woman hurried over with a second clipboard. Apologies, she said, I gave you the wrong form. The correct form requires your consent to feel outrageously invincible, to be extra outgoing and twice as hilarious despite potential to say or do things you might regret later and to experience a heightened emotional state of overwhelming love and affection for all of your friends, even the unattractive ones.

Everyone said, sign that one!

Grabbing the pen I thought, all paperwork should be this much fun.