

Sunday Message from Fr William for the Epiphany of the Lord 2024

The 'Other World' continued from 17.12.23

Dear People of St Mary's, human experiences that were once thought to be uniquely human, and attributed to a non-material 'soul' – the experience of memory, the experience of self and self-awareness, personal identity, freedom to choose, and so on, are progressively explained by scientific observation and rational argument. The human 'soul', accounting for experiences that cannot otherwise be explained, is gradually and inexorably being explained away.

On the other hand, at least for a Christian, the idea that Man is nothing more than a complex organism, whose decisions and actions are determined by internal memory and external stimulus, undermines the dignity of Man. It undermines our capacity for a freedom that is not deterministic. And it denigrates the Creator, the Trinity, as if they would create Man and then leave him in an illusion of autonomy, and that they would then enter into a relationship with such a creature that is purely physical, purely material, with whom they have nothing in common.

But there is a third option. Let me take you back once again to the Genesis account of Man's creation. Man is fashioned from the 'dust of the earth', yes just like the other animals. This 'fashioning' from the material of this world is entirely compatible with mainstream modern science and the theory of biological evolution and the resultant complexity of Man's central nervous system. But then the Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, is breathed into him from the 'other world'. (*Genesis 2:7*). And this changes everything.

It changes everything, but only in the most incremental way, and in a way that gradually generates true autonomy in the creature, and seeks agreement and collaboration with this increasingly autonomous creature, every step of the way.

But the starting point is also important. We need to step away from any notion that everything spiritual is good and anything material is bad. This is a heresy that continues to dog Christianity to this day. (It's called Manichaeism). No, the material world is good. Genesis 1 is clear and emphatic about this. 'He saw that it was good.' (repeated six times). This includes Man, and this is even before the Spirit is breathed into him. Man as a biological organism - he too is good.

So the idea that it denigrates the Creator to enter into some kind of relationship with such a physical, biological creature is not so problematic after all. The Book of The Bible portrays divine Wisdom 'at play everywhere in the world, delighting to be with the sons of men.' (*Proverbs 8*).

Starting with this good raw material, very much of this world, the Spirit then comes down from the 'other world', makes himself known to the creature, and awaits an invitation...

to be continued...



Sunday 7 January 2024