

Sunday Message from Fr William for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time 2024

*The 'Other World' continued from 07.01.24*

Dear People of St Mary's, the notion of a superior intelligence connecting with this world and effecting a transference of their intelligence into human beings has its place in literary fiction. Eg Arthur C Clarke *The Sentinel* (1948); Fred Hoyle *The Black Cloud* (1957). Is this the kind of transformation or enhancement of Man we're looking at when the Spirit is 'breathed into' Man, elevating him to a new level of existence? Not really. I guess there is a superficial analogy: the human organism with its central nervous system provides the raw material; the Spirit could be described as a 'superior intelligence'; the transformation involves imparting something of itself into the human organism. But that's about as far as any analogy goes.

To think of the Spirit as a 'superior intelligence' is what we call a category error. It's like placing the Spirit on a sliding scale of intelligent beings, at the top end of the scale, with humans and chickens at the bottom end, and advanced alien lifeforms from distant galaxies somewhere in the middle. The Spirit belongs to no such scale. In fact he cannot be placed on kind of scale or measure of comparison with the things of this world, with the things of this universe, whatsoever. Even to attribute 'intelligence' to the Spirit is to attribute a very human notion to a being that is utterly beyond any human categories. Nor does Spirit come into this world from some distant galaxy or from any 'place' in the universe. The Spirit is from the 'other world'. He is the 'other world', with the Father and the Son.

But He does come into this world. He does engage with Man. And He does have a transforming effect on Man by imparting Himself to Man, and into Man. This is worded in the Greek Septuagint of Genesis 2:7 that the Lord God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' (ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς) and the man became a living being (καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν).

In *The Sentinel* the superior intelligence trains primitive Man using its extra-terrestrial technology. In *The Black Cloud* the superior intelligence in this literary fiction attempts something like a digital transfer of knowledge into the brains of its human recipients, albeit with their consent and collaboration. I reference these fictional images only as a useful contrast to the utterly different way in which the divine Spirit is poured out into the hearts and minds of Man.

By contrast with these, the Bible uses a very different set of images to convey how the Spirit is imparted to Man – images of breathing into (Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37), pouring onto (Joel 3), drinking in (John 7), giving (John 7), being plunged into (Acts 1), being filled with (Acts 2) – a rich concert of images, and we need them all. But it's this first image of the Spirit being breathed into Man in the Genesis 2 account of creation, it's this image that the Risen Christ evokes and confirms on the day of the Resurrection, when He breathes on them and says 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (John 20:22). Time to go more deeply into what it means for the Spirit to be breathed into us.

*to be continued...*

*William*

Sunday 14 January 2024