

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

*The 'Other World' continued from 21.01.24*

Have another look at the scenario. Instead of your usual beach holiday you spend a week on the streets of Kolkata working with the Missionaries of Charity. Here's the same range of possible motives, this time in reverse order: To enhance your CV; To make a good impression on others; To step beyond your comfort zone; For the feeling of satisfaction; To become a better person; To help make our world a better place; Compassion for those in need; You love Christ and you see Him in the poor.

Motives at the beginning of this range arise from instincts such as self-preservation and self-propagation. There's nothing bad in this (unless it's at the expense of other people). These are God-giving instincts. Remember, Man, along with the other animals, is created 'good'. And this is even before the Spirit is given. But as you progress through this range of eight hypothetical motives, the motives become 'higher'. The last two in particular – compassion for complete strangers, and love for Christ – it's difficult to account for motives such as these in terms of self-preservation or self-propagation, even on a family or tribal level. What's happening here is a transformation of human organism by the Spirit. This is the spiritualisation of Man.

Notice we're not talking here about Man becoming a two-part entity – body + 'soul'. We're not talking about the Spirit introducing into Man a new component that will work alongside and in addition to his central nervous system. We're not talking about a biological component capable only of instinct, and a separate spiritual component capable of these higher motives. We're talking instead about the spiritualisation of the human organism itself. These new and higher motives that Man becomes capable of, let's call it altruistic love, spring from the human organism itself, once it has been infused by the Spirit, and in particular from the brain and central nervous system. This is the 'spiritual body' that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15. This is the New Man he speaks of in Ephesians 4. And it is, once again, a gradual transformation, a gradual elevation, a gradual spiritualisation of Man.

So, back to the question: Are we (a) purely physical bodies, working in a way that is deterministic, or (b) physical bodies with a non-material component, a soul? I ran through with you the pros and cons of each view. (17 December 2023). What we're looking at now is a third way that brings these two philosophies together into a coherent synthesis. No need to invoke a bipartite model of Man (body+soul/spirit or body/soul+spirit) or a tripartite model (body+soul+spirit). Instead what we're looking at is the Spirit infusing the human organism itself and creating something that is *single* and radically new – the 'spiritual body', the New Man. (We can look at why Paul sometimes switches to a bipartite or tripartite account of Man).

This third way is entirely compatible with any scientific account of experiences such as memory, self-awareness, personal identity, self-determination, etc generated in the central nervous system. At the same time it upholds the dignity of Man as a spiritual being with a capacity for love, and for a personal relationship with his Creator.

*to be continued...*

*William*

28 January 2024