

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

The 'Other World' continued from 04.02.24

Go back once again to that foundational text from Genesis 2. 'Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the earth. Then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.' In common with the other animals fashioned by the Creator, Man is a biological organism formed from the particles of the material world. The Spirit is then 'breathed into him'. What impact does this have on his freedom?

It sounds like a takeover doesn't it. There he was, a free, autonomous being, exercising his freedom and autonomy, as accounted for in the preceding reflections. And then some external influence or force or being that is other than himself, even alien to himself, is 'breathed' into him from outside. It sounds like a takeover. It sounds analogous even to demonic possession, frequently documented in the Gospels and in rare subsequent cases of this phenomenon.

But demonic possession and the indwelling of the Spirit are not analogous nor even remotely comparable. Whatever it actually means for a demon to be in a human being, it shouldn't be there. It's definitely alien to him. By contrast the Spirit is the one thing that should be in Man as an inalienable part of him. The Spirit is native to Man. It's not that the Spirit is breathed into Man subsequent to his creation. The breathing of the Spirit into the human organism is an integral part of his creation. This means that the more the Spirit is breathed into Man as an ongoing part of his creation, the more he becomes truly himself.

What does this mean for the uniqueness of our personal identity? Does it mean we all become clones of the Spirit? Far from it. Not only does the uniqueness of each central nervous system provide the foundation for each person's unique personal identity, but the Spirit is breathed into to each of us in a different way, adapting to the uniqueness of the individual. This is symbolised on the Day of Pentecost by the Spirit first dividing, and only then coming down each of the recipients (Acts 2). It's articulated by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (12:4): Although the Spirit is one, he gives himself to each in a uniquely different way.

And, finally, what does it mean for Man's freedom? I know it's been a long lead up to this all-important question! I began with this account of freedom: The extent to which cognitive output and any resulting action is determined by you, by your personal identity, by your unique neural network – to that extent it is your thought and it is your action. (See 3 December 2023). I also added that this freedom is never, or at least not yet, absolute, but a balance between internal and external factors.

Now allow the Spirit to come into play. If Man becomes more and more truly himself the more the Spirit is breathed into him as an ongoing part of his creation then the implications for his freedom are immense. Far from diminishing Man's freedom, the the more Spirit enhances the increases his freedom and autonomy, and potentially without limit.

to be continued...



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