

The Soul Lives where it Loves

by the Revd Neil Broadbent

'Let saints on earth in concert sing
with those whose work is done;
for all the servants of our King
in heaven and earth are one.'

Charles Wesley

Spiritual Beings

A quick search using the internet reveals a large number of television programmes aimed at teenagers and young adults which have a paranormal theme. Amongst them are:

American Gothic, Being Human, Charmed, Ghost Whisperer, Hex, Jekyll, Medium, Moonlight and Night Gallery. The viewing figures, the

large sums of money spent by the programme makers and the counsel of elder relatives 'not to waste your time on such stuff' suggest the possibility that there may be something in such stories.

Fr Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, by the gift and grace of God, a spiritual genius and world-famous palaeontologist, wrote 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience'.

In fiction, we have Oscar Wilde's delightful story of *The Canterville Ghost*. This chimes in with the great Doctor of the Church, St John of the Cross who tells us that 'the soul lives where it loves, not where it breathes'. Putting all this

together suggests that there really are souls with bodies, like us (incarnate beings) and souls without bodies, people who have died (discarnate beings).

Spiritual Union

Helen Greaves' *Testimony of Light* is the remarkable account of her unsought and ongoing relationship with her deceased friend Frances Banks. As scripture says, 'Love is stronger than death' (Rom 8:38). This must be so because 'God is love: he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him.' (1 John 4:16). Jesus brought Lazarus back to life again and, later, God raised Jesus from the dead.

Purposeful, outpouring Love (also known as God) never ends. It is, of course, God who first loves us (1 John 4:10,19). We are all members of the mystical body of Christ whose love binds together the communion of saints (cf. 1 Cor 12-15). Love *is* both spiritual union and, as the bishop St Francis de Sales wrote, 'the abridgement of all theology'. Jesus promises us eternal connectedness to him (love) and through him to our loved ones: 'Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time' (Matt 28:20).

Dying Unprepared

The opposite of love is separation. It may well be that fear of death and dying comes from the fear of being disconnected from those who love us the most. Indeed, the Litany in *Common Worship* teaches 'From dying unprepared, good Lord deliver us'. What, then, of today's war dead,

those who died in traffic accidents, those who have committed suicide, the stillborn, the miscarried, the aborted fetuses and others who have not died peacefully?

The Revd Dr Martin Israel wrote, regarding babies who have died, 'As a rule, the younger the victim of "unnatural death", the more unsettled is its soul, and the more disquietude it sets up. Following miscarriage, "inevitable" or "induced" abortion the foetus is not well disposed after its rejection and death, for it tends to remain in psychic attachment to its mother, and sometimes to other members of its family also. There is often a great degree of resentment inasmuch as the foetus has lost its foothold in the family circle, and it may intrude quite disastrously in the family proceedings until it is persuaded to move on to God's care.' Loving prayer can heal this hurt; though the pain may still be felt for a long time.

Misery and Terror

Some people suffer from thoughts that torment or terrorize them. They inwardly struggle to be their normal selves, yet find, at times, that they are behaving 'out of character', 'unlike their usual self'; contrary, argumentative. "Why can't you hear me? Who am I, really? Can I ever be the *me* I want to be?", they may ask of others and of themselves. They may spend many years wandering the waste-howling wildernesses of anguish, loneliness and despair (Deut 32.10), in which life appears to be hell.

One way to begin to comprehend such enormous suffering is to envisage the afflicted one as an actor; at times involuntarily acting-out the part of another character, someone else. In medical circles the norm is to think of psychiatric, rather than psychic, conditions. Some of the individuals tormented by, e.g. gender confusion, may in fact be haunted.

The state of being haunted is a state of being sought and needed. The help the unquiet dead needs is recognition of who they are and that they do indeed exist, though not as we exist in the flesh (1 Cor 15:44). What is forcefully wanted is recognition of the emotional pain and distress of those still very close even though they have died. They, too, need to be loved.

The psychiatrist Dr Kenneth McAll taught that those most likely to be haunted will be, within their family environment, the most sensitive, the most intelligent and the closest to God, because the 'lost soul' is turning to their best bet for help.

Healing Atonement

The Church is tasked to bring healing both to the seen and to the unseen (cf. Eph 3:10) and the annals of the Vatican contain many records (see Fr F X Schouppe) of the practical art of healing the haunted.

The first requisite is love for all involved, then prayer. Praying for, not *to*, the deceased is one of the best ways to

resolve grief and inherited family conflicts and is recommended in the Church of England's 1971 Report, *Prayer and the Departed*. Traffic accident 'black-spots' can cease to be dangerous after clergy have prayed at and blessed the site.

As these may be uncharted waters for almost everyone, it would be wise to ask your local minister or priest if he or she conducts 'requiem Eucharists'. Some evangelical ministers do and the majority of 'catholic' clergy certainly will. A requiem Eucharist is a celebration of Holy Communion (itself a re-presentation of Jesus' Last Supper) undertaken in the minister's usual fashion in which particular prayers are made to God. In these prayers, the 'dead but not departed' person is explicitly named, admitted to be one of the family if it is a foetus, apologies are made regarding the circumstances of their untimely death and forgiveness is sought from God over selfish, unloving acts of the past. The deceased is then commended into the light and love of Christ. It is most beneficial if the prayers come direct from the family members involved e.g., Mum or the afflicted one. It is perfectly OK to use one's everyday language; special 'religious' phrases are not essential. Suitable scripture readings include Ephesians 3:7-20 and John 5:24-29. Countless thousands of souls, in this life and the next, have received tremendous relief, release and healing by this simple method of amendment and reconciliation.

In a reversal of common belief regarding our deceased relatives, as Maurice Zundel wrote in *The Splendour of the Liturgy*, 'God has not taken them from us; He has hidden them in His heart that they may be closer to ours.' All parties concerned may then rejoice, in the words of George Wallace Briggs:

'Unfathomed love divine,
reign thou within my heart;
from thee nor depth nor height,
nor life nor death can part;
my life is hid in God with thee,
now and through all eternity.'

Bibliography

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