

October 2017

The World, the Flesh and the Devil: thoughts from Father Charles

A Triad of Evil

In catholic moral tradition, the teaching is that 'the World, the Flesh and the Devil' are the three primary sources of evil. They are sometimes described as the enemies of the soul. Reference, to emphasise their significance, is often made to Jesus' parable of the sower or to Paul's letter to the Ephesians (2:1-3).

In the Sower Parable the suggestion is that the birds eating the seed represent the devil, the 'shallow beliefs' of some are related to the flesh, and the 'attraction of wealth', to the world.

Paul writing to the Ephesians is somewhat more direct.

"You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else." Ephesians 2:1-3

As would be expected, this sound catholic moral teaching, based in scripture, underlined by Thomas Aquinas (in *Summa Theologica*), articulated at the Council of Trent (1547) is adopted within our Anglican Tradition. The Book of Common Prayer, the source of the full expression of Anglican Doctrine, includes the Litany statement (modern edition):

"From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord, deliver us."

So, 'the World, the Flesh and the Devil'.

A Question of Order.....

There seems to me to be an important insight related to the order (world – flesh – devil) of these three sources of evil. Many of us, and in particular certain parts of our Church, focus on 'flesh'. Yet, the first named is the 'world'.

When we talk of 'the world' our point of reference is not creation or nature but the 'system'. It's the way that we organise ourselves in groups, nations, cultures, institutions and the wide variety of other structures that serve to protect themselves and preserve their power. It is here that the most hidden source of evil lurks, both hidden and denied. And, because we exist within these 'systems', we are all part of it, though we may not see it and we are equally likely to avoid its recognition even when brought to our attention.

This evil informs nationalistic thinking, it's the unspoken factor in the increasing prominence of the 'Alt-right' in Germany and France, the articulated expression of purpose in Brexit, the underlying message within 'make America Great - again'. It is the confidence that allows and informs the belief that there is one direct line to God – whether it's ISIS and fundamentalist Islam, conservative or Orthodox Judaism or the certain knowledge of scripture as the complete expression of the will of God (identifiable within 'Orthodox' Anglicanism or GAFCON).

Focus on Flesh

If the 'World' is associated with system, the 'Flesh' is personal. And being personal, and belonging to the individual, it is the source of evil that exists in the value structures of people and how this lives out in their conduct with one another.

However, we are subject to a certain amount of bias when we consider matters of the flesh. This seems particularly so within the church. The 'sins of the flesh', sexuality and questions of gender are much loved by the more conservative wings of the church. It is these that occupy our fuller attention (as sin) rather than the personal mistakes and poorly framed values that are the source of evil on an individual level.

Yet, despite the fact that Jesus made no reference to 'sexual sin', it is an aspect of life that preoccupies attention. It is also interesting to observe that in the recent General Synod debates on 'Human Sexuality' and 'Conversion Therapy' theological reflection was completely absent. Additionally, the time taken and the emotion invested in these topics was out of proportion to pretty well all other subjects.

World and Flesh

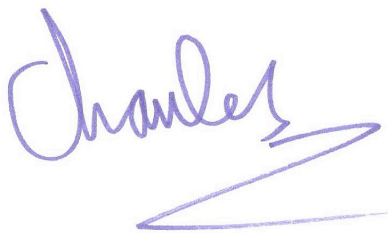
Perhaps when we consider the system and how individual evil shows itself at the individual level we should look for a more consistent ethic of life. Perhaps we should ask ourselves why the worlds of the media, business, entertainment and culture (systems) celebrate and promote people who are greedy, vain, prideful and driven by unnecessary levels of wealth (flesh). The lack of a consistent ethic allows us reward and promote evil in the world and then to try to punish and shame at a personal level.

Is this inconsistency one of the reasons that people fail to look toward the church for moral leadership? If this is the case, and such things as the 'rumblings' of Synod on Sexuality fill our minds, and we become deaf to the words of Bishop Philip North, who suggests that the "*Gospel we proclaim*" becomes "*a sham, an empty hypocrisy*" because of our failure to focus on the poor and those in need, then we need a rethink.

And the Devil

This, evil which is frequently sanctified and idealised, and which holds a place at the top of the 'triad of evil', I will leave for future reflection. Though, I will finish with a return to Thomas Aquinas, and the *Summa Theologica*, in which he suggested that "*evil only succeeds by disguising itself as good*".

With prayers and blessings,



As He Seemed To Me

When I mentioned to Dad that I wanted to say some words today, he looked at me, paused, and said “I’ll think about it”. That’s as far as we got. So, in the spirit of compromise and a little cheek, I decided to write them down instead. I can’t even begin to describe his musical gifts, and if I attempted a piece of prose with infrequent rhetorical flourishes it somehow wouldn’t have seemed true to him or to me; so I followed the oft-repeated advice – ‘write about what you know’.

Not one for outward self-examination at least, his was a generation twice removed from mine. When I look back at the events around his birth and childhood – the completion of universal suffrage, the rise of communism and fascism, living through a long and tiring war – it feels very much like ‘the past is a foreign country’. It seemed even longer ago when I was a child than it does now.

Childhood was happy memories of silly games, watching the trains go by, fairgrounds, small cornets, chips with sugar on by mistake, old churches, flasks, cold potatoes, Roman roads. It wasn’t that usual back then, having an older Dad. Some people thought he was my grandfather – the poor checkout lady soon found out what he thought of that. And later, some distance. For all our shared love of classical music, it was hard to explain something post-Glenn Miller to someone who didn’t think much of Elvis, and even less of most who came after him. His adult view was shaped pre-1960s: pre-Beatles, pre-sexual revolution. Pre-McDonalds. ‘Eugh!’

But where it left gaps, it also offered something special and even unique, which I felt strongly throughout his life and mine. The touching of two hands from wide spaces in time. Sometimes arguing or even infuriating one another; more often laughing. I learnt a lot from him, more than he could know. And even when this ungrateful teenager was dismissive or got angry with him, I confess, Dad, you (sometimes) had a point then, too.

He witnessed tumultuous changes in his life, particularly in attitudes and, consequently, language – of which he was a master, and which he couldn’t bear to see strangulated and Orwellian-ised. We live in a world today where we’re encouraged to say the right thing, utter the right phrase; somehow brushing the wrongs of yesteryear under the carpet and avoiding the many elephants still left in innumerable rooms.

He didn’t really understand this and wasn’t *always* “linguistically appropriate”. But what I witnessed in him was something that puts that into stark perspective: warmth, acceptance and a desire to understand. For a man so scholarly, there was an inquisitiveness and time for people that transcended personality, colour, background... he touched people in ways he didn’t know. This was an Oxford graduate, but from a grammar school, who endured national service and was the first in his family to go to university.

Disagreeing with him or challenging him was another matter, but many of us are only too aware of that. This five-year-old once uttered the word “rubbish” about something he didn’t like. A nearby adult told me “you shouldn’t say that just because it’s not for you”. “My Dad says it all the time”, I replied. His opinions and intellect were fierce; as was his reaction if he thought you’d insulted them.

Dad sailed blissfully close to the wind with his health over the years; in fact, he sailed right into it shouting ‘look, no hands’. His ‘five a day’ was taken in coffee, digestive biscuits, puddings, cigarettes (one full portion), with his grapes fermented. It gave us much cause to

laugh and sometimes (several) frights. I never expected him to be around for as long as he was, and the trials of others in this life have reminded me how lucky and grateful I am for it.

I think of the imagined words of C S Lewis at the end of 'Shadowlands': 'the pain now is part of the happiness then'. The raw truth is his passing will leave a hole in our lives that we will never quite be able to fill; and it will hurt, every day. But it can't and won't be empty because of all that he has generously left with us and *for us*; knowledge, wisdom, a multitude of wit and laughter; and love, in abundance.

So what did he teach me most in his 88 years, 11 months and five days? Lessons simpler than perhaps the above would suggest. Be yourself; delight in it; don't ever be defined by the expectations of others; but use what you have been given – for yourself and for the benefit and joy of others. And none of this semi-skimmed rubbish.

The times Dad looked most content were when playing and making music; time spent with mum; and when he was asleep. Last Saturday, just before 12.45pm on a bright September day at the edge of autumn, came the crushing yet inevitable realisation that he would not wake up from this one.

Thee, Lord, before the close of day,

Maker of all things, thee we pray

For thy dear loving kindness' sake

To guard and guide us in thy way.

Thank you for everything; and goodnight, Dad.

Words from 'Evening Hymn' by Henry Balfour Gardiner (1877-1950); an anthem that he and I both loved.

Barnaby Smith

DIARY DATE FOR THIS YEAR'S ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

The day before Armistice Day has been chosen for our Act of Remembrance at the St John's war memorial on the junction of Apsley Road and Whiteladies Road this year.

Armistice Day falls on a Saturday but our Act of Remembrance has become so important for the 200 local schoolchildren who attend each year that we have moved the short service and wreath-laying ceremony at 10.45 am to the previous day, Friday, November 10.

Most of the names on the memorial are those of former pupils of the nearby St John's Church of England Primary School who died in the *First World War*.

During this year's Act of Remembrance Fr Charles – and other clergy from *Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham and Redland* – will remind those gathered at the memorial that November this year is the hundredth anniversary of the end of the Battle of Passchendaele.

One of the bloodiest episodes of the First World War, it was fought from July to November 1917 for control of the ridges south and east of the Belgian city of Ypres in West Flanders. The Allies finally recaptured the village of Passchendaele but by then around a third of a million British and Allied soldiers had been killed or wounded in some of the most horrific trench warfare of the conflict.

Prior to the two-minute silence at 11 am on November 10 *The Last Post* will be sounded by bugler Sergeant Major Martin Dove of the Bristol Army Cadet Force's Corps of Drums and the silence will end as lone piper Bob Smythe from the City of Bristol Pipes and Drums plays a lament.

It is expected that wreaths will be laid this year by representatives of local residents, businesses in Whiteladies Road, Avon and Somerset Constabulary and local schools.

Brass players from Redmaids' High School – which, following a recent merger, now includes pupils of the former Redland High School – will accompany the singing of the hymn *I vow to thee, my country* and the *National Anthem*.

IN THIS MONTH ... OCTOBER 1897

Two letters to the Editors from the Correspondence Page

Firstly, from Agnes C Wollaston of College Road, Clifton:

Dear Sirs,

It is just a year since, through the Parish Magazine, I appealed for help for the violet growers at Porlock Weir, an appeal which was most kindly met at the time. This Autumn the violets seem likely to be fine and plentiful, but owing to the enormous foreign competition it is impossible to get regular orders from the florists. At a time when the winter prospects for the poor are not too cheerful, money brought in by these small industries will be most helpful, in addition to the uncertain earnings of the cottagers. Will no one give a standing order for weekly boxes at one shilling and upwards? Orders over five shillings would be sent post free, the number of flowers varying with the market price. The violets are freshly picked, and

packed immediately, thus retaining the freshness and delicious scent, in which the foreign flowers are unavoidably wanting. Orders sent will be immediately and carefully attended to, and any enquiries promptly answered.

Secondly, from "Veritas":

Dear Sirs,

As a visitor to Clifton and an attendant at your beautiful church, may I call your attention to a fact by which I, as well as others, have suffered?

The Churchwardens have thoughtfully placed at the bottom of the church a stand for umbrellas; but, unfortunately, when once placed there they are not always to be found again. I was the loser a fortnight ago of a valued one, and although I expected last Sunday to see it returned by the person who *unwittingly* took it, I have been disappointed. I know others have suffered in the same way. It is not pleasant to place dripping umbrellas at our feet. Is there no alternative to ensure their safety?

Julian Trust Night Shelter

Blanket Request

Winter is approaching rapidly and cold nights for the homeless.

Blankets and duvets are needed in the night shelter and to offer too often to guests who are unable to stay for the night as we only have 18 beds.

Please either leave them in the flower room or if you are unable to bring them to Church please ring me and I will collect.

Many thanks in anticipation.

Vera Sanders

Tel 01275 814002

PARISH RETREAT 2018

As many of you now know Glastonbury Retreat House will close on 27 December 2017. This comes as a shock as it has been a Retreat House since 1931 and All Saints has been going there for many years. We have been very happy there.

Many years ago All Saints also went to Llangasty, near Brecon, for retreats and that is where we will be going in 2018.

- The dates are
Friday 2 February 4pm to 4pm on Sunday 4 February
- Cost approximately £160 per person – the new tariff hasn't been confirmed yet.
- Conductor – Christine Dodd, who is a Roman Catholic and an experienced Retreat Conductor. She has lead retreats at Llangasty.

We have to pay for 16 places regardless of whether that many go, so the cost may be a little more. We will need to pay with one cheque when we arrive, so I will need your full payment by 21 January 2018 to confirm your place.

Llangasty is much smaller than Glastonbury and is rather remote, so for the few, retail therapy will not be an option! It is intimate but friendly and has two chapels and a library. The scenery around is magnificent and there are some good walking places. I would suggest looking it up on the internet:

www.llangasty.com/

We are waiting for confirmation of a Conductor.

I will be putting a list to sign in the porch soon and update as necessary. I will also give details of directions and offer of lifts nearer the time.

Liz Badman

*Thou that has given so much to me
Give one thing more, a grateful heart.
(George Herbert)*

The requiem mass for Ken on 13th September was a profoundly moving and fitting occasion, for which his family give thanks to the many who made it so. We are also immensely grateful for the expressions of condolence assuring us of how much his contribution to life and worship at All Saints means, the love and esteem in which he is held. Our hearts, while sorrowful, are filled with hope and thanksgiving. Now we must adjust to living apart awhile until "we may merrily meet in heaven". May he rest in peace.

Jessica Smith

Notes for Fr James Harris Sermon at ASC

On: Sept 17th 2017 (Trinity 14)

Genesis 50: 15-21; Matthew 18: 21-35

- It won't have escaped your notice that our readings today all relate to forgiveness – and in a week when we have celebrated and given thanks for the Holy Cross, that does not seem like a bad thing to be thinking about.
- But forgiveness is one of those topics which trips off the tongue in Christian discussions, but which is so profound and complex and interconnected with other concepts like justice and healing and reconciliation, that it hardly seems possible to say anything useful about it in a short address like this.
- So I want to offer just a perspective on forgiveness today and, to do so, I want to put it into the context of the Nicene Creed, which we'll rehearse in just a few minutes' time. I want to offer a perspective on forgiveness which focuses not so much on what we do or how we do it; but rather on who we are, as the body of Christ; how forgiveness informs how we live and relate to one another; how we see our place in the economy of God.
- Economy is a fascinating word; linked to ecumenism, and derived from the Greek 'oikos' – house. It's essentially about how we order our house, about our relationships with one another and the stuff of life.
- Forgiveness in the economy of God, and in the context of the Creed, is about how we relate to the past and face the future in a God-ordered way.

Past

- There is a novel by Louis de Bernieres called *Birds Without Wings*, in which there is a beautiful episode about how the past can haunt. In it, the local Aga visits the Imam to discuss his treatment of his wife whom he has, perfectly legally, dismissed from the house and had stoned in the village square. The Imam leads him through a beautifully erudite and eloquent description of what it is to carry our sin with us: he describes it as a 'wavering in the soul'. He asks the Aga, 'do you feel a wavering in your soul?'. And the Aga responds, 'Yes, I do feel a terrible wavering in my soul.'
- It seems to me that the characters in our Bible readings felt that wavering too: Joseph's brothers, the indebted slave. They all felt that by doing something themselves, by making some kind of recompense, they could rid themselves of it. but the truth they discover is that there is no achievable recompense that can be made. The 10,000 talents the slave owes is estimated to be more than the GDP of his own and surrounding nations at the time. Jesus further makes the point to Peter with his exaggerated 77 times.

- Like the Aga in the novel, we find that, whatever legal or societal steps are taken, it is ultimately only God who can absolve, or resolve the past. As Joseph says, 'Am I in the place of God?'
- Lucy Winkett on R4 Thought for the Day recently put it like this: forgiveness is giving up all hope of a better past.
- This, I think, is part of what it means to be a holy catholic church which acknowledges one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We believe that, since Christ died for all (catholic) to restore all to God (holy), then as a result, the past is dealt with and no longer dictates the future. What we were yesterday no longer dictates what we will or could be tomorrow. Mistakes once made no longer rob future potential.
- Christ's work on the cross liberates us from the shackles of all we cannot change in our own strength and which would otherwise bind us indefinitely.

Future

- This freedom affects – or should affect – how we face the future: we are apostolic in the sense that we are sent out into the future to look for resurrection and signs of life, confident from experience that even the most seemingly intractable of situations is not beyond the redemption of God.
- We can choose to respond differently to our hurts and disappointments and weaknesses. As Christians, we are not immune from those; faith doesn't remove them from our lives, but we are enabled to place them within that God-economy, that God-ordered way of living which is centred on hope.
- But the future perspective on forgiveness is not only about ourselves, and here is the twist in the parable which, as ever with the parables, unlocks so much of the meaning.
- There is a tale told in north America about a crystal clear, limpid pond into which flows a stream. From time to time, a group of Beavers would build a dam at the inlet to the pond and the water would turn brackish because it was cut off from the fresh flowing water to replenish it. when the dam was removed, the water would flow and the pond returned to its clear state. However, it was noticed that, occasionally, the Beavers would build their dam at the outlet of the pond. And when that happened, the water turned brackish again – because, again, the flow of the water through the pond was blocked.
- And so, the living water which flows into us from God, which quenches the wavering in our own souls, is not destined for us alone. It is destined to flow through us and out from us for the refreshment of others too. Just as in the case of Joseph, the forgiveness he offers his brothers not only benefits them at a personal level, but is

expressly said to be of benefit for their children and children's children, even for us today, the descendants of Israel.

- The water that flows into us and through us brings blessing for others and opens up the possibility of resurrection for the whole world.
- We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, in which the past is dealt with and the future actively sought with hope. This belief allows us to be blessing to others, to channel what we have received into the world and among one another.
- And if we struggle to experience or recognise God's merciful forgiveness for ourselves, it may just be that we need to look beyond ourselves, to seek to give away even that little that we struggle to own, to open the gates and let mercy flow out in order to increase the inflow of blessing for ourselves.
- A Celtic prayer of blessing to close:

On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders,

And you stumble,

May the clay dance to balance you.

And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window and the ghost of loss gets into you,

May a flock of colours, indigo, red, green and azure blue, come into you and make in you a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays in the cullach of thought,

And a stain of ocean blackens beneath you,

May there come across the water a path of yellow moonlight to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours.

May the clarity of light be yours.

May the fluency of the ocean be yours.

And may a slow wind work these words of love around you,

An invisible cloak to mind your life.

In the name of the + Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.