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Personality, Telepathy and Spirits from The Christian Parapsychologist

Introduction

Supernatural events recorded in the Bible such as appearances of angels, and prophetic and apocalyptic visions, can be interpreted as instruments of divine purpose and revelation. But today perhaps people need a more rational understanding of how such things could happen. What ideas within a framework of Christian faith, that meet the requirements of experience and reason, will help us understand the paranormal? There are three well known general hypotheses accounting for psychic events. Firstly, there is the notion that they are due to projection of aspects of

personality; for example, poltergeist phenomena are usually considered to be produced by a particular person, such as a frustrated child around the age of puberty. Secondly, there is the idea of telepathy: for example, the findings of experiments in thought transference without physical means. Thirdly, there is the concept of disembodied spirits; mediums usually claim their communications come from spirits on the 'other side'. Is it possible that all three hypotheses – personality, telepathy and spirits – are implicated in all parapsychological phenomena?

Personality Hypothesis

From the perspective of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, it is thought that parts of the personality of the individual that are too uncomfortable to be directly experienced, nevertheless emerge, albeit in disguise, into conscious awareness.

Dreams, for example, are said to arise from repressed desires expressed in symbolic form. The personalities who appear to speak through a medium are therefore claimed to be projected repressed sub-selves of the medium. This idea can also be applied to the experience of UFOs, hauntings, messages heard in states of trance, automatic writing, and the near death experience. Others have suggested that it is not just repressed material that is projected in imagery but rather all the inner world of the individual. Psychologist Wilson Van Dusen described what he called an 'auto-symbolic process' whereby the inclinations and values of a person are naturally revealed in imagery experienced in conscious awareness. This material is said to correspond to and illustrate the inner state of the person. For example the imagery in one's dreams is said to be fashioned out of one's life and speaks of one's life. In other words there is a spontaneous and natural process in which the central life concerns of an individual are presented in a dramatic language.

Van Dusen wrote that the appearance of imagery is facilitated during times of self-reflection and the quietening of the ego. Projection of the inner

state of the person, it is said, is not just apparent in dreams but also found in meditative, trance, hypnagogic and hallucinatory states. Two well known mediums Eileen Garrett and Geraldine Cummins accepted that some of their communicators may have been aspects of their own psyche.

Telepathy Hypothesis

The philosopher H.H. Price, noted for his study of perception and thinking, has suggested that various types of psychic occurrence, such as thought transference, clairvoyance or precognition, are all forms of telepathy that is time independent. Research has not yet discovered the limits of extrasensory perception. Until these limits are known, those sceptical of any human survival following death try to explain away evidence from mediums concerning spirits by evoking the notion of extrasensory perception. In other words they claim that information ostensibly received from spirits actually comes telepathically from living people. There would have to be a very considerable power of supernormal cognition required to transfer information that is beyond the medium's ordinary level of knowledge and so this is known as super ESP. Commentators have pointed out that super ESP appears to be something quite as supernatural as the idea of spirits from beyond the grave.

Spirit Hypothesis

In addition to being responsible for messages to sitters at séances, disembodied spirits of the dead have been claimed as the cause of visual apparitions and automatic writing. The New Testament speaks of the spirits whom we are to test before believing them. It is often thought that psychics and people in altered states of consciousness have special sensitivity to receiving impressions from spirits. The trouble is it is difficult to have a clear idea of what a disembodied human life might be like. If lacking bodily senses, how could a spirit entity have emotion and thought? Both of these are normally conceived as human reactions to things sensed in the world or as responses to bodily sensations. Yet Price made a case for saying that whether or not there actually is a spirit world, the concept is an intelligible one. He argued that we all experience visual and other types of image whilst dreaming because we have visual-image, auditory-image, tactile-image and smell-image producing abilities. Finding it difficult to realise that one is dead is quite often reported in mediumistic communications. Perhaps this is not surprising if we assume that experiencing an 'image-world' would seem just as 'real' as experiencing the material world. It might also be asked, if there is a spirit world, where is it? Arguably, mental images, including dream images, are in a space of their own. Price's position was that although visual images may have spatial properties such as extension and shape, they only have so in relation to other visual images and not to any seen objects in our material universe. We can note that these arguments do not address the scientist's basic objection that there can be no perception of mind without a living brain. To acknowledge the possibility of spirits one must accept that mind might persist without the material body.

Angel Presence from the Fellowship Review

As a child I was brought up with stories of how my family had been helped by their guardian angels: my father was saved in the war by a sixth sense, confirmed by angelic presence, and my grandmother was saved from being run over in a busy street; her guardian angel reached out and pulled her safely back on the pavement. So when I ran into difficulties when swimming in deep water on holiday in Crete, I knew, as I struggled to keep my head above water, that I could call on my guardian angel for help. I was instantly calmed and assured that I could get my breath back and continue swimming towards the shore. I experienced an angelic presence and knew that I was not alone and would always be helped whatever the danger. What a privilege and joy these affirmations of angelic presence are and continue to be, in my life, leading me to a deeper relationship with God.

Why does God choose His angels to guide and protect His people? Why is angel support so significant and essential to our understanding of God's love and guidance? How is this reflected in our Christian lives today? To the people in the Bible who saw angels, there was a reason at that particular point in their lives. It was vital to follow God's instructions. They all needed direct guidance and authority.

In the Apocrypha, Archangel Raphael accompanied Tobias on a journey and ultimately helped heal Tobit's blindness. God sent Raphael because the characters of the story, through prayer, found favour before the glory of God. Acting as protector and guide, Raphael was apparently a man who gave his name as Azarias, son of Ananias, one of Tobias' kinsmen. So angels can take the form of a human.

In Daniel 9:23 Angel Gabriel appears to Daniel and says: "I have come to teach you to understand". Again in chapter 10 the vision of Gabriel is described in detail. Angels dare us to look again and see the world in God's eyes, giving us the knowledge that "all can work together for good for those who love God." The angel offers two things to Daniel: firstly, what is written in the book of truth and secondly, God's strength to bear it. Angels teach us about the love of God that is eternal.

Sometimes God needs to speak to us in a specific way which transcends three-dimensional life and He sends His angels to do this. Experiences of angel communication can help us to evolve spiritually, leaving us with a radiance which can only be created by a glimpse of heavenly realms. Angels bridge the gap between God and man. The gap is caused by our sin and limited thoughts, but angels are the ladder between earth and heaven as they were for Jacob.

In secular literature we can read about experiences of angels that have opened doorways to a spirituality previously unknown. In a Waterstones bookshop only the other day, I found two shelves full of different publications about angels, all packed with stories of how, in our present time, angels are appearing and helping people in need. Surely similar experiences are happening to us within the Church; if so, wouldn't it be wonderful

to be encouraged to be witnesses and inspire our friends.

Patrick Garland has produced an anthology of poems called Angels in the Sussex Air. Living in Sussex myself, I was inspired by reading many of these poems, especially The Kingdom of God by Francis Thompson, 1859-1907. In it he writes:

O world invisible we view thee,
O world intangible we touch thee,
O world unknowable we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!
The angels keep their ancient places;-
Turn but a stone and start a wing ...

Certainly on visiting some of the ancient churches that nestle along the Sussex Downs, I can relate to these words. William Blake writes about Felpham, "Heaven opens here on all sides her Golden Gates, voices of celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, their forms more distinctly seen."

God interacts with His creation through angels in the Bible, throughout history to the present day. They continue to be an important part of our Christian heritage at Michaelmas and through the singing of hymns. We ask "Ye holy angels bright, who wait at God's right hand," to "assist our song". We as Christians believe that we are joined and helped by angels when we sing and worship. In the Eucharist, at the Consecration, we sing "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts" along with the angelic realms.

Heaven and earth meet at the communion and we join our counterparts in heaven as we worship. In "Christ the Lord is risen again," the angels are shouting for joy, "singing evermore on high, 'Alleluya'". Through angels God shows us a glimpse of His power - power to heal, protect and guide. Power to bring us into His presence.

By giving clear vision, angels reach through our limited thought patterns and give us strength to do God's work. The pathway God wants us to take is revealed. I pray that this celestial presence will be known in our churches and be an eternal inspiration to us all.

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