

Daniel's reflection for week Beginning 15Th January Leap in the Dark

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A late breakfast at home during the holidays. My mother brings in the toast. She tells us the dream she has just woken up from. She dies and goes to heaven, dragging two bulging suitcases labelled 'Good Deeds'. She rings the bell of God's door. No answer. While waiting she checks her precious baggage, her passport to heaven.. The suitcases seem to have grown smaller. Anxiously she presses the bell again. Still no answer. Once more she checks her suitcases. They have now disappeared completely. Utterly distraught, she flees in confusion from the one place she has spent her life trying to reach.

As we piled on the marmalade we discussed the dream. Was it telling our mother that Christian commitment is not about banking up 'good deeds' so as to wrest yet again redemption from God? Is it, we wondered, more of a commitment to authenticity? Unhealthy religion can add to our ambivalence. It can hide us from ourselves and from God. Instead of stripping us bare of our veneer of pride to a condition of complete simplicity, the external practice of religion places us in the role of the Scribes – undoubtedly do-gooders, but who were so proud of their good deeds.

Each morning we need to surrender our lives completely into the heart of God. This surrender is the essence of all great faiths. It has a raw and scary quality about it. Even Jesus hesitated. Most of us shy away from such a challenge. Yet without that initial, blind and extreme act of trust, repeated as often as possible every day for as long as we live, all other routines and pastoral performances will only, at best, boost our ego, at worst, poison our soul. . .

As another year gets under way it is important to reflect on these things. In our anxieties we forget the 'one thing necessary', to enjoy that vibrant sense of freedom through a blessed trusting and a single-minded focus on the divine love in the very centre of our lives. Our in-house preoccupation with liturgical incidentals, and our religious rivalries about who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, have little to do with a God who just wants to love us. . .

There is something bold and breathtaking in the vision of Jesus. It is to understand this that we are created. And whatever elitist reasons we may have for our claims to special treatment by the God of truth, without the hard winter of personal and communal surrender, we will never carry the honest light of the summer sun.

We must enter the future fields of freedom not proudly through guarded gates with our special passes, but humbly, on our knees, in a company of fellow failures, quite unable to believe how, in our sins, we are so undeservedly loved and utterly cherished by a tearful, smiling God. A God who cannot resist the surrendered heart.

(Unmasking God pp 133, 134,135,136)