

## Chapter Twenty-Two

### TRULY SPIRITUAL INDIVIDUALS?

Monday 1st May

‘Well,’ said Mary as they drove home, ‘do you have enough examples to use with your boss tomorrow?’

‘Yes, I think so. Tonight was very helpful.’ James nodded as he gripped the wheel. ‘That Julie has a remarkable understanding.’

Mary’s eyes flickered sideways at James but James was watching the road with no particular expression on his face. ‘You and Julie seem to be on the same wavelength. If I didn’t know better I’d think there was something going on between you.’

James looked at her quickly in amazement to see if she was serious. ‘You mean clandestine meetings in secret places?’ He laughed. ‘Well, she’s good company when we meet for coffee.’

Mary shot a horrified glance at him but his twisted grin gave him away. ‘Just kidding dear.’

Mary shook her head sadly. ‘You devil.’

James pursed his lips and watched her out of the corner of his eye. ‘But I must admit, it’s very nice to have someone pay such close attention to what I say.’

Mary sighed at James. ‘James, she’s flirting with you.’

‘Mmm.’ James considered that interesting possibility and rejected it. ‘Nah. Don’t be silly.’

‘Anyway, I think the group’s getting a bit stale.’ Mary looked straight ahead avoiding James’ eyes. ‘It needs the injection of some new blood - like, for example,

someone who has actually had a mystical experience of the kind we talk about. Otherwise, I don't see much point in meeting again - except socially,' she added quickly, not wanting her jealousy to appear too obvious and feeling a little ashamed of the intensity of her feelings.

'You're probably right,' said James affably but he thought to himself, *what a great idea - someone with a mystical experience. I will have to keep that idea in mind.*

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**Tuesday 2nd May**

**Daily Mail, Bowen Hills**

'Come in James. Have a seat.' Peter Preston was in a good mood. He seemed to James to be in a state of eager anticipation. 'Now, what have you got for me on this mental switching idea?'

'Chief, I'm afraid I can't tell you how I do it - at least not a step by step instruction but I can give you some examples of how I do it. Is that OK?'

'I guess it'll have to do, won't it? Just a minute.' He rang through to his secretary, 'Jenny, will you hold all my calls please?' He hung up and gave James his full attention. 'OK. Go on James.'

'Well, one example I thought I'd share with you was the question of creation.' James waved his hand across the desk horizontally. 'According to our Hebrew-Christian tradition and linear time, God created the world out of nothing. Originally there was nothing and then, in time, the universe was created. Right?'

Peter nodded and waved James on. 'Yes. I understand that.'

'OK.' James then waved the edge of his hand vertically. 'But when I 'switch' to vertical time, creation is eternally flowing out of the timeless world above. See the difference?'

The Chief nodded. 'But which one is true?'

James shrugged. 'Both, in terms of their own world-view. In one of our Holy Communion Orders of Service, we actually combine them. We say, 'Lord God, creator and sustainer of all that is'. See the difference?'

Peter screwed up his face. "'Creator' is linear and 'Sustainer' is vertical.'

James was pleased. 'Exactly.'

'Give me another example.' The Chief leaned forward and picked up a pen. 'Let me take some of this down.'

James paused and thought of an idea. 'Chief, are you planning on sharing this with someone else?'

Peter Preston froze and looked hard at James. After a moment he replied suspiciously. 'I could be. Why do you ask?'

'Well,' James decided to take a risk and answered slowly and, he hoped, casually, 'If you are, then wouldn't it be better for me to talk to them directly - with you of course. Some of us spent hours on this last night and the other examples can get pretty complicated. You might understand them but this other person might ask questions that I need to hear and answer, if I can, and it's always harder working through third parties.'

The Editor looked down for a moment. 'I'll have to ask them.'

*He's still not going to own up.* James decided to try once more. 'What does this person do for a living?'

'She -...'*Dash it all* thought Preston. *I've given it away.* 'She works on radio, at the ABC.' He looked hard at James as if he were making a decision. 'You're a trained Pastor aren't you?'

James frowned, wondering where this was leading. 'Ye-es.'

'Well, you're trained to keep confidences, aren't you?'

James nodded quickly. 'Definitely.'

'Well, I suppose you have a right to know.' Peter looked past James into the distance. 'You've worked very hard on my assignment. The fact of the matter is, my wife Stephanie and I used to worship together at the Anglican Church. Then, a few months ago, she met this Buddhist priest through her work and started attending his temple on the north side. She said she was just doing research but she hasn't been back to our church. When I try and talk to her about it, I get all upset and we get into an argument. We used to be very close but I feel we are drifting apart over this.'

James was sympathetic. 'I'm sorry to hear that Chief. Is there any way I can help?'

'Maybe there is. She wants me to go and talk to the Buddhist priest and I want her to talk to my priest, but what we really need is someone like you - more neutral and independent.'

James was taken aback by this sudden turn of events. 'I don't know if I'm all that neutral, but I'd be prepared to give it a go.'

'Good. I'll see if I can arrange it. Stephanie may understand your theory better than I do.' The Editor made a note. 'There's just one thing that worries me.' He looked up. 'Stephanie seems to be getting a lot out of this mystical thing she's into and I am afraid she might go all the way with it.'

James frowned. 'What do you mean Chief?'

'You know.' Peter looked up at the ceiling, feeling a little foolish. 'Some of these mystics who find enlightenment think they've become divine.'

'Oh I see what you mean.' James nodded slowly. 'Like when mystics makes the assumption that they've become deified.'

'You know about that?' Peter's eyes opened wide.

‘Oh yes.’ James nodded with a wry smile. ‘When the Sufi mystic al-Hallaj emerged from his mystical experience he said, “I am Truth”. He was crucified for his ‘blasphemous’ presumption.’

‘A rather harsh punishment. I wasn’t planning to do that to Stephanie.’ The chief kept a straight face. But I thought that you said that the mystics do experience a oneness with the Absolute?’

‘During their mystical trance, yes, but that doesn’t mean that they still have that unity after they come ‘back to earth’ so to speak.’

Peter’s eyes glinted with interest. ‘So you’re saying that they haven’t become deified?’

‘Yes. I think that’s a false assumption. At least in accordance with my theory.’

‘Good’ said his Chief enthusiastically.

James expanded on his theory. ‘Because it exalts the status of the mystic over the status of the theist. One mystic even has the hide to describe mystics as the ‘qualitative minority ... composed of truly spiritual individuals’.

‘That does sound arrogant.’ The Chief looked up at James directly. ‘So you’re sure there’s no truth in their claim?’

James felt put on the spot but he ploughed on. ‘Maybe they do actually unite temporarily with the divine during their trance or maybe they merely have a vision or dream-type experience as a foretaste of the after death experience.’

‘Then why do they think they’ve become divine permanently?’ the Chief persisted.

James hadn’t thought about it before but an idea came to him. ‘Maybe because of the vividness of their unity experience during their trance.’

‘So they are mistaken?’ asked Peter Preston eagerly.

Another idea occurred to James. 'Not entirely, but they are no different from us.'

'Now I'm confused.' The Chief sat back in his plush chair. 'I need a cup of coffee. Have you got time to join me?'

'Sure, Chief.' Even if he hadn't had time, he would have stayed anyway after the Chief confided in him about his marriage problem.'

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Peter Preston settled back into his armchair with his coffee mug clasped in his hands. 'Now, I asked you about those mystics who think they have become divine, and you said it was because of the vividness of their experience. But then, just when I was convinced they were totally mistaken, you said they weren't entirely mistaken.'

James put his mug down. 'That's right, because in vertical time we are all united to the divine in essence.'

'We are?' The Chief seemed to be in shock.

James hastened to reassure him. 'But only in the vertical time world-view. In linear time, becoming one with God's a future hope.'

Peter was a little mollified. 'I see, so where do they go wrong if they are no different from us?'

James paused while he decided how to express the answer. 'Maybe when they come out of their mystical trance, back into linear time they just don't realise it's a totally different situation.'

Peter seemed unconvinced as he screwed up his face. 'Don't some people look up to mystics as 'truly spiritual individuals'?''

James thought he could see what was worrying the Chief. He might be afraid that his wife would achieve a higher level of spirituality than himself, or think she had. 'They do, but according to my theory their interpretation is based on a wrong

assumption. That is that mystical experience is the same kind of experience as theistic experience but more intense and therefore a 'higher' experience. One mystic calls it 'what all Christians experience in a more hidden way'.

Pater pointed at him. 'There you are.'

James shook his head. 'No. I think they're wrong. If they are two entirely different ways of being religious, with two different understandings of reality, their assumption is false.'

'Good.' The Chief nodded but still looked puzzled.

Noticing this, James stated it again in another way. 'According to my theory, mystical experience doesn't differ from theistic experience in degree, only in kind. Therefore to call mysticism 'religion in its most concentrated form' exalts mystical experience over theistic experience on the same value scale.'

Peter pondered that as he took another sip of coffee. 'And it's not on the same value scale?'

James finished his coffee and put down his mug. 'I don't believe so. It has a peculiar and special nature - an experience of a different aspect of Ultimate Reality from a different view-point.'

The Chief sat back with folded arms. 'Let me get this straight. Mystics aren't the 'elite' spiritual beings some think they are but in their contemplation they may experience a unity with the divine which is true of all of us if we assume a timeless world-view.'

'That sounds right to me.' James looked at his watch. 'Could we discuss that aspect further when we meet with your wife, if you can arrange it.'

'Oh, I'll arrange it,' the Chief assured him confidently.

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Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May

*The Religion Report*

*In recent weeks, I said that the personal and the impersonal understandings of Ultimate Reality seem to have almost equal support throughout the world and I asked the question, 'How could God be both personal and impersonal at the same time?'*

*Last week I said that I had received a possible solution and provided a story about a shield that was seen to be a different colour depending on the direction they were facing. Now for the proposed solution.*

*The personal God is generally experienced within normal, historical, 'linear' time, as we understand time. The Impersonal Absolute is usually experienced in mystical contemplation along with a sense of timelessness, which I like to call 'vertical' time.*

*Therefore, I would like to suggest that both understandings are valid and perfectly normal within their respective time frameworks, i.e. from their different viewpoints. Neither belief is false but neither understanding is sufficient of itself. Therefore, Ultimate Reality is two sided and, yes, there is another side to God. Next week we will look at the problem of keeping a balance between the two world-views in daily life.*

*Other items of interest in the religious media this week*

*include ...*

James had just finished rereading over his own article in his file copy of the Wednesday edition of the Daily Mail when his phone rang. 'James,' said the voice of Janelle, the receptionist, 'there's someone here to see you, a Pastor Adrian Markwell. Do you know him? He seems a bit tense.'

'I don't know him personally Janelle.' He knew he was the pastor of a very conservative independent church. 'But I don't think he's here to congratulate me on my article.'

'Well, he didn't make an appointment. Will I send him in?'

'I'd love to say I'm busy or out of the office, but that wouldn't be true would it?' Then he continued without waiting for an answer to his rhetorical question, 'I suppose you'd better show him in. Thanks Janelle.'

James felt the familiar knot in his stomach as he waited for his visitor to come to the door. He would normally have gone out to greet him but he didn't feel like making him that welcome as he anticipated a rather unpleasant roasting.

'Mr McGregor,' said Janelle formally, 'This is Pastor Markwell.'

'Thank you Janelle. Come in Pastor Markwell.' James motioned hi to a chair. 'Please sit down.'

The pastor hesitated as if he would rather stand but decided he had better sit. 'Mr McGregor, I apologise for coming without an appointment. It was a spur of the moment thing. When I found myself outside your building I thought I'd take my chances and it seems it was the Lord's will.'

*For you or for me,* James wondered. 'What can I do for you Pastor? Do I call you Pastor?'

‘Oh’ again he paused, reluctant to let go of his formality, ‘You’d better call me Adrian, and you are?’

‘James.’ The knot in his stomach tightened. ‘How can I help you, Adrian?’

The Pastor pursed his lips. ‘I’ve been following your articles with great interest and some degree of concern.’

*Here it comes* thought James. ‘Oh?’

‘I had hoped you would come down on the side of Biblical Theism but in today’s article you made it quite plain that the mystics are equally correct in their understanding.’

James nodded slowly. ‘Yes Adrian, all the evidence seems to point in that direction.’

Pastor Markwell sat up suddenly and stiffly. ‘Not the Biblical evidence.’

‘No, of course not. The Scriptures mainly support a theistic understanding of God.’ *What’s the point of discussing this? Still, one must do what one can.* ‘I don’t agree with those who try to make out that Jesus was a mystic.’

‘Very good.’ The pastor leant forward at this unexpected agreement, ‘then why do you give them so much credence? Couldn’t you just deny the validity of their experience?’

James involuntarily sighed. ‘Because the mystics wouldn’t be very impressed by that argument. They could use the same argument to negate our claim of an objective loving God.’

Unable to follow that argument, the pastor changed tack. ‘James, are you a born-again Christian?’

‘I don’t use that terminology but I had a rather dramatic conversion at the age of twenty one.’

The Pastor leaned forward and pointed his accusing finger. 'Then, how can you, a convinced Christian, argue for the validity of a different experience?'

James had one last try. 'Because I work on the assumption that no one has the right to deny the authenticity of the experience of others. I believe we should respect the experiences of others and not interpret them as illusions or immature stages on the way to the true religion.'

The Pastor sat up and looked down his nose. 'Even if they are contrary to Holy Scripture?'

*It always comes back to this. There is no escaping it.* 'Adrian, in my earlier articles I dealt with that argument. Remember the Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism approaches to other religions?'

The Pastor spoke through clenched teeth. 'I didn't agree with your Pluralism ideas.'

'Well, I thought I had made a pretty good case against Exclusivism from Scripture itself but obviously, you don't agree.'

'Not at all.' The Pastor raised a finger. 'The Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God.'

James shook his head sadly. 'If you persist in taking the words of the Bible literally, then I don't see the point of continuing this discussion. Let's agree to disagree and part as brothers.'

'You are not my brother.' He stood up abruptly as if to deliver a judgment. 'Heresy is the mark of the Anti-Christ. I cannot have fellowship with a heretic; but I will pray for you, that you will see the light.'

James also jumped to his feet, his eyes blazing. 'I beg your pardon? Did you say, 'Heresy is the mark of the Anti-Christ?''

The Pastor backed away from the other man's fury. 'Er.. yes. I think so. Why?'

'Because those are the exact words used by the 'nut-case' who's been making crank calls and death threats to my wife and me.'

Pastor Markwell went white as a sheet. 'I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't rung you or your wife. How dare you accuse me of such a thing?' He swung on his heel and left the office, slamming the door behind him.'

James sank into his chair. He felt sick.

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