

These are difficult texts – all of them: they cut at the heart of our present largely Western project of liberal imperialism – that is, the gradual evacuation of spiritual meaning from our understanding of ourselves as human beings and, perhaps, it's this lack of spiritual and, dare one say, moral fibre, which is behind our sudden collapse in Afghanistan and the breakdown of our own society here. In short, are we no longer willing to give up our lives for the sake of others – leaving aside, for the moment, the many ways in which that can be interpreted. When Christ speaks to his disciples in John's gospel, the issue is equally stark: are you prepared to follow me, now, knowing that 'I am the bread of life' which you must become if you are ever to have life also, and which you can only have and I can only give you if we are prepared to give up our lives for one another? The sticking point may appear to be over the nature of the bread which the disciples are being asked to share. Is it bread or more than bread? Is the Church merely a physical society or more than that? And the closest analogy that the letter to the Ephesians can come to is that of man and wife as one, inseparable in their mutual love despite being cast in the patriarchal language and understanding of the day. So, as with the image of bread as not only *representing* but *being* Christ's body, so with the usage of the Church and Christ being in a relationship as of wife and man in marriage; the analogies inevitably jar because they are conditioned by so much else but chiefly by our own unwillingness to give ourselves unhesitatingly to one another. So we're talking about the nature of love; not love as something largely worked out in the head – the project of liberal imperialism – but love as an instinctive response to love. And so far have we been corrupted by our present cultural understanding of love that we really doubt whether such self-sacrificing commitment can ever be possible again – but this is just not so. It's what we are made for; it's what we do, or could do, best; but it's not something we can do on our own. We need to be part of a larger project if this is to succeed, embedded, one might say, in God; and this not necessarily as a conscious or obviously Christian awareness. This Spirit of God, this spirit of Christ, is at work everywhere, all of the time, in all people. Some are in tune with it and some are not. It's the most inclusive project the world has ever seen – indeed, it is the world as one, properly understood.

Today, perhaps, we might use the analogy of quantum entanglement or evolutionary connectedness to make the point. But these are always analogies which can only work because in Christ we see flesh and spirit as one and so when Christ says 'It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer' he says this, not in order to disparage flesh altogether, but to emphasise that flesh without spirit has no value. It would be as if we were in Afghanistan merely to build up a human society evacuated of spiritual meaning. Sadly, one suspects we were and others are now paying the consequences. This could, of course, happen here, and probably is happening, which means that our worship here today is as important as ever for, in the eucharist, we see body and soul, body and spirit, as one: God's project for us all made flesh; something and someone worth dying for – the essence of love.

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