

We could go several different ways with this

—We could interiorise the issue recognizing that we have a dark side which can in some mysterious way also be a prompt to goodness – thinking of Rilke – ‘ If you drive out your demons you may be driving out your angels too’;

—we could see it as a warning that our own perception of what is evil and what is good is deeply flawed and we should leave such judgement to God at the final judgement;

—we could see it through the lens of safeguarding – surely it’s better in many instances to act early and remove the causes of future abuse,

—how then should we be managing sin now both our own and what we perceive to be that of others?

—is it possible indeed to manage sin at all in the sense of knowing when to intervene or not, and then there’s the whole matter of forgiveness which is a perennial demand but not, we think, at the cost of justice.

And so it goes on. Nothing it seems is as straightforward as at first it may appear, do we leave the darnel or do we root it out has many implications and I’m also reminded of that law of unintended consequences under which we live whether we like it or not, and our susceptibility to manipulation as innocent trusting Christians wishing to do no- one any harm if we can.

What I have in mind here is a superb but deeply disturbing series of four programmes exploring just such an invasion of goodness by evil almost on our doorstep – the seduction and murder of a retired teacher of English literature at Stowe School and Buckingham University, Peter Farquhar, by Ben Field, the son of a Baptist minister, who portrays himself as a practising Christian in a manner so convincing that he is accepted for training as an Anglican minister – echoes here of our own issues with priestly training. He cultivates and murders Peter in order to gain his inheritance and succeeds only to be caught when he attempts the same thing just up the road with an elderly Catholic lady, Ann Moore- Martin. Watching the programme I shared the dread of both the critics I read and the desire to look away – it’s so harrowing to see the serpent at work in the garden – not least through the ministrations of an equally gullible spiritual director encouraging Peter in his relations with Ben. When to direct and when not? Or can we take a leaf here from the psychoanalytic manual and largely remain silent allowing the subject to come to their own conclusions – another imperfect process. So what I’m left with, and I don’t know about you, is my own need to pray even more and rely on God’s grace hoping that the Spirit does indeed come to help us in our weakness – but don’t be fooled, it’s a rational process also.

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