

Jokingly, I've said in the past, when people have talked about God's plan, or any plan of my own, 'What plan?' I'm making this up as I go along so. Or more seriously, if God has a plan what happens then to our personal freedom? This becomes especially acute today when personal freedom is promoted as the goal, or the good, of our life. To be free: is that what it's all about? Adam and Eve taste this sort of freedom and the consequences are dire. But God still clothes them, all the same, and still has a care for them in their new found freedom: still has a plan for them: *Man proposes, God disposes* still seems to hold true: this presence of God in all our meanderings. *Writing straight with crooked lines* still remains a challenge to us, a bridle on our ambitions. We seem to have a certain freedom to do this or that, limited by circumstances and character, but still a freedom of sorts and yet also constrained by consequences, not only by the free will of everyone else, but by the good demanded of it; by a certain plan God has for us in the doing of this good. It's a puzzle certainly but when we go with it all sorts of 'riches' appear; benefits both to ourselves and others; benefits which don't seem to appear when we go against it. This plan, which is only known to us as it unfolds, is something often only recognised or understood with hindsight, calling for faith, not in a known plan, but in a known person, a God in whom we trust: a known unknown, one might say to compound the mystery.

Mary faces this known unknown – or is faced by it, and, understandably, hesitates, is fearful, doesn't really know the consequences. But she trusts the messenger, dares to say 'yes' and God's plan for her, and us, goes forward. She could have said, 'Well, if this is of God, surely God can find another way. There are plenty of other punters out there'. But no, God has a plan for her, and us, which only we and she can fulfil. It's frightening and ennobling at one and the same time. It needs a certain innocence in order to unfold – a second, third and fourth naiveté: a trust that only an infinite love can meet.

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