

report comments: "The fact that 53% of pastors have considered leaving the ministry should be a matter of considerable concern, given the view that many others may already have left". Comparatively few pastors appear to be provided with the appropriate professional support to maintain the delivery of effective pastoral care. The majority of pastors (64%) said that their spouses were the main source of their pastoral care. This in turn raises the question: what happens when both the pastor and his/her spouse are in need of pastoral care?

The following needs were identified as the six key pastoral issues facing pastors today: stress (66%), marriage guidance (62%), bereavement (56%), unforgiveness (54%), loneliness (49%) and depression (49%). Second tier pastoral issues were identified as following: single-parent families (37%), debt (37%), conducting funerals (37%), marriage preparation (36%), dying (436%), family counselling (34%), terminal illness (33%), visiting hospitals (32%) and divorce (32%). Low priority pastoral issues included victims of bullies (9%), eating disorders (8%), abortion (7%), rape victims (3%) and abuse of the elderly (2%). The report comments: "These figures suggest that pastors may not be listening carefully enough to some of the issues of pastoral concern which are of growing importance in today's society".

In terms of ministry priorities, the pastors in the survey wanted, above all, to be preachers of the word and people of prayer. Interestingly, in a list of eight priorities, the task of leading public worship came last, while being a visitor or manager did not feature at all!

LOST SOULS: WHAT DO WE THINK WE ARE?

Rowan Williams

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One of the problems that we face these days when we try to communicate what faith is about might be expressed in these terms: we are trying to change the content without changing the style. That is to say, we can treat what we have to say about the

Christian faith as if it were another thing to fill the gap that the modern, or post-modern self lives with. We don't seek to change or educate the emotions; we don't seek to change or educate the kind of desire that's around in people, we just change the product. That seems to me to be one of the hardest things to come to terms with in the present religious situation, because it's very tempting to market the faith that doesn't actually challenge the way in which we think about and experience our hopes, our wants and our desires. We import religious and religio-moral ideas into an unreconstructed self with wants, thoughts aspirations and desires. So I want to try to spell out what I think is the matter with that particular way of addressing the issue. I'm going to do it by seeing what a 'soul' might be, what it isn't, and why it's very difficult to see where souls are these days.

Of course, it's never been terribly easy to see where souls are unless you have a particular kind of clairvoyance. Lots of religious people, and even more so non-religious people, assume that the soul is the 'fuzzy' stuff, as opposed to the 'lumpy' stuff, which is our corporeal bodies. The fuzzy stuff is that which survives death and zooms around in the stratosphere. While the lumpy stuff is still working, the fuzzy stuff doesn't have to work too hard. Happily, the fuzzy stuff can do without the lumpy stuff and everyone lives happily ever after in a fuzzy sort of way!

An older tradition of thinking about souls

There's an older tradition of thinking about souls, which says that the soul is the shape or the form of the body. In other words, what gives the lumpy stuff meaning, what enables it to make sense of itself and its environment, is what for convenience we call 'soul'. Or to say it differently again, the soul is what gives structure and life to the lumpy stuff and gives it, one might say, a story to be told. If you stop thinking about yourself as someone of whom there is a story to be told, then something very significant about the soul is lost. You are left with either just the lumpy stuff or one version or another of the dualism we described earlier.

If soul is the word we use for what gives shape to a life - what makes the story of a life - then to think about ourselves as souls is also to think about the role time plays in our lives. And one of the things I think we frequently encounter in contemporary culture is some bizarre notions about time, as if we would rather not think of ourselves as involved in taking time. It is as if it would be much

simpler to think of ourselves as 'given', timeless creatures with a set of agendas, desires, aspirations and possibilities. But if it is true that time makes us souls - that one cannot think about the soul without thinking about ourselves as being involved in the passage of time - and if we lose that, then the soul becomes a mere ghostly, abstract thing.

So in what ways might we see this problem about time coming up in our contemporary culture? Let me try to illustrate it by reference to contemporary cultural activities including films, fiction and psychology.

Sealed-off endings and romantic closures

Film first of all. Earlier this year, I achieved an unexpected notoriety by revealing that I had seen the film, *Notting Hill*- this was newsworthy on the grounds that it seems to be assumed that archbishops do not watch films! But I refer to it as one among many examples of the enormous sentimentality which currently pervades the film industry. It is as though we are reacting against a decade in which the boundaries of visual portrayal of sex and violence were pushed to the limits, by moving towards a very soft-centred emotionalism which is about sealed-off, happy endings - romantic closures. Films pour off the production line, with little variety of plot or even cast (e.g. *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You've Got Mail*), but all illustrate a passion for getting to the point where a story is over, where one is settled, where an object has appeared which fills the gap in one's life. All romantic fiction does this to some extent, but the question is about how much one allows oneself to be persuaded by it as a way of thinking intelligently about being human.

Sadly, our culture has left us with few resources to defend ourselves against this sort of thinking. I desire, and I want to stop desiring. Therefore I am searching for an object which will stop me desiring. And when I've found Meg Ryan, I can relax!

That's a caricature, but we need to recognise that somewhere in our character is a desire, a longing, an unsettlement which does not correspond to any object to fill the gap. I believe that understanding what it means to be a soul may well be to do with the idea that there is something in us which is not satisfied by objects plugging gaps, and annoyingly, it keeps on growing when perhaps we'd rather it didn't. At this point, one can easily see how

religion can collude with the situation rather than resolve it, because sometimes we present God as the ultimate gap-filler, as if God were a transcendent Meg Ryan - once you have this, you will want nothing else again, ever.

The God of the endless story

In that older, and rather more complicated Christian world that existed before we got into thinking about fuzzy stuff and lumpy stuff, there was quite a lot of seriousness about the way in which it is God (since God is that whose end we can never come to) who gives the soul an endless story, a story which is always expanding and enlarging, where there is never going to be a simple plugging of the gap. Because when the gap has been plugged, that is the end of growth, the end of history and, on the level of philosophy, history and economics, the message is that we've done it, we've arrived and there is no need to be restless any longer. There is a McDonald's in every village and American capitalism has succeeded in satisfying the desires of the world!

However, you may have some suspicions that that is not entirely the case! But it is a version of the same problem. We want to be in a position where we don't have to want any longer, where we're at the end of the story, the end of restlessness.

The soul as the source of restlessness

The soul is something to do with being restless, a story of which we have yet to come to the end. So let us come at this from another direction. If to be a soul is to do with the passing of time, then who and what I am is tightly bound up with who and what I have been. To understand myself is to understand where I have come from. That's obvious enough, and a century of psychotherapy should have taught us that. It also means that who I am now and what I am doing now is involved in creating the future. What I do has consequences. Or to say it differently, what I do has a life in the lives of other people. I do not exist as a self-contained person, but I live in your life. I am involved in what you will become. Even though by this time tomorrow you may have forgotten everything I have said, I like to think that the sheer experience of being packed into a warm tent, sitting uncomfortably on the floor, listening to a vague droning noise from the front will have affected your sense of who and what you are. There is a life not just about you as a sealed-off individual, but a life that you are creating with and

projecting into the lives of other people. And that is part of the soul as well - a life involved in past and future. I am what I have been and other people live in me.

A few years ago, one of my most beloved and respected academic teachers died. He was an exceptional personality, and one of my friends commented thus: "If you had been his pupil, you had an internal Donald living with you ever afterwards". He had involved himself in the life of his students and his students' judgements were shaped by his. In smaller ways that happens with all of us. Another friend wrote recently about a devastating experience in his life. He admitted that he found writing the letter difficult because "you are someone I always think of when I have to make decisions". My first thought was that this was an appalling responsibility to carry. But it is not uncommon. Most of us do not know the role we play in other people's lives.

One of the things to which one gets accustomed as an ordained person is the uncomfortable fact that other people dream about you! What you say and do has that kind of life in the life of someone else. And that interweaving of lives is part of how we live in time. Our soul, our spiritual existence, is about a passage through time, not about something given, static, the fuzzy component in a complex reality with a lumpy surround.

We are not as in control as we like to think!

That is uncomfortable, and often unwelcome, to us, because of course that rather limits our level of control. I would quite like other people *not* to dream about me and I would quite like it if I could restrict and control the effect of what I've said! I really don't know what chord something I say may touch, and I wish I knew because then I could feel safer and I don't particularly. Most public speakers if they're honest don't feel all that safe. They don't know what chords they're touching. They don't know what stories they're activating in other people's lives. How much nicer it would be to be in control of what people were hearing when I spoke. We like the idea of control. We don't very much like this interweaving of past and future in you and me and one of the things this romantic notion can perhaps help us with is that there could come a point where because desire was satisfied and because fantasies were over and projections were done with we could know a bit more securely what we were for and to and in each other. Only we don't. Each one of us continues to shape a life for themselves. Each one of

us continues to shape, in ways we don't know and can't understand, the life of the person next to us.

The basic thing I want to say as far as that's concerned is - don't panic! That's actually good rather than bad because it means that the resources I bring to being myself aren't just what I can dredge up from my insides. They are resources which have been fed in in ways often deeply obscure to me and the way in which I live in the lives of others may be good or bad or indifferent, but it's again part of resourcing them to be who they are. If you're beginning to catch just a whiff here of a theology of the Church you wouldn't be entirely wrong, but that would be the matter for another seminar.

There's more to us than the lumpy stuff

Good news, then because to be a soul involved in the passage of time, to be growing, to be living in the life of another and have others' lives living in me means that there's more to me and to you than we can imagine left to ourselves, and to look at one another in such a light, to look at the face next to you in such a light is to see it afresh. There's more to that than just the lumps, as you might say. There's history and there's a future. There's what has been poured in and there's what will be poured out. Beyond that there is that elusive, but very potent sense of me and you as involved together in a growth into some endless mystery - some desire that's never satisfied and done with, some passion which is never fully resolved.

Souls go on growing for ever

In the last chapters of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* Tolstoy is incapable of ending the book. He couldn't find a resolution for the end of the book. It tails off quite literally in mid-sentence with a row of dots. It tails off with a little boy going to sleep. After all the immense upheavals of Napoleon's invasion of Russia and all the other things that happened by the way in the thousands of pages, the solution, the final point you're getting to is a row of dots as the little boy dozes off to sleep, because Tolstoy had felt his way so searchingly, so profoundly into the time-bound lives of his characters that he couldn't stop. It's just as well for his readers that he found some way of breaking it off, otherwise *War and Peace* would still be going on! But it's an interesting index of the degree to which an artist can so weave their way into a self being created in time that he or she can't actually get out of it. There's no way of stopping

except arbitrarily saying, "OK, that's enough. Let's just leave it there with a row of dots". The selves that Tolstoy is interested in are selves that are very obviously making one another in their immensely complicated interrelationships of all those Russian names that nobody can remember from page to page. They are selves evolving and continuing to evolve, and they don't stop.

I don't know whether it's possible for us at the beginning of the new century to write quite like that any more. But it's certainly true that in a fair amount of contemporary fiction there's a strong sense that the characters are bounded by the pages of the book. They are literary inventions, constructions. I'm not saying that's a bad or evil thing - just pointing out the difference between a character you might meet in a Martin Amis novel and a character you might meet in Tolstoy. I'm just inviting you to notice the difference. For the record, I think Martin Amis is a brilliant, if worrying, novelist. But that's the degree of difference I think that we've lived through. The sense of the imagination working its way into an open-ended story, into a process of growth that goes on right up to the row of dots and beyond. That sense is harder these days to encapsulate, harder to put down because we've become more used to a narrower sense of what the self or what the soul is and perhaps we've become too much in love with the notion of a soul or a self as something that desires and is satisfied and its story is over and the book is shut.

Learning to be a soul

In all of this I'm suggesting about learning how to be a soul (and it is a skill we need to learn) is that it begins by putting the present moment in question and not taking the present moment for granted. Learning the skill of scrutinising yourself, the skill of putting yourself, not obsessively or indulgently, but as candidly as you can, under some kind of microscope. What am I saying? What am I doing? What do I mean? Where has this come from? It can triple the self consciousness, of course, if it's protracted to infinity and yet that sense of putting myself as I now am in question is one of the skills we may be in danger of losing, because if the point of a desire, a longing, is in the long run to lead us further into a process which has no closure, no romantic happy ending, no end of history, but an endless journey towards God, then to treat them as simply itches that need scratching won't really do.

What kind of self would be interested in living a moral life?

The difficulty we're in, in our immediate environment, is that getting that across to ourselves is a bit counter-intuitive. So often Christians, like other religious people, make the mistake of thinking we can talk about what we ought to be doing without talking about the kind of self we might be. To use the obvious example, Christians talk a great deal about sexual morality. They don't talk about the kind of self to which a sexual ethic might make sense. It's not much use recommending fidelity or continence to someone who doesn't see their life, their selfhood, their soul, if you like, as something that goes on growing through time. To get across anything about what Christians have traditionally meant by sexual fidelity you have to start a long way back and you have to start by talking about what kind of self you're thinking about.

Our culture attempts to scratch every itch

We're all of us, in greater or lesser degree, involved in the culture which encourages us to think that essentially itches are there to be scratched and the quicker the scratch, the better - whether that's sex, ideology, money-making or religious experience. What would it be to live differently, to live as a self painfully and gradually evolving into, growing into something in relationship over time? It's a question which might be one that should be around in what we think about education. It's possible for us again to suppose that you can introduce something called moral and spiritual education into a school curriculum without asking a more basic question, "Well, what kind of person do you think you are dealing with in the first place?" You can't just build on a set of values and imperatives to an unreconstructed, unreflective person. How do you mould a personal being, a life in time?

I did once suggest that you might learn more about the spiritual values of a school from looking at its timetable and the diet in the canteen than about the content of its religious studies lessons, because that would tell you quite a lot about what this institution thought human beings were like. If you have an overcrowded timetable, that tells you human beings are there to achieve limited goals in a very limited space of time, and that immediately tells you quite a lot about what you think a person is. If you have a canteen diet which is tailored into that particular kind of timetable, you know once again the point of education is to get you through it as quickly as possible with as many measurable goals achieved as you can in a short space of time. Far be it from me to

suggest that this might be the philosophy that prevails in the Department of Education!

Mission often ignores the soul

I think that's one of the problems we have to address, if we're trying as Christians to say anything critical and hopeful to the culture around us. So often we start too far down the road. We start by saying, "Here are the religious objects you ought to believe in. Here are the ethical standards you ought to be applying". Somehow we've never quite dealt with that more basic question, "What is it like to be a human being in the framework of faith?" We haven't dealt with that at all. We've lost the soul.

A friend who teaches philosophy said that one of the things philosophy ought to do for you was to help you bear your own scrutiny. That's one of those wonderfully intimidating phrases that philosophers can come out with occasionally and in plain English I suppose it means that philosophy should help you to look intelligently at yourself, to ask those questions, to put the 'now' in question, to ask a bit about how my decision, my satisfaction, my frustration live in the life of others, about how their lives live in me. If I'm right, then this murkiness about the soul, this uneasiness about the passage of time is something that doesn't just affect individuals - it affects communities, tower blocks, nations, and the world as well.

When President Reagan introduced the Star Wars, the strategic defence initiative, it was aimed at final and perfect political security. You would be so safe that nobody would ever want to attack you. It's another way of looking at the end of history. It's interesting to see that this subject has come back in recent months as a public issue in the United States and once again the question is being asked, "How do we become so safe that nobody will want to attack us?" It can affect people at the level of that curious passion, particularly in the United States - litigation. Someone gets sued if a person dies in hospital, because people don't die and if they do, somebody must be made to suffer for it. Now I exaggerate, but I think you may see what I'm getting at, that the passion for the end of the story is one in any sense that I think is of any real Christian interest. What I'm proposing is simply that. How do we recover a sense of living in time? How do we face and accept more honestly the life I live in you and you in me?

The community of souls - good news!

I said earlier on that there was a bit of theology somewhere on the horizon, and I will just say a little bit about that before I finish. Christians start from an assumption that the body of Christ, the community that comes into being in the wake of Jesus Christ, is a community where everybody has an interest in everybody else. I don't mean by that the twitching of lace curtains across Christendom! Not that kind of interest, but everybody has an investment in, a stake in everybody else. Somehow or other, you're not going to flourish fully unless I do and I'm not going to flourish unless you do. It's what St Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians particularly. If one bit of the body suffers, all suffer. If one rejoices, all rejoice. In other words, we do indeed live in one another. My frustration and my joy feed into, become resources for how you become yourself before God, and all of that is woven together in a way which is very hard to be precise about in and through the person of Jesus Christ. That, for St Paul and indeed for the whole of the New Testament, is gospel, good news.

If we could get ourselves re-acclimatised to the idea that it's good news to have an interest in one another, it's good news that our welfare is interdependent, we might have something a little bit more interesting and challenging to say to the culture around us than simply nagging it and saying, "Well, you ought to believe x and you ought to do y ". If it were the case that in the Christian community people were living in such a way that it was clear that their interest, their investment in one another was powerful and central and transforming, things might look a little bit different on the mission front. They just might.

We all have a task to rediscover the soul

All of that means that each one of us has a task to rediscover where the soul is concerned. Each of us needs somehow to develop, or redevelop, or extend those skills of asking awkward questions about the present moment. Each one of us needs to have patience - the patience, that is, to look and ask about what it is that our passions, our desires, our longings, serve. I came across a book by an American Roman Catholic missionary who worked in Africa for many years, where he imagines the Virgin Mary saying to him at one point, "What does your anger serve, what does your grief serve?" In other words, don't stop with the passion and the feeling of the moment - ask what's it for? What's it capable of feeding into

and resourcing and growing into and when you hesitate enough to ask that question, it may be that the soul is beginning to spring to life, or a fuller life in you.

Good news is proclaimed when we take time

Can we, then, get into the habit of putting questions like that to ourselves, rethinking and challenging again and again our understanding of time, setting ourselves more free from the tyranny of seeing time limited and of an area in which we have to achieve maximum results in a short compressed duration? I think good news is often proclaimed most deeply and most effectively when we are in that way set free truly to take time and that's the case because it is in taking time that our souls grow and it is in the growth of our souls together that we actually make the good news flesh, or rather body, not just lumpy stuff lying around in heaps, but bodies that speak, communicate, nudge one another, raise eyebrows at one another, talk to one another. And all of that is how the lumpy stuff acquires meaning, communicates something, becomes informed by a soul.

The Most Revd Rowan Williams is Archbishop of Wales

DON'T LOOK NOW, BUT NEXT YEAR'S COMING!

John Simpson

Diaries, like fire and water, are wonderful servants, but dreadful masters. Given that the day-to-day exercise of the pastoral ministry has such an unknown quantity about it, planning ahead may seem to be an exercise in futility. We frequently complain about shortages of time and the stresses arising from unexpected demands which can throw a day into disarray. It takes only one phone call to move you from order to potential chaos. So let me begin with some brief observations:

- Many ministers convey the impression of ongoing disorganisation. Too often there appears to be a basic disregard for even the simplest strategies of ordering one's life.