

# A MEDITATION ON POWER

All power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. If that telling paradox is juxtaposed with the opening phrase 'Almighty God....' it would seem to imply that the rule of the Almighty is almightily corrupt. In so far as all power and authority are gathered together and placed in Him, just so far is man almightily vulnerable to the metaphysic, and almightily impotent in himself. 'Almighty God... who knowest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves....'

In human terms he to whom absolute power is given, who becomes therefore absolutely corrupt, is free to enact primal retaliation without control. The tyrant rules and eventually becomes caught up in the primal rage of counter-dependence upon his holding environment. If God is to be both omnipotent and safe he must be stripped of retaliation. It is to the only good God that we donate our authority and power. It is the only wise God to whom we attribute omnipotence with impunity. Thus God becomes the deposit for phantasies about power and omnipotence as well as goodness and wisdom, all of which are split off from homo impotens (he can hardly be designated sapiens). This Almighty God who was and is and is to come, who acts in history, performs in such a way that his acts make no difference to history. He has power over all things yet chooses not to use it and to become foetally impotent. This cosmic source and originator of universal energy becomes in the Incarnation his own antithesis. In Emmanuel the nothingness and the all become one. Mary indeed is the Mother of God, for out of the schizoid split of the Madonna arises the omnipotent phantasy of the Son.

So religious man oscillates between impotence and omnipotence. He who without God can do nothing can do all things in Christ who gives him power.

The religious leader is par excellence the primally unconscious one (in every parson is a foetus longing to be born). In so far as he shares the phantasies of impotence of religious people and focuses those phantasies in relation to the omnipotent one he sustains his priestly role. In so far as he is seduced into becoming the object onto which those phantasies are transferred he suffers the conversion from impotence to omnipotence and is looked to as the messiah, the incarnation, the presence in human flesh of omnipotence from beyond the veil, whose dictatorship is fundamentally unsanctioned, whose morality is unquestionable, whose use of power is unassailable.

Many religious leaders operate in the schizoid pole of bad-self/good-environment in which case the retaliatory material and the punitive use of power emerges in their secular role. Jesus in contrast (though not uniquely) operates in the schizoid pole of good-internal/good-external idealisation, with denial of the retaliatory in both self and environment. The use of power in this position has to do with the elevation and deification of the good primal environment and the ultimate intensification of the process of projection and denial of the bad. Inevitably, such a person becomes precisely the receptor of ambivalence, the object onto which the schizoid phantasy is projected. He is both Deus and Demon, to be adored and abhorred, canonised and crucified.

Followers attracted to such a position will be precisely those with fundamentally schizoid characteristics and high levels of idealisation and denial, but operating with the good-

environment/bad-self position. For such to admit bad in the environment (to come to terms with the crucifixion and death of the leader) is to face the intolerable primal abreaction in defence against which individual and common hallucinatory experience, delusional construct, denial, omnipotent manipulation of reality and unassailable common collusional systems are brought into play. This we call faith.

Since such a system in terms of its primal mechanism carries precisely in symbol form the defences utilised in primitive religion to manage and suppress the re-emergence of primal trauma, it becomes supremely the system suited to the preservation of splitting in every man. It is divested of the crass sexuality of the early fertility cultus, divorced from the heavenly drama of the sun, moon, earth and stars, and is a sufficient sublimation of the Greek and Roman pantheons to form a universally valid synthesis of primal defence, albeit with unconscious continuity and congruence with all other religious systems. The price man pays for his preservation from resurgent perinatal persecution is psychological fixation within the intra-uterine field. While science and technology have tended to free man from his foetal slavery, religion perpetuates his imprisonment within the primal mould.

So faith emasculates man, just as it deprives him of goodness and wisdom. In his phantasies of safety lie the seeds of his extermination. For the foetus lives cut off from the real world, within which perforce we live and move and have our being, to dissociate from which is to abdicate responsibility for the survival of the species.

D. Wasdell

Easter Day 1980

Meridian Programme, Meridian House, 115 Poplar High Street, London E14 0AE

Hosted By: Unit for Research into Changing Institutions (URCHIN)

(Charity Registration No: 284542)

Web-site: [www.meridian.org.uk](http://www.meridian.org.uk)