

I'm Nobody—Who Are You?

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by Simon Tugwell, O.P.

'We piped to you, and you did not dance.' And when people do dance, we tend to look down disapprovingly from our upper window, like the worthy lady Michal. She remained barren, and so do we.

It has perhaps become commonplace to say that ours is an age which has forgotten how to play (eutrapelia a forgotten virtue, and all that). There are even therapists to teach us how to play! But somehow, the Church seems to go on, doing all things in moderation and busily turning the Lord's wine back into water.

Now the books under consideration¹—admittedly a rather heady mixture—are all about wine, or attempts at wine.

Richard Neville in *Play Power* (the book was previously to be called *Flower Power*) offers us his, in many ways attractive, version of 'the underground scene'. He admits to being himself only half-liberated, so perhaps he won't mind another half-liberated person venturing to offer some comments from a slightly different angle. Richard Neville's background is political, and his interest in play power is as a form of political movement (when I first met him, he confessed rather shamefacedly to still writing letters to the *New Statesman*). Earnest protest movements suddenly caught fire (turned into wine), and became parties, games; people began to preach revolution, not because it was important, but because it was fun. People began to have confidence just to 'do their thing' (which is highly revolutionary in its implications). The whole thing became 'turned on'.

Or did it? Obviously some of it did, but perhaps not in the way Richard Neville suggests. From my point of view, one of the most interesting facets of the underground is its spirituality, ranging from cockeyed psychedelic occultism, through spiritualism, to ascetic contemplative Hinduism. Josef Pieper tried to teach us a long time ago that you cannot have a party without any gods, and the underground rather bears that out. I don't know how fair Peter Fonda's film, *Wild Angels*, is but one of the most striking things about it is how very similar the Hell's Angels seem to be to their parents. They are no more capable of just enjoying themselves, just playing, than are the guests at a palace garden party.

And perhaps this is because they have inherited uncritically a suspicion of ritual, of traditionalism; they have swallowed whole the false antithesis between 'doing what you're told' and 'doing what you want'. As all the studies of children's play keep emphasizing, playing is a highly conformist and ritual and traditional activity,

¹*Play Power*, by Richard Neville. Jonathan Cape, 1970, 38s.

The Christ, Psychotherapy and Magic, by A. D. Duncan. George Allen and Unwin, 1969, 42s.

The Rose-Garden Game, by Eithne Wilkins. Victor Gollancz, 1969, 63s.

Catholic Pentecostals, by Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan. Paulist Press, 1969, 17s. 6d.

bound by age-old rules, and for that very reason profoundly liberating and authentic. Pasolini is quite right: tears (and all other real emotions) come welling up from the centre of the earth.

From a political point of view, Richard Neville's book will doubtless be (indeed already has been) avidly read as an important and lucid statement of an important new credo. Do what you will shall be the whole of the law, without any further enquiry into who this 'you' is, or what his 'will' is. Thou shalt enjoy thyself.

And, of course, this is where much of the underground is at. But not all of it. There has been a scathing attack on the book by the music critic (pardon the expression) of IT. And a much more important silent protest is made by the very existence of places like Gandalf's Garden (which has recently started a weekly 'extramural' meditation at the Dominican Convent in Portobello Road). You cannot have a party without any gods.

And you cannot have any gods without a tradition. This is where the whole western world is in such a pickle. So much of what passes for 'traditionalism' is merely fossilized nineteenth-century progressivism (papolatry, for instance); and no doubt the progressives of today will be the conservatives of 1990 (if the world survives that long). The real chasm is not that propagated by the world press, but that between traditionalists on the one hand, and conservatives-and-progressives on the other.

Speaking for the moment in purely comparative-religionist terms, a tradition is a historical process of handing on, through a succession of empowered teachers, a life and freedom deriving from an absolute and ultimate source. It contains, as the Buddhists say, both a wisdom and a method; or, in our terms, it contains Word and Spirit.

The upheavals in the post-Vatican II Church have made clear just how little even of the Word we had retained, let alone the Spirit (the Person of the Trinity, not just forgotten—all but excommunicated). It is therefore hardly surprising that the underground, at its spiritual awakening, should not generally turn to us for Traditional lore. Viewed dispassionately, we don't seem to offer much *prima facie* evidence of being bearers of any particularly divine, or even human, life. So they look elsewhere, and either get lost and go mad or revert to politics; or they are lucky and find a guru, whom they revere in the most fundamentalist way (no wonder they have little use for liberal Christianity!). And that, as often as not, re-opens for them a very genuine insight into traditional Christianity. Only they can't recognize us as the legitimate heirs of this Christianity.

One of the more important and sometimes impressive competitors in this field, is the whole world of the occult; and this is where our second book comes in, *The Christ, Psychotherapy and Magic* by A. D. Duncan. One cannot but admire the author for writing the book at all; it is an attempt on his part (he is an Anglican priest) to

respond to a pastoral situation involving the occult, and though I think it is, in fact, a very unsatisfactory book, perhaps it will persuade others that this is an area we can no longer afford to overlook.

A. D. Duncan invites us to take a Christian look at the so-called Western Tradition claiming to derive from the Qabalah (though Gershom Scholem, who ought to know, casts considerable doubt on the legitimacy of this claim—see his magisterial *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*). Most obviously this 'Tradition' is the fruit of a revolutionary intellectual encounter between the western world, and India and Tibet. Typical products of this encounter are theosophy, and in general the gnostic tendency pointed out by Jung as characteristic of the spiritual quest of our age.

The aim of the occultist is Higher Consciousness, and A. D. Duncan very interestingly compares this with the psychosynthesis school of American psychologists: both aim to liberate and contain the nether regions of the human personality in some sort of higher synthesis. And this, for both, involves the use of archetypal symbols and ritual practices and meditations; both, obviously, entail a much richer view of reality than that afforded by degenerate rationalist scientism, and by that peculiar combination of detached respectability and sensationalism typical of so much journalism, not least that extraordinary thing *Man, Myth and Magic* (it is not for nothing that Hermann Hesse calls our age 'das feuilletonistische Zeitalter'). The occultists, in particular, offer an amazing phantasmagoria of exotic concepts and constructs, and draw on deep psychic powers long forgotten by secular and 'enlightened' man.

Two antithetical criticisms can be made of the occultists. One can say that it is all a lot of nonsense, or, more mildly, that they are on to something, but it needs to be submitted to the critique of western rationalism and empirical science. And this is, more or less, what A. D. Duncan says. Or one can say precisely the opposite: the occultists have sold out to western rationalism and scientism. And this, I suspect, might be the truer complaint. Physical laws on the material plane are complemented by just as rigid spiritual laws on the inner plane; the whole thing is tamed and brought under control. And is not that precisely the danger with magic? Even the attempt to displace the ego, and reach through to a higher consciousness, can result in an egocentric universe, with an inflated ego (this is one of the most important teachings of the Sufis). It is no accident that the most basic heresy in western Christendom has been Pelagianism; and it needs to be said that Augustine's response to Pelagius is itself liable to Pelagian developments. The radical flaw, surely, is in the constant tendency of the west, the latins, to voluntarism. It is interesting to watch Rufinus, for instance, translating Greek texts and slipping in references to choice totally absent in the original. Too much stress on choice, on human deliberateness,

almost inevitably creates a Pelagian system, a system based on the presupposition that if I haven't got tabs on it, it isn't there, if I don't do it, no one will. . . . Mention has already been made, in this journal, of Gregory Bateson's important contribution to the *Dialectics of Liberation*, on just this point: we must learn once more to give a priority to the systemic integrity of the whole, and locate conscious, deliberate purpose only within this whole.¹

Now some standard occult works (e.g. William G. Gray's recent book, *Magical Ritual Methods*) are quite explicit about this, and it is a pity that A. D. Duncan has not been able to use them. Also some of the 'occult' practices most widely used by the underground, but again not mentioned, or only *en passant*, by A. D. Duncan, openly presuppose a systemic view of human action—for instance, I Ching (the Chinese oracle), or the Tarot, or astrology, all require a non-linear view of causality: each situation has its own total integrity, and this may, in some circumstances, be discerned by the informed scrutiny of certain privileged elements in this totality. (This is, of course, in some ways much closer to the Greek view of causality, the most important 'cause' being the thing itself in depth). The use of such oracles can be a major help in breaking the dangerous short-circuit between individual desire and act (in this, serving precisely the same purpose as the practice of obedience as worked out in the writings of Dorotheus of Gaza, for instance). The deepest source of human authenticity is not egocentric. I live now not I. Tears well up from the centre of the earth.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you—Nobody—too?

Then there's a pair of us!

Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!

(Emily Dickinson).

Placed in this sort of context, many aspects of occultism need to be taken very seriously by the Christian. The whole psychic realm has been disastrously neglected by the Church, with the result that it has tended to take on a potentially dangerous and unbalanced life of its own. And, in the atmosphere of western culture, it is hardly surprising that it should fall into the traps of egocentricity and rationalism. Even W. G. Gray is very concerned to show that magical ritual *works*, that it gets results. It is salutary to remind ourselves from time to time that even as late as Bacon, the term 'empirical' was a term of abuse. There is a wrong sort of cautiousness and control, a wrong sort of practical concern with success and results; the point of liberating the subconscious and all that, is not that this is the way to achieve control over the environment or anything of that kind; the sole aim, in the last analysis, is to achieve the full flowering of ourselves in the same sort of gratuitous joyousness—play, if you like, or, better, praise—'achieved' by a rose in bloom (i.e. *ohne*

¹Fergus Kerr, O.P., 'Liberation and Contemplativity', *New Blackfriars*, April 1969.

Warum, if I may borrow Heidegger's use of Angelus Silesius). So we should not, like A. D. Duncan, retreat from the occult into rationalism and scientism, but we should try to liberate it into the wholeness, the catholicity, the uselessness, of the life of freedom in the Spirit, of the sons of God.

And something very like that, believe it or not, is the point of the rosary. Eithne Wilkins traces in an utterly beautiful way the various aspects of that strange string of beads, both in the inter-religious context of prayer-wheels, and in the artistic and literary context for the development of the Catholic rosary as we know it. She stresses that it is a game, that it is self-justifying, that it liberates the subconscious—all the things we have been talking about. Of course, you won't find any practical help in saying the rosary from this book but that is of the nature of the case. The verbal statement of what symbols are involved, and so on, however 'playful', is still only Word. And Word-play, however liberating, only finally liberates when you throw it away. At the remarkable conclusion to that remarkable book of Hermann Hesse, *Das Glasperlenspiel*, even the integration of all arts, all sciences, in the Game is found not to be the end of the journey: there is a further liberation, which only comes when the Spielmeister abandons Castalia, and goes back into the world as a private tutor. And he watches his young pupil, on the mountains, dancing to the rising sun, a dance not learned or rehearsed, but elicited by the very sun itself. As the wise Benedictine had remarked earlier in the book, 'You intellectuals have lost both the animal and the divine in man'. Incarnation and spirituality are inseparable; as Gregory Palamas taught, the fact that we have bodies is what makes us superior to the angels (don't tell Augustine!). Liberation into the body, and liberation into the Spirit, are paradoxically very closely related. That is one reason why so many of us find the rosary so difficult, and why our liturgy is tending so much away from ritual and gestures: in both cases, there is a sheer bodiliness which embarrasses us, Augustinians that we are. Whoso danceth not, mistakes the event, as Miss Wilkins quotes for us from a new edition of the Acts of St John; and dancing comes from the body, not from the mind. 'If thou wouldst understand that which is I, know this: all that I have said, I have uttered playfully.' Wisdom frolicked at creation; by comparison with our adult wisdom, there is something about God which can only be called 'folly', or so St Paul thought. There is nothing new in the slogan that man has come of age: it goes back to that tiresomely grown-up Pelagian, Julian of Eclanum (see Peter Brown, who refers to Augustine, *Op. Imp.* I 78: man is *emancipatus a Deo*).

' "Grown up, indeed", said the Lady Polly. "I wish she *would* grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she'll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay at that age. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one's life as

quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can” ’ (C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*).

The Christian is invited, indeed, to grow up; but in such a way that he also turns and becomes as a little child, and learns to dance, and to play. According to another delightful text quoted by Miss Wilkins, the final preparation in alchemy of the Philosophers’ Stone ‘is only a labour fit for women, or child’s play (*ludus puerorum*)’. ‘Perhaps’ (she comments) ‘perhaps it was because, with all his intuition, he prided himself on being an empiricist, that the great doctor Jung was baffled by the words *ludus puerorum*’.

I can’t really tell you anything about the book; read it, and enjoy it. If you are a child, you’ll probably understand it; if you aren’t, perhaps at least you’ll begin to feel that there’s more to life than simply ‘growing up and becoming responsible’.

Perhaps you’ll even want to be born again, and that is, as we know from St John, something to do with the Spirit, with the outpouring of the divine folly and drunkenness, which confounds the wisdom of the world, even the occult wisdom of the magician.

Catholic Pentecostals is an account of the growth of the Pentecostal movement in two Catholic universities in the United States, and a rudimentary theology of it. The style of the book may at times be off-putting, but the phenomenon is too important to overlook.

Basically, what is presented to us is a rapidly increasing number of Catholics, living under the experienced power of the Spirit, just as it says in the Bible, It is a spontaneous recovery of something of the life described in the Acts. And, at least for us Dominicans, that must stir a familiar chord in our hearts; our Order was expressly modelled on the apostolic Church, and was, for that matter, quickly identified with the Pentecostal theology of Joachim of Fiori (which, incidentally, St Thomas went a long way to accommodating, except that he insisted, against Joachim, that the Age of the Spirit was *now*, identical with the Age of Jesus; that is to say, Pentecost has already happened, *and is still happening*).

We have been rediscovering the Word in the Catholic Church; and now the Spirit offers himself. And once more, just as we are told in the New Testament, the sick are being healed, people speak in strange tongues, and prophesy, and demons are being cast out—by educated Catholics, not just by strange groups of illiterate Protestants.

And doesn’t this fit? Isn’t this the Church’s own psychedelic movement, the Church’s own life of play and prayer? Isn’t this the fullness of Word and Spirit, Form and Meaning, which is ours to preach, and which so many of our contemporaries have despaired of finding with us? Isn’t it this which empowers us to say ‘Yes’ to the occultist, but immediately challenge him to go further, to resituate himself in a world of praise, a world ‘liberated from purpose for our encounter with meaning’?¹ Or, as Joseph Wittig said: ‘The

¹David Rast, in his editorial introduction to the number of *Good Work* devoted to the Japanese Tea Ceremony, Spring 1969.

natural impulse of God was to play.' That is why he always wants to turn our water, the water of our efforts and seriousness and purpose and good works, into wine, the wine of his intoxication. *Bibite et inebriamini, carissimi*—and that is a much more accurate rendering of the Hebrew than the usual 'drink deeply'.

And this does not mean rampant emotionalism. For centuries our culture and our Church has tried to work a simple dualism between intellectualism and voluntarism, head and heart, mind and feeling. This is because we have been so hung-up on ego-identity, and have forgotten the fundamental psychological truth of I-not-I (not to mention the theological superstructure, I not I but Christ). The experience of the Catholic pentecostals has not involved them in emotional revivalist hymn singing; often their meetings are characterized by quietness. And they testify without exception to a revitalized devotion to the Church and the sacraments, and to a much deeper awareness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Spirit bears witness *in us*, experientially, that Jesus and the Father are in us (cf. I John 3, 24). The love poured out in our hearts by the Spirit is deeper than (not exclusive of) mere emotionalism; it educates us towards the realization (now well known to Hebraisers) that to love is to know. It links us with the Eastern Orthodox teaching about drawing the mind down into the heart—the heart being, as Karl Rahner reminds us, the human centre, the point of psychosomatic unity, the locus of the encounter with the transpersonal depths of human reality.

Of course, as the book points out, the Spirit is given to all of us at our baptism. So why do we let him lie dormant, so to speak? Why don't we let him deliver the goods, to ourselves and to others? If the goods are not found with us, they'll turn up elsewhere. For instance, healing, part of the mandate given to the apostles; if we don't do it, then others will, lots of them are in fact, but without the context of the total healing brought by Jesus Christ.¹ People think that it is only Hindu believers who are constantly 'high' on God; they're usually right too. But that's not what the New Testament says. 'The disciples were filled with joy and Holy Spirit' (Acts 13, 52). And here are thousands of Catholics, claiming the promise of the Father, and experiencing it, just as it says in the Bible, and letting themselves be transformed and taken over and 'turned on' by it. And they learn to love, love with a power not of themselves, they learn that our religion is *really* anti-pelagian, not just in name, that it really is a liberation from an egocentric reality; and the world, at least some of it (and we were never promised more) *does* see, and *does* believe.

¹We must, of course, avoid spiritual 'technocraticism'—cf. my 'Thoughts of a Monk', *New Blackfriars*, October 1969. But the pentecostals are all agreed that they have become increasingly aware of the 'other-power' nature of their lives. We must surely get away from the whole dualism of own-power and other-power (*tariki* and *jiriki* are inseparable, even in Zen—as pointed out, for instance, by Marco Pallis in *The Way and the Mountain*): it is not (and here I am being a very traditional Dominican), it is not 'partly God and partly me'. It is wholly God; and wholly me. Our legitimate and necessary fear of sensationalist thaumaturgy and a merely success-seeking spirituality should not lead us into a timidity which is itself equally Pelagian (and rationalist) in its tendency.