

*More Questions Than Answers**

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The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.

(Deuteronomy 29:29)

About four months ago there appeared, in successive issues of the Sunday Sun, a discussion between eminent psychiatrists in this country on the relationship between religion and mental health. In her contribution, the chairperson of the Jamaica Psychological Association, Dr. Ruth Doorbar, a self-confessed agnostic, is reported as having said:

. . . I feel that if God does exist (I am an agnostic) he is kind of wicked. Look, he has made humans with a mind that wants to find the answers to ultimate questions like "Why am I here? Is there any purpose for human life and the universe?" And, "How did everything begin?" So we have a mind that can ask these questions, but we are so limited that there is no way we can finally know the answers.

I am not sure that this shrewd observation of Dr. Doorbar has disposed of the question of God. I am sure that it has not disposed of the questions which have been agitating her. I don't know that, if we had answers to all of these questions given to us ready-made and in advance, we would be more human than we are. I rather suspect that if that were the case, the human mind would have atrophied long ago and there would have been no psychological association for Dr. Doorbar to chair!

It is almost as if there was something undesirable in secrecy, that nothing should be held in abeyance or in reserve from human scrutiny; that there was some kind of moral obligation on the part of God, as well as of men, to reveal everything that they happened to know; that there was nothing wrong in the invasion of privacy and to withhold any kind of vital information was tantamount to a crime.

I would like to suggest that all of this is misleading and based on wrong assumptions, and that if these assumptions were correct, we would not become more human but infinitely less so, and life would soon become uncomfortable for all of us.

Even in our ordinary human relationships, there are things revealed and there are things secret, and it could become quite intolerable if each of us had a solemn duty to reveal everything that we happened to know, and the rest of

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us had an incontestable right to pry into everything we had a mind to.

You see a couple living together, and from what you know of each as individuals, you might well wonder how they are getting on. First of all, it is probably none of your business, but that's how we are. And they will tell you, about themselves and their life together, what they wish you to know. But it doesn't add up, and therefore you are still unsatisfied. So what are you going to do about it? Are you going to eavesdrop or spy on them? Are you going to spring a visit on them suddenly and catch them unawares? Are you going to plant a bug or tap their telephone? No! You respect their absolute privilege of privacy. Their secret is theirs and it is sacrosanct, and you must make what you can of what they wish you to know.

That's how it is, I'm afraid, and that's how it must be. There are things revealed and there are things secret. It is sick people who feel that they must expose themselves to all and sundry and reveal their inmost thoughts to every passerby. It is a sign of immaturity, of disrespect for others and of disrespect for yourself, not to be able to distinguish between the things that can be revealed and the things that must be kept secret. A chatter-box is not necessarily a saint or even a hero.

Indeed there are things about yourself that not even you will know. Sometimes it is left to others to tell you. Sometimes not even they will know. Introspect as you like. Navel-gaze for as long as you please. Visit ever so many psychiatrists. Stretch yourself out on ever so many couches, you will remain a mystery to others and to yourself because that's just what you are. Thank God for it. When someone says to you, "I don't understand you," take that for a compliment! Why should they? "I will praise you, O Lord" exclaims the psalmist, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6, 14).

So much about myself I do not know. Enigmas, the outlines of which I can barely trace. Depths of my being that I cannot fathom. Heights of possibilities that I cannot comprehend. And it is all of this, the revealed and the secret, the commonplace and the mysterious, the known and the unknown, which make the human being. And for me to keep secret what should be revealed is bad. It brings out the worst in others. And to reveal what should be kept secret, is also bad. It brings out the worst in me.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God. And that is a far more meaningful and far more liberating word which comes to us from Holy Scripture. Secret to us, but known thoroughly to Him who knows our downittings and our uprisings, who understands our thoughts afar off, who compasses our paths and our lyings-down and who is acquainted with all our ways (Ps. 139:1-3), and who is therefore far stricter with us, and far more merciful to us than we are to each other or to ourselves. He understands what He has made. He knows the works of his hands, "I know you" is the message which resounds throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jer. 1:5); "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27); "Thine eye did see my substance whilst as yet there was none of them and in thy book were all my members written" (Ps. 139:16).

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, and therefore there will

be more questions than answers. And what is true of the mystery of our being is equally true of the mysteries of our existence. There are things revealed and there are things secret. There are many questions to which we shall have to answer for a long time "I don't know." "How did everything begin?" is Dr. Doorbar's question. Why is it that it is on this planet that human life and reason appeared? Or is there a duplicate of this planet somewhere else in space going through the same processes and the same mutations as this one? And do I have a double somewhere out there, doing precisely what I am doing now, saying just what I am saying, referring to me as I am referring to him? I don't know. The secret things belong unto the Lord our God.

And what about the contradictions of our experience? Why is it that it is we, human beings, who have a thirst for happiness and well-being, but who are dogged by pain and misery and misfortune? Why is it that just when we would like to think that this planet on which we live is safe and habitable, then there is a movement in the earth's crust which sends tremors up to the surface and sicken and decay and die? What lies beyond the grave? What becomes of those whose remains we hide in the earth? We may speculate and dream and hope, but what do we really know? There are more questions than answers, because the secret things belong to the Lord our God.

This is what, I gather from Dr. Doorbar, drives people to atheism and agnosticism. It isn't that becoming agnostic brings the answers to these questions any nearer. It is rather a kind of protest about their right to know, a quarrel with the One who is responsible for this unsatisfactory state of affairs. He ought to make everything clear. He ought to answer our questions. He owes it to us. Is it really what atheism is all about? A theism up in arms? A theism in protest? Like the school-boy who flies into tantrums and is angry with his teacher because she knows the answers to the questions which baffle him? So he concludes that there is no teacher before the class, but only a monster. The secret things belong unto the Lord or God, and because we are not gods but merely human there will be more questions than answers.

But the second part of this verse from Deuteronomy is just as powerful and just as important. If there are secret things which belong to the Lord our God, there are nevertheless some answers and they belong unto us and unto our children forever. We are not left in total ignorance. We are not shut up in gross darkness. We have light enough for our way. There are some things which we do know, and what is more, they are quite enough for us to be getting on with. This planet is not useless because there are earthquakes, or hurricanes, or epidemics in diverse places. The human race is not completely written off because there are wars and atrocities and rumours of wars. Out of this same fallen race have come amazing acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, goodness, uprightness and clarity. Over this same threatened planet the sun shines daily, the rain falls, the earth bears fruit of itself, grass grows for cattle, food for the use of man. Civilizations have risen from the dust. If there are diseases, there are medicines. If there is crime, there is law. If there is need, there is generosity. Things have been revealed and they are quite enough to be getting on with.

These three score years and ten that we have—or more, or less—they do

not become pointless because they appear to be so brief under the span of eternity or because we do not know what happens afterwards. No! There are things revealed. We know enough of what pertains to life and godliness. We know enough to make our calling and election sure. We know the reality and the extent of our freedom, the nature of our obligations and our responsibilities. We know our station and its duties. We know good from evil, right from wrong, we know what is required of us.

The things secret are no excuse for being less human, less concerned, less responsible. We know that faith, hope and love abide, because they are worthy of human devotion. We know that indifference and self-centredness and resignation have no future because they starve the human spirit. "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8) There is enough revealed for us to be getting on with. I know that from him to whom much is given much shall be expected. I know that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. I know that he who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. I know that God is not unrighteous to forget your works and the love that you showed towards his name in that you ministered to the saints and still do minister. This is what we have, they belong unto us and to our children and they are quite enough to be getting on with.

And one day a man appeared in Galilee, the son of a carpenter. Many things that are commonplace to us were secret things to Him. He knew nothing of electricity or aircrafts or satellites. He knew nothing of contraceptives, or antiseptics or chloroform. He did not know the New World or the Caribbean or Jamaica. He could never have got a B.A. or a B.Sc. He could never have been a graduate from this or any other university; but of Him it was said in a voice which spoke from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). And what was his reputation? "He went about doing good, and healing those who were oppressed" (Acts 10:38). And what did He say? "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound" (Luke 4:18). "I am the Bread of Life. He that cometh to me shall not hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). "I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

More questions than answers, but lack of complete knowledge is no excuse for falling short of full, meaningful, responsible, positive living, for in the final analysis we shall be judged not by what we did not know, but by what we knew, and did not do. For, if you are not getting on with what you know, what proof do you have that you will get on any better if more and more secrets are revealed to you?

The New Testament has the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), but I am afraid that in our various interpretations, the main point has often been missed. It is not so much the indifference of the rich man to the poor man at his gate, nor is it their contrasting destinies in the other world.

The main point is the little dialogue between the rich man in hell and Father Abraham about the five brothers whom he pre-deceased. He wants Lazarus to be sent back to them as an emissary from the secret world of the dead to give some mysterious signal of what things are like on the other side so that they may believe. But Abraham says, "No, there will be nothing weird, nothing bizarre, no necromancy. They have enough to be getting on with. They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them and if they are not getting on with what they already have, they will not believe even if one should rise from the dead." And lest we miss the application, we are the five brothers of the rich man in hell. You to whom we say farewell tonight, whatever it is that you do not know, whatever else is left for you to know, there is enough for you to be getting on with. The things revealed belong to you and to your children forever.

Martin Buber in his book, *Tales of the Hasidim*, relates the story of a young disciple who wanted to tell his teacher about his inner torment but he could not find the courage. One day when he could hold back no longer, he ran weeping to his teacher who asked him what was the matter. "Here am I," he cried, "alive in this world, a human being created with all my five senses, but what it is that I was created for, or what good am I in this world I do not know." "Little fool," the Hasidic teacher replied, "That's the same question I have been carrying with me all my life. You must come and eat the evening meal with me."

There are more questions than answers. Indeed there are no neat, pat, ready-made answers to life's most vital, urgent and significant questions. They will remain questions all life long. And far from pointing to the wickedness of God, they only prove his wisdom and his goodness. As long as those questions remain, the human soul and mind will not atrophy but will grow and mature until we know even as we are known. In the meantime there is enough to be getting on with, and the truth of our religion will be proved not in the accumulation of knowledge but in personal relationships, how we treat each other, how we respect each other, how we love each other, how we share with each other. Even in the twilight of our times, we can still say, and must know how to say, to each other, "Come and eat the evening meal with me. Come and share my scanty store. Come and share my dreams, my hopes, my advantages and my adventure. If they are mine, they are yours. If they are yours, they are mine. The things revealed. They belong unto us and unto our children forever."

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