

# Souls for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Dr Gareth Leyshon  
Penmaenmawr,  
Friday Session 1

# [ The SOUL: what is it? ]

- HUMAN = MIND + BODY
  - Reductionist approach
  - Consciousness = brain function
  
- HUMAN = MIND + BODY + SPIRIT
  - What is this spirit?
  - “Immediately created by God”
  - “Spiritual” as a current buzzword
  
- SOUL = HUMAN = BODY + SPIRIT
  - I am a soul
  - Eastern Christian approach
  
- HUMAN = BODY + SOUL
  - I have a soul?
  - I have a body?

# The SOUL as the WHOLE PERSON

- Pope John Paul II
  - “Theology of the Body”
  - A new approach to the human person – touching human life and gender issues
- PERSONALISM
  - A philosophy that human beings *per se* are the highest good (contrast utilitarianism – the greatest happiness)
- As Karol Wojtyla
  - “Love and Responsibility”
  - Implication for human sexual relations

# The SOUL as the HUMAN SPIRIT

- How can we know anything about the soul (the human spirit)?
  - Scripture (especially where it relates directly to our salvation)
  - Tradition (“unwritten Scripture”)
  - God speaking through the teaching authority of the Church (e.g. Papal and Conciliar texts)
  - Testimony of mystics, charismatics and all who report ‘spiritual experiences’ – including those of other religions.
  - Near Death Experiences ???
- The soul and consciousness
  - Brain damage impairs thought – brain, mind and spirit are interrelated somehow
  - Can the brain as a purely physical system result in the exercise of free will?

# The SOUL as the HUMAN SPIRIT

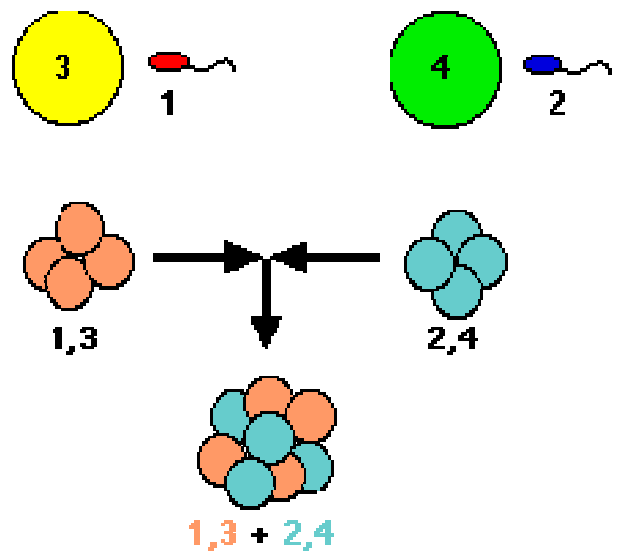
- What do we mean by “spiritual”?
  - And how should it be distinguished from “emotional”?
- Three questions for involvement in “spiritual practices”
  - Has God forbidden it?
  - Might it open myself up to the influence of evil spirits?
  - Does it get in the way of my duty to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only spiritual power I turn to?
  - See leaflet on “New Age Practices”

# The problem of ENSOULMENT: Biological basics

- 1. Sperm meets egg! (the introduction takes a whole day...)
- 2. A single-celled embryo is created, necessary and sufficient to develop into a human foetus.
- 3. Cleavage occurs as the embryo divides into two and then three cells.
  - The first four cells produced are TOTIPOTENT – they can develop into any cell of the body or placenta.
  - Splitting to produce identical twins can happen at this stage.
- 4. Those cells destined to make the body become PLURIPOTENT, they can make any body cell, or extra pluripotent cells, but not placenta. These are “embryonic stem cells”.
- 5. These pluripotent cells divide and specialise to become all the body parts needed.

# The problem of true Chimeras

- It can happen that two newly-fertilised embryos can merge and grow into a single organism!



# The problem of ENSOULMENT: Biological facts:

- A single totipotent cell is necessary and sufficient to produce a new human being.
- This cell may be produced by fertilisation, nuclear transfer or (perhaps in future) by manipulation of embryo or adult stem cells.
- There is a phase of fluid identity during which twinning, recombination or chimera formation may occur.
- During the pluripotent phase, the number of human identities becomes fixed.



# The problem of ENSOULMENT

- The soul is “immediately created by God”.
  - Immediately means “without mediation”, not “straight away”.
  - Is there a genetic criterion which is not met in damaged embryos?
- When might this happen?
  - Conception?
    - How to tackle twinning and chimeras?
    - Do ‘lost embryos’ go to heaven? (And is this more unreasonable than for victims of infant mortality?)
  - When twinning becomes impossible?
    - What is the status of the totipotent cell?
  - Some later time?
    - Pro-abortion lobby often accords human rights at viability, but this depends on life-support technology available.

# The problem of ENSOULMENT

- The scientific method can establish:
  - what kind of cell can or cannot become a grown human without further intervention
  - the conditions for it to be possible to form identical twins and chimeras
- Can theology establish...
  - when the soul is infused?
  - what moral status should be given to the human embryo if the ensoulment problem cannot be solved?

# “The works of the Lord are great”. CONCLUSIONS

- Galileo’s conflict arose when he did bad science and the Church of his time responded with bad theology.
- There are no irreconcilable issues between biology and Catholic teaching over evolution, including the requirement for “Adam”.
- Science’s job is to model what happens in the real world. This can’t rule out miracles if miracles happen.
- “Soul” may refer to the human spirit or the whole person. The church has not fixed the moment of ensoulment but protects the embryo from the time of conception.