

I killed Caroline Flack

Friedrich Nietzsche's exasperated lament runs as follows:

*"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"*

To his fans he is at the crest of Man's apotheosis, to his detractors a victim of hubris. As so often with the truth, it is to be found in nuance.

Nietzsche did not make this utterance lightly or with any tone of triumph. He declares it with fear in his heart. He was smart enough to know what was to follow. Nietzsche died in 1900, the following century would prove to be the most cataclysmic in the human experience. Nietzsche, like many of those that elevated the fruits of the enlightenment over any other age, believed that God and the belief in God belonged to the age of superstition.

Nietzsche's points on the existence of God are not particularly original but his desperate analysis of what type of creature emerges from this loss of faith is. He knows that there is no festival of atonement from which we can return to our bliss. No amount of expunging can rid of us of the blood that stains our hands and those of our children. We see it and we weep for our condition.

Nature abhors a vacuum and he was insightful enough to identify the idol to whom we shall all bow, ourselves.

*"A stranger came by travelling and he went to every door, he said he'd lost his people, he'd come to look for more. And many did believe him as he talked upon the square. The spell he wove upon us fills our bodies with despair".*

So wrote Stuart Adamson in the song Flame of the West. There has been and always will be individuals that are able to personify our stain, our guilt and our wrath.

Albert Speer, Hitler's architect reflected upon the first time he heard Hitler publically speak during his 20 years imprisonment in Spandau. He writes *"He spoke urgently and with hypnotic persuasiveness. The mood he cast was*

*much deeper than the speech itself. He swept away any skepticism, any reservations. Opponents were given no chance to speak. Finally, Hitler no longer seemed to be speaking to convince; rather he seemed to be expressing what the audience expected of him”.*

Nietzsche believed that this stain of ours was a software issue. If we only had a belief in God we could avoid the nefarious maneuverings of a man like the one spoke of by Speer.

Nietzsche’s postmortem of the human condition is too limited and the saints of the Church knew this all too well. The Christian knew that the stain was not caused by a so called enlightened ‘casting off’ process but as a condition of our birth, it is a hardware issue. It’s a fundamental malevolence that expresses itself in a myriad of ways.

If one takes the story of Cain and Abel as a small example.

The story is no longer than a paragraph in the book of Genesis 4. 1 – 16. Within that one paragraph more analysis of the human condition is offered than the many encyclopedias produced.

What is the response of Cain to his blood brother’s successful offering to God? It is to wrestle him to the ground and kill him. The petulance and resentment of Cain leads him to something he never thought himself capable of. If we are being brutally honest with ourselves what is our response to our neighbor getting a new car and telling us about it? How does one feel when a colleague at work gets the promotion over oneself? You might not feel murderous rage and you may eventually have been genuinely pleased for them and yet, somewhere inside I’m sure there was a moment no matter how brief where you felt resentment, envy or a sense of injustice.

In a very brief way, it is understandings such as this that scripture presents to us that helps us understand who we are, what we truly are. If we wish to get well one must first know how sick we are.

The only balm that can anoint the inflamed soul is the love of God made known in Christ. ‘Forgive them Father for they know not what they do’. To utter these words as men drive nails through your bones is to me a love that cannot be dwelt upon for long without utter ruin coming to my composure. It is the love of God.

Take if you will that quote from Speer. Where it uses the pronoun ‘he’ replace it with the word ‘they’ and where it says Hitler replace the word with ‘gossip’ or ‘tabloid journalism’.

I never knew who Caroline Flack was and don't particularly recall watching anything she presented. The news of her death was not the bombshell to me that it was to many of her social media followers. The picture that emerges is of talented young lady who, perhaps initially courted the world of celebrity, but was unprepared for the lengths at which that world would go in reveling in the misery of her own private life.

Pope Francis does not confuse his words when he said in a recent address *“Slander or false testimony. We know that slander always kills. This 'diabolical cancer,' arises from the will to attack someone's reputation also destroys the rest of the ecclesial body.”*

He articulates that this base desire of ours to slow down at a crash site, to repeat a slur about another or to profit through the misfortunes of others is nothing less than a fundamental attack upon our civic and ecclesial bonds. Anything that seeks to divide, fracture or replace the equality and wholeness of the state or Church is fundamentally sin.

So whilst I didn't know Caroline Flack, I have clicked on tabloid links online, I have read about the celebrity disasters in the newspapers and I have contributed to a media that devours lives. This morbid curiosity is sin, it is also us.

“What water is there for us to clean ourselves” Nietzsche cried. No water originating in this life can absolve us from ourselves; no release from the prison we find ourselves in, a thirst that can never be quenched.

*“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”.*

So spoke Jesus to his disciples 2000 years ago. If we are going to live out our Christian faith then we need to be calling out the abuses and excesses of tabloid and social media. We cannot worship the Father through Jesus Christ who himself was vilified by the powers of his age. We need to ask God for eyes to see many of these corporations as expressing what we (the audience) have come to expect of them. Let us all turn our hearts to him who promises not only absolution from this sin of ours but to place within us a well of peace and love that leads to everlasting life.

RIP CF #BeKind