

Have any of you read Dan Brown's newest book? Released last September, "The Secret of Secrets" is the sixth in a fiction series featuring Robert Langdon, a "symbolologist." Maybe you recall this character in Brown's "The DiVinci Code."

At any rate, this new book involves another fast-paced mystery, which was not of interest to me. What interested me was the premise that our human consciousness doesn't "reside" in our brains, as we think, but outside our bodies in the "collective unconsciousness" of the universe. Sort of like "the cloud" in computing terminology.



I wonder what you think about this idea, that our individual consciousness exists beyond our brains as a part of universal consciousness.

If this premise is true, the implications would be astounding. A 1960s theologian named Wolfhart Pannenberg, for instance, posited that God interacts in creation using what he called "force fields," a type of energy that another theologian named Carter Heywood says that we know as the Holy Spirit. If so, perhaps our consciousness resides within God, or at least the part of God that interacts with our world. In terms of our consciousness, our very being, we are what we "download" and we are NOT what we filter out.

When I read about this theory of consciousness, I HAD to check it out. Is external consciousness only a fictional fantasy? Well, let's just say that neuroscientists disagree. Those who have studied Near Death Experiences say that our consciousness exists independently of our body, outside the brain, as an inherent property of the universe. And—they conclude—when we die (and this is a quote) "we transcend our material bodies and merge with the collective consciousness." On the other hand, other neuroscientists say that our consciousness is only a function of brain chemistry—gone when our brains die.

One of the great things about having had a theological education is that when I hear new theories such as this, even fictional ones, I immediately think of scripture. In this case, I thought of Nicodemus, the pharisee who visited Jesus at night to call Jesus a "teacher who has come from God." He was there, no doubt, to also persuade Jesus to be more cooperative with the Temple authorities, but he also had sympathy for Jesus as an emissary from God.

Well, I actually thought of Jesus' answer to Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being **born from above**."

What does the phrase "being born from above" mean? There are Christians who prescribe an answer, sure of their checklist of what WE must do to be "born again:"

- Confess our sins and ask God to forgive our sins, which they interpret to be the "born of water" part of today's gospel lesson, in other words be baptized; and
- Profess belief in Christ Jesus as God's only Son.

Other Christians would add another "step" in being "born again," that we need to act in the name of Jesus, doing what Jesus taught us. Perhaps this is the "born of the Spirit" part of today's gospel lesson, to act according to what Christ taught. In fact, in scripture faith is not something we do with our brains, not BELIEVING about Jesus only, but adopting Jesus values and actions.

Back to neuroscience for a moment: What Jesus said is that we "must be born of the Spirit." I think of being "born of the Spirit" as an activation of the spiritual pathway in us, using the Christ Jesus' spiritual energy that is always available to us, waiting to be believed and requested. We ask in a formal way at baptism, but we draw on this spiritual energy whenever we act in Christ's Spirit.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus it was because of the miracles that Jesus was performing, miracles which he knew had to be "from God." In this, Nicodemus was part-way to recognizing Jesus as the Christ. He understood that no one could do the miracles that Jesus was doing apart from God, and yet he thought Jesus was only a teacher. As a result, Jesus told Nicodemus that his sight was limited. Jesus told Nicodemus something like, "Yes, you've seen the miracles. But unless you unblock the God-filter, you can't recognize me for all that I am."

What do I mean by "unblocking the God filter?" God has given each of us a choice, a choice to accept OR REJECT God and Christ Jesus. To open a full channel to God we need to acknowledge who Christ Jesus is by believing in him and in the One who sent him.

Most, if not all, of you have been baptized, when you formally invited Christ Jesus into your consciousness and into your life. If you didn't choose baptism for yourself, someone chose it for you. Perhaps you also chose God for yourself at Confirmation. You have activated your "God channel" and (I hope and pray) have let the Spirit of God lead you into actions in his name that bring God's kingdom more fully into our world.

The important thing to note here is that God is the one doing the acting when we are "born from above," not us. We put ourselves in a position to receive God's Spirit when we ask. But nothing that WE

can do can MAKE God act. God does what God does. Our lives may be transformed, but not due to our own efforts, but to God's.

So, what does this mean for us today, here at Church of the Resurrection, believers, all? In John's Gospel, believing in Christ Jesus means having a relationship with him. Thus we, who by act of God have been "born anew," or "born of the Spirit," or "born from above," are motivated to give thanks:

- By our worship,
- By our prayers,
- By our profession of faith anew this Lent, and
- By our lives lived in love in the name of Christ Jesus.