

This evening, our church's film-discussion group "did"
"THE SIXTH SENSE" (1999)

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Here, what I wrote before (& distributed after the discussion) is enriched by the vigorous interchange.

1 Does death end one's decisional opportunities? If the scripter thought so, this film would be only a few minutes long: our hero, the protagonist Malcolm, a pedo-therapist (Gk., "child-healer" [child psychiatrist]; Eng. wd. not yet in the dictionary), is murdered in, as it were, act one. But only at film's end do we learn that the shots were fatal: his transformative, redeeming acts occurred *post mortem*, as a ghost. Christian theology (1) is more serious about death & therefore about one's *premortem* decision-making, but (2) stresses the divine fairness & mercy & therefore is loth to preach an un-nuanced heaven/hell apocalyptic.

2 I'd written how important the color red was throughout the film, & the Internet's 8pp listed several appearances I'd forgotten. Red is blood, but also sacrifice & salvation (Christian redemption being an underlying, modestly appearing, but unobtrusive theme in the story). At film's beginning & end, the 8-year-old boy Cole enters a church through its red doors: safety, security, salvation inside from "bad people" (as C.'s psychiatrist, M., says to C. inside the church [M. diagnosing C. as a ghost-seeing paranoid schizophrenic]). In an upstairs room of his home, C. pitches a red tent to which he retires when he needs to feel safe. In it are small statues of Jesus, Mary, & saints (one of which statues we see him steal on his way out of church). The doctor always wore something red; & red was the color of the door to the wine cellar, which was also his office (& which his wife, in her grief, locked after his death: he as ghost discovered it locked). Determined to be reconciled to his wife (whom he'd neglected in his obsessive effort to heal C., & who in her neglect had acquired a lover), Ghost M. returned & found (1) her sleeping & (2) her red pills of anti-depression medicine (which was a stretch, said the pharmacist in our discussion group: that particular medicine comes only blue or white). A red balloon floats up the well of a circular staircase into the ceiling's center, from which light (life & God-as-life-giver [Internet]) is streaming; Cole follows the balloon, but some children lock him into a dark attic, from which his mother rescues him. More red: (1) A little girl is murdered by her mother, & C. reveals the murder by presenting a red-cased video in a red box; (2) Some of the ghosts C. sees are gory; (3) When near film's end M. & we discover he's been a ghost since he was murdered, his corpse is rolled over & we see something we didn't see when near film's beginning he was shot: a pool of blood.

3 The Bible? (1) Red as a redemption thread through the film: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Heb.9.22); (2) After C. says to M. "You can't help me," in despair M. moans "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord" (Ps.130.1, NRSV, NIV, the De Profundis; CEV, "From a sea of troubles I cry out to you, Lord"). C.'s mother seems deist in saying to him, in her despair, "We're just going to answer each other's prayers." While the story proceeds without any stated benefit of clergy or deity, divine redemptive action seems implied in the repeated appearance of the church & the cross & in M. & C.'s mutual healing.

4 Also throughout the film is a deep note of loneliness as a symptom of a social disease, viz. individualism, the downside of the West's touting of freedom. In the prolog, the murderer says "I'm lonely; I don't want to be afraid no more"; & in the epilog, "Do you know why you are afraid when you are alone?" (In both, "you failed me.") NEWSWEEK's current feature is "Joe DiMaggio, the Loneliest Hero." At the other end of the American success ladder, today a Manhattan homeless man phoned to tell me of his utter loneliness. You could guess (right) that the film has no nuclear (father/mother/child) family. (At the Million Family March four days ago, Louis Farrakhan said "The family is the basic unit of civilization, so everything must be done to take care of the family.") Nor is there any family-substitute community: no church (as people; only as building), no support group.

5 The film's genre? It's one of a rising number of afterlife films, this one specifically ghost-horror (with psychiatric & social-critical angles). Biblical religion (1) forbids necromancy (spiritualism, the consulting of the dead) & (2) delivers from

fear of the dead (which is mocked-played at Halloween, & transcended in the thin-veil novels of Christians such as Chas. Williams & C.S. Lewis). Houston Smith (THE RELIGIONS OF MAN, now THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS) grew up in a Chinese village whose folk lived daily under the superstitious fear of ghosts until Houston's Methodist missionary parents brought the gospel to them. Where biblical religion fades, as now in some cohorts of the West, the old animistic-spiritistic fear is returning--a factor in the present popularity of the ghost story.

6 The film incites us to meditate on the mystery of consciousness. Says the Internet, "Pay attention to windows and doors, which are symbolic entrances to other realities." (List the windows/doors in the film & in the Bible, including Jesus' "I am the door.") The film's title suggests the paranormal beyond our five physical senses: "the Beyond" is even a name for the sphere in which religions are born, the realm from which God comes to us : "Moses had seen the invisible God and wasn't afraid of the king's anger" (Heb.11.27b CEV). Seeing what isn't there (C.'s ghosts?) is abnormal; seeing invisibles is paranormal; seeing visibles is normal. While one's dead brain can be preserved in a glass bottle, one's mind is osmotic to nonphysical realities it can reach out to & which can reach into it, one's will being the gatekeeper. C. was "possessed" by frightening & demanding intruders: "Ghosts want me to do something for them"--the dark pathological side of Jesus' "Not my will but Yours be done."

7 C.'s necrophilism is sick: "All the time I see dead people walking around." But the film has two supernatural effects: shadows, & visible breaths without a cold surround.

8 M. & C. are redeemed together. C. is no longer a "freak" (as his teacher & peers called him), & M. returns to his wife with these words: "I need to help someone [in compensation for his not helping the child who, become a man, murdered him]Everything will be different in the morning. Get some sleep."

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