

## **A Psychiatric Case Study and the Role of Analytic Philosophy in Values-based Clinical Care**

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### **Exercise 2 – Simon's Story<sup>1</sup>**

Simon (40) was a senior, black, American professional, from a middle-class, Baptist family. Before the onset of his symptoms, he reported sporadic, relatively unremarkable, psychic experiences. These had led him to seek the guidance of a professional "seer", with whom he occasionally consulted on major life events and decisions.

Around four years before the first interview, his hitherto successful career was threatened by legal action from his colleagues. Although he claimed to be innocent, mounting a defence would be expensive and hazardous. He responded to this crisis by praying at a small altar which he set up in his front room. After an emotional evening's "outpouring", he discovered that the candle wax had left a "seal" (or "sun") on several consecutive pages of his bible, covering certain letters and words. He described his experiences thus. *"I got up and I saw the seal that was in my father's bible and I called X and I said, you know, 'something remarkable is going on over here.' I think the beauty of it was the specificity by which the sun burned through. It was ... in my mind, a clever play on words."* Although the marked words and letters had no explicit meaning, Simon interpreted this event as a direct communication from God, which signified that he had a special purpose or mission.

From this time on, for a period of about 18 months, Simon received a complex series of "revelations" largely conveyed through the images left in melted candle wax. He carried photos of these, which left most observers unimpressed, but were, for him, clearly representations of biblical symbols, particularly from the book of Revelations, (the bull, the 24 elders, the arc of the covenant, etc). At other times he described thoughts coming into his head: "... the things that come are not the things that I have been thinking about ... they kind of short circuit the brain, and bring their message."

All these experiences meant nothing to Simon's family or friends but for him they signified that *"I am the living son of David ... and I'm also a relative of Ishmael, and ... of Joseph"*. He was also the *"captain of the guard of Israel"*. He found this role carried awesome responsibilities: *"Sometimes I'm saying - O my God, why did you choose me, and there's no answer to that"*. His special status had the effect of *"Increasing my own inward sense, wisdom, understanding, and endurance"* which would *"allow me to do whatever is required in terms of bringing whatever message it is that God wants me to bring"*.

He expressed these beliefs with full conviction, *"The truths that are up in that room are the truths that have been spoken of for 4000 years"*. When confronted with scepticism, he commented: *"I don't get upset, because I know within myself, what I know"*.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon's story is based on one of a number of cases collected by Mike Jackson as part of his doctoral work and published with philosophical implications in Jackson, M., and Fulford, K.W.M., (1997) *Spiritual Experience and Psychopathology*. Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology, 4/1, 41-66.