

WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING?

“Who’re you following? Who’re you starting to move like?” – Yeah Yeah Yeahs

These are contrary times. It’s the age of individualism. Everybody’s been talking about the individual, about individual freedom. About following your own heart, about following your own dreams. We’re not the people anymore, we’re individuals!

It’s also the age of mass culture. We all watch the same TV, the same films, read half the same books, glance sideways at the same billboards. We all say roughly the same things about how important it is that we’re all free to think differently. The age of individualism is this: that we each have our own television sets. We’re not individuals anymore, we’re sheep (or goats), and we’re following something...

There’s roughly two ways of following things. The first, and most interesting, is to follow something because of a conscious and personal choice. We count the cost and decide that it’s worth it. The second, and most common, is to follow natural inclination, or popular “choice” whichever way, without even really noticing. We live by decision or by default.

Organised religion is something we spat out a long time ago as something weak, passive and damaging – one way of living by default. Jesus felt the same way. Perhaps the strongest expression of organised religion today is mass culture itself, with its gods and goddesses, its rituals and observances, and its influence in controlling and pacifying behaviour. To follow Jesus, on the other hand, is impossible without personal and conscious choice.

We’ve all been enamoured with Jesus’ way of thinking in some way or other. Most of us feel that “love your neighbour as yourself” is a good start to good living. But how deep does the hole go? What does it look like to really follow a man who started riots, committed acts of vandalism in holy places, protested against capital punishment, spent scandalous amounts of time with prostitutes? A man who was an asylum seeker and then a convict on death-row? A man who said he was God, even though he cried, even though he bled, even though he died? A man who’s friends were willing to die horrible deaths swearing that they’d seen him alive when he was supposed to have been dead?

If anything, he’s a hard act to follow. Certainly impossible without counting the cost and making a big choice. The tragedy is to never make a choice at all.