

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## The Way You Think

My father used to say that there was a right way and a wrong way to do everything (a sentiment he only recalled when he had detected my choosing the latter alternative). I know of no Hebrew in the family pedigree, but he displayed a very Jewish attitude: the idea of our living in such black/white landscapes doesn't come from the West. We inhabit a world of infinite shading and sophistication. There are things that are right, like telling the truth - but we don't think you should be too officious about it. *I never lie*, said the lovely Fra Paolo Sarpi, *but I don't tell everybody the whole truth!* We can think of dozens of reasons for tailoring the truth: we don't want to give unnecessary pain, we want to keep confidences, we do not feel it is our job to confront someone, even about something serious: or we don't think we can afford the time to pick up the pieces afterwards. We find many reasons for keeping silence. Does this amount to deception? Western people are used to such "grey areas"; maybe we ought to call them whole *spectra*, rainbow progressions of possibility.

### The Gospel Is Absolute

Jesus in the Gospels is never paralysed by the kind of doubt and uncertainty we find endemic. He lives a life which doesn't pass through shaded areas: this is perhaps part of what he means when he says: *I am the light of the world*. The sun is *never* overshadowed; if our understanding of Gethsemane demands that it *should* be, then we are misunderstanding it. So for Jesus, a quite amazing conclusion can be drawn: he could echo my father and say, *There are two ways of thinking: my way, and the wrong way*. Does that sound arrogant to you? What else can you make of *I am the way, the truth and the life - no one can come to the Father except through me!* or *Whoever is not with me is against me: whoever does not gather with me scatters abroad!* There is a sureness of foot in Jesus which is entirely unrepresented in the sort of clergymen who fashionably lead the churches today, and which would be better embodied in the sort of certainty evoked by unfashionable concepts like *authority* or even *infallibility*. For some Protestants, such terms represent untruth and bad taste - even if they are themselves sometimes fairly dogmatic in saying so. For many others, these words are a necessary part of the announcement of the Gospel

down the ages. I couldn't relate to a church which only claimed fellowship in confusion, the communion of uncertainty. I do not find there *the truth* Jesus claimed to be - and to give to his own.

### Peter As Satan

Having said that, it is surely a glorious moment when Jesus denounces the Rock on whom the Church is founded as *stumbling-block* and *Satan*. Here is Jesus differentiating between himself - assured and positive as ever - and Peter, not *a bit mistaken* or *offbeam* but wrong, wrong as Hell! A fearful warning for all who aspire to proclaim the Gospel or to lead the Church. But a sign, I think, that the Apostle was destined to become a true mouthpiece, a real bearer of the Truth, even though it lay beyond his compass at that moment. He could only have been a stumbling-block, after all, if people listened to him; and Jesus spoke so fiercely to Peter, not because he did not want him to be a leader at all, but because he wanted him to think differently, to lead differently, and to be listened-to when he did. It is those who are called to do a saintly task, and called to act in the power of God, who are the ones whose failure becomes disastrous, worthy to be called satanic. So it's clear that we should take seriously *the way we think*: it may be a life-and-death issue, not just for us, but for others who hear and see us, and who may look to us for leadership. We owe it to our Christian calling to do everything we can not to be wrong.

### Spiritual Hygiene

Only the indwelling Spirit can really cleanse us of error. We must seek the Spirit in prayer and in diligence of thought, refusing to swallow falsehood or any comfortable talk that flows from it. We must expel the silly theory that our secret mind is of no concern to anyone else, and make our heart an open door for anyone who seeks to enter it. We are for Christ, and Christ is for God.  
*Fr Philip*