

The Advocate Will Teach You Everything

Everything? Astonishing when our religious language goes into overdrive like that. Human life is characteristically made of half-measures and compromises, a bit of this but also a bit of that. The age we live in has made this into its religion: the last thing you can mention nowadays is anything like *absolute* truth or *absolute* goodness. Instead we talk about “*my* truth and *your* truth”, or “good *for me* but not necessarily good *for you*” and even “right and wrong *for you*, but perhaps not *for me*”. This tepid soup is designed on the old French Revolution lines, to preserve everyone’s *Liberté* to be what they like, and their *Egalité* - in that no-one shall be considered better than anyone else. I don’t know whether or not this is a good foundation for *Fraternité*, in fact I think it leads to our putting a safe distance between ourselves and the brothers and sisters whose brand of truth, goodness and morality we don’t quite trust. In other words, we pay lip-service to this sort of total indifference to values, but in practice we think it is tosh.

With God, It Is Not So

Divine life, happily, isn’t like that at all. God is free in a sense that is impossible for us - enjoying a sovereignty that is completely unrestricted. He doesn’t depend on anyone or anything, and therefore cannot be subject to any force or person or control. The pagan gods of Rome or Greece, being more or less human in origin, had to cope with fights and fields of power between themselves. They were just human beings with big guns. Their Olympus was a kind of celestial soap-opera. There is little in common between that kind of religion and ours. From the beginning there has been an essential difference between the God of Abraham and his human creatures; and the awe and humility demanded of his worshippers has been founded on the certainty that “his ways are not our ways”. We have expressed this difference between us and God by the words we should never use of ourselves: *all-knowing, almighty, eternal*. We express our knowledge of our weakness and infirmity, not by saying *there is no truth, there is nothing utterly good, beauty is in the eye of the beholder*, but by saying: *God alone is truth, God is beauty, God is all-holy, God is alive*. And these eternal values are not beyond our grasp, or hidden in some far realm beyond

human knowing. We shall find our way to goodness and beauty by finding our way to God, whose intention is that we should come to share in his freedom, his glorious selfhood which blazes effortlessly and eternally, never impeded or limited by time or space or change.

The Fulness Of God

If you think of anything that gives you joy or delight, it will always be limited to one time and space. To enjoy the sunset at Cortina d’Ampezzo is granted only to a fortunate few of us each evening; the rest of us have to make do with a rainy twilight in North Hykeham, or the like. I suppose the number of Lincolnians who will hear the pop of a cork out of the neck of a Krug Vintage 1985 today could be counted on one hand, or less: how about a nice cup of tea instead? And, rarest of all, the people we love: how irreplaceable, how precious they are, and how hard it is when we have lost them, and the world is void of their beloved presence! Italians think of their home city and its towers in this way. It has a special profile in the mind that nothing else can replace. It’s called *campanilismo*, and I understand it very well. People like us can’t imagine love and happiness that isn’t tied to time and place like this. But God’s life is spectacularly different, because what we love in our little local way is lovable insofar as it springs from God and reflects God. We can only see light when there is something that “catches” the light. But if we turn from what is reflecting the light, and open our eyes to what is shining on all things, then the joy we have drawn from brightened creatures comes to reveal their Creator. That promises to be something else; and we express the difference by the unlimited language we use of God, but not of any other being.

The Advocate

When the Spirit gets hold of us, we shall be lifted up into these transcendent realities, the glory of God, in all his truth and beauty. One of the loveliest things Jesus promises is that “when that day comes, you will not ask me any more questions!” At Cortina I was silent, as the light on the Dolomites changed through glorious registers of the spectrum. But then, the earth is in his hand, and I ain’t seen nothing yet.

Fr Philip