

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Only One

It's strange that the phrase "only one" can carry such different emotional charges. It can sometimes express loneliness and isolation, when it's contrasted with a multitude of others. *I was the only one who didn't pass* can be a distinction too far. It can express a severe experience of being trapped: *it seems I have only one course left open to me*. It can express poverty: *I have only one smoked salmon sandwich, where you have many*.

Unique Is Beautiful

On the other hand, it is the phrase for preciousness and uniqueness, as in *this is the only one left in the world*, or *this is the only one Michelangelo finished*. It can be a supreme endearment, just by itself: *you are the only one*. And in the Bible it is the key phrase of all when we want to refer to God. There is nothing to say about God more important than this: that *He Is One - there is no other....* and the next phrase follows with seamless necessity: *you must love this one God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength*. If you have the least understanding of the necessity to love the Creator, then his Oneness demands oneness of heart in his worshippers. This is really simple to get hold of, but it's the most important of all ideas in our religion. It doesn't just apply to people, but to the Creation itself.

The World Is One

If God is One, then the world he created has no fissure or rift within it: it comes as one work from the hand of the one God; it will make sense, it is designed to hang together, it is comprehensible. There's nothing in it that proceeds from some other god or creator, there's no other mind that we need to consult to find an explanation. There is, in other words, a whole truth that proceeds from the single Mind of the One God. It follows that our individual beings, made in God's image, are designed to be one, to make sense, to have integrity. We have got to cling to that. If we decide not to, we can invent a private self-centred world that's full of its own micro-rules, a little pocket where there are multitudinous "realities" which exist side-by-side; so I can lie, and change my heart, and be a different person seven times a day; and if we all live like that, then we can live broken and piecemeal lives where we constantly shoot ourselves or each other in the foot,

wreck our health and happiness, ruin our environment and our prospects, offend and alienate one another, break our promises, betray our dearest loyalties, and poison our lives with every sort of senseless pain. If that's what you call "the exercise of freedom" - and many people do - then freedom may be a very dangerous concept for us.

Life With The One God

But if you live your life under the gaze of one loving God, then it may be that we may yet find a way of sharing the earth that will be just and fair, where people can share the truth fearlessly, where we can build peaceful structures and exploit the planet respectfully, and build trust between all the children of God. All the Commandments proceed from this concept of the unity of God; in its name we accept the world as he has made it, and the people that he has called us to share it with, and instead of impaling ourselves on our differences, constantly tearing the world to shreds for being different from ourselves, we can seek the resolution of all the discord we fear in the harmony of God's mind.

Sphärenklänge

There was in the ancient world a fond belief that as the planets revolved around the earth, they described concentric spheres; which movement produced a heavenly harmony - perhaps audible only to God - called the Music of the Spheres. It's a beautiful notion, but there may be a truth in it dimly perceived: that the eye of God is indeed the reconciling factor that calms the jangled nerves and devastated minds that live through the (relatively) tiny disasters we know. After all, even a cataclysmic earthquake must be called tiny in the vastnesses we now realise the Universe contains. Yet, even if as never before we can ask God (with Ps 8) *When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, what is man that you keep him in mind: mortal man, that you care for him?* still on the lips of these insignificant human creatures the Almighty *finds praise that scales the heavens, and silences the foe and the rebel*. Perhaps in our longing to sing psalms in the ear of God, to chime with the will of God, and to resound with the justice we glimpse in the mighty movements of the Creation, we may find our lives filled with music.

Fr Philip