

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Who Do You Think You Are?

That's quite an important question, and can be asked - and answered - at many superficial levels before we face up to its real depth. Various people are satisfied with various answers. *Name, rank, and serial number* are sometimes enough; sometimes our *function* is what's wanted ("I'm the plumber!"). Occasionally we're being asked for our *credentials* - and we can respond with variable patience to such a demand. But there is a way in which the question can be posed entirely lovingly, and with total respect; we want to know who we're dealing with, we want to share another person's image of himself, to understand the way he looks out on the world, to share his fears or hopes. In the deepest place I have to ask this question of myself, and it is a momentous business, coming to answer it.

Who would you like to be?

Who, not *what*! The answer is not "an engine driver" this time. And the answer is really not possible in a sentence - unless it's a life-sentence. We answer this question not by a pipe-dream - however vivid - but by a sustained programme of life, a series of decisions that try to match up to our real hopes, our real image of what goodness and truthfulness demand. This means that only *possible* answers will do. My answer must match my resources, gifts, and situation. It must recognise my shortcomings, weaknesses, and limits. It doesn't matter how sincerely I may long to be someone else; such longing is evil and damaging, and disobedient to God's most important call to me - to be myself! Once we've accepted this all-important truth, all sorts of interesting consequences seem to me to follow.

Who do you think I am?

There's a question that can be abused in the answering. All sorts of people are waiting to tell us who to be. *Behave yourself!* people used to say. Have you ever thought about that old call to order? It usually meant *stop what you're doing and do what I say* - which sounds very little like behaving yourself, and more like behaving somebody else. Of course, there is bad behaviour which is not worthy of

us, and which represents a true abdication of our dignity or ability; but there may also be "good" behaviour that is forced on us, which does not represent our true self, and which springs from our desire to obey others. Such "goodness" is poorly-based and may not survive. We've got to invest all our powers in the person we really want to be, and then people can know us and accept us for what we are.

You are my beloved Son

God has the right to tell us who we are. All others speak from imperfect understanding: but God knows our ultimate name and nature; more than that, he knows our final destiny. God is therefore the source of our answers, and if we want to get our lives into good shape, he alone can teach us. When we lay aside our speculations - idle, or even feverish - about ourselves and our future, and come into the presence of God to be taught our way, we know that we are becoming *disciples* - people being educated. The school is a great and high one, with the noblest possible record of achievement. We breathe deeper and see further here. I can't help thinking that when Jesus emerges from the waters of the Jordan, and sees the heavens opened, and the Spirit descending on him, he is experiencing that feeling of expansion and vision which is the prelude to a life of discipleship. As he will say to us: *You have only one Father - God; and you have only one Teacher - the Christ.*
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