

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Day The Fire Fell

Last week was celebrated the Jewish Feast of Shavuot, the Giving of the Law. This reminds us that the people of Jerusalem are depicted in the Acts of the Apostles as getting their first live glimpse of pentecostal energy on that feast - Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover, represents Sinai, and the arrival of the Commandments. Pardon me, did you say *feast*? What's to celebrate in the Law?

Fashion and the Law

We moderns do not think of the Law as compatible with religion. Religion, we think, if it is acceptable at all, is a matter of freedom, of choice, of personal taste. This is why religion as she is spoke is such a bad thing and nobody wants it: those rotters, the generations of the past, have tried to foist upon us a religion full of things like obligations and commandments and duties; heavy, man! No wonder they lived such awful lives in the past, pursued by guilt and fear, destined to fail and to have their inadequacies flourished before them daily.... so what were the Jews thinking of, holding a *feast* to celebrate the Law?

“Worthy of eternal life....”

Paul reproaches those who reject the Gospel as *people who do not consider themselves worthy of eternal life*. If we want to think of ourselves as worthy to share the life of God, we must have a long suit in hope! There will be much to change before we can inherit eternity. And it is not just a matter of degree. There's a great difference in consulting humanity to find out what leads to life, and consulting God. The vision and understanding of humanity is limited by our natural finitude: we cannot reach far towards perfection, either in contemplation, or in deeds. The basic religious premise, that *we need God to lead us to life*, is the great constant which binds us to the generations of Christian and Jewish believers whose heirs we are. And the meeting between us and this God whom we so deeply need is, of its very nature, unequal. One can be neither created, nor saved, by an equal; my Maker has to exist before me, and have the power to cause me to exist, a power I can never claim for myself. My Saviour has to stand in a safety I have lost, in order to share with me his security. With God, equality is not to be claimed: not because there is some kind of merit in our being subjected, but because it is

the way things are. We can restrict our dealings to equals, of course; but we shall never receive a blessing greater than we could give ourselves, and there would be no salvation, no eucharist, no worship, no religion - in other words, we should have espoused the modern version of paganism, where people are not ashamed to boast that they have disposed of religion in favour of the present moment and its gifts

The Gift of the Law

The Jewish feast of the Law rejoices because God has chosen to enrich our earthly life with gifts of heavenly wisdom and visions of goodness beyond what is natural to humans. In this gift comes the dimension of obedience, by which our lives are opened to what is limitless, what is welcoming to perfection. The Christian celebrates the same joy in Pentecost, as the breath that stirred the waters of Genesis is breathed again over the earth, bringing beauty and goodness out of dark chaos, and making known the power of the arm of God. Our obedience is the joyous acknowledgment of the Divine, no longer far beyond us, but present to us, as wind and fire, as transcending power and almighty love. Only an ignorance of the greatness of God could found the barren disinterest of the world about us to this prospect. We who have tasted the Paschal joy of salvation must not bring this new life into disrepute by any trace of meanness or slavishness. The Jews who came to Sinai were a liberated people, and the Law showed them a life that was worthy of their God-given liberty. Our enslaved lives too need to be lit, inspired from above, so that we can be worthy of Christ, of eternal life.

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