

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Do I Love God?

What is it like to love God? In the Old Testament it is described as an all-in experience: to love God, we are told, you have to love him with your *whole* heart, your *whole* mind, your *whole* strength. That is the way to relate to the God who made the whole universe, and the whole me.

It's starting to make sense

In hearing the parable of the weeds in the wheat field last Sunday, we acknowledged that some people find it hard to accept that a good God created everything there is. Our field is full of sharp, stinging, poisonous life-forms, and sometimes seems profoundly lacking in harmony; is it true that there is one great Mind that holds the meaning of every last shred of being? Blake gazed at the tyger and asked, "*Did he who made the lamb make thee?*" Well, we've tried believing in several gods at once, which seemed at first to be a better explanation of the chaos and the contrariness - whether in the world, or in the human heart. But that offered little progress in comprehending the universe. If we believe in a warring cacophony of gods, like those of the ancient middle east, we are accepting a chaotic world, and that leads us to accept a chaotic life. However often this may seem to fit the facts of our life, it isn't the purpose of religion. You can't put your life into order by accepting that the heart of reality is disorder.

Dualism

Then someone decided that there must be only two gods: a creator of good, and another to create evil. At least that made the struggle between them more orderly. But the great leap forward came with the insight that the human heart itself, far from being torn in two, demands to worship One alone. Only One can be God, because that which we worship must unite all values and desires, and must open to us the prospect of harmonising our lives: in themselves, and with one another, and with the whole universe in which we live. Worship cannot divide the human heart and still be worship, just as love cannot be love and yet want to separate or reduce or damage. Now we are getting near to the question at the top of this

page: *do I love God?* You can reverse the terms, and say: *Is God Love?* If so, we have finally no choice about whether to love or not.

The Pearl Of Great Price

"If you love me, keep my commandments." These words of Jesus could have been spoken by the God of Deuteronomy, and he is the One who demands the whole of everything. It's a great thing to realise that nothing else will do - *not just for God, but for us!* Do you remember what it was like to collect things, and that dizzy feeling you get when for the first time your eye is blessed by the sight of *the best* or *the greatest* that there is? There was once an archaeologist, digging at the ancient site of Troy, who unearthed the grave of a tremendous king. As they watched, the face began to wither and fall, as the atmosphere reached it. But the scholar telegraphed awestruck to his monarch: "*I have gazed upon the face of Agamemnon!*" He knew what I mean; I knew it myself when I first saw Michelangelo's David, or the Dolomites, or the Dome of Florence Cathedral. The only God we can worship must be greater than all else, and we have to seek to worship him with every power, every sinew of our being. We shall only be sure that we love God when we can truly say that *nothing* else comes before him, and *nothing* matters except him. That is when we trust his power to explain our lives, and to teach us how to live them to the full ("Keep my commandments!"). This is what I think today's Gospel is about.

So What's The Answer?

Like Peter (*Simon Peter, do you love me?*) I'm afraid to answer. God leaves me no space to say: *I love you a bit*; either the whole you, says God, or nothing; I'm not a bit of a god, to be offered a fraction of your devotion. *I am the Lord, there is none beside me, there is none that can deliver out of my hand...* Only total trust, total fidelity is worthy of God. It is a mercy for us that he still gives us time, to travel towards him, to grow in his grace, to learn love.

Fr Philip