

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## A Prophet Among Them

Genesis tells us that God created us. At its most exalted, it tells us that he did this *by his word*: “God *said*:....and so it was.” In other places Genesis shows God doing less divine work (he shaped man from the clay of the earth); but the most beautiful thought is that he simply *spoke our name*, and we sprang into being. This means that in our very nature we embody a word of God; and therefore we already have kinship with Jesus, who is called *the Word of God*, the first-born of all creation.

### A Hot Potato

So it is not true to say, as some of the first Protestant leaders said, that human nature is *absolutely* corrupted by evil. If it were, it would not endure; merely to go on existing shows some sort of goodness. Yet, because of evil, we sometimes find the presence of the word of God a burning and challenging reality. It contradicts the way we live and feel, it goes beyond our wisdom and our generosity. We respond to it deeply, yet we want it to say other things, less testing or threatening; we want the word of God to speak our way; and this is deeply perverse. It's like wanting the doctor to come to our sickbed and tell us that there is nothing wrong with us, or our teacher to accept our ignorance and assure us that we have nothing to learn. In that way we would have no doctor and no teacher: in this way, no God.

### The Cult Of Idols

Many people think that idolatry is only present in the form of materialism, the pursuit of wealth, and so on. I think it is most deeply ingrained in us when we seek to project our images onto God, trying to worship a compound of nice ideas instead of the terrible otherness of the real God. We'd secretly like a God who's as decent as we like to think we are. Take the language of *friendship* as applied to God. When we speak of God as *our friend*, we express a grain of truth, but not much more. Is God at the Red Sea a friendly presence? Is the God of Gethsemane? Or the God of Calvary? As long as we go on muttering about friendship with God, we are in danger of blotting out the fearful *difference* between us and God. There is a great and salutary difference between friendship and love. That is why *friend* falls so short as a term for

God. There are innumerable other examples of our readiness to adopt poor ideas and our tendency to diminish the divine. What we're doing is to make God humanly *acceptable* - house-training God.

### The Presence Of Prophecy

The Letter to the Hebrews describes the covenant at Mount Sinai as “*the great Voice speaking to them, which made them beg that no more should be said to them*”. Sometimes the voice of God may find the response he designed in our making: our being, imprinted by the divine hand, answering readily to its Maker. But often the word will come to us in such exact contradiction of what we want, in so precise a diagnosis of our mortal malaise, that we will not be able to respond with anything but rebellion. Such speaking is the uncomfortable task of the prophet.

### Not Peace, But A Sword

Jesus displayed the divine source of the Gospel by his fearless insistence on giving it, untailed, undiluted, and unedited. He spoke, not as people wanted, but as God wanted. His condemnation was the measure by which he was declared unwelcome. It also measures the distance of humanity from the mind of God. If our religion should find itself relaxing into worldly repose, we can be sure that we have finally managed to evade his prophetic call.  
*Fr Philip*