

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## A Cruciform World

Here's an alternative to the Flat World Society: to see reality as shaped, defined, interpreted for ever by the Cross of Christ

### A Strange Thought

If the "explanation" of the world delivered by the Cross is "for ever", then its message must have been, in some shrouded way, the whole truth *before it even happened*. In other words, that which the Cross manifests to us *has always been the case*. On Good Friday we sometimes *unveil* the Cross during the liturgy, like a mystery becoming gradually plain. This reality is made clear to us in several ways. In the Gospel story, Jesus announces the Passion three times *before it happens*. He doesn't speak of it as a possibility, or a danger to be borne in mind, but as his only future. When people ask him to rethink, he turns on them with unique exasperation, as if any other way forward is a kind of blasphemy or apostasy. Thus he unveils *what has got to come true*. Again, the Gospels surround the story of the Cross with constant echoes of the past - quoting the prophets, and drawing the words of the Psalms into the account: God has always spoken of the Cross! Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane kneels, or is prostrate, before this necessity of the Cross. The apostolic letters speak in the same vein, illuminating the Cross with the words of Scripture, and the world by the light of the Cross. The risen Lord himself makes it his Easter message: "*Was it not written that the Christ should suffer, and so enter into his glory?*" asks Jesus on the road to Emmaus. We have been struggling to understand what happened on Calvary for two millennia; but people have been struggling to understand the mystery of the Cross, dimly perceived, since the human race began.

### The Fiery Serpent

Some deep insight in the mental labyrinth makes us sense the mysterious kinship between our suffering and our healing. We day-dream about miracle releases from our fears and our pain, like people dreaming of a lottery win. But the greater part of our experience tells a different story: that our path often lies *through* the darkness we most fear, and that there is no other choice in the matter that can do justice to our nature. I don't suppose for one minute that these truths are universally understood. I think of medical researchers, locked into alternative, even opposite agendas, desperately searching for the elixir of life; few of us have seen enough to realize that the search for wealth or power or pleasure is a

dead end in the quest for true life. But what strangely-inspired thought caused Moses to lift up that brazen serpent in the desert? To make a *standard* of the very thing that threatened the lives of those who were suffering? Only the classical truths of God: *I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light, and I create the darkness; I make well-being, and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things*. Moses had grasped the truth that even the worst experience has to be explained by God, who alone holds the fulness of truth, concealed from us now, but there for us to know in the fulness of time.

### Coming Of Age

There is much in the New Testament to tell us that we are *now* called to our adulthood and our inheritance; the Cross has been revealed, and we are to live *now* as people who know its truth. There is much to help us. In so many ways, we are all entering into this mystery, whenever we embrace hardships and sufferings - that are bound up with the gift of life - in the spirit of Christ's humility. It isn't a simple thing to identify the Cross in our real sufferings; it doesn't come labelled, or with a leaflet of explanation. But if we seek generously to understand our lives by means of this mystery, then the Cross is exalted once more, and all who see it "raised up like a standard" in our lives, all who look upon it with faith, will be healed. What greater gift could we offer, with wounded hands, to the world?  
*Fr Philip*