

Only A Game?

There's a beautiful poem in the book of Proverbs, which speaks of God's *enjoyment* of the work of creating. Scripture supports the theologians who tell us that God creates in freedom: his decision to create is free, and he is free in choosing what, or whom, to call into being.

In this, God differs in kind from us humans. We sometimes speak of our work as *creative*; but we are flattering ourselves enormously in using the word. We are ourselves *creatures*, which means that we had no choice about who to be, when to live, how to look, how to feel, what to long for. We didn't choose our parents, our state of fortune, our relations, our nationality, or the laws, customs, or culture into which we were catapulted at birth. In "creating" Hamlet, Shakespeare was merely rearranging the components of the nature God had called into being, within the world as God made it - as true Creator. And since God created Shakespeare, we could truly say that *Hamlet* fits in with the rest of the works of God, for which we who believe in him may give him thanks and praise.

The Poetry of the Proverbs

In ch 8 we read that God did not create in a lonely vacuum, but accompanied, in his creating, by a second figure: the figure of divine Wisdom. Wisdom is depicted as a lovely young girl, and she grows, in the Wisdom books, to be an accomplished and beautiful woman, who acts as hostess to the whole human family, turning our steps towards grace and privilege, towards honour and dignity. She is shown to us opening up her house, welcoming us to banquets of delight, presenting us with priceless gifts, loading us with her own benefits of counsel and right direction. In one of the finest moments of this writing, Wisdom says of herself:

As he created, I was beside the Master Craftsman, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere on his earth, delighting to be with the children of men.

One of the freedoms of God in relation to the world is that he isn't threatened by its weakness or its tendency to destroy itself. These are imprisoning facts which afflict us. We live in constant dread of the failure of our plans, and of the disaster we perceive in the ordinary processes of the world: we fear drought, frogs and insects, plagues and famines, floods and darkness, the death of our firstborn, and our own death. All of these are in the mind of God, and he finds no terror in them, but says: *I create light, and I form the darkness, I make well-being, and I create disaster: there is no God but me.* I find something intensely life-giving in the knowledge that God the Creator was, and is, *at play*; but also something terrible and awesome as well. Beneath the tangled wreckage of our disasters, there is a peaceful and almighty Power who, for purposes unknown to us, allows the drama and terror of the cosmos to run its course, and never loses the sense of play. Beside this thought, our theology seems tame and thin. We must look forward to our meeting with him, with a firm belief that we are not going to be bored, but astonished.

Fr Philip