

R C I A

Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults

Godspace

Odd word - for a purpose.

When we're thinking about God, we are "thinking out of our skins": we're in search of a Being we're too little to understand (and always will be), a Being whose existence we can't prove or disprove (and never will), and (for Jews and Christians) a Being who forbids us to make an image of him.

Philosophers say we are getting into *metaphysics* - which is Greek for the area where logic and factual experience won't guide us: we're going beyond what we can sense. Some thinkers refuse to go there, and accept that they're never going to know about God one way or the other. Some get angry, and declare themselves enemies of the very idea of God, as an irrelevant distraction from the business of getting to terms with the "real" world (the one we can test with our senses). The Church knows that real people often do and think things which can't be tested or proven except by experience: for instance, they fall in love and get married. You can't actually prove that you love your fiancé(e) except by getting on with the business and keeping it going until death do you part. That's an example of a tremendously important decision which is unsupported by any sensible evidence: a leap into the unknown that costs you your whole life...and it shows that when our *whole* life is involved, we can go beyond our reliance on proofs: marriage is metaphysical!

The idea that we could make room in the Universe for God is ridiculous, of course. Solomon built a Temple for God, but his famous prayer on the day of its consecration makes the point that no earthly hand can or should pretend to "make God a space". However, Solomon did build, and he did ask that God would use the space he had made as a place where his people could come to find him. *In this place, he prayed, listen to your people: and from the place where you live - in heaven - listen, and when you hear, forgive.*

We are privileged to give God room in our thoughts, in our hearts, in our planning, and in our daily living...or to refuse entrance to God, and exclude him from our life. There is a third option, which is neither to admit nor to exclude God, and to ignore the whole question.

- If you think that God is your Maker, and that your continuing to live depends on his support, then *finding a place for him in your life* is already a bit nonsensical. He's already deeply involved with every breath you take.
- If you think of God as a figment of human imagination, you should firmly exclude him from any place of influence - along with the Bogeyman, the Fairy Godmother, and your next millionaire lottery win - on grounds of personal hygiene.
- If you've postponed the whole question because it's too hard, complicated, metaphysical, or whatever, you *might* be living this difficult but beautiful existence for nothing: after all, *if God is there*, as the cause before we began, and the terminus when we reach the end, it seems a bit careless not to enquire how we should relate to him. Our lives can become cogs in other people's machines if we take no notice of the big picture. Perhaps we would be missing the most important meaning life can have.

A Few Questions To Take Or Leave

1 Do we respond to the idea of God as our Maker?

*Might it give us a sense of value - my life is a gift from God, a work of love?
Do we experience awe at God's work - 'I am wonderfully made'?
Do we gain a sense that we don't live just for ourselves, but for the one who made us?
Do we take consolation from it when our life throws up problems, in illness, in perplexity?
Is it a source of questioning: 'Why is my life this way? What does God want of me?'
Did the Creator do a good job when he made you? Or have you reservations?
Does the idea even make you angry, wishing you had been made differently?*

2 How about the idea that God made other people too?

*Can you value others more highly because they are "God's work of art"?
Did you ever feel God had "designed" your meeting with someone else?
Do you believe that God might speak to you through someone you've met?
Are other people a problem for you some of the time? Where is God in this?
The first commandment: to love God with your whole self. The second: to love your neighbour as yourself. Does that reflect our experience of things?*

3 Do we have a big picture of reality?

*How do we feel about recent events in Mogadishu or Tamil Nadu? Are we overwhelmed with news, bombarded with the world's griefs, till we can't look any more?
Do we forget deep questions, and get on with every day realities, laid end to end, until we fall gratefully asleep?
Do we find time to think of God or pray? How much?*

4 Do we have sacred images of God?

We all tend to pray imaginatively, and need images before we can think. Have you ever experienced the collapse of some treasured image of God? How did you respond?

5 Are you at peace with the idea of God?

*Is your belief in God rock-like, a bit shonky, or frankly negligible?
Is it basically intellectual, basically emotional, or inherited from others?
Is it a source of quiet, disquiet, consolation, disturbance?
Is it private and personal, or does it involve outside realities, other people?
Would you bother to defend it before other people? Could you?*

*Octavian was at the Battle of Actium, with twenty thousand galley-slaves.
All of them got very tired. But the galley-slaves never saw what they were there
for, and many were drowned never knowing.
By winning this battle Octavian became the first Emperor of Rome.
Accepting the religious quest is an attempt to get out of the bowels of the ship,
climb the rigging, and see what's going on.*