

R C I A

Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults

Looking For God

From the first days of life, we can watch babies looking for understanding. They have their tiny systems of sense, and we can tell that they're working overtime (that's why they keep falling asleep). We know that long before they're born, babies are listening hard to the sounds that penetrate their quiet; they are tremendously sensitive to touch, and they know their mothers is as much through scenting as anything else. Babies' eyes are unreliable at first, not yet focused; but once they tune in, babies miss nothing that happens. We used to give newborn babies their first taste of salt during their baptism, traditionally in the first week; the sound of a baby smacking his lips over a few grains of salt is one of my childhood memories.

We don't live easily with what doesn't make sense. Something vanishes: I know I put it down here yesterday, now it's gone. There may be plenty else to do, and it doesn't really matter; but it's a puzzle I can't drop, and I continue to return to it over and over, until it's explained. That's our capacity to *reason* at work; and it's like a bloodhound. Once it's smelt a question, it won't rest until it's found the answer.

What we're saying is, *there's always a reason*. We're totally confident of that; and this means that our nature has a principle of its own: *everything makes sense in the end*. You only have to persist in inquiry, and you'll find the reason for everything.



Whilst we're used to seeking the reason for little things - why the lights have gone off, why the buses have stopped running, or why somebody's soup tastes so good - we also have a deep need for *ultimate* reasons: What am I for? Why are we all here? Why is *anything* here? We feel that there must be an answer to these big questions, as surely as for little ones. Big questions are much harder to answer. Much easier to stick to little questions, we feel. There might even be something fearful in great questions: suppose we discover there's *no* reason, no purpose, in living, beyond what bit of fun or pleasure we can take in it: come some chronic ailment or disability, if life becomes a burden to us, what's the point? Those who decide that the whole universe is a complete, mindless coincidence, with no end, aim, or purpose, must find it hard to go on living if life gets painful.



This need for a purpose in the universe isn't academic. It's connected with *right* and *wrong*. If there's no all-embracing purpose in the world, we're all in it for ourselves; there's nothing else to live for. *What's good for me* is "Good", and *what's bad for me* is "Bad"- even if I'm a pyromaniac, a mass-murderer, or a crazed addict. If we all decide that keeping the peace is "Good", maybe we'll all keep the peace; but who will lead us *all* to such a decision? People have always loved peace, but they have also always been at war. If you want humanity to act together, you've got to find things that unite us all, and principles all can keep. This implies a *unified* purpose in the whole enterprise, and that implies an intention that gives reason to the Universe *as a whole*. The Universe, in fact, needs a religion. Can we find it one?

It can't be something we invent, limited and divided as we are by race and language and history. It is *something that's already there*: the residual act of faith that most people will still make is, "I feel sure there's Something there....". They know their need to find a meaning that is above any one of us, and that governs us all justly and equally. It must be something that gives meaning to all our life - our joy, but also our sorrow. It must be something that makes sacrifices worthwhile, and sets standards to which we can be true, even if it costs us dearly. Above all, because human beings know nothing greater than their own personal consciousness, it must be *personal* if we are to find in it the meaning of our personalities. It doesn't have to be a human person - in fact it *can't* be: we're too limited. (So we can't live and die for darling Barbie or wonderful Ken, or gorgeous Nurse Gladys Emmanuel!)

We don't easily obey anything smaller than we are. We all obey physical laws, like gravity (most of us obediently go down the stairs, because although the window is quicker, gravity makes us use the stairs). But we know that smoking and drinking alcohol can break physical laws and our health; we still massively, disobediently, do both. We're pretty sure that burning fossil fuels breaks a physical law (destroying the ozone layer) and we still top up our tanks and still fly to Ibiza. Knowing the laws of the material Universe isn't enough to make us good. Human beings need an appeal to the heart, and if it is to unite all of us, the appeal must come equally to all. Therefore, the question about God arises.

Do you believe the Universe has a Personal meaning, to which every thing is related?

If you say *no*, you can treat your life and the existence of all things as a random accident, and go on living an accidental life which refuses to look for any meaning beyond what you can see. Few people do this: as you can imagine, it creates more problems than faith does!

If you say *I don't know*, you're saved from ruling anything out; but you still can't feel that you've got a position about what your life means, or why you should live it one way or another. This is the uncertain position in which Britain's life is largely lived.

If you say: *I can't see how it isn't so*, you are setting your feet on the search for God - without saying anything about who you're likely to find at the end.

Revelation

Revelation is the doctrine which says that the Personal God communicates through creating, and intends to communicate with the Creation by various means. This creates all sorts of questions; but that's all grist to the mill; clearly the Person who creates us has made us the questioning, searching creatures we are *for a purpose*. If our minds are full of questions about the small things of our life, it is so that we should arrive at answers. So with the great questions, including those about God, our own mental processes have not been left without the means of finding answers that are reliable. *Revelation* is the idea that God lets us find our way through the gifts established in our being, and the events which make up our lives. There is a profound way in which a Community of people is involved; living in response to God, people sharing their faith have believed they were meeting God in the events of their shared life. Later writers speak of God living within each of us, meeting us in our deepest, most intimate space. Out of this encounter has come revelation, embodied in chosen individuals such as prophets: in the history of a chosen people, Israel: and in the Scriptures they generated, all of whom we believe to be providentially guided. God wants to be known by us. The world is alive with the "speech" of this Maker, and the message we receive from God is of unconditional love. The Community which listens together to the word of God is the Church, within which the Word spoken by God is given its guaranteed interpretation. So we're not left to find God on our own: the people of God are here to support us, and - what is more - God is coming to meet us. Thus, at least, says the Church! Does it seem likely?