

The notion of being a disciple is a rather strange one for us nowadays. With the abolition of apprenticeships and the fashion for re-inventing the wheel which impoverished the human world so grievously in the last half-century, the idea of submission and acceptance has gone into the shade. The nearest thing some people get to discipleship is the cynical urge to destroy the influence of someone whose influence they resent; ultimately the process leads to the spectacle of Professor Dawkins understandably trying to destroy the influence of his Creator.

The ways of God are indeed strange. But the Bible still has the deepest respect for the institution of discipleship, seeing it as the reverent and loving inheritance of the gifts of our fathers and mothers: a sound piece of human housekeeping, yes: but also the safeguarding of treasure dearly bought, mined from the living rock of past generations and experiences, and shared with future generations in equal and generous love.

If we do not offer the young a discipleship worthy of their trust, they will simply accept whatever strong flavour is offered to them by others; and we may not be pleased with its provenance or its motivation, much less with its results. When religion falters, and tradition is let fall, the relay-race cannot proceed with the total commitment and full power that it demands. When young people are offered the split motives of commercialism and self-interest - enlightened or otherwise - they grow up crooked, with a divided heart and a discontented mind. That is an opening for mixed motives and deeds that bear fruit in malice and cruelty. And that is where the world we are living in finds itself.

The great vision of the prophet Isaiah was not received in an atmosphere of pure holiness.

*I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips*

but

*my eyes have looked on the King, the Lord of Hosts*

We are compelled to examine our lives, and to ask ourselves whose disciple we are. If we are to preserve our humanity, and keep open the path of life to which it is destined, than our ideals must not be drawn from any other source than the pure fountain that has been revealed to us by prophets and teachers speaking through the Holy Spirit. We shall never feel that we're at home in a divided and unclear world. But our belonging must all the more be totally to Christ, in whom the clear fire of God's justice burned and who has the power to purify us, and to make us missionaries of his truth and love to the world.