

You could consider the whole religious history of the world under a single enquiry: *How do human beings live with God?* How does the heavenly lie within the grasp of the earth?

Human beings are all mysterious, original creatures. As we go through our lives we are constantly revising what we make of them. Every now and again we meet someone so beautiful or so gifted or so intelligent that we are knocked sideways and re-evaluate our ideas positively. Again we run across the experience of monsters, who show us new depths of iniquity or cruelty, which remind us that the dimensions of evil are also beyond our measuring.

We Christians keep our hold on this immense variety partly by our trust in God, who holds in his own divine mind the single thought or Word which will unite, explain, harmonise, justify, and lead to salvation all the scattered realities he has made. In the infinite space of the mind of God there is room for all of this human diversity to be gathered and reconciled. This enables us to live with our own lack of understanding, never for one moment thinking that the world is inexplicable, or an unredeemable chaos.

The first Commandment, which forbids us to make images of God to worship, is our great saving principle. We do not attempt to define God according to any idea of ours, or by thinking how he *ought* to be. It's the greatest grace for us that God doesn't conform to our ideas of him, and when he allows or produces experiences in our lives which put a spade through our cosy imagery and reduce us to doubt and question, he is reminding us of this essential fact. Those who worship an image of God that they have made are trapped in a dangerous and closed circuit: they are worshipping themselves thinly disguised. It is extremely unhealthy to worship yourself. It ends in despair.

It is precisely in exceeding us, transcending us, that God reigns over us and saves us. This is what Jesus displayed to us in his own obedient life on earth. God's will is not an alternative plan for the world, it is the *only* one. He provides for his creation according to his mysterious plan. Lost in our own minds, we snatch at all kinds of earthly motives and rewards, like African dictators trying to create a private world of prosperity and wealth for themselves. Their poor people pay with their lives for their President's helicopter and fleet of Mercedes, but however gilded, the President's life is a trapped one, upon which God's reality will dawn at last. We exalt our earthly plots and plans, designing the kind of fulfilment that seems good to us. But in the end these plans will pass before the judgment of the God who made us; and we are not permitted to predict his verdict. Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is the heart of all our hope. He is the Wisdom of the unseen God, he has spoken the word of God in our hearing. He is our flesh and blood, and he is the fulness of the Father's glory. In mysteriously pouring the Spirit into our lives, the Father and the Son let us share the peace of the divine covenant, in which all our lives will be resolved. In Word and Sacrament we feed on the divine gift, and we inherit eternal life.