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HOW IMPORTANT ARE WE?

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In the old days it was believed that the earth was the centre of the universe. The heavenly bodies revolved around us. It was a pretty self-centred idea, but it did mean that there was no doubting the central importance that man has in the universe.

Of course things are no longer the same. Ever since the days of Copernicus we have begun to realise that the earth revolves around the sun, and that we are situated on a small planet in a remote corner of the universe. Indeed, the danger is now that we will be overwhelmed by the sheer insignificance of the mankind.

Take space, for example. Only about three thousand stars are visible to the naked eye on this planet. But with the aid of modern telescopes astronomers have detected, among other things, a cluster of galaxies in where there are estimated to be at least a thousand million million million stars together with their planets. Light would take 100,000 years to cross our own galaxy, and at least thirty thousand million years to cross the universe. It's hard to imagine that human life is significant in face of such immensities.

Or, take time. Scientists tell us that if this world's history were seen as a 48 hour period, fishes would only appear on the second day at 8.00 p.m. At 10.30 p.m., reptiles dominate the earth. At 11.50, monkeys and apes come to the ground. In the last 30 seconds of the day man appears, but only at the last stroke of the midnight bell can the earliest tools be recognised. Where does man fit in? Human history is so infinitesimally short, that it would seem nothing less than lunacy to argue that man is at all important in the scheme of things.

And if our race is insignificant, what of the individuals that go to make up the race? Where do you and I fit in?

Now these figures are enough to make the head reel. They suggest that life is meaningless, that there can be no difference between right and wrong, and that if there is a God who had made all this, he cannot take any interest in us. To him we must be like ants are to us. This sense that we are lost and unimportant pervades many areas of our culture. It lies behind the cult of pleasure and the widespread abandonment of morality.

Yet there is a confusion here between size and importance. A diamond is very precious, even though it is tiny when compared to a hay stack. The God whom we imagine is too immense to be worried about us, is so powerful that he has the capacity to worry about us. He is the designer of each individual snowflake as well as the far-flung galaxies.

These and other considerations challenge the current tendency to discount the value of the individual. But the most telling fact of all is that the Son of God assumed human nature, and appeared amongst us, as truly man as he was truly God. This in itself is striking evidence for the importance of the human race; but it is also the case that the Son of God remains man to this day. His becoming man was not temporary.

You matter to God; his knowledge of and care for you is perfect. He will never forget you or forsake you. If you are lost in this immense universe, it is only because you have desired not to be found.

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