

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## The Spirit

I think there's a huge ignorance of spiritual facts in our culture. The very phrase "spiritual fact" may seem contradictory to most people. Facts, we think, are *physical*; spirit isn't a fact at all, but a kind of gaseous, fanciful suggestion, which can be reduced to the effects of indigestion or electrical aberrations in the cerebellum.

### We Believe

*God is Spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.* Jesus said that to a foreigner; so if the message is foreign to our times, it's nothing new. To believe in God is to believe not only in the reality, but in the *primacy* of the spirit: that spirit is *more* real than physical reality, and indeed that physical reality springs into being at the command of the Spirit that is God. If we want to encounter reality – and that's the aim both of the Church and the University – we have to enter into the world of spirit. This is the order of priority which respects the ultimate fact, reality, or truth – God.

### Light Of All That Live

A title of the Holy Spirit – *Light of all that live* – is a clue to the relationship between spiritual learning and lesser forms of research. In order finally to *understand* the world, we need the mind of God; in order to *relate* properly to the world, to receive it, care for it, enjoy it, and love it properly, we need to share God's Spirit. This is what Pentecost is about. The beauty of it is that God's Spirit is poured out in abundance not only on great minds, people of huge awareness and significance, but on *all who live*; the simplest person can be caught up in the tide of the Holy Spirit just as readily as the most humanly gifted: probably more easily, because it is the poor who are most ready to receive the Kingdom of Heaven. The way in which the Spirit dwells in the children of God is ultimately fit and right; we all have room for the Spirit of the one who made us, and the discovery of this readiness to receive the Spirit into our lives is the most dramatic, transfiguring *gift* that can come our way.

### Our Unknown Need

Judging by the heavy weather people make of it, it seems that many don't know how vital the spiritual dimension of their life is. In British education, we systematically neglect the development of spiritual experience and power.

The spiritual powers which lead to insight, inspiration, creativity are left to their own devices. We talk endlessly about bodily health, and the acquirement of exam qualifications, whilst ignoring the personal realm where we develop wisdom (rather than self-interest), understanding (rather than information), guidance (in place of errancy), strength (not half-heartedness), knowledge (in its deep, biblical sense), fidelity (instead of the orphan poverty of "making it up as we go along") and awe (a good swap for the indifference many develop amidst the glory of creation). Small wonder that we grow into self-centred people with nothing to live for outside ourselves, locked into the poverty of a self-made, self-determined humanity which becomes capable of any crime or dereliction.

### The Beauty Of Christian Obedience

Latin writers on spiritual themes used to speak of a kind of humanity that is *docile* to the Holy Spirit. The word means *teachable*. There is a wonderful experience to be had in the company of growing children. They reach a point - at various ages, as all differ - when the world suddenly comes to life for them, and they to the world. You can easily enthuse a classful of them at this stage, and it reminds you of how wonderful the world is if we can only see it. I find the word *unteachable* one of the saddest of adjectives, and I hope I'll always be ready for illumination and instruction, not just in superficial things, but in the heart. The depth of our willingness for this is the measure of our true humanity, the real standard of beauty. God has nothing planned for us except his eternal joy. We are working against him if we forget that, and become baleful and blind to the immense beauty that surrounds us. Pentecost is a feast of flowering and fulness, matching the way in which the living world around us is coming to summer fulfilment. Our capacity to come to God with open ears and eyes and hearts, our hands emptied of the commerce of greed, and to welcome this beneficent Spirit to his chosen, and destined, home in us, is the perfection of our being.  
*Fr Philip*