

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

My Neighbour

This weekend we have several situations to think about which raise sharply the question asked by the lawyer in the Gospel, *And who is my neighbour?*

Starving in Sudan

Always saving the reverence of Ms Short, there are still one million people in Sudan staring starvation in the face. The BBC tells me the international “community” - could we call them “the neighbours”? - has pledged £16 million for relief. I’m more grateful that CaFOD (representing the Catholics of England and Wales) has taken £3 million into the famine zone. *But the needs are for £140 million.* I don’t need to remind you of our food mountains.

Not At The Match

Meanwhile, I listened the other day to a young football fan complaining that none of his friends wanted to go to the match with him. Not lack of personal freshness: he is just the wrong colour. The remarkable numbers of talented black footballers scan the terraces, but only one in a hundred of the average football crowd is black. And the ones who are white are engagingly throwing bananas and nuts and monkey-noises at the black players, hurling racial abuse each time they get the ball. Ince and Lawrence, Barnes and Crooks are heroes of a huge soccer following amongst black youngsters: but, however enthusiastic, a black lad can’t go to a match because he’s afraid of what the rest of crowd is going do to him. Who’s my football neighbour?

A Quiet Evening In Drumcree

Meanwhile, over in Ulster, the efforts to resume normal life are bearing fruit to a degree few of us had dared to hope for. The huge majority are known to want a new start; but thank God! we didn’t prematurely throw away those drums and flags, or make alternative plans for July. *It’s all still on,* and, as the rather androgynous and very Orange grandma in the front seat of her Campavan roared, *We’ve got what it takes.* Yes indeed! What an achievement in the teeth of such opposition. At the time of going to press, we’re hearing about events in Gower-street, W1 - where the Catholic Chaplaincy to the University of London lives, by-the-bye. It seems that some well-motivated boyo has decided to let off incendiary bombs in London, to make sure the good work in the Garvaghy road is seconded by sound efforts

on the front page of the Sundays over here. *Neighbourhood!* Nice!

There I Go, Me And My Past

It seems we all have a major problem taking a critical look at our past. Do the Loyal Orange Lodgers really think they are gathered at Drumcree to preserve the right of ordinary citizens to walk down the Queen’s Highway? Do they not think that - as ordinary citizens - they could *always* have done that unmolested, and that it is only as the flag-flying, band-playing, card-carrying, drum-beating Orange Lodge that this right is being questioned? Are they really so innocent as not to realize political truths? Of course not. And what about our racist football crowds? Of course, *I’m* not racist in the slightest degree - it’s against my religion. But what difference does such a pious statement make *in practice*? What do I know of a life where a white guy is *always* preferred to me for a job, where the police stop and search me *routinely* on my way home at night, where I cross the road rather than meet five people coming out of a pub, and where the neighbours think I eat dog-food and live on immoral earnings? As for the famine, could you imagine it happening in East Anglia? It’s acceptable in Sudan because we all secretly know the people there are a bit savage and primitive; it doesn’t hurt *them* to watch a baby die or to see grandma fall by the wayside because we’re refugees this year. They’re used to it, it’s part of their way of life. Pass on, pious Priest and Levite. You simply enjoy a security that you have never questioned, and therefore you can pass on the other side of a road to which you have no commitment. But really, the road we use for our purposes, and the road this seeming corpse was using for his, are the one road we must all use, where we all need to be safe. We should not wait to be threatened ourselves, before we go to the aid of the threatened. And this is not a matter of enlightened self-interest. There is a God whose eye has always been on travellers, and on pilgrims.

Fr Philip