

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## A Slave Both Of God And Of Money

We cannot be this person, Jesus assures us. I would say that we have laboured (and I use the word advisedly) under the mistaken impression that we *can*.

### “We Have Never Slaved For Anyone!”

This is the crashing allegation thrown at Jesus by “the Jews” in John’s Gospel, when he promises to make them free. Their claim holds no water religiously. To be a Jew means *to have been liberated from Egypt*; that is the meaning of Passover, Sabbath, and the Law. If you claim never to have been a slave, you can never have been liberated, and the Passover means nothing except something far in the past, someone else’s business, someone else’s feast. But the instructions for Passover tell each generation never to use the past tense when telling the story of the Exodus, or to say: *the Lord brought them out*. Instead, every generation must say: *the Lord brought me out*. So the acknowledgement of slavery forms an essential part of being a Jew, as it does of being a Christian.

### We Need Our Exodus

When a people is enslaved, it puts down roots of enslavement, it learns to respond as enslaved. It learns to live on the bread of oppression, loses the power to fight back, and is broken. It no longer knows that it is broken; it knows no other life. In this way all suffering can imprison the human race, until it can no longer dream of freedom, and treats the enslaved condition as the truth, inevitable and authoritative. To live sensibly and truthfully is to live enslaved. We do this whenever we bow to what oppresses us, and co-operate with our task-masters. We learn how to use tyranny over each other, we take our part in exploitation without turning a hair. The collaboration of decent human beings with tyrants of the cruellest sort is a commonplace of recent history; the officers of the Third Reich and of *apartheid* often believed they could go home at night and cuddle their children, as if they had not spent their working hours marshalling queues for the gas-chambers, impassively dividing other families, or patrolling the lagers of the coloured and the black, preserving the privileges of the chosen white. The culture and civilisation of many such men was of the highest kind. Yet they learned to serve a monstrous political creed, hoping in some recess of their *private* life to preserve their souls. Could

it be that we, calm inheritors of the “civilised” West, might be collaborating – in similar silence – in an equally awful system of destruction, dominating as we do the greater part of the world, which is helpless in its poverty? Even the Nazis found it necessary to keep their “final solution” under some kind of secrecy. The facts about our world, on the contrary, are perfectly plain for anyone to see. Every attempt to modify the oppression of debt, and the exploitation of resources, and the unfair distribution of wealth, is shipwrecked on the same rocks: *it would be impractical, we cannot engineer such sacrifice, we must be responsible to our electorate...or, to put it plainly, we do not wish to afford the cost of justice*. It is not hard to spot the slaves in this picture; but can you identify the task-masters with equal assurance?

### God And Money

We can’t have clean hands in this situation, unless we do two things. First, use our influence, however slight, to call for justice and freedom, to bear witness as loudly and clearly as we can, to put ourselves on record as hating the evil by which our economy survives so comfortably whilst others are obliged to founder. Second, we must put our money where our mouth is, examine the needs we take for granted, simplify our way of life, and share with the poor. This is an investment against the tide of the world, and it will only “pay out” when the *final* balance is struck.  
*Fr Philip*