

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Off With The Old

*'Tis good to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new.*

I think this is quite a good sentiment for the beginning of the Church's year, which is today. For us, who have blighted the copybook of a new millennium with a hideous portfolio of violence and hatred, there can be no illusions about an easy new beginning. But good things flowing from the evil may yet appear. The Prime Minister, in his Mansion-house speech, was sure that *one* illusion had died in the maelstrom: the illusion that we can continue to have the fruits of Western prosperity, irrespective of the lot of the rest of humanity. If that message gets lodged in the slow minds of our electorates, as it has certainly been brought to the attention of the political and financial establishment, we shall not have wholly lost.

Hope For The Best

For certainly we have a great capacity for blind optimism in the face of certainties. We build our glittering cities on the known fault-lines of future earthquakes, we fly vigorously in the face of established truths like global warming, climate-change, the finitude of our resources for the preservation of this privileged world, and the growing menace of diseases not only incurable but uncontrollable. *Something will turn up*, we are sure. *Die, my dear Doctor?* Lord Palmerston said, *That's the last thing I shall do.* (His last words.) The prophet Isaiah speaks to us today of a world dominated by the mountain of the Lord, and a sudden pilgrimage of all the nations, who will turn to seek the real truth together. Could it be that this time can only come when the utter disaster of human alternatives is at last made clear to all? We can remember moments when we might have expected the rebirth of humanity: the first Christmas after the First World War should have been such a time. It had taken the liturgy of international strife to the point where a whole generation lay dead, where the broken treasuries of great empires were exhausted, where no-one could remember what it was all for; and still the world went on preparing for war, getting ready for the return fixture, building blindly a reservoir of insatiable hate which would guarantee another devastation just 21 years later. The Soviet Empire gave us the motive and excuse for decades of fearful endgames and espionage, for endless preparation of a war which thankfully never broke, but which still had humanity in thrall. The

fall of Soviet communism could have triggered the radical dismantling of so many walls and weapons, the remaking of the world. Instead, it saw the enthronement of an evil and soulless capitalism and criminality which kept the slavery, losing the freedom of a great moment of grace.

Sweep Away The Past

By meditating on our incorrigible way of keeping alive our worst ideas, we can learn to look at history in a new way: to enjoy its sweeping-away: to be glad that things change. Our God is ever new, ever creative, ever changing, restoring, renewing what he has made. He is the One who never changes: we are the ones whose only hope is to change. The end of all our change will be beyond the grave, because death itself has to be the ultimate experience of our inability to change, our addiction to immobility, our incapacity to hope. When we have finally surrendered the pointless attempt to be our own god, the real God will have room and freedom to show us his mercy. Like the Prodigal Son, we will at last start to learn what kind of Father we have. It is there in the Scripture: when you hammer your swords into ploughshares, your spears into pruning hooks, and walk in the light of the Lord, he will teach you his ways, and the direction of his paths. May Advent be a time of newness, the hour of God's visitation.
Fr Philip