

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Family On The Run

The Gospel this Sunday shows us a family in flight, under threat: our worst nightmare. But it is not a nightmare for the people of Afghanistan. It is the reality of their lives, and the world appears to be powerless to stop it happening – despite the fact that we all knew it *would* happen for weeks before the war began. These unhappy people are responding largely to violence offered them from outside. We can only guess at the effect this is having on them as families. For us, what is truly awful is the extent to which our families appear to find the seeds of their destruction already within them. I find myself seeking for the ways in which this is a false conclusion to draw; because I can't bear to believe that the dreadful suffering endured by broken families is freely chosen by anyone. If our families are labouring and collapsing under the strain, could it be that they, too, are on the run from some malign enmity against them?

Lonely Britain

One in three Britons now lives alone. That doesn't sound so many; but it means that in every two houses, one *at least* is lived in by a single person. Because many live in families - with two, or more, others - it means that *most* houses are lived in by singles. So although we think of human life as communitarian, much of the life we experience is in fact solitary. It is pointed out that many of these are widowed people, and that women especially are rather liking the independence and freedom their grandmothers would never have found. Still, the implications for society are not good. And other cultural forces are coming together to reinforce the message.

What Does The Telly Say?

One of the major media influences on everyone is television. Does the message we get from there help us to live together? The jury, for me, is still out. I often see the exposure of selfishness and the punishment of the selfish: if it is a truthful drama we shall also see the extent of the damage caused by self-interest that exploits others. But I don't often see a cogent explanation of (for instance) self-sacrifice, forgiveness, reconciliation, or peacemaking. In *My Family* we are invited to laugh at the sheer vanity and self-seeking of the family members, and we enjoy the downfall of their schemes; but laughing at selfishness doesn't open our hearts to learn love, in all its glorious annihilation of self-interest.

Pathetic Fallacy

I don't believe that any one person has seriously designed to deceive two whole generations about human nature. But as the nation loses touch with its Christian roots, we no longer easily say what it is that grounds our faith, and thus our promises. At the heart of our *culture* is a spiritual vacancy, indeed an utter vacuum. Into that space have moved the commercial forces of enticement and suggestion, replacing poetry with commercial pop, idealism with commercial marketing, and above all stressing the constant message: *Ask yourself....* Our whole culture is individually centred, on supermarket principles: *If this is what you want, add it to your shopping-trolley.* As a Christian I am appalled by what this has done to our relationship with God. As a human being, I can see the poison spreading through the minds and hearts of people who know nothing of what is befalling them. Well-meaning, harmless people think that personal and individual freedom is the only value we need. It is vital, but it isn't enough to preserve the whole scale on which we measure it. It is not a religion, it is not a reason to live or to die. We need our faith to give us that purpose, which can embrace and include all who live, and which can make us one – in our families, in our nation, and across all borders, as a human race that knows how to care for the world, and does so.
Fr Philip