

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Not Flesh And Blood

Peter the Fisherman is unique in having a personal Beatitude addressed to him by the Son of God: *Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.* We Catholics eventually derive the Papacy from this individuation of Peter, from the *this* in *upon this rock I will build my Church.* Like all the mysteries of our religion, the Church's authority has been endlessly expressed in different forms. It's a kind of maturity to be able to live with this in a creative way, remembering that image Jesus gives us of the disciple of the Kingdom of heaven, who is like a *house-holder, who brings out from his storeroom things both old and new.*

Tides Of Time

There have been some strange old things done in our house, which we may not consider resurrecting. They were once very much *flesh and blood* realities, and are now, like so much other flesh and blood, skeletons in the cupboard. Think back to the Renaissance, probably considered by the world as the glory-days of the Papacy; Julius II on the ground, Michelangelo on the ceiling, Italy full of palaces and hired soldiery. Any devout Catholic shudders at the thought of Julius, as of Alexander VI, Paul II, or rich, power-mad Franciscan Sixtus IV, whose eternal destiny remains as mysterious as mine. I've always wondered how a Pope of today manages to move through all those corridors full of loot and gilding, still keeping the Faith; or how one celebrates the humble mystery of bread and wine amid the thunderously grandiloquent forms of San Pietro in Vaticano.

Growing Older, Growing Up

I think we grow out of some of our past mistakes, and I'm sure we labour under bits of the heritage we ought to have the guts to discard. How do families do this? One thinks of many a spouse who loyally supports some annoying custom of her husband's for years, abandoning it with a sigh of relief the moment he breathes his last. I see nothing dishonourable in that; and I wish the Church had as realistic a sense of the transience of values and customs. So often we find our colours nailed to some mast, some form of words, about which contrary opinions can be held: the infallibility of the Pope would be an excellent example. Many great and holy bishops like

Cardinal Newman did not want to use those words of the Pope, in the days when it was defined. The Church had weathered nineteen centuries without so defining it; it was clear that the term was controversial, and would therefore provoke as many problems as it would solve; but eventually all opposition was ignored, and the definition went through. Looking at it dispassionately, one would wonder whether its presence on our books, so to speak, were today a help or a hindrance. We do not seek infallible pronouncements from the Pope, nor does the Pope ever make them. It is one of those incidents, sensational in their time, through which we passed, and which have sunk in importance.

True Authority

Although we talk of Peter as the first Pope, he was a pope in a fishing-boat, not a Popemobile. He had no mitres, no press-officers and no Swiss Guard. He did not have the Papal States, the Vatican City, or the title *Vicar of Christ*, and I am quite certain, because I have it on the authority of St Paul (Galatians 2:11), that he wasn't infallible in his opinions about the Church. We have it on the authority of Jesus (Mark 8:33) that he was capable of thinking human thoughts when he should have been listening to God; and that's how all human beings make history into a cupboard full of skeletons. But we also know how a broken, sick, physically powerless old man can be, in our own times, a worthy Rock for the building of the Church.

Fr Philip