

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Have You Set The Alarm?

It seems strangely appropriate that we should call the little machine that wakes us up *the Alarm Clock*: as if our first sensation on achieving consciousness ought to be apprehension.

Traumas I Have Known

I think back to times of tension I've lived through in the past: bereavements of one sort or another, uprootings, challenging meetings with medics, academic authorities, Bishops, and all the rest. Is this what waking-up should be like - that terrible tension that repossesses you with sickening realisation, as you once more awaken to the unresolved worry that filled your mind last night? So often, we don't need wakening in such a state: the whole problem is how ever we're going to get to sleep.

A Character On The Soul

Perhaps we should ask ourselves what mark these things leave on us. I think some people are never purified of them, but accumulate them helplessly, staggering onwards with the ever-increasing burdens of their past, acquiring even more *as each day brings troubles of its own*. The Alarm Clock is inside them, constantly wound up, ready to shrill out its summons: *worry more!* I'm sure all this is profoundly wrong, as damaging to life as sin itself. When the prophets tell us to *break unjust fetters, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free*, they could not be speaking more relevantly to our modern soul, characterised as it is by depression and fatalism.

Hope! Hope! Hooray!

We should remember that old custom, to include in our morning prayer an Act of Hope. We probably recited one, parrot-fashion, in the past. We should find a way of restoring it which engages our gears and changes them; there's nothing threatening about a hill; if we're only in the right gear, we can soar up it - that's what we're designed to do. Hope requires a change of gear in us. We need to wake up to a Hope Clock. Today's Gospel reads the world as charged with hopefulness. If you try to read it like that, it starts to make sense in a new way. All the old, depressing interpretation has to be swept away first; and it's amazing how extensive it is. Our

decks are mired and snarled with the traps of depression; and they are self-incarnating. Just walking about expecting the worst is enough to make it happen.

2002 – The Great Hope Epidemic

I wonder if we could engineer a more virtuous infection, that would lift the eyes of people from their depression. What would bring it about? I notice, first of all, that Jesus does not shy away from the truth we sometimes think of as depressing. You can't worry yourself into longer life, or make your present

*An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing,
For every tatter in its mortal dress.*

WB Yeats: *Sailing To Byzantium*

life richer by taking more thought. His imagery of the birds of the air in their transient life, and the flowers of the field that are *thrown into the furnace tomorrow*, are truthful reflections of the real world. But over them all is the great protecting arch of the Father's care - the ultimate Fact of Life. We need to get that fact where it belongs in our own mental universe. Secondly, there is a broadside against setting our hearts on our needs (*it is the pagans who set their hearts on these things*). Our tendency to be imprisoned in our worry makes it seem realistic: we call it *facing up to things*. In fact, it is one more kind of narrowness - reducing the Kingdom of Heaven to incarceration in anxious and lonely concern.
Fr Philip