

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

You'll Have To Tell Him

- your brother, that is, of his sin. And why not? If my brother were falling ill, visibly weakening, and hadn't noticed, or weren't taking steps about it, surely I should have no hesitation in raising the matter. If the roof were hanging off my neighbour's house, and she hadn't noticed, and the wind gathering outside, she would need to be alerted. Well, my brother's moral dignity is of far more significance than a few tiles.

What Should The Church Say?

There's a whole lot of things the world needs to hear from the Church, because the world is getting sick, and doesn't know what to do about it. I guess most of us could contribute to a list of what's wrong. I'm sure most people are worried about low moral standards in society at large, and the way this lowers moral standards in our families. Permissive divorce laws, for instance, invite permissive attitudes towards marriage; you might argue that, if a marriage is good and true, it need not concern itself with divorce laws; and if it is false and destructive, then taking it apart ought to be as easy as possible. Very good; but in a society where selfishness – or something very near to it – is the chief value, marriage is already under the cosh, before its costly promises are ever uttered. Equally, those who campaigned for abortion suggested that, if you didn't agree with it, you were welcome to steer clear of it. But the moral climate is lowered by the admission of the possibility of abortion; and those for whom motherhood comes as a fearsome challenge are not standing on firm ground as they make their decisions.

The Loss Of A Sense Of God

Many pundits believe that God is an optional extra. True, you can't disprove the existence of God; but nor can you prove it. How can something so uncertain be the most important reality of all? Well, Benjamin Franklin said that *in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes*; I dare say there are people who base their lives on those realities, but I wouldn't wish to know them, much less be one of them. We don't live by certainties. We live by dreams and guesses, by acts of faith, by hoping for the best. We live by our insights into love, which lend power to our deeds and ideals. No-one ever married, or became a parent, because of *certainties*. The ignoring of God means that,

where life used to be a dialogue between creature and Creator, it's now a lonely furrow in a neutral world. Once we saw ourselves as living in God's presence; we now live on our own, and in the presence of such as care to watch us. We try to find our meaning in that relational world; but the best we can do is to ask whether we are enjoying ourselves. There is little moral greatness on offer in such a world, compared to the sort of world which has to answer to its creating God.

But Is It True?

All of this remains academic unless we are prepared to commit ourselves to the truth of God. We know well that it is possible to be a busy member of a church or other religious organisation, without actually *believing* very much in God. It's a matter of intensely personal commitment. Even with a modicum of financial support, it's clear that people can be found to function in such rôles as pastor and teacher without any firm personal faith. For members, the imperative to make faith a living reality can be even less vigorous: that is why we have in England a lapsed Christian country. Augustine prays: *You were within me, Lord, and I was outside*. They are seeking bread from the stones, *they are looking for water and there is none*: the yawning gulf within them they try to fill with false joy, manufactured placebos which cost them dear, but which disappear over the edge of the chasm, and never fill it. We have forgotten God. That is the evil about which we must speak to our brothers and sisters.

Fr Philip