

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## One And Whole

The most terrible of all mental diseases is called *schizophrenia* from the Greek *skizein*, meaning rip or tear. The mind appears to tear itself to pieces. Why should this happen to people? I can't think of the physiological reasons, but I think I know some of the mental paths people may find themselves taking on the way.

### Refusing My Self

In order to live, it seems to me we've got to agree to be who we are. We have to be at peace with our personality, with our mind and its powers, with our emotional range, with our body and its appearance. For most of us this doesn't come entirely easily: we all have occasional problems in thinking positively about ourselves. But for the most part we manage. Schizophrenics don't; they find it so impossible to accept the whole of their life that there is a rending of the mind, a refusal, or an inability, to live as one whole person. The parts of the self judged unacceptable are rejected, denied, refused admittance to the conscious mind: *but they're still there*. So the conscious mind inhabits, so to speak, only a limited area of the personality, like a hermit in a darkened house, full of unidentified others living their own shadowy lives. The frightening thing is that these others are not strangers, but *part of the real me*; if I accidentally met them, I should find myself looking into my own face: but it would be the face that I can't live with, the truth I can't accept. So schizophrenics seem often to be haunted, to have a dim perception that they are being stalked, listened-to; their walls are bugged, their lives are under constant threat of invasion. It must be terrible to fear being taken over *by the truth*.

### Obedience To The Creator

Schizophrenics need medical care first and foremost, just as clearly as sufferers from fractured bones. The mysterious nature of mental illness shouldn't make us superstitious about its treatment. But as the ultimate healing of all human ills lies in the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, the final resolution of schizophrenia lies in the integrity we all have in the mind of God. Of the earthly cosmos, Isaiah says: *God did not create it to be chaotic; he made it to be lived in*. So the human heart is not meant to be a divided and haunted house, but a place of warmth, generosity, hospitality. If there are elements in our life that demand great courage before we can accept them,

then God must be keen to create great courage in us. If he asks some of us to live with great afflictions, and few are so formidable as schizophrenia, then he calls us to trust that he has reasons we cannot know for his free choice. Do you recognize this situation? You should; it is the plight of Jesus in the garden of his agony. That Jesus suffered for us – in our place – does not mean that we are left without suffering. The Scriptures remind us that it is a privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ. And this doesn't mean it is reserved for the saintly few, armed with their manuals of spiritual wisdom and filled with the consolations of a resolved Christianity. The two thieves who hang beside him share his death, and there is no-one who cannot see his or her own life with all its messy wounds and failed responsibilities, in them.

### Precious In The Eyes Of The Lord

*...is the death of his faithful*. When we ask God to *be mindful of our affliction*, we are drawing his attention where it is already fixed. We feel that he must be unaware of our plight, because we can't believe that he would let us suffer if he knew. The psalms are particularly concerned with this prayer, asking God over and over again if he is watching, if he can see his faithful and their suffering.. The psalmist begs for enlightenment, to be given a reason for the pain and loss which afflicts all who live in time - which "like an ever-rolling stream Bears all its sons away". For part of our life we all try to live as if we were already eternal, and had nothing to fear. I think that is when we are truly schizoid, trying to live in unreality. In fact, the mystery that is wrought by suffering is something between the human and the divine, not to be known or understood by human wisdom alone. The fond assumption that all ills can be healed by our wisdom is our most dangerous mistake. Put into its prime place the command to love God, and to be taught by him and to rest in him, and we may be safe at last. *Fr Philip*