

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## A Power More Than Human

"Evil doesn't exist: there's no such thing as evil" Does that sound irreligious? There's always a fight to be picked over the existence of the Devil; Bible-thumpers point to his diabolical presence in hundreds of places, and the snobbier intellectuals talk about *symbolic language* and so forth, or tell us that instead of talking about demons Jesus would have used the language of psychology if he'd had it; and then the Bible-thumpers say that he could have used any language he cared to, because he was God; and the intellectuals say that he was a first-century man, and therefore used first-century words, and the Bible-thumpers ....well, it gets on yer marrow

### The Evidence Of Our Eyes

You don't have to be a gifted clairvoyant to know that any human life is hemmed in by powers greater than its own, and that some of them are set to destroy. Every one of us is subject to death, to sickness, to limitation of our capacity, all seemingly endemic in our nature, and yet contrary to it. Why do I want a fullness of life that is always beyond me? Why do I find my best intentions foundering as they hit my weakness and the opposition of the world? Why is my wisdom so short in reach, my grasp on the truth so weak? Why do we find those powers which impel us towards paralysis, depression, suicide enthroning themselves in our nature? From time to time I have had to speak at the funerals of those who have chosen to die. The only thought that I had in all of them was: *If you could see what I see this morning, you would not have done this.* This experience above all others convinces me that it makes sense to talk about a superhuman force of evil. But for all that....

### Evil Doesn't Exist

..... it really doesn't exist. Evil, in its pure form,, is the absence of God; and one of the first things we learned about God at school was that God is *everywhere*. Therefore the positive presence of God is always available, and there is no hope for the absence of God to triumph over it. So how can I reconcile these two realities: the real power of evil, even to overwhelm people and sweep them

away, and my belief that evil has no power to exist?

### Within The Creation

Certainly we are struggling to understand a reality which only applies within this Creation: which in God's eyes -that is, in ultimate reality - is transient, temporary. Just as we labour under the tyranny of time, with all its limiting and diversifying power (now I'm strong, now weak: now I'm happy, now miserable) it seems there are pockets of distortion which make untrue things appear true, and true things appear impossible. And because we live under these false appearances, it is as if they were real, and they might as well be. Those who choose to die, for instance, have come to find evil more real than good, and because of this perception, it *has become* so in their lives, and they have died from it. And I find myself standing before a coffin, and proclaiming the supremacy of good, and the sovereign power of love, when everyone listening can see that evil has triumphed over a human being's whole power to live. So something that doesn't exist has a power that proves itself in some sense superhuman in scale. Does that mean that evil really does have an independent life of its own? *Perish the thought!* Evil remains the endless possibility for us to choose a negative; it always means the option for something less than God. The choice against God is, in the end, the choice of nothing. My grandmother was once watching me rooting violently through my possessions with very bad grace. *What are you looking for?* she asked. *Nothing*, I said bad-temperedly. *Well*, she replied pointedly, *I hope you find it.* Fr Philip