

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Peace Is Breaking Out

One of the great truths about us is that we are really very small fry. We take ourselves too seriously all the time. It's a feature of our lives these days that people look for ways of experiencing this: it's quite liberating. Why do we like going out into wild places, looking at huge views, going up mountains and gazing on the vastness of the sea? Nobody did this very much until quite recently; a journey through the mountains was considered as a nightmare by our great-great grandparents, and they would only have crossed the sea under great duress. But we find a special balm to the soul in getting out of town, seeking wide open space, contemplating the sky and the sea. I think all this is quite holy. I think we are trying to feel our littleness in the vast scheme of things, to put our life into a much wider context, to put things back into proportion. The modern world has put such stress on individuality. We want to be connected again, to be embraced in a relationship with the world beyond ourselves. We know in the depths of our being that we make no sense alone, and we want to know our place in a wider setting. To whom do we belong?

### If It's All An Accident

A lot of people profess to believe that everything is governed by sheer chance, that the world you look at, from the Grand Canyon to the plays of Shakespeare, is just a rather complicated accident floating in an empty space that means nothing. This enthroned fatuity is the last refuge of a world in flight from intelligence; the last denial of the urge to make sense. If you believed that, then you would scratch together what shreds of community you could find with the other accidental people, and stoically wait for the accident that would push you off into the nothingness from which you came. And that is, I'm afraid, exactly what many of us are doing. No wonder we can accept even quite horrible experiences as *normal* in such a senseless world. No wonder we find it so easy to wander into drugs, crime, and violence. They are there as options, so why not take them? If everything is equally senseless, why not live a senseless life, every man for himself? Welcome to the accidental world!

### If It's Not All An Accident

If you reject that poor account of what we can see is a world of radiant beauty, constantly

healing itself, constantly unfolding new gifts of fruitfulness and meaning - even though there are forces in it that seem at odds with such a reading - then you might join the rest of us in the huge expedition that is searching for the truth of the matter. *Why* is there a universe? Scientists can tell us *what* the universe is, but we need a different kind of insight to discover *why* it is here, and why we are in it. This is the realm of faith. It doesn't usurp the scientists' rôle, and it won't conflict with it. Its matter is the human mind, and the desire - and the capacity - we have to find some compelling reason behind our experience. Only if we find a reason for ourselves can we be at peace.

### Ours Is A Big Reason

Because the reason we want to find is going to have to include everything we know or can think of, it is necessarily going to be a big reason, a reason bigger than my reason and yours and all the world's put together. Not a simple question, then, with a simple answer. The answer will be beyond our telling, because it will be beyond our comprehension (more than we can contain). That means none of us is going to be able to put words to it and express it. In fact, all we will want to do is to keep silent before it. Which is what I do when I stand on a cliff-top to look out to sea, or stare into a sunset, or look from the top of a mountain. But this doesn't mean I haven't found a reason. The fact that it is bigger than I can say gives me good cause to trust it. And in its presence, I not only fall silent; I become *peaceful*. I don't need to explain myself any more. I am understood by the One who put us all into the state of being, and I live my life in his presence. If it takes a frightening turn (in my eyes) I trust that it still makes perfect sense in the eyes of God. That doesn't prevent me being afraid. But it may well prevent my panicking or despairing. The fact that *I don't know why* is quite different from the belief that *there is no reason*, I can live with the first, but never with the second. In fact, the sense that there are mysteries behind the world's existence that are yet to be revealed gives the whole experience of living a new allure. I'm always ready for the world to become much more beautiful than I thought - which it frequently proves to be - and there are other times when I grit my teeth and say, *Lord, I'm looking forward to hearing your line on this one!*

Fr Philip