

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## A Shocking Waste Of Time

“Don’t die rich!” That sounds to me like good advice; one of the wise things my parents taught me, at least by example. Mum spent a lot of thought on unloading property as she got older, clearly thinking ahead for the fuss it would cause her children, having to disperse it when she died.

### An Acquisitive Life

Quite young babies can get very proprietorial about what’s theirs; we don’t like to see a little one who can’t seem to share. But some of us never get out of the habit of wanting things that we see. Queen Mary was famous for picking up people’s ornaments and saying “Can I have that for my blue drawing-room at Windsor?” and people were so shocked that they gave it her. I guess people probably clogged on, and started putting things away when they thought H.M. might pop in. Our modern acquisitiveness is (for us who are still reasonably poor) a rather sad business of self-advertisement. “Here is my array of property,” we say, “all in the best possible taste. This is me: my house, my car, my party, my way of life: this is me.” Some people live on because of their property (one thinks of J Paul Getty and his art collection and massive investments, or poor Tutankhamen, so early put away) but, as they say in Scotland, “they’re a’ deid,” which is our Lord’s point in the Gospel. Or, as he put it, “one’s life is not made secure by what one owns”.

### What’s The Point?

So why are we so easy to con with adverts, that tweak our lead and get us ready to be fleeced for the latest fashionable accessory? It isn’t, surely, that we really believe these things can change our life? No; but behind the apparent greed is a real hunger, and a real lack of faith. The *hunger* is that we long to be fulfilled, really and truly fed and satisfied from “the full cupboard of life”. The *loss of faith* is that we secretly suspect that we never shall be satisfied, that we shall spend a lifetime searching, and die in disappointment - and that will be that. That’s what puts the frown over the top of “the lineaments of satisfied desire”: those crumpled faces, raddled by too much gin and sunburn, those lizard-like eyes, that have looked on too many orgies of spending and tired of it all, and the sad heart that’s tried everything it can think of, and found it all

wanting, such is the face, not (as you might have been thinking) of the Cathedral Chapter, but of an acquisitive old age. It isn’t very desirable! And fortunately it isn’t inevitable either.

### Self-Indulgence Again

Acquisitiveness is part of the frame of mind that trusts no-one else to bring us joy. It is the opposite of that childlike quality that Jesus liked so much: a smiley baby sometimes greets us as if to say: *let’s be happy!* - and for a little while, our heart turns over and smiles back, entering into that simple world where there is nothing but fun, and openness, and readiness to find life a game. The hiding games and the games with tissue paper that happen when a present has been unwrapped and quite properly discarded. Babies can chuckle riotously over such cost-free enjoyment, and they have been taken completely out of themselves, learning the fun of being with someone who will play. But when we are trying to possess, trying to secure our own lives, there is never any joy. Almost always such security is bought at the cost of others; it is never the poor who are adequately insured; and our ring-fenced securities more or less demand the poverty of those who can’t afford to buy in.

### Crash! Went My Pension Fund

My father never lived to draw his pension, so I have a certain doubt about the sturdy talk of pension salesmen; it didn’t surprise me at all when this provident talk fell silent because so many pensions went missing, and all the endowment mortgages fell short, and people’s stocks and shares and ISA’s and what-not turned sour. At the same time, the smooth faces of those clever gents who bought the AA and made billions of untaxed profits remain untouchably smug, as such elite persons always have. Let us not grow bitter about these facts of life; perhaps, like my mum, we might find better ways than to die rich. Jesus gives us an interesting idea: that of “making ourselves rich in the sight of God”. I suspect that the word *rich* has a very special meaning in that phrase, and that we might learn more about it by contemplating the richness of friendship, of selfless service, and of peaceful hearts. None of these depends much on bank balances: and all of them endure beyond the grave. *Fr Philip*