

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Swindler Of Heaven

Jesus makes some shocking comparisons and metaphors in his teaching. There's that striking moment when he says that the Kingdom for whose coming we pray thrice daily will come *like a thief in the night*. The idea of being summoned to judgment by a vast global trumpet is one thing; that we might find the Son of God appearing at the foot of our bed, wearing rubber shoes and carrying a jemmy, quite another.

The Swindling Steward

Most people think that Jesus came to be a moral teacher, that is, to tell us how to be good in our daily living. In fact, he doesn't seem that interested in those questions; he seems to think that Moses has done quite well in teaching people the difference between right and wrong, and when people ask him what it is, he refers them to Moses. But he is very interested indeed in passing on to us a state of mind, a realism about the coming of the Kingdom, the end of time, and the justice of God. In using a swindler to make his point, he shows us that we might look quite wrong in the eyes of the world, when we are being quite right in the eyes of heaven. How we need to listen to him! We're terribly keen to believe that we can go to heaven as part of a general plan that's made up of being well-educated, fashionable, rich, popular, famous, and extremely comfortable. Alas! Reducing the journey to heaven to a detail *in a bigger picture* shows that we haven't understood the Gospel at all. There's no bigger picture than the Kingdom, and if it is the real Reign of God it will outbid all other themes and aims, dominating everything. Now: in order for this to be the truth about us, we have one massive need: we've got to lose the faith we put in the world to determine our meaning and to give us happiness. Only when we've severed our bond with the world can we inherit the things of God. That's what the swindler has done; and that's what inspires him to swindle his former master.

Swindle The World!

Make no mistake about the world's hold over you. It isn't a kindly, generous, loving mastery which will work for your benefit. The world will have every last drop of our blood, every ounce of our effort, and give us what it says we're worth: as little as possible, with a

gold watch at the end - how ironic! - for long service. The price of the world's favour is high, and the rewards it offers slight and - above all - temporary. Thus the way forward does *not* lie in excelling in the world's eyes. You have to turn traitor; you have to do a massive U-turn, and use what influence you still have to bring forth the Kingdom of Truth and Justice, in which you must shine like a bright star. All you have to do is to listen to the ticking of a gold watch. The world's whole message is hidden there, in that inexorable whisper which we strap onto our pulses.

How Far Could I Go?

As a world-swindler, you need to start quietly, in the secret space of the heart. Prayer is already subversive; it's the start of a process, invisible to others, of giving the keys of our fortress to God. You will already be engaged in a fight; the world *does* possess our hearts in great measure. What do we spend our time thinking of, what are the private visionary aims of our inner life? Isn't it true that the world's persuaders are established in deep inner chambers of our life, selling us all manner of property on the easy instalment plan? The rewards may seem faultless: but if they become the treasure of our hearts, we're done for, as surely as if we were plotting murder and theft. You have to throw out these false promises and deceptive offers, and to make sure that your heart is set on real treasure. Of course, real treasure requires sacrifice, rather than easy instalments: that is one of the signs of its true value. There's another way you can make a start on liberating your future: and that is to appropriate some of your property, and divert it into the hands of useful allies. We have been told that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor. So why not make good friends with them, whilst we still have our hands in the till, so that when they come into their inheritance, they will recognise us as their friends? If you get *really* radical, you might actually decide to make *yourself* poor - and then you could be one of the welcomers!

Give To God What Belongs To God

We must give the reign of God its eternal authority over us now. If we do that, we shall be safe. If we don't, then we must await the day of justice with terrible fear: it will be the day when we lose everything. *Fr Philip*