

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Bishop's Move

The Bishop of Argyll and the Isles has, so far, done nothing to infringe his celibacy. Celibacy means *not marrying*. Of course, he has done several things which, without being married, are wrong: but these have been offences against *chastity*, commanded by God for all people - married or single. It is a difficult virtue to practice, but it binds us all, and needs a daily self-denial and watchfulness from all of us. (I hope our next failures in this respect are not reported in the *Daily Mirror*).

### Teaching from the Tabloids

The response of the Press has been to say that *what the Bishop needs is to be married*. This may be true, amongst other things. But to think of marriage as a sort of sticking-plaster for unchastity is a very poor reflection. I hope all married people resent it as much as I do; it just isn't true. Bishop Wright has clearly been a very sad man. He gave himself to the Church because he wanted to love people generously, and he accepted celibacy in the process. He didn't, perhaps, notice that the purpose of celibacy is to let yourself be loved by God. Without that warm and total relationship with the Father that comes absolutely first, celibacy becomes a cruel, heartless thing, crucifying its victim on a cold, killing loneliness. Such a parody of holiness - above all in this undermined and falsified moral climate - has no prospects of survival. It doesn't deserve to survive.

### Real Love

The Press, for the most part, doesn't believe very much in God. Love, for the Press, can only mean human love, and all talk of God's love is purely academic. The fall of Bishop Wright triumphantly vindicates this view: he was living a lie, and it collapsed, and what he *really* wanted is what we all want. Now, I can't imagine anyone seeking the priesthood because he *doesn't* want to be loved by another person. Or because it isn't good to come home and be welcomed with a cuddle and a romp with the kids. Or because he doesn't like sex. Or because he thinks life is nicer alone. Priestly celibacy doesn't stand against those things. It asks

a man to sacrifice them *for something else* which takes their place; and that is the personal experience of the love of God. If that's real, then celibacy can work. If it isn't real, then celibacy will collapse.

### Lord, Be My Inheritance

Of course, what I've said about celibacy and the love of God can equally be said about marriage and the love of a couple. If the love which feeds all that care and belonging fails, then the marriage becomes a prison, and all its demands become extortionate. The loneliness of being unloved in marriage is just as destructive as loneliness for a priest; and the shell of a dead marriage can cave in just as easily. I'm not saying this is a good fact; a fair amount, perhaps, might be salvaged if our expectations were a little less demanding. Life is never easy if it is good. Priests in trouble with their priorities try to throw themselves into their pastoral work, seek for depth in their relationships with their parishioners, and get less and less likely to find their way to the one they are promised to, and who can love them with the totality we all need, and for which we yearn. So my response to the disaster of Bishop Wright is a quiet and questioning one. I don't see how his infidelities and betrayals could possibly be read as the signs of a vocation to marriage. Nor do I believe they prove the impossibility of priestly celibacy. I think they are a clear call to *all* of us to seek the love of God for the foundation of our lives.  
*Fr Philip*