

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

What Belongs To God

In a sense you have to say that *Caesar* himself belongs to God - his sense of self-possession, as he sits on top of the Palatine Hill and listens to the Praetorian Guard keeping the population of the world at a safe distance from him, notwithstanding. Like the rich man in our Lord's story, the night is coming when God will say: *Tonight I will claim your soul; and whose then will be this empire of yours?*

But for the time being...

...Caesar is allowed his hour of freedom; so are we; and it is not easy to fix the level of honour we owe to the powers of the world. When I was a child - watching the 1953 Coronation from a relatively stable and respectful society - there was a widespread remnant of regard for the community at large, for politicians and authority-figures; satire and discontent, today's faint feelings that everyone is on the fiddle, and that the face of civil society is a paper-thin veneer on something perhaps rather horrific, were still in the future. Young people do not know how far we have travelled in this unfortunate direction; but perhaps our journey is really necessary. Much in that apparent stability *was* false, and unworthy to govern us the way it did. People were not really as involved in their own destiny; I am very sure that June 2nd 1953 will never be imitated for Charles III.

Election On The Way

Some time soon we'll have an election. I wonder how people will think of their choice when it comes. It is so habitual to pour scorn and abuse on the whole idea of politics and politicians; do we expect low turnouts - or perhaps a sense that people's simple dismay at the political condition of our country will lead them to vote out those who have so long presided over it? I keep hearing people say: *I have no-one to vote for*, and I think that is the saddest comment that could be made on the state of our common life.

What Belongs To Caesar

It should be an honourable task to think for the whole community, to be given the

power to decide on behalf of all. In giving our leaders honour, we honour those they lead. We dishonour our own world by our despair for its future; we pollute our lives if we assume the worst. Our faces are anxious, we see around us those who do not know where to find hope. Our city does not look well. The clouds of detritus blowing about its spaces, the decay of the buildings, the signs of failed enterprise, the ditched car in the housing-estate, the beer-can in the underpass - all speak of a life that is no longer shared, no longer giving an account of itself to others. The age of the polite past is definitively gone; it could not inspire the world on which we now look out. But our contempt for all who try to give us a lead does us little credit. If we cannot do our politicians the service of expecting much of them, we can't be surprised if they don't offer us much. It is a political statement when we turn our backs on the community. We should seek for a way to tell our politicians what sort of world we want; and Christians, who have every reason to believe in a just, generous world, have more of a duty than most to express these thoughts cogently, and let a moral, thoughtful, and decent voice be raised in the world where brutal power, and pragmatism, and self-seeking greed, can easily sell themselves as the way forward. Those things come more readily to hand than sensitivity, compassion, and justice; we, if we value such qualities, must fight hard to defend them.

Fr Philip