

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Gardeners' World

The fruitfulness of the earth, the quality of the harvest, is something most of us don't spend long thinking about each year. We grumble if the cauliflowers are frosted in Feb., and we complain if coffee goes up in Aug., but fundamentally we are prepared to let farmers here and abroad worry about the fields, and turn our attention to the much less imponderable business of the supermarket.

Is Our Future Predestined?

Many of Jesus' parables speak about thinking forwards. He is interested in *potentiality*: the discerning of the future embedded in present realities. In a quiet kitchen, *a woman puts yeast into flour*; at once the situation starts to change and develop, there is a new process afoot, something new is on the way, and the flour's days (as flour) are numbered. It's destined to turn into dough because of its marriage with the yeast. You may not see this from the outward appearance of things; but the coming kingdom of God is already sown in the world, and from now on the world is like a minefield, likely to explode. Some people have (quite properly) found this thought very disturbing. It's like discovering water coming through the ceiling, mice in your sofa, or a strange and worrying pain in your chest. *Something is going on*, and it is sufficiently urgent to make me cancel, at least what I had planned for this morning, possibly more. We have a dizzy feeling that we're about to waken up to realities previously hidden - had we known, we might have done things differently. I think Jesus is telling us that there's a destiny in the world, hidden from most, and - ultimately - unknown to anyone except God. *The reign of God is coming.*

What Can We Do?

This thought has led some people to think very negatively about our freedom. They become fatalistic, and start to see their world as sadly beyond all human control. This is a horrid abdication of humanity, and not at all what the situation demands. We should remember that God has designed our freedom into his universe. But he doesn't just say the word of creation, and then sit back in his eternal

Sabbath rest, and maybe watch his work destroy itself. God has a final overarching design for the Creation; his purpose will not be deflected by any of the failures or derelictions which take place in the realm of our freedom. God is still God, and his will does not fail to be accomplished. This is what the Gospel calls "*the reign of God*", and it is the ultimate truth about the world. It doesn't bear any unmistakable label, and sometimes you can hardly see any trace of it with the naked eye. Great crimes and awful disasters will happen, but they must be judged against the backcloth of the will of God, so that our best deeds will chime with the oncoming reign of the Father, even if other deeds will contradict or delay or deny it. We make up our mind, profess our faith, place our bets, stake our future, and invest our hopes, not by what we say, but by the whole thrust of our lives. But whatever we choose, *the reign of God is still coming.*

Omega

When we light the Easter candle we speak of Jesus as "*Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end*". That A to Z (in the Greek alphabet) covers the whole of human experience, and all that went before it from the beginning of time. Our lives each contain some profit and loss, tiny incidents in the huge drama of the universe; but all the histories of its galactic spaces are contained in *God's* life. A gardener planting a tiny seed starts a small process in a secluded garden. Nothing could be more private, nothing less epoch-making. But to the eye that sees the reign of God advancing, it is a moment whose meaning resounds with eternity. We know that Jesus watched the world in that spirit, because that is the theme of the parables. So catching sight of the drift and apparently random processes of the world is no longer good enough for us. We need to see it all with new eyes, and believe, as we watch, that the world is indeed unfolding like a flower in the light of eternity. This divine optimism isn't foolish or trivial. It is the truth of the eternal God, who in our disastrous scrap-heap can discern the treasure, who in the jungle of each heart can see the seed, the flower, the fruit of his harvest. *Fr Philip*