

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Integrity

Ever since the first World War, I feel, we Europeans have been thinking about integrity in radical terms. The Great War displayed a degree of falseness, in an apparently sane and balanced society, which stunned and devastated the human family. How could those silver-headed Edwardian nobles and statesmen have delivered the whole youth of five continents so pointlessly to its death? For the first time, as the awful facts of the conflict unfolded, there became possible a kind of huge community of revulsion which came to contradict the Establishment. In any other world it would have been a time for revolution; but a real revolution *was* in the making, quiet as it might have been: *never again would people trust their leaders as they had before the war*. The next century was a time of disillusion, of lost innocence.

Wholeheartedness

Is it possible, as the Preface for Virgins and Religious suggests, that God could “recall us to our first innocence, and invite us to taste on earth the gifts of the world to come”? Can we have restored to us something we have so definitely lost? In the world which has suffered Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, the Ayatollah, Saddam Hussein, and dear old Tricky Dicky Nixon, can some Lord Nolan conduct a radical enough anti-sleaze campaign to give us back the capacity for respect, for public trust, for decency at all levels of national life? It doesn't feel as if the conditions prevail for such a rebirth of trust. Our society feels so torn with divided interests, factions, and cynicism about people's motives, that there are no ideals left deep enough to transcend our selfishness. We've been privatized; each man or woman for him- or herself. That's why people excuse mean, petty, selfish actions by saying: *We've got to live in the real world*. There's no choice about that, of course; but as to what the real world *is*, we can disagree strongly. Idealists will say that the world is what we make it, and set about asking what it *ought* to be. The trouble is, this can often be a *lonely* search; we're newly conditioned to think the answer to our problems has to be *individually* thought-out; we don't believe any longer in a meaning that can be shared wholeheartedly by all who live.

How much we need belief in God! *Christians believe there is such a meaning, and that it is in the mind of God*. Cynics say: *And I suppose you are going to tell me what it is*, implying that this is just another attempt to take humanity and deliver it into slavery.

Humility

Clearly this is a place where only a deep and transparent humility can heal the wounds. The Bible tells us to *put no trust in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no help*. Our trust, indeed, belongs to God alone. We have to learn to say that without disparaging humanity; we also have to learn how to convey our knowledge of the glory of God without oppression, without distortion, and with that sense of wondering love which might disarm the mistrust of our hearers. Not many accuse Jesus of Nazareth of wholesale oppression, or think of the one we rightly call “Lord” of being a control-freak, power-mad, or out to enslave. His saints too can have such a key to human hearts: not many accuse Francis of Assisi of trying to rob his hearers of their humanity, or their freedom. The fact is that he spoke simply out of the holiness that is the true need of the world. *If we are to be shepherds, we need to be holy*. Politicians, bishops, priests, parents, teachers, please note: you aren't the answer to the world's questions and needs. You must teach us how to belong to one God - or continue to retell the human family's wretched story of exploitation and betrayal. *Fr Philip*