

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## Whatever Turns You On

People my age usually have an attitude - positive or negative - to the year 1960. We think of this year as the beginning of a different age. It was a sort of watershed between a much more formal, rather starchy world with a fairly narrow idea of What Was Best, and a world where anything at all seemed to be acceptable to someone somewhere. I seem to remember a lot more shared values in the old world; at least on the surface, people were more conformist. They made a great virtue of doing what was expected, doing what everyone else was doing. In the new world people began to seek ways of breaking moulds from the past, innovating, being unconventional. Life, we felt, was not to be lived in the straitjacket of the past, but to be fresh and freed. This led to a new kind of conformity, as all new fashions do; it was now conventional to be unconventional, and what was undertaken in obedience to tried and tested forms was suspect. People whose mothers had married in church wearing a dress like Princess Elizabeth's found themselves wanting to marry in hot-air balloons or Bali, wearing bathing-suits or Victorian uniforms.

### If it feels good, do it

Despite the sillier vagaries on the surface, something really serious was happening. People were quietly adopting the principle that *their own lives* were the only really significant measure of good and evil, right and wrong. This was not a simple, brutal selfishness, it was a huge collapse of faith in anything outside the individual human heart. *Only I really know what's happening to me*, people felt, *so only I can judge what should happen next*. Society was feared and mistrusted; society exploited you and robbed you, and took you where you did not want to go. It led you to wars you had no interest in fighting: the American experience of Vietnam was hugely important here. People meditated on Dr Strangelove, and the kind of patriotism that would blow up the world (*better dead than Red*). Doctrines and principles - *shared values* - were seen as negative and destructive, impersonal, blind, deadening forces. There was a soft spot for idealism - *personal values* - as long as it *remained* personal; if it became a shared idealism, it turned into a cult, and people got hurt or went home. The ultimate truth was always a hoped-for personal

fulfilment; thousands of priests seemed to be torn apart in the dilemma between fidelity to values binding them to the past, and a future life so many people were yearning to live, free of the bonds of convention, open to long-suppressed hopes and possibilities. It was a time of great loss, as well as a time of opening doors and windows - Pope John wanted to do this for the Church, and his Council has yet to take its full effect; may it do so soon!

### Jesus' Way

In today's Gospel we hear a solemn theme: *It is better to enter into life crippled, than to have a whole body and go to hell*. Personal fulfilment here is relegated; it *isn't* the ultimate value for Jesus. Indeed, he does not see the entry into life as incompatible with huge *renunciation* of fulfilment: *if your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out*. You may be asked for great sacrifices - and that means cold, empty, heart-rending loss, with no pay-off and no apparent benefit - if you want to be saved. Sometimes you may be given a glimpse of why this is asked of you. Often you may just stay in the dark, with only your trusting in Christ, and your knowledge of his own sacrifice, to sustain you. Such trust could only properly be asked of us by God the Father. *Fr Philip*