

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Growing

I remember clearly the disconcerting feeling of growing big. A day came when I looked doubtfully at the distance away my feet had recently achieved. I wondered if they would still respond to orders from headquarters, and was slightly surprised when they did. Nevertheless, growing was an unnerving business, and I felt awkward and unused to it. Mentally, I seemed to be always behind the times: I was really shocked to find I was a prefect at school, as when I'd arrived I'd taken some time to distinguish the prefects from the teachers. In the same way I find the onset of middle age surprising; inside, I'm still young; something false is giving me a middle-aged spread and white hair.

### The Good Side

I've got to believe that there's a good side to this business of age. I find it hard to identify; but that is par for the course. The really important changes always steal up on you, rather than announcing themselves with a peal of bells. Nor, by the account of the Gospel today, does our choice have much effect in the matter: the growth in the farmer's field happens, as it were, behind his back and without his intervention. Its course, its details, lie hidden in the seed, and the seed lies hidden in the earth, and the progress is out of his hands. All he can do is to wait...with his mind set on the moment of harvest. This gives him a specific character of watchfulness; having once sown, he is an onlooker, but not an indifferent one; he is waiting for the harvest he does not, cannot, control.

### Enter Dolly the Sheep

Nowadays, of course, the Biblical parable is outdated. Farmers are now concerned, not just with sowing and reaping, but with daily surveillance of what grows. Like them, the parents of an unborn child no longer wait in a state of rest. They find out a great deal about the baby: its gender, state of health, size and shape. The least abnormality can be found and quite possibly medical intervention will be applied to correct, enable, or prevent. Our world is changing fast; but the question comes to me: is there anything happening in relation to our spiritual growth, that is like the intervention we are making in physical terms? Whilst we tackle the genetic sources of cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer's disease, and autism, are we seeking ways to hinder the onset of things

like greed, violence, selfishness? Like disease, they are also written into our nature as possibilities; like disease, they can comprehensively blight our lives and the lives of others. Do we have to accept them as inevitable? Is it possible to circumvent them and refuse to be mastered by them?

### The Creating Wisdom

For this to happen, we would need to tread very carefully: we would need to share in the mind of our Maker. This isn't a matter of detecting trace elements, learning about hormones and enzymes and the rest. It is a matter of growing in the knowledge of the love of God, which is the governing reality in the Universe, and the key to it. We need wisdom from God to grow to our intended stature. Needless to say, this is not an unheard-of modern venture like genetic engineering. Ever since we first achieved the power to reflect, we have sought the way to live well, and the search has never been called off. Yet, when it becomes a personal quest for an individual, it is the heart of life and work, the most absorbing goal of all. I find this growth into the mind of God the least measurable of processes. From time to time I meet someone who appears to have done the work and gone the distance: a holy person. I would like to hear the genetic scientists speak of the spiritual, not as rationalists but as fellow-seekers after perfection, as people sharing the search for spiritual wisdom, the true wisdom of the eternal God.

*Fr Philip*