

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Feast To Save

There's an old, evil way of looking at life that sees the creation as profoundly flawed - so much so, that whoever put it together ought to be sued for negligence. This is theology; you may think it an outrageous theology. It is; but it's actually quite near to the real beliefs of a lot of people. How many of us, even if we're religious, *really* believe in the goodness of our own lives? Oh, we believe in our good *works*, or our good *prospects*, or the possibility of our *redemption*. But we have grave doubts about the goodness of our being, of our actual lives. I'm lucky: I've had time to think a lot (in a previous incarnation, I sometimes feel); yet I catch myself feeling like this a lot. So it must be easier, if your life hasn't given you time to draw breath for forty years, to enshrine even more shonky ideas of God, the world, life and everything. These ideas want chasing up and cleaning out. *Religious hygiene is vital*. Bad drains are dangerous; they can infect the back garden. Bad religion is also dangerous: it infects hearts and minds.

The Incompetence of the Creator?

Here's some more bad theology: the idea is that God was being *incompetent* when he was building the universe. *That* is why there is evil in it, and why Jesus had to come to mend the situation, and it was such a sad mess that he died of it. The Father reaped a harsh reward for his earlier mistakes! Think what this says about us: that God lets us loose, with our crossed wires and our damaged lives, and then he thinks: *It's no good, I'll have to do something about them*. And that's why he goes into redemptive mode.

The Mystery of Evil

This is an awful way to present God. Our faith in his almighty power does not allow us to call him incompetent. Our faith in his holiness does not allow us to call him malicious. This simple way of blaming God for the evil we see about us does not seem to me like a journey into light. There's something blank and pitiless about evil that I will not ascribe to God; somehow we'll have to find a different approach to the whole problem. Perhaps it is best to adopt God's own approach.

Wine at the Wedding

John's Gospel takes humble realities and projects them onto a big screen. The wedding-feast of Cana is as loving and tender as any. But as a celebration it is coming unstuck. A fairly humble disaster - most families meet it: the sudden discovery that there's

nothing left to offer the guests: embarrassment! On the big screen, this is the whole human condition: great ideas, but the performance falling short of the ideal. Is there an image here of the modern crisis in marriage? Surely. Our ideals are good, as far as they go; but even good people find marriage disappointing, or exhausting, rather than the engrossing and positive thing they had hoped. This leaves them, in this most intimate and vital area, prey to the conclusion that life is a collection of beautiful illusions, rapidly succeeded by sad realities, and that's an invitation to despair or at least to cynicism.

The Miracle

To this very modern situation, the Word of God speaks today. The message is not that we are a mistake, or that we need to be rubbed out and done again, but that God precisely does *not* repent of our making. Our Creator is unchangeably optimistic; and the ideals we cherish, but cannot achieve by ourselves, we can reach when he is in our midst. The miracle story gives us a beautiful image of the faithfulness of the God who comes to our side. In Jesus, it is the Master of the Sabbath himself who will pour out the wine of the marriage between humanity and its Maker, saving the feast. In him our ideals are safe, and by his power they will be realized. It is in him that our land will have its wedding.

Fr Philip