

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## “*Foreigners!*”

This epithet, muttered or spat, used to proceed regularly from English lips; strangely, considering how the Empire met, influenced, and governed so huge a proportion of the earth's people. Did this teach nothing but *how to be British*? It may be that the strain on the average colonial civil servant, soldier, or expatriate was that of trying to preserve a sense of identity against the overwhelming reality of (say) India, or Africa. I guess the values learnt in the Home Counties might have run fairly ragged, confronted with a school of Burmese priests, or even a competent Indian salesman. It comforts exiles to cling together, and so reinforce their sense of nationhood against onslaughts from the alien culture in which they are living.

### A Negative Value

One can't, however, build positive values from a pessimistic outlook. Nationalism has been rife from late medieval times until this century, and what has it brought us? Legacies of division, mistrust, violence, war, and the Church of England (a *national* institution, which has great good qualities, and is the home of undoubted saints, but whose existence I, as a Catholic, beg to regret). I suspect that nationalism is more of a weapon for the use of tyrants than a genuine popular quality: Henry VIII was much more interested in his Tudor dynasty than the throne they sat on or the Church they prayed in. Elizabeth I ran a huge system of what now would probably be called spin-doctors, to assure that Spaniards, Frenchmen, and Italians were all feared and loathed: most parsons were involved, and so was that great propagandist for the Tudor throne, Mr W Shakespeare. *Cry God for Harry, England, and Saint George* sounded as good to Elizabeth as it did before Agincourt. Northern Ireland is another situation where nationalism has been a weapon for the preservation of privilege; I don't sense a great wave of support in this country for the Loyalist Orange Lodge. Fear and hatred have never been good building materials, and this is as true for nations as it is for families or friendships. We need to cleanse them from our national life, and we can start with ourselves.

### Good Principles

One good principle is to recognise that we are truly enriched, not by gawping at our own image in a mirror, but by meeting others who are in some way unlike us (*a man meeting a woman* springs to mind). Our first cautious experience of friendship (remember the first day at school?) ought to teach us that it is in accepting strangeness and otherness that we come to experience things like wonder, joy, and awe instead

of boredom and predictability. Another good principle is to accept that what matters to one people can usually be appreciated by others. I may not be able, at first, really to understand why a horse-race round a Piazza to win a banner of the Blessed Virgin is the most important thing in the whole world to a young Sieneese; but the experience of standing in the Campo while it is happening will teach me a great deal.

### Foreign Muck

You might have expected international tourism to increase international understanding, and to an extent it has; but in some ways it has made the problems worse. Some wary tourists stick together with invincible tenacity, seeking out keg bitter and fish-and-chips; what they really want is Skegness plus sunshine. Sometimes they treat the town they are in and its people with contempt, evoking nothing but contempt in return. Particularly, mistrust of other people's cuisine seems to me to be the most awful barrier; *companions* are those who break bread together, and to arrive amongst strangers with a determination to refuse their food seems to me to torpedo the possibility of real friendship. It's good to know that Jesus opposed nationalism, and could sometimes see greater good in Gentiles than he found among Jews. Lord, make us worthy to be called Catholics - children of God, inheritors and stewards of one Creation.

*Fr Philip*