

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Those Who Say There Is No Resurrection

To be Christian, you have to be optimistic from your roots upwards. Is optimism learned, or inborn? Both, I'm sure. A new human being is often endearingly optimistic: a little child, still unable to reason or negotiate, looks trustingly to us and waits to be satisfied or comforted. Think, further, how the faithful care of a good mother or father enters the soul of this child, reinforcing the hope that the world will be kind. Of course, if things are not well-arranged, it can be different: a child cries in the night, and no-one comes; a child is hungry, and there is nothing to share. But even there, I sense a knowledge of justice: the child knows, however inchoately, *this should not be so*. I think that is the reverse of the same coin of natural optimism. It makes room for hope, room for things to get better.

Enemies of Hope

Optimism has to endure many a bucket of cold water. A lady who knows this once said to me, *I've had many more kicks than kisses*. Hope wouldn't be hope if it were assured knowledge; and from the beginning we also know, again without putting it into words, that our hope lives under threat, is already in conflict with danger. This gives our optimism a stern test, but also puts us on our mettle to work for our hopes, to plan and refine the capacity to keep vision and generosity alive, even if the world should look cold to us, and the future uncertain. Much of our moral behaviour is our attempt to make certain a future which might "go either way"; by choosing to behave generously, and to build imaginatively, to value the best possibilities, we prepare a birthplace for a better future: this is optimism working for the world, even if it involves contradicting the way the world has gone in the past. The story of human idealism - in politics, in government, in medicine, in education, in law, in marriage and family life, is all based on the power of people to hope for the best, and to do battle with the worst: putting to flight the enthroned powers of vulnerability, injustice, suffering, loneliness, and discouragement.

A Future We Do Not Design

Hope, however, is not selfish or limited. In the Church it is called "a theological virtue" - a gift which leads us to know God. Hope that is confined to my own fortunes, my own lifespan, my own desire would be a mean, narrow reality. Hope recognises in itself a communal quality: it brings people together so that they can love and care for each other, and share their gifts generously; hope acts as a kind of secretary for the great virtue, love, the one that will be left

when all the others have finished their work. The final fulfilment of all human hopes is in the infinity of God, the maker of all the optimistic human hearts of all times and places. This future fulfilment *must* be greater than we can imagine, if it is to accomplish all that is expected of it. My personal recipe wouldn't do at all!

"Beyond The Dreams Of Avarice"

This phrase perfectly sums up the point: because our hopes are always confined by our littleness, perhaps tainted with our selfishness, it is *certain* that the response of God to our hopes will exceed them. This is why we are unable to speak of heaven, or to depict the joy of God which is known to us only in his promise. There are moments in our lives, thank God, when we are suddenly surprised by joy, by the wonder of the world, by the beauty of the grace of God. Then we see the work of the Creator, and gladly accept our status as his creatures; it is like the difference between the bitter struggle to earn, contrive, or steal, and the graceful hope of receiving of a perfect gift.

Sadducees Ahoy

There are modern Sadducees about, insisting on their depressing judgment that we are disposable fragments of accidental matter, agglomerated in the wastes of space by some blind force which is destined to obliterate us with indifference. I can see this belief is *viable*, and why some people, having once adopted it, may find it hard to challenge; but I can't see why anyone should *want* to adopt it, or live for it, or feel that it is an appropriate way to respond to what I see as the breathtakingly beautiful gift of human life. If there is an alternative faith that is credible, and makes more sense, I will choose it. I believe this desire to believe is also God's gift. Faith and Hope will pass away one day, it is true: but here, on our way to that future, they have to grow greater all the time, excavating in our fear and ignorance the huge space which is to be fulfilled by Love. Don't hope for little things, therefore. Hope for the Best! Don't put your faith in little things: believe in the greatest of all. You will already be a sign of what is to come, when all imperfect things will pass away, and God will be all in all.
Fr Philip

