

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Different World

Sometimes I read a story which leaves me sure that something is gravely wrong. It happened to me the other day. On May 1st Sandra Hurley went to court in London. She'd given birth to a little boy in her 35th year, and the doctor had refused her the screening test for abnormalities in her unborn child. Matthew was born with Down's syndrome, and his mother was now suing for damages on the grounds that, had the tests indicated the child's disability, she would at once have aborted him. She had, in fact, loved him from the very time of his birth, a love which had only grown deeper and deeper with every passing year (he is now 6); but, she said, "My rights as a woman asking for the test were taken away from me". The result was a settlement out of court for £300,000 plus costs.

Loadsamoney

I'm all in favour of parents of disabled children having £300,000, or whatever it costs to care for them in security. But to hear a mother say that her beloved child could have been killed, and that someone has to pay for its not having happened, made my blood run cold. The attitudes simply do not hang together; how can one pursue one's rights to have terminated the life of a deeply-loved child?

Jessica

It was in the quandary induced by this story that I heard about Jessica Mary Rose Hepzibah Wilde. She was a Down's syndrome baby, who was born quite blue. After a year of relative health she had undergone three operations for hole-in-the-heart. The local parish prayed for her with great love; many people were so touched by her that they said they were ready to die instead of her (thinking that God might need such an alternative). Her face was forming into the face of a little child, her hair had grown, she was a person everyone knew. Eight weeks after the third operation she quietly died, aged two years and one hundred days. Her body was brought to the Church, and through the evening people prayed there, offering praise to the Father for this little one, knowing that her life was

destined to be short, that it could have gone on no longer. (This vigil is such a great help, being an image of our trusting the dead to God's care, not rushing to dispose of the body, but honouring it and reminding ourselves of the heavenly home to which we are all going.) The next day, the Eucharist celebrated our sharing in the mystery of Jesus, risen from the dead, and everyone felt that God's time is the best time, and found peace in his presence.

The Kingdom of Heaven

It's not difficult to see that these two stories belong to different worlds. I feel that more and more we are being presented with a sort of alternative, which until recently has been fudged and confused. The world which is destined for God and looks for his will day by day seems to be more and more at odds with the world that seeks within itself for its reasons and purposes. Those who want to be Christian may have to renounce the alternative world with greater and greater discrimination, ceasing to talk casually about "living in a Christian country", and expecting to have to struggle to embody a Christian way of life. Then we shall rediscover the duty to bear witness to Christ *contra mundum*, in the teeth of the world's opposition; and even recall the Greek word for witness - *marturion*, martyrdom. Jessica's mum is full of grief, but knows that the tenderness she gave to her little daughter is a pledge of eternal life. Matthew's mum says that her marriage broke down because of the strain of her experience. Mrs Hurley, it could have been otherwise.
Fr Philip