

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## GROWING

It is said that we cease to grow new brain-cells at the age of 18; this suggests that, from this point onward, our brains are in a course of deterioration. Yet we appear to go on learning, and to grow in various ways which we might call “spiritual”; perhaps we lose some of the more damaging qualities of youth – a certain intolerance, our easy assumption that we are right, our willingness to override the possibility that we have something yet to learn. This is an example of the way apparent deterioration can in fact favour our redemption.

### **Disappointed?**

This strange law operates very widely. We often find ourselves thwarted in our plans, and compelled to take a different path – in our view, an inferior course. We can easily come unstuck at this moment, letting the sense of frustration and disappointment take possession of us, turning us bitter and negative. If we keep our heads, however, and go with the flow, we may find that unexpected blessings come our way which exceed the probable result of our former plans. We will be obliged to accept, in the future, the idea that *we do not know best*, and that our notion of goodness is itself subject to review. Is that a diminishment? Hardly! A mature humility will recognise it as an act of mercy, robbing us only of what made us poor, opening us to a wider future than the one we designed. One sniffs in all of this the disposition of a divine plan, which won't leave us imprisoned in our limitations.

### **A Work of Mercy**

I wonder how comprehensive this principle might be: how far does

God actually intervene in our arrangements for our benefit, making possible the growth we need to come to “the full stature of Christ”? That celebrated theme of “thinking in God's way rather than man's” – the theme which leaves open the possibility of the Cross – isn't far away.

### **“A Lovely Surprise!”**

People who are in love are always devising surprises for each other. This is not a vindictive process – far from it. It is an attempt to show the beloved that the presence of a lover is capable of changing the world, and making it open up surprisingly, with unlooked-for beauty and joy. I suspect that God's hidden agenda is very like that. We are formally incapable of predicting the future. That's no accident; it makes possible all that is wonderful in human beings: trust, hope, promise, creativity, and the rest. I believe that the faith we have in God includes the belief that he can divert our lives *to our astonishment*, and that out of the puzzlement, and, not infrequently, the anguish of this experience, he can show us the path of life, the fulness of joy in his presence.

### **Right, You Can Open Your Eyes**

Can this thought part me from the resentful and mourning condition I suffer from when my plans come to nothing? I think it might. So, as my brain gets more and more addled, and my personality less and less supple, I can grow in hope and trust that the God who made me for himself will bring me to the fulfilment that he has designed for me, which I cannot predict or achieve alone. *Fr Philip*