

“I suppose you’ll be wondering about its value....”

It’s certain that money is a very important commodity, and that it’s pretty hard for most of us to get hold of it. If you’ve got enough of it, you might forget about it; but if you haven’t you can’t forget it for a moment. It’s perhaps not difficult to understand how it becomes “the bottom line” in so many people’s lives.

We can see the effects of this in the process we call “commercialisation” – the making of trade out of everything and anything. I think of the treatment of workers, for instance, as a disposable resource subject to the rules of commerce; my grandad was a joiner, and worked for a building firm still trading in Nottingham. When it was frosty, he was simply laid off until the weather improved, with no regard for his welfare, or that of his family, or their survival in the bitter winter. He was just a resource, not wanted and therefore not paid. You can see what this process has done for sport, for popular music, for broadcasting.

Nevertheless, my breath was taken when first I saw on the back of a bus the words: *Divorce - £300 plus VAT*. The blandishments of advertisers have seldom so distorted the truth. What relationship can there be between the two halves of this equation, except in the minds of a lawyer with a mind like a cash-register? Even to mention the word *divorce* in so mercenary a sense – a product with its price, like a box of detergent – displays the callousness of our public space, the space between me and an advert on a corporation bus. Nothing here about the disastrous loss of confidence, the broken home, the riven family; no mention of the experience of catastrophic error, the feeling that no-one can be trusted *least of all myself*; the laying waste of the power to promise, to trust, and to endure. *All yours, mate, for £300 plus 17.5%, sorted.*

The indecent hand of commerce has no values to guide it. It works in a space which we permit to it, converting every value to cash. We co-operate with this process whenever we accept its pay-off. The handing-over of all human need to the Social Services, the handing-over of children’s education to the school, the handing-over of all care and responsibility for the sick to the NHS, always reserving the power to sue them when they fail, is one feature of the cash-convertible world. I feel we must oppose it, before we find our own humanity weighed on the same scales, and found to be old, unattractive, and lacking in worth. In these terms, I look forward with hope and longing for the Day when true judgment is spoken on the earth, and where God will vindicate his choices as Creator and Redeemer, and put to silence the jingling tills we have substituted for his justice, his love, and his mercy.
Fr Philip