

Fullness of time: God's time and ours

From the Editors in the [December 6, 2000](#) issue

We live between Christ's first and second advent, in what W. H. Auden called "for the time being," which can be "the hardest time of all." Everything has been changed by Christ's coming, and yet to most people's eyes, and often to Christian eyes as well, everything seems to remain the same. In Christ, the redemption of the world is under way, yet that redemption remains in large part hidden, still awaiting the final consummation.

Two articles in this issue take up the challenge of faithful living in "the time being." Mary T. Stimming and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. ponder some of the Advent challenges of waiting with hope in God amid the temptations of despair or complacency.

In thinking about time and the fullness of time in this season, we often remember that modern theological classic, *Groundhog Day*. It's the film in which Bill Murray plays a rude, self-centered weatherman named Phil, who finds himself in a time warp, reliving over and over the same day of his life in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Phil wakes up each day and hears exactly the same idle chatter on the radio, encounters exactly the same assortment of small-town characters, and pursues exactly the same round of inconsequential activities with his cameraman Larry and producer Rita.

This experience of time that is headed nowhere is excruciating. Phil responds to the prison of time with acts of contempt, frivolity or despair. But eventually he starts seeing the time he has been given in Punxsutawney as full of possibility. He even comes to regard time as a chance for preparation—a chance to become a different kind of person. The consummation and transformation of Punxsutawney time is reached on the day when Phil becomes a person who can win Rita's affections.

In its clever play on the vagaries of time, this lighthearted romance suggests one way to think about the mysterious intersection of God's time and our time. What can seem like the meaningless extension of time, or the ceaseless round of same-old same-old, is in God's time part of the work of redemption. The prolongation of history can be seen as a gift, a gift that allows us to become aware of God's

purposes.

The church's Advent faith is that time is not a prison but a path, and that the path leads to the fulfilling of God's purposes. The human task, as Phil realized, is to get ready.