

Comment

Readers will perhaps have already noticed that we have increased our number of pages from 48 to 52. We managed this by chopping one fifth of an inch off the length of the page and putting in one extra sheet. This means that we are still (just) able to keep within the weight limits laid down by the Post Office – so that it remains (marginally) cheaper to send *New Blackfriars* through the post than to have the editor fly around the world delivering it by hand. The consequence, anyway, is that you get more words for your money. We know and worry about the fact that these words have been coming to you rather late for the last three issues; this is another consequence of the reorganisation of our production on DIY principles; we apologise for it and promise that we will soon be doing better.

The beginning of a new year and a new volume of *New Blackfriars* (in this slightly new format) seems an appropriate moment to reflect on the sort of words that we put in the journal and why we put them there. Looking at the Index for, say, last year it must sound paradoxical to assert that our journal is purely and simply concerned with theology. When, for example, we are asked by people who compile works of reference what our magazine deals in, we have to say that we discuss theology, literature, politics, philosophy and so on, because otherwise we might be mistaken for a technical journal for professional theologians. We are not that; nor on the other hand, are we simply trying to popularise the conclusions of such academics by sweetening them with an admixture of general ‘culture’ – indeed it would come as news to many of our readers that we are trying to *popularise* anything; they say they often find it tough and sometimes nearly impossible reading. We aim neither to be ‘academic’ nor ‘popular’ because we reject this easy distinction, we aim to be simply theological.

Sometimes this means we are involved in the technical infighting of people who have thought hard and long about some question – and this makes for hard reading to those on the sidelines (often including the editor); sometimes it means that we are explaining to educated men and women in the street how things are going in some field of research which is not their own – and this makes for easier and often just as valuable reading. But in all cases what we are trying to do is to understand God. *New Blackfriars*, it says at the top of the first page, is edited by the English Dominicans, and the job of Dominicans is to seek to understand God while sharing both the seeking and the understanding with others. It is because we want to share the seeking that we sometimes make such demands on our readers; our aim is

to *do* theology with them rather than simply to talk about it to them.

People quite frequently wonder out loud why a journal which professes to seek God should spend so much time with people who are manifestly atheists – with marxists in particular. Is this just perversity? If it is, I think we could claim it is a traditionally Dominican form of perversity. The most famous, but not the only, parallel from the past would be the perversity of St. Thomas Aquinas who departed from the obviously religious and rather platonic Augustinianism of his time and found himself fascinated instead by the pagan (and for all practical purposes atheist) Aristotle. He found himself with problems: both the near-insoluble intellectual problems of squaring the old materialist with christian spirituality, and the more practical problem of ecclesiastical condemnations far stronger than anything we have had to cope with – we know of no Archbishop who has yet publicly burned a volume of *New Blackfriars*.

Aristotelianism stood at the centre of the transformation that was taking place in understanding and in ways of life during the thirteenth century – the beginnings of the scientific and secular culture that has lasted almost to our own day – and so it was here that faith came to seek understanding. St. Thomas did not come to Aristotle to jump on a fashionable bandwagon, he came because Aristotle was preeminently there; it was here that the new thinking and understanding was going on, it was here, therefore, that theology could be done. Part of our editorial policy is based on the, doubtless debatable, belief that Marx holds a rather similar position in our world. We are not so dogmatically sure of this as to exclude those who would disagree, but we are pretty confident of being on the right lines. Of course, this faces us and our readers with problems – we think that is one of the ways we earn our 50p each month.

Because Christianity starts from the humanity of God our theology cannot be indifferent to any new understanding of man – such, for example, as the insights of post-humanist structuralism that we discuss this month and have examined several times before. It is ultimately because of the humanity of God that a perfectly disinterested concern with literature or anthropology can be of theological importance. We do not seek to impose a ‘theological’ framework on such topics because we are confident that truth left to itself eventually finds God. That is why we often have non-christians writing on such matters, for the important thing is not a facile last paragraph linking the whole thing up with the gospel, but the relevance that any insight into man must have for our insight into the God-man.

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