Comment

The design on the cover of this month's issue is a reproduction of one of the works shown recently in the Matisse exhibition at the new Hayward Gallery, London, and we publish it thanks to the kind permission of the Arts Council of Great Britain. With its suggestion of origins and dreams, it seems an appropriate way of marking the celebration of the fiftieth volume of this journal. And it is for a like reason that we also publish again the very first article to appear in the new review, Fr Vincent McNabb's 'Our Aim of Truth'. For besides manifesting the rather craggy character of its very individual author, the article carries with it something of the feel of that whole generation: the concern for writing as a craft, albeit a craft that harks back to the tradition of *belles lettres*, the sense of a new and optimistic offensive into the jungle from a clearing of light, and above all the superb and aggressive confidence in the force of St Thomas's articulation of the Christian tradition.

It is perhaps this last feature, the nature of the fidelity to St Thomas, that is the touchstone of the various changes that have gradually succeeded each other in this journal through these near fifty years. Some ten years later, the reviewer of Fr Martin D'Arcy's book on Thomas Aquinas will quote his phrase 'the Thomist *sans peur et sans reproche*' (1930, p. 749), and it might be said that the history of the journal is the history of the change in the character of this Thomist *sans peur et sans reproche*.

In those first early years, the names that dominate and recur (Vincent McNabb, Hugh Pope, Luke Walker and John-Baptist-Reeves, O.P., Eric Gill, G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc), and the kind and manner of subjects treated (Vincent McNabb on the literal expounding of key principles of St Thomas or the 'crime of birth control', the repeated call to return to the land, Robert Bracey, O.P. on Dr Johnson and the eighteenth century, J. F. Makepeace on Dante, Joseph Clayton on economics, travel pieces by Elizabeth Belloc, the reverence for the poems of Alice Meynell and Rupert Brooke, frequent poems by Edwin Essex and Sister Mary Benvenuta, O.P., of the first and second Orders respectively), all these conjure up an era that now seems as appealing as it is remote: at once virile and sweet, concentrated, passionate and gay.

Is it, then, just the effect of a personal prejudice for the world that was already forming about one's birth that makes the early thirties seem suddenly to have a different feel? Was it more than a chance

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1968.tb07403.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

that Mr Walter Shewring should in September 1934 compose a quite lovely appreciation of two great friends of the Order, Canon John Gray and André Raffalovich and write: '. . . With others who knew them, I see in their death an epoch ended' (p. 622)? Certain it was at any rate that those early thirties saw the appearance in rapid succession of new and brilliant stars in the firmament: Thomas Gilby, Gerald Vann, Victor White, Conrad Pepler, O.P. And certain it was, too, that with these men in particular a new style of Thomism came through, whose mood and specific note was caught in a prescient article by Fr Thomas Gilby in the June issue of 1934, 'Catholics and the National Consciousness': '. . . Is it worth asking whether Catholicism in England, for all its external impressiveness, is not actually working as a closed system so far as the general life of the country is concerned. . . . But there seems to be need as well for a more general action. . . . The process might be called *infiltration;* rather than an assault or a confrontation of the world we live in with the whole formal equipment of the Church' (pp. 380-381; cf. *ibid.* pp. 706-707, reporting the Laxton Week-end).

So a new phase in the dialectic of Church and society, otherworldliness and this-worldliness, had begun, and the next ten years were the golden period of the journal. During this time so many of the harmonics and permutations of this theme were sounded and explored, and with the instrument again of Thomism, but of a Thomism newly subtle and sensitive, differently rigorous and confident. One interpretation of this theme of Church and society deserves particular mention in so far as only a slight but critical modification of its wording would provide the contrasting version favoured by our present-day political theologians: '. . . Only by a return to the true practice of Catholic teaching will the world be righted or rather find that it is healed. Yet we cannot but admit that some abatement meanwhile of the evil can be secured by purely political and social remedies. These are not really in the nature of remedies but only of palliatives' (1934, p. 6; cf. *ibid.* p. 87: the editor was now Fr Bede Jarrett). But the theme was worked out in many of its other implications: Gerald Vann writing specifically on St Thomas and humanism (v. e.g. 1934, pp. 395, 467); Victor White's successive analyses of the true nature of the Christian revolution and of Marxism (1934, pp. 138; 1937, pp. 325, 465); the incisive registering and discriminating of the liveliest issues of the day over the next few years by 'Penguin'. Two of Penguin's contributions were, of course, of quite particular note: his chronicling and commenting of the running debate between the 'muckers in' and the 'muckers out' (v. 1935, pp. 855-856; 1936, pp. 58-61, 142-145, 301-302, 311-312; 1937, pp. 405-407, 620-627; 1938, pp. 795-804), and his noble refusal to join 'the stampede' of most English Catholics to support Franco during the Spanish Civil War, out of a concern for impartial truth and justice ('. . . It is necessary to assert and

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reassert that if the Left will not have God, it does not follow on that account that He is on the Right'—1936, p. 708; and cf. 1936, pp. 647-649, 704-711, 725-729, 779-785, 855-857; 1937, pp. 141-144, 283-300, 457-463, 528-531, 696-701, 783-785, 807-812; 1938, pp. 608-613).

What was at work here was a coherent social theory which owed much to the quickening and sharpening influence of Maritain: the reciprocal relationship of individual and society could be stated thanks to certain key distinctions between individual and person, secular society and supernatural kingdom. And the problem of the internal relationship between successive historical versions of the Christian political order received a solution of rare clarity in an article by Victor White entitled 'Christendoms, New or Old?' in November, 1938: 'We cannot, we may not, restore, mediaeval forms. And that not only because they are past, but far more because to try to do so argues a basic misunderstanding of the non-univocal, analogical nature of the applicability of Christian social and cultural principles. . . .' (pp. 797-798; on all this, cf. 'Politics and Theology: Retrospect and Agenda', by Fergus Kerr, O.P.; *New Blackfriars*, August, 1968).

Already, however, the actual existing society was increasingly under the shadow of war. And when war came, there was a peculiarly sad irony about the fact that two articles under the titles 'In Tempore Belli' and 'Patriotism and the Life of the State' should come in 1939 and 1940 from the pen of Gerald Vann who had done so much to instruct the consciences of those sensitive to the moral issues of peace and war. And one of the first casualties of the war was Penguin's feature, with its wide international reference. Which was another symbol: the review continued through the war, though somehow at once reduced and more inward, returning in a quite different mood and for quite different reasons to the exteriorly inhibited but interiorly rich Catholicism of previous epochs of restraint.

And so peace, of a sort, returned. The continuity of the journal was assured at least by the editorials, which tirelessly repeated certain basic truths, a synthesis of the earlier principle of Bede Jarret and those of Victor White and Gerald Vann: the primacy of the person and of the kingdom of heaven (v. e.g. 1942, pp. 334; 1947, p. 103). But elsewhere the influence of St Thomas seemed to be receding: whether it was that this influence had penetrated so much into the marrow of such older Thomists as Gerald Vann and Victor White who were now turning their interests particularly to psychology and anthropology, or that a new style of penetration was again necessary to meet the needs of the newly 'emerging . . . Catholic professional and middle class' (Editorial, September, 1950, p. 403), it is at this distance impossible to say. But certainly

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https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1968.tb07403.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

composed by Fr Cipriano Vagaggini and published in his book *The Canon of the Mass and Liturgical Reform*. It is designed to be used with the variable prefaces of the missal. The communion *epiclesis* which prays that the Holy Spirit may make us an everlasting gift to God, one body and one spirit in Christ, is particularly beautiful. It also has a special intercession for the dead in which the names of particular deceased can be inserted.

The longest and most solemn of the three, and perhaps the most beautiful, is the eucharistic prayer IV. Its preface is fixed and after the *sanctus* it has a long development on the history of salvation starting from the creation and ending with Christ. This is not a prayer for everyday use but its didactic effect should be very great.

There can be no doubt of the importance of this step in the liturgical reform. After perhaps an initial shock in some quarters these prayers will be warmly received and the generation which grows up listening to them will receive a better formation in the essentials of Christianity than their parents could receive from the liturgy. But once the Western Church has become accustomed to a variety of eucharistic prayers and priests have learnt the form such prayers should take, it is to be hoped that greater freedom of composition will be allowed. Fine as they are, these prayers are not suited to every occasion. There remains a need for prayers which are closer to the expression and Christian preoccupations of modern man, and there are surely circumstances in which improvisation would be better than any set formula.

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new names and new styles were coming forth: Kenelm Foster, Illtud Evans, Laurence Bright, Cornelius Ernst, Herbert McCabe, O.P. . . .

And these are only a few, amongst the many 'of whom there is no memorial': quite apart from the brothers, and the sisters, of the first and second Orders, all silent, yet serving, too. Not to speak of the convulsive ravages of the past few years.

Where, then, do we stand, and where stands St Thomas? At another juncture, no doubt. And here we can do worse than to return to the opening quotation of an early article by Gerald Vann and ponder its truth:

> The desire for order is a primary need of our nature, of our minds and bodies. . . . In the sphere of society man desires primarily a clear order, the deep satisfaction of knowing himself bound up with that which is moving to some defined end (October, 1933, p. 860).

Could we say that the clarification of that order and the making of that society constitutes *our* commitment to the aim of truth today?

P.L.

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