

ST THOMAS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY <sup>1</sup>

THE ruined Parthenon, as it stands in the lucid splendour of the Athenian sky, enshrines for us not the adolescent worship for which it was designed but the philosophy and art of ancient Greece. It stands as their symbol. In the grove of Mambre, four millennia old, is the tomb of Abraham, our father, where obedience to the one high God lies sleeping until we are all gathered to his bosom. The Roman wall, the arch at Trier, the inscription on the Iron Gates of the Danube, the temples at Baalbek and Timgad, the aqueduct at Segovia, are adequate representatives of the militarism, sanitation and civic creed of Rome. Together these three influences built up the background for the Christian revelation; the basilica of St Peter is reared upon these mighty foundations and transcends them. Europe, as we understand it, is the work of the Catholic Church, and we can ask ourselves today . . . where, then, is the abiding memorial of the greatest of the Church's intellects, St Thomas Aquinas? Where is the temple of the Solomon of the West?

As the eye looks eastward from the cliffs of Dover to embrace the territory of Europe, it picks out certain well-defined characteristics. The first is the appropriateness of the Roman boundaries, the Rhine and the Danube, with a possible extension to the Carpathians. Beyond these rivers and mountains stretch the vast plains which run into Asia, where Confucius and Mahomet and the Buddha rule instead of Abraham, Socrates and Justinian.

'So far and no further' seems to be written on some invisible curtain of the mind beyond these boundaries. The spirit of the West is visible to her farthest outposts, but where the onion-topped towers give way to domes and minarets, where Byzantium and Ivan the Terrible and darker powers hold sway, Europe ceases. On the other hand, across the Atlantic spaces Europe has spread to steppes and prairies as vast as those that lie beyond the Urals. On the shores of all the oceans new outposts of the West arise, and Boston, Massachusetts, is not more European than is Minneapolis, Minnesota. Europe is an oecumenical designation. It may be menaced in its ancient citadel, but new Europes have sprung up beyond the seas to redress the balance of the old.

The Europe of St Thomas Aquinas was a picturesque and menaced little polity. How remote must seem to us the figures of his great-uncle, Kaiser Barbarossa, the island-city of Paris cluster-

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<sup>1</sup> The substance of a paper read to the Aquinas Society of Leicester.

ing around the brand-white Notre-Dame, the clash of Pope and Hohenstauffen, the Royal Justiciar St Louis, the General Chapter of the Order in Blackfriars, London. England was a feudal holding of the Papacy, Magna Carta as fresh as Lloyd George's Budgets (and far less revolutionary), Richard of Cornwall Emperor-elect of Europe, Simon de Montfort recently Earl of Leicester. Of that Europe of St Thomas I think it safe to say that scarcely one visible trace remains, and though it would be a charming antiquarian exercise to reconstruct those visible appearances, there are more important things to talk about. True, the Catholic Church and St Thomas's work remain to this day; Europe, in a sense, remains, but is it continuous with that 13th century illumination

Like the gilt page the good monks pen,  
That is all smaller than a wren,  
Yet hath high towers, meteors, and men  
And suns and spouting whales?

Clearly our task here must be to follow two lines of enquiry, the one into the nature of the European thing, the other into the specific significance of St Thomas. Where do these two lines converge?

Recently in subsequent broadcasts I came across two widely differing solutions of our present troubles. The first, offered by an American soil conservation expert, naturally asserted that a profusion of crops would remove the causes of unrest, social and international. The other, proffered by an Anglican Archbishop, was the one about a union of all men of good will. It will at once occur to my readers that a third line of action might prove helpful, that of hard thinking, and if that were so then St Thomas would prove very important indeed. For I don't suppose there is anyone who will deny that St Thomas has some claim to be the hardest thinker the human race has ever produced. I mean that for real sinewy reasoning, muscling in to a problem, as I might put it, there are few rivals in the field. Even Aristotle drags in some poetic bric-a-brac to enliven the tedium of his pages; not so St Thomas. 'Cold, clear logic, and buckets of it', as a modern dramatist has put it, is his recipe for dealing with a problem, and if one has ever taken the trouble to penetrate to the core of one of his arguments the result is a permanent enrichment of one's own thinking powers. St Thomas, I think, was not entirely without humour (Mgr Knox asserts that he omitted an article on it from the *Summa* only for lack of space); he was most certainly a poet; but he keeps his poetry and his philosophy apart. The vast bulk of his work is an intellectual exercise *tout court*. Exercise, I would say, rather like that of climbing a mountain, having nothing whatever to recommend it except

its extreme strenuousness and, of course, the superb view one gets from the top.

A formidable figure indeed, formidable as a Saint, with his massive purity and simplicity, such a great *Christian*, formidable as an example of industry, those four secretaries toiling simultaneously; formidable above all as a challenge to the lazy, hazy mind, refusing it a moment's respite, resolutely disregarding flowery detours, the relentless progress from the beginning of an article to its conclusion. What a mind, what a relentless dynamo of intelligence. There are more than two million words in the *Summa* alone, and *not one of them is unnecessary*. If we did not know that he was such a good man, such a humble man, such a God-given man, how we should dislike him for being such a brain. He would be the 'teacher's pet' of all history, the *bête noire* of all us oafs at the back of the class, the boy who never put a foot wrong. But there is another side to St Thomas which saves him from all that, his humility before the truth, wherever it might be found, in the Fathers, in the Gentiles, in his academic rivals. There is his constant recourse to the spring of all knowledge, St Thomas beating his great head softly against the door of the tabernacle, 'wisdom knocking at the door'. What a brain, yes; but what a supreme lover of God above all. We do sometimes forget that he was a theologian, not a philosopher, and that his message is primarily not one relating to essence and existence, form and matter, substance and accident; his message is that of the Word made flesh.

In this he is, if I may say so, supernaturally as well as naturally, a European. Like most people, there are moments when I feel the attraction of the Asiatic mind, in the sense of admiring the detachedness of Asaka, the simplicity of the sage beneath the enormous tree, the pure contemplative directing his gaze towards eternal things. On the other hand, there are moments when I, like many others, feel strongly transatlantic, when the problems that beset Bloomsbury seem like a species of Neronic fiddling, and one thinks how much better it would be to have the 'know-how' of the Technocrats, to have the world run by a vast Tennessee Valley Authority. Streamline everything, build up your assembly lines, get material comfort established and then you may have leisure to think. But in more normal moments, when I think of the life of cities such as Dijon, Bologna, Augsburg or York, cities in the true European sense; when I remember the fishing-villages of Brittany, the huge farms of Bavaria, the dairies of Denmark; when I recall the conversation of Oxford common-rooms, the salons of Geneva, a concert in Munich, a committee-meeting in Whitehall, I catch a glimpse of the Europe I admire above Asia and Atlantis,

where contemplation issues, however tentatively, into action, and there is a balance between two extremes. This is the European idea which Newman, for one, considered to be coterminous with civilisation absolutely speaking, not because of its superior battleships and bombers, but because God has designed it as the true expression of man's social nature. I am all too well aware that in saying this I am laying myself open to the charge of continentalism, which is, I suppose, only one better than insularity, but I boldly put forward, with Newman behind me, thank goodness, the proposition that the European branch of human society is meant by God to be a norm of what human society should be everywhere.

Appalling questions at once raise their heads. What do you mean by human, by civilisation, by society? And anyway, how do you dare to make such an assertion, when it is from Europe that all the misery and unrest of the world come? Have we brought to other civilisations anything but disregard and destruction of all their good qualities? Have even our missionary enterprises done more than gloss over ancient cults, put the witch-doctor into a dog-collar? Surely I am not going to bring up the white man's burden and the flag on which the sun never sets, blacks ruled by blues, a sahib in every jungle and a memsahib to keep the niggers straight? Well, I hold some unorthodox opinions even on those topics, though I shall not trouble you with them now.

What claim has European civilisation to be a norm? To start with, we might consider this combined inheritance from Palestine, Greece and Rome with which I began this lecture, and which the Catholic Church has fused into a single thing. First, that fanatical insistence upon the singleness of God and his supremacy which was the teaching of the Prophets. No race or religion other than that of the Jews has so signally proclaimed the one God, or more successfully and awe-inspiringly named him 'He Who Is'. Then there is that marvellous *aperçu* of reality that we derive from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and which came to St Thomas so largely from the African Augustine and the Arabic Avicenna. The Jews had a faith, or, if you like it, an intuition, of the ultimate reality. The Greeks discovered the range of man's reason and rejoiced like giants to run its course. 'Man is a political animal', what an admirable conclusion to reach! But it was only a conclusion in the speculative order, not a social and political reality. That remained for Rome to accomplish, so much labour it was to build the first world empire, to govern it and give it laws. Rome, to use a dangerous analogy, provided the matter to which the mind of Greece might give a form. And when Rome fell it was the Catholic bishop who transmitted to weaker, more primitive polities

the science or art of practical affairs. The Catholic bishop is the residuary legate of European civilisation, as was seen only yesterday when, on the collapse of the Axis powers, surrender was negotiated city by city by its bishop, save in one case where the matter was taken in hand by a dauntless and octogenarian abbess.

You will not have failed to notice that in this list of assets from Palestine, Greece and Rome two are in the contemplative order, one only in the purely practical. Palestine provides a supernatural object of contemplation, Greece a natural one; while it is in Rome and her roads and rules that the contemplation spills over into fruitful and stable activity. Now St Thomas does say that this mixed ideal is the best one for men as they are; they are rational, they have intellects, but these intelligences are cast in a social mould. Their thoughts demand to be shared, to be cross-fertilised. Man is, if you like, a mind which has to do something about its thoughts because it has something to do it with, a tongue for propaganda and a body for propagation. Looking upon man with as scientifically detached an eye as is possible, it does seem as if this European civilisation of which we are speaking, diversely endowed as it is, provides the proper vehicle for human activity and that another civilisation could fall short of that requirement.

Of the charge that European civilisation has been a disaster to other cultures we may at least remark this, that it has had the energy to diffuse itself, unlike, for instance, that of China or the Aztecs. And in diffusing itself it has not been merely destructive, as, for instance, Mohammedan civilisation was so often. European civilisation has at least been supremely dynamic, and destruction has been only incidental to an immense activity.

It is towards this dynamism and St Thomas's relation therewith that I particularly wish to direct your minds. It is true that in St Thomas's day the Crusades had already shown a first awakening of the merit of European enterprise, but the picture of the medieval world as a whole is that of Chesterton's 'little isle of Athelney', a highly coloured world of Pope and Emperor, King and Primate, Duke and Archbishop, Count and Bishop, castle, cathedral and monastery, ascending and descending in the nicely ordered scales of the ecclesiastical and feudal hierarchy. It was all, in theory anyway, as closely knit and architectonic as the *Summa* of St Thomas or the cathedral at Amiens. It was a tight little civilisation, far more menaced than menacing, assailed by the Tartars in St Thomas's own time, its inland sea dominated by the Saracens, its internal economy ravaged by plague and famine. I see it as a walled city, such as one finds depicted in *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, crenellated and fortified and picturesque, but vulnerable and

often gravely assaulted. Marco Polo, in that same epoch, found the cities of Cathay twelve times larger than Venice, much the greatest city of the West, and the apparatus of Chinese life immensely more developed than that of Europe. Visitors from the Crusading forces to Byzantium found a city rich in mechanical marvels, in science, art and literature, which made them look like barbarians. Yet today China stands almost where she did in the days of Marco Polo, and Istanbul has for long been a by-word for inefficiency and decay. Western Europe has reached out to find her counterparts in Australasia, Africa, America and Asia, and it is her mechanical genius that has been the instrument of her expansion.

It is, of course, a ludicrous over-simplification to say that Europe, which in St Thomas's day thought but did not act, now acts without thinking. No action without a preconception is as true now as it was then and it is no more than a jest to say, for instance, that the British Empire was founded in a fit of absence of mind. It was from no absence of mind that the Industrial Revolution took place, and that Revolution, with its preceding and consequent stages, is the heart of the European complex of today. Clearly what has changed is that nowadays nearly all thought is directed to immediate material objects of action. And what a remarkable change it is, and how difficult to explain. Why did printing and machinery and ocean voyages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the siege-train and experimental sciences, all come so closely together in time and space? Why was it that the Western mind, hitherto so deductive, so defensive, suddenly became inductive and expansive, critical and aggressive, flung aside its carefully built up philosophy and theology, and launched upon those techniques of production and inventiveness that have led European man within measurable distance of being able to dissolve the great globe itself? Why did all this happen in Europe and nowhere else? Why should the Western world and its offshoots alone have developed the telescope and the microscope, astronomy and psychology, atomic physics and heavy industry? What is the connection between the Europe of St Thomas and that of Einstein and Vickers Armstrong? This seems to me to be one of the most fascinating problems of history and yet one of the hardest to answer.

None the less it is a problem to be faced and examined, for upon it will depend the attitude of the Thomist to the world in which he lives. Let us examine the historical sequence a little more closely. There are, you know, some human arts and activities which seem to spring fully grown from the matrix of creation. The science of logic, for instance, seems to have been a spontaneous development of Aristotle's; the Greeks achieved a sense of propor-

tion at an astonishingly early period, mathematical formulae of extraordinary complexity seem to have flowed from Newton and Descartes almost simultaneously, the art of Gothic architecture flared up and remained poised in an everlasting beauty of conflicting forces within a few decades. There is in these things no slow development from perfection to perfection; their gestation is accelerated, as it were, to flash-point. And there is something of the same quality in the work of St Thomas Aquinas. *Ipse dixit et facta sunt*. He far outshines his predecessors and contemporaries in clarity of arrangement and intense concentration of argument. His achievement, given the materials available to his mind, could not be improved upon, humanly speaking. Once he had done his work, weaving into his text the whole of the knowledge available to his world, there could only remain a task of exposition and elucidation. No one, working on the same material, was going to produce a *Summa* as good as his; it was almost inconceivable that another arrangement could be excogitated. It was certain that no one could outdo him in detailed argument. The potentialities were exhausted, the technique perfected, almost as soon as they had come to light. A kind of discouraged exhaustion sinks upon the European mind. The scholastic of the later Middle Ages was rather like a modern conservative dully repeating the dicta of Beaconsfield and Burke.

What the epoch of the Renaissance (which I still conceive to be with us) did was to provide an enormous and still-growing field of material for investigation as well as a dynamic force which drove men on to the task of mechanical and scientific development. The substitution of the Copernican for the Ptolemaic astronomy in itself demanded a completely new world view, a demand that was only belatedly fulfilled, while the multiplication of individual sciences or objects of research has been, to the ordinary mind, bewildering. The bibliography of a tiny subsection of entomology now fills, in the archives of Geneva, a volume of some thousand pages alone. The examinations of archaeologists, anthropologists and psychologists suggest fascinating new fields within the confines of the political animal himself, whilst the physicists and mathematicians are describing life, matter and time in terms which demand revolutions in thought no smaller than the Copernican. It was not only that Columbus penetrated the oceans and the continents; not only that European man showed a hitherto unsuspected talent for the gadget, of which the electronic brain is only the most remarkable; it was and is that the bases of many of our preconceptions have been shown to be false. Not in the strict metaphysical and theological order of course, but the humility of the true scientist in face of the enormous task of assimilating our new materials

of knowledge is not inappropriate to the modern Thomist or theologian who has to strive to direct the activities of man to his last end.

And there is the trouble. The founding of the British Empire could not be a 'last end', though some people seemed to think that it was. Nor is the perfection of the magneto or the resolution of the mysteries of the enclitic *de*. But man's mind is limited in its capacity and it does appear that nowadays men are too concerned with the immediate object of their researches to consider the ultimate end of those researches and of all human life. Brains produce machines to do the work of brains.

The picture of modern Europe is, then, one of a culture that has laid overwhelming emphasis upon one of its three main elements, with the result that the other two lie in abeyance. The doctrine of the Word made Flesh or the objectivity of knowledge are subjects to which a few of the best minds direct their thoughts while far more are concerned with engines and negotiations, buying and selling, practical affairs. Rome has triumphed over Greece and Palestine, Galileo over Paul and Socrates. Could anything have been done to arrest this process? Should it have been done? If the Inquisition had been organised more efficiently, would the world have been a better place to live in? I remember during the war a Catholic Professor in Oxford standing in his garden and saying to his son as he watched the bombers going over to Germany: 'Never forget, my son, that those are the real enemy'. He meant, I suppose, that mechanism and industry were the twin enemies that led us so far from the purity of the medieval scene. Well, it is true that the burgeoning of special techniques has obscured for many the great fundamental issues of life and death. But can we reject or even decry them for that reason? Does not St Thomas say that the mind is 'quodammodo omnia'? And if it is orientated to reality, not only passively but actively, then surely if these things were in potency to being invented the mind was only doing its duty in inventing them? It is true that there was a tree from which Adam and Eve were forbidden to pluck, but does a flaming sword stand before the spinning jenny? Is 'thus far and no further' written upon the doors of the research laboratory? Was it ever graven in stone 'thou shalt not invent the gramophone'? If not, then the mind of man had a right to invent these things; it may be, even a duty. They are part of the content of reality to which his mind is connatural. He may have lost sight of ultimate ends in pursuing immediate ones, but there is nothing wrong, essentially, in these modern marvels that too greatly absorb him.

If these things are good in themselves, then why has European



man made such a hash of things with them? If we were to put ourselves under the guidance of St Thomas again, should we not find all falling into order? How agreeable it would be if Mr Bevin and Mr Bevan would advance through a study of Sertillanges, Gilson and Maritain to the study of the Holy Doctor himself. Well, why don't they? The answer to that question may lead us far.

From the Baptist chapels where Messrs Bevin and Bevan were brought up in their youth the road leads back through Wesley to the Established Church of the 18th century, and thence to the Reformation, Cranmer, Henry VIII and all that. Mr Bevin and Mr Bevan have probably never heard of St Thomas. I never heard of him myself until I was twenty-one. I never heard of him because the iron curtain of the Reformation stood between us. What had the Reformation to do with St Thomas? And, granted his supreme intellectual achievement, his magnificent exposition of and apologia for the Faith, how is it that the Reformation ever happened? After all, a full 250 years elapsed between Aquinas and Luther. Surely the Church had time to consolidate her position. She could hardly complain of being left unprepared.

There was some intellectual virus in European Catholic society during those 250 years which has, I fancy, never been properly detected. Hilaire Belloc, of course, ascribes the mental decay and weariness of the end of the Middle Ages to the Black Death, but it seems to me that some other factor is necessary to account for that almost mortal weariness of the spirit. For the fact is that the Church lost the battle of the Reformation because her leaders were not up to the calibre of St Thomas either in intelligence or sanctity; whilst the Reformers rejected the Church, paradoxically enough, because she was too Thomist. Luther explicitly refers to this point, denouncing the Church as Aristotelian. This odd fact is, I think, explicable only in the following way. The definition of man as a political or rational animal may be an adequate one but within those terms much else lies implicit, and among them is that man is a cultural animal. 'Whenever I hear the word culture', said Reichsmarschall Goering, 'I take out my revolver.' Without going all the way with the late gentleman, I would beg to be excused (for lack of space) from giving a comprehensive definition of the word 'culture' apart from saying that it has to do with the human habit of making patterns. Now the pattern-making habit of man is intensely strong, so strong that, for example, if we were going to meet again in this room for another session or so, it is a safe bet that 80 per cent of my hearers would seek out the seats which they had occupied before. The same tendency produced the two-party system in English politics. Clearly, of pattern-makers St

Thomas is, in the intellectual order, a supreme example, and his *Summa* became for the later Middle Ages a cultural Shekinah, a holy of holies, as unalterable a mould of theology and thought in general as the Pandects of Justinian in the Byzantine world or the Analects of Confucius in the Chinese. Let me say at once that they deserved the greatest reverence; they are a supreme work of the human intelligence. But let me recall six of the most pregnant words St Thomas ever wrote:—

*Et antiquum documentum*

*Novo cedat ritui.*

St Thomas wrote a life into the *Summa*. It was never intended by him that his work should be graven in stone, but that it should be a fountain of intellectual vitality, refreshing souls to send them springing towards the light and life of God. How easy it is to the hide-bound mind to interpret his supreme philosophical examination of the nature of God as a bit of pure abstraction, a *via negativa* leading to a static precension from all individuality. And yet his essential idea of the deity in the philosophical sphere is one of *pure act*,

in which these flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

His supreme Being is a furnace of light, warmth and love; his dissection of the subsistent relations in the Trinity does not obscure for a moment the Fatherhood of the first Person, the brotherhood of the Second, the friendship of the Third. And his conception of the fountain of all being is harmonious with his intellectual method, which for all its conciseness and strictness is a living mode of thought, the human faculties moving untrammelled about their highest object in utter freedom. The mind is *quodammodo omnia*.

But this expression of a living, a thinking personality, became something unalterable, a corpus of doctrine to be accepted by the faithful and in regard to which their sole duty was one of exposition and interpretation. He did his work so supremely well that his successors despaired of development. There is a tedious amount of mere argumentation in the later Middle Ages. The Church, which for St Thomas was the living expression of the Incarnate Word, could appear to an impatient spirit in the 16th century as Thomist or Aristotelian, rather than Christian. The intellectual precision of St Thomas might appear to an impatient observer such as Luther to be the essence of his work, whereas really that precision was only a means to obtain the true object. The subtlety of the *Quinque Viae*, for instance, was of no importance to St Thomas compared to the nature of the Godhead revealed by them, and still less compared to the manifold ways in which that Godhead sent down Grace upon mankind. Intellectual competence could never be for

him a substitute for the supernatural life of the soul. None the less, in the early 16th century Tetzels arguments for the Indulgences that caused Luther's outbreak could seem typical of the mind of contemporary churchmen. Now Tetzels was a Dominican.

It was perhaps not surprising, though it was certainly disastrous, that Luther, in his impatience with this kind of argumentation, threw out the baby with the bathwater, and rejected the validity of human reason altogether, just as, to all appearances, he denied the efficacy of the Incarnation. One could almost say a more un-Thomist mind never existed. From his emotional intuitions sprang a host of appalling consequences, all of which can be traced back to his failure in the supernatural sphere to appreciate the meaning of the *Verbum Caro Factum*, and in the natural to see the mind's connaturality with truth. It is, I think, impossible to see how the Church could have found common ground to argue with him. The very reasonableness of the formulae enounced at Trent would have been anathema to him; it was reason which he disliked so much. If ever the schism was to be removed, it was not to be there and then, given the state of mind of Luther and his followers. The Church restated her position uncompromisingly and in the clearest of terms, a clarity in itself entirely uncongenial to Lutheranism, and then waited patiently on the Lord.

This patience is, I believe, about to be rewarded. Truth will out and error will breed self-annihilating contradictions. Luther's Justification by Faith alone, exaltation of the Bible above the Church, and rejection of that visible Church, have produced their antitheses in Protestant good works, the Higher Criticism and the God-state. Nor is there a conceivable synthesis between those theses and their present contradictories. Luther's followers, at Amsterdam and elsewhere, are contemplating with dismay the result of private judgment, and are crying out for unity, for union. The argument that was impossible in the 16th century may become possible in the 20th. So, too, with the Renaissance and its brood of particular sciences, its preoccupation with the material, measurable world. The measurements begin to reveal ultimate immeasurables, mysteries; the modern scientist finds it hard to be a pure materialist. Appalled, too, by the ramifications of these special sciences, and by the effects of mere specialisation upon the mind of man, the scientist is crying out for a humane education to correct these latter effects, and for a co-ordinating science to synthesise his mass of particular conclusions. As yet few scientists realise that they are reaching out towards Aristotle and to Aquinas eventually, for what can a co-ordinating science be but a theology? It was impossible to see this development in the 16th century, but I believe that today the tide

is moving back from those far off beaches where Reformation and Renaissance alike have stranded.

Meanwhile, however, Thomism fell into a kind of abeyance, perhaps a providential one, until it should emerge once more to prepare the way for the reintegration of all things in Christ which is beginning to appear on the horizon. Descartes and his successors had first to appear, and fulfil their demonstrations of inadequacy, until Leo XIII summoned the Catholic world to restore the vigour and prestige of Thomism. This particular glory of a great pontificate has already had immense fruit, not only in ecclesiastical studies but in the Catholic world as a whole. Lay Aquinas societies have sprung up throughout the Church, and the names of Maritain and Gilson are inseparable from the study of modern Thomist thought. Leo elevated Thomism to its proper level just at the moment when the forces inimical to the Church reached the term of their disintegration. Protestantism had reached its maximum of separatism; Renaissance science had just produced the complete materialist doctrine of evolution; and finally the very fabric of Western civilisation was seen to be breaking asunder from its denial of the human reason. The marvellous society which had conquered the world fell a prey to man who had deliberately denied the objectivity of truth, and the very efficacy of its mechanical marvels became the measure of its peril.

It is indeed to my mind from this final denial of man's truth-telling capacity that the Thomist opportunity will spring. What do we mean nowadays by speaking of the Western transition, or European thought? The phrase has been ventilated recently in connection with the project of Western Union, and Mr Bevin has even gone so far as to describe Western society as a thing based upon spiritual principles. What principles? we have a right to demand, we who belong to a spiritual society which has proclaimed a lasting law for man's behaviour for so many centuries. Well, clearly, so far as Mr Bevin is concerned, they will be natural, not supernatural spiritual tenets. Despite the aberrations of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hume, Kant and Hegel, the Western world still has a leaning towards objective truth, to the valid principles of reasoning, to the resolute confrontation of reality, and this leaning has been increased in recent years by the behaviour of those who have abandoned those principles and have, none the less, attained great power in their respective societies. Comparatively few men, the inner cabinets of a handful of states, have the heartbreaking responsibility of keeping European society away from chaos, and these men are utterly dependent in their tasks upon being provided

with accurate information on the real state of affairs. If they do not receive this accurate, objective information, they and their cause are lost. It has been a terrible shock to these men, whom the experience of affairs has educated, to find during the last 25 years that their counterparts in various great states, Russia, Italy, Germany and Japan, have been so blinded by their ideologies that they have refused to face facts, have disgraced those conscientious enough to tell them the truth, and have consequently brought destruction and chaos upon a world. It had scarcely occurred to these men that the Chancellor of the Reich, the master of the Kremlin, could be so blind to the appalling nature of their responsibilities, so besotted with an idea that they could create a system in which no one would dare tell them the truth. Yet the Ciano and Goebbels diaries have revealed this hideous defect behind the Nazi and Fascist façade, and the recent rejection of an objective biology by the Politburo shows that it is eating like a cancer at the life of the Soviets. The statesmen of Western Europe are faced with the necessity of recognising that the fundamental principle upon which they rely, the rendering of accurate information, can be denied by an ideology, a philosophy. They are therefore becoming vaguely aware that accurate information itself depends upon a philosophy and are wondering what that philosophy is. The figure of Aristotle stands once more before them and behind him mightier figures yet, St Thomas, Abraham and the God of Abraham. Chaos itself has created hope.

This is where Aquinas Societies of laymen can especially help the masters of modern Europe. There is a grave disability attendant on the clerical state at the moment. Never; perhaps, has the influence of the clergy on the world as a whole been less than it is today. Tied up in our queer clothes and our specialised vocabulary, we are disregarded by the average citizen of Europe. But when a man in an ordinary collar, using ordinary, or even attractive language, speaks to the modern world, it will listen. The statesmen themselves will one day listen to a lay Thomist.

It is, however, the language in which he presents Thomism and the ambit of his thought which will be the decisive factors in the effectiveness in his presentation. In a recent article in *Dominican Studies* Mgr Davies has laid particular emphasis upon the first point, stressing the influence Newman has had from the literary felicity of his style and his employment of non-technical language, always the test as to whether the matter of the technique has been absorbed or no. The clergy are so often concerned with the application of philosophy to theology that they can only use it

in that connection, to express, for instance, the doctrines of the Blessed Sacrament or the Trinity. It is necessary for the lay exponent to give that philosophy a far wider application, to increase the ambit of Thomist thought. It is idle to assert that the special sciences, simply because they are special, have nothing to do with a Catholic synthesis that can only move upon an abstract plane. All knowledge must be our province if we are to maintain that Grace completes nature, that the mind of man is connatural with truth. Still more must we remember that certain modern disciplines are altering our conception of reality in a way that affects religion. The Word became flesh; it is man that our Lord came to save, and we have a great deal to learn about the nature of man. Much is being taught us by anthropology; Freud has taught us a good deal about subconscious motivation. I believe we shall know much more about man when the school of Jung is able to advance beyond its present tentative conclusions. All this must have some effect at least upon the ways in which we state our moral theology. The conclusions of the physicists upon the nature of the physical world do not, of course, impinge upon such metaphysical categories as matter and form, act and potency, substance and accident; but they do open up valuable lines of approach to the arguments on creation and the dependence of creatures upon God. Our knowledge of the mystery of sex has greatly increased during the last forty years. At the moment, it would appear impossible for one man, or even a group, to synthesise all these achievements of modern investigation and to harmonise them with the tradition of St Thomas. But the desire to do so is growing, even in unlikely quarters. When the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Educational Conference came over to London just after the war, its main proposals were not towards the elaboration of educational equipment but towards the creation of a directive science, in effect, a new theology. We would maintain, of course, that no new theology was necessary, but we should at least imitate the intellectual altitude of St Thomas as he sought truth even among the Arabs and the Manichees. We can hardly imagine St Thomas, if he lived today, failing to take the liveliest interest in every real discovery, his mind reaching out to grasp these new evidences of the glory of the Creator.

This is, I think, the light that St Thomas continues to cast upon Europe, the perpetual example of a mind totally open to reality. It has risen by contemplation to God and then, motivated by charity, looks out upon the world and sees that it is good. It was with a robust and calm mind that St Thomas looked out upon the pagan world, a mind secure in its inner fortress of the Faith,

in its conviction that the gates of hell should not prevail against the works of the Almighty.

Yet by God's death the stars shall stand  
And the small apples grow.

'All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well', says Juliana of Norwich. It is with this tremendous conviction that the Thomist should look out on the European world of today, widely diffused as it is, rachitically convulsed as it may be. There is truth to be found throughout the whole universe of being, truth in Hegel, in Darwin and in Bernard Shaw, charm he never so wisely. There is even some truth in Hitlerism. And if we can find truth, we should act upon that assumption. It was not to leave men upon a dead-centre of hesitancy, self distrust and inaction that the Word became Flesh, that the Incarnate Word sprang naked from the tomb, that the Spirit of Love filled the Apostles with all manner of tongues. 'Parthians, Medes and Elamites, we do hear them tell in our own language the wonderful works of God.' Tell them in their own language and above all, do them. We should look at our Western world with quiet confidence, shattered as it is and feebly clutching at the controls of fantastic machines, recognising in every tiny piece of reconstruction, every hairsbreadth escape from destruction and chaos an object of our Christian love and solicitude.

Yea, on the shores of darkness there is light.

We can, I believe, begin to see the providential disposition behind the epoch of Reformation and Renaissance. Thomism lay in abeyance from Trent until the time of Leo. Meanwhile the world that had abandoned reason and theology pursued its ever swifter course towards the denial of man and of God. Now it stands aghast and looks for reintegration.

And precipices show untrodden green.

The mind of St Thomas can be our guide in this work of reintegration. Where even the most particularised objective truth lies, or any action true to the law of God, there is our object, the object of the mind and of charity, part of the creation of being, of that which God has made. Because God made it, Aquinas looked out over the whole of his world, for it was good. We cannot have a lesser conspectus than his. European civilisation is world-wide and its spirit must again be the search for objective truth and its synthesis. That was the realm in which St Thomas ranged with his imperial mind. That was his temple. 'Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.'

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