

The difficulties and bewilderments of our lives provide occasion enough for a special number on the foundations of morality. These are, however, rather symptoms of a more deep-seated sense of loss of personal and collective direction and identity. This is why we concentrate on principles rather than on recipes. Similarly, we make this a candidly theological enterprise, according to Manning's insight that all conflict is at bottom theological.

So, on one level, our scheme is simple enough. The etching by Rembrandt symbolizes the initiating impulse of any Christian morality: the preaching of the Father's saving love for men by the Son of Man. From there we proceed naturally to the first series of pre-gospel formulations of the tradition flowing from Jesus as made by St Paul for his communities. And one interest of Fr Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's exposition is that it is precisely by being true to his task as exegete of the particularities of St Paul's preaching that he leaves open the possibility, the necessity even, of a further re-crystallization of the essential message. So the way is pointed forward to the further 'de-mythologization' and re-interpretation of this message at a classical moment of Christian culture by St Thomas. This reformulation is, however, in its own turn subject to the same law of dissolution and recrystallization. And so we come to the three articles which attempt to interpret our *contemporary* experience from within in such a way as to find in it again and re-express in its terms the image of the author of the tradition.

In this perspective, Fr Fergus Kerr's article evokes an alternative to all that is crass, positivistic, unconsciously aggressive and repressive in the Skinner box of our established society, all the built-in 'hard will'—and on the Left as well as on the Right. But, as he says, any on-going reconstruction of an alternative is both 'nuclear and global'; and the two following articles focus on the two different emphases of this polarity. Père Pohier suggests that the classical notion of virtue when properly understood in terms of learning process unexpectedly meets a prime exigency of our psychological sciences. Such a learning process has, of course, a momentum of its own, working outwards 'among a *group* of people, or many people—if possible, all the people of the world'. And so the baton is relayed to Dom Helder Camara to show up once again the global consequences of the oppressions inherent in our present way of conducting society—'What *we* can do to solve the problems of the Third World

is to reform *our own society*' ('Liberation and Contemplativity').

Our undertaking is, therefore, thoroughly theological not only in its content but in its method. And it is here that at a deeper level some of the problems inherent in this approach must be acknowledged. For all its apparent simplicity, the scheme outlined implicitly enacts certain basic options and a certain conception of man.

As a visual rather than a verbal statement, the introductory Rembrandt etching not merely symbolizes what the Council of Trent called the 'purity of the Gospel . . . first proclaimed by Our Lord Jesus Christ Son of God by his own mouth, and then ordered to be preached to the whole creation by his Apostles as the fount of all saving truth and morality' (DS 1501); it also symbolizes the antinomy to, as well as the assonance with, the formulation of this content in 'the scriptures and non-written traditions' (*ibid.*), and so raises the same problem of substance as is raised in turn by other re-formulations of this Gospel message: the problem of the interior relationship between these various versions of the Gospel.

Now, we are justly warned against archaeologizing or even mere adaptation. But we need not therefore over-react and behave as if every generation had to start from scratch. In principle, there is a middle way, which can be variously expressed, for instance, in terms of the extended metaphor of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: that of projection taken in the sense of projective geometry. For the sense is that just as a basic shape when projected on to different planes from some centre of light casts shadows of varying sizes which yet retain mathematically determinable relationships, so in any living process of tradition there can be *both* identity *and* transformation.

Such a notion, however, in turn implies a certain conception of man: man is not merely culture-bound but transcendent. Even more importantly, he is as such the subject of a peculiar and paradoxical alchemy according to which it is precisely through being released *into* his historicity that he is released *for* his specifically transcending capacity to re-historicize anew. For we have learned again since Descartes from Husserl that every act of thinking (*Cogito*) is a thinking of something (*Cogito aliquid*). By the same token, a man's potentialities are released, exercised, realized and revealed in particular learned acts, so that it is through what a man receives from others and so from the past that he is schooled for personally social creativity in the present. The practice of theology therefore exhibits the same pattern, in so far as there is here, too, a socially received past, in the shape of the canonical Scriptures and privileged theologies which nevertheless remain rehearsals for the essential creative project of the present.

To come clean and to articulate options like this is to invite disagreement as well as assent. But at least the debate is opened frankly. For the rest the success or otherwise of our enterprise is left to the judgment of our gentle readers. P.L.