

I have been back to Ushaw only once, on my way to preach in a Newcastle church. I was received with generous hospitality and in a most friendly spirit. It was long before Vatican II, but some reforms had been introduced and anyway, at its worst Ushaw always had on its staff men of culture, open-minded and quick to consider the interests of their guests. But I could never have faced a "Grand Week", when the men of my own year would turn up *en masse* and remind me too vividly of that September day in 1926 when I stood outside those grim walls and decided – like Jacob for Rachel – that I must endure the seven years for the sake of the vocation which I hoped I had found.

The Funeral as a Work of Art

Roger Grainger

In the attempt to give order to a diffuse and contradictory experience each individual is an artist, as he or she proposes an ideal solution for a particular difficulty and directs every effort towards achieving the closest practicable approximation to such a solution. Looked at in this way, it might be said that the action of the human mind is inevitably directly towards a synthesis of content and form. Society itself – the arrangements men make in order to live together in mutual security and provide for their well-being in organised interchange – could be considered to be a work of functional art, designed to solve problems and overcome difficulties encountered in living.

The greatest difficulty, the most intractable problem which faces mankind is the problem of death. To say that we are deeply pre-occupied with the fact of our own mortality is not to say, of course, that death occupies the forefront of our conscious awareness all the time. On the contrary, our awareness of the certainty of our eventual death and the accompanying knowledge of the vulnerability of our bodies, a vulnerability which may at any time prove fatal, forms a kind of unacknowledged background to all our thinking, a mental and emotional *sitz-im-leben* which has lost all precise definition because of its sheer familiarity as an idea. In fact, we might turn inside out the arguments of the common language philosophers, who hold that death cannot be thought about because it has never been experienced as a fact of life, by saying, with Heidegger that we cannot contemplate our own mortality because we are unable to distinguish the thought of death from all our other judgments and attitudes, which can only exist as humanly meaningful

propositions in the context of finitude and limitation. Life exists in the context of death, human meaning in the presence of its own extinction. We feel that death is a subject which is 'too big to think about', because death necessarily *includes* the thought about death. Like divinity, it escapes us as a precise concept. And so death deserves and demands symbolism. The funeral rite is man's resolution of the imagery of death into the form of conscious art.

Having made this claim a little time must be spent in justifying it, for its centrality to our argument demands that it should be taken seriously. First of all, we must consider the religious significance of such an approach. How can aesthetics contribute to an understanding of the religious awareness of society? The art-form employed in the rite is the acted scenario. This is the dramatic form given to a poetic metaphor for an existential encounter which is apprehended as ultimately significant because of its ability to express the nature of a fundamental relationship. The story of Adam and Eve, for instance, is a kind of drama about the relationship between God and creation, and illustrates the specific terms of that relationship. In many cultures throughout the world such a 'primal scenario' is given acted form whenever the intention is to refer to ultimate matters concerning the identity of the race as a whole or of individual members of the race. In this way the contingent events of everyday life are brought into relation with a timeless truth, an eternal, changeless, reality.

As an art-form, religious ritual communicates with us in the way in which a work of art communicates: that is, by inviting a specific kind of question, to which it provides its own kind of answer. The questions and answers of art are about relationship. In specific terms they are about the relationship between experience and aspiration, the world as everyday reality and the world as ideal truth. In the context of its use in religious ritual, art is clearly revealed as the language of aspiration, of the sensibility which reaches out towards the thing that is not itself, but does so without losing sight of its own human limitation. Artistic ritual involves spectator and artist alike, making an artist of the spectator by drawing him into a shared experience of discovery. Such an artistic experience preserves art's symbolism, its identity as a reminder about perfection rather than an example of perfection itself; for a true work of art has no independent perfection, but welcomes us into relationship with the perfection that inspires it. This, of course, is part of the creative process itself, for the action of giving a truthful shape to what was meaningless and irrelevant is always an on-going one. The artist, whether he be sculptor, philosopher or natural scientist, cannot abide in his own productions, but continues always to search, always to aspire.

It could be said that art provides religion with the most appro-

prate of all languages, because of its ability to communicate a message about persons in relationship without reducing them in any way. Spoken and written language may do this for thoughts. Only art can do it for *presences*. Thus art encourages us to regard authentic human existence as a free coming-together of selves, and human perfection as the unfettered enjoyment of interpersonal love, love which can only exist in freedom. The personages of the rite remain separate. They are not merged together so as to lose their unique individual outline, but are engaged in *being in respect of* one another. The symbol itself is an artefact, but one which possesses a certain special significance. It is a thing, but a thing with metaphysical implications. Here, in the rite, men and women draw close in aspiration to the perfection which individuates and unites. The play of relationship is acted out, its symbolism spreading outwards to include within its scope the men and women involved in the interchange of the dance, the ground where the dance takes place, the dance itself and the emblem of the dance. Concretion itself is here shown as a kind of awareness. What seems to be a total dichotomy, a simple and final contradiction – God versus man, the ideal as opposed to the real – is revealed as a mystery of potential unity. In this way, men and women use the imagery of art to express an awareness of the need for union and wholeness in situations of conflict, and division, and their aspiration to a state of being in which such conflicts and divisions are finally resolved. The embodiment of the idea of change in a ritual scenario adds to the clarity – the tangibility – of its presentation, as a real event, something which takes place in life and does not simply remain an idea, an abstract concept.

In funeral rites throughout the world, the ritual scenario counters psychological denial of the factual nature of death as social reality. On the one hand, the use of real actors, the personages of the rite, helps to bring home the situation of those who are immediately involved in critical changes of social status and personal experience. On the other hand, the actual shape of the rite, the order in which its successive actions takes place, is of fundamental importance for its practical value, its social function as an exposition of the facts about human transformation and experiential change. The rite brings its own unique message about life and death as a cosmic progress to the ceremonial recognition of a particular person's death. We should not underestimate the value of this contribution as a means of establishing the honesty of the proceedings: for whereas theology has an effect, however unintentional, of seeming to reduce death by 'arguing it away' the ritual scenario carries the bereaved into an authentic experience of dying and renewal. The message about death's finality is proclaimed in the language of living human relationship. A living symbolism em-

bodies and transmits the crippling impact of loss and death not as an abstract proposition but as a present human experience. The presences of the rite impose the awareness of an inescapable absence – an absence which cannot be denied, which must be *lived*. Whatever its theological plot the funeral action sustains life because it subsists in living human behaviour. The funeral speaks of death in the language of life – not the least painful way of communicating ideas, but the only practical one. Quite apart from any theological comfort which they may have to offer, funerals are rendered feasible by their fundamental human truthfulness about the immediate situation.

At the same time, art holds a prospective power which is able to distance us from an immediate world of harsh and uncompromising alternatives by providing a ‘time-out-of-time’ in which we may look beyond our present position and call upon a wider truth. The artefact provides us with an alternative reality: in it we find an escape from the sheer pressure of time and events, from the limitations of our awareness to the present moment and the pressure of decisions about the future. Above all, we are powerfully delivered, through our imagination, from our terror of situations and states of being which we have not yet experienced for ourselves, our apprehensions about the existentially unknown. Left to itself, our imagination does all it can to encourage these terrors. Embodied in the rite, however, it may find a positive purpose in expressing our religious hope in a way which is creative and inspiring.

A greater distance and a more profound involvement. Because it is a work of art, the rite encompasses both things at once. Because of the existential dynamism described by Martin Buber,¹ according to which Thou becomes It only in order to become Thou again, this artistic movement of withdrawal reveals itself, as a way of achieving an even closer identification with the reality of our human situation. Through art we escape only in order to become more completely committed to the facts of our situation. This, I believe is what Buber means when he speaks of “the polar unity of the scenic event”: we live in the space between a symbolised perfection, which is the artistic nature of the rite, and our own contingent and limited actuality. We may not attain the wholeness whose image we demonstrate within the special circumstances of the rite, for the rite itself is an empirically contrived world, purposely limited in scope in order to achieve unity and concentration of experience. Here, man focuses his being upon a point in order to be truly present in it – memory, imagination and will attend the single purpose of proclaiming one single well-defined corporate message about life and death. The rite remains the symbol of an ideal life, and not that life itself.

And yet, because of this distance between aspiration and actuality our incorporation within the ideal world to which we reach out is the more whole-hearted, as we 'leap the gap' which the symbol makes for us and share in its resolution of an essential difference. The symbol points us towards the perfection of all meeting. It is distance that makes it so, for it is distance which prevents confusion and permits relationship. There is no question of any kind of subjugation of the ideal by the limited and finite — only of a relation of otherness by which the self reaches out to what is not itself, and in doing so, discovers its true identity in acknowledging its boundaries, and proclaiming the urgency of its need for transformations which are real and not contrived.

1 Martin Buber: 'The Space Problem of the Stage', in *Pointing the Way*, RKP 1957.

A Note On Aquinas

And Ordination Of Women

Jeremy Miller O. P.

On 20 January 1977 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," reaffirming the Catholic position barring women from priestly ordination. The issue is complex and thorny. The major argument of the Declaration was that the restriction is founded on an "unbroken tradition" possessing a "normative character". Later in the Declaration other arguments from fittingness, described as being in themselves non-demonstrative are brought forth.

One set of these arguments developed the sacramental idea of natural resemblance, listing in support various theologians, among whom was Thomas Aquinas. Because this latter part of the Declaration, with its attendant idea of *maleness* as a prerequisite for priestly ordination, attracted so much interchange in newspapers and periodicals, it behooves us to take a more careful look at the position of Aquinas referred to by the Declaration. While it is our opinion that the real strength of the Declaration hinges on the idea