

THE BIRTH OF PURGATORY by Jacques Le Goff (Translated by A. Goldhammer) *Scolar Press* London 1984 pp. ix + 430 £25.60.

Like a number of other modern French thinkers, and particularly the *Annales* group to which he belongs, Le Goff has the gift of releasing the past with challenging energy. What went largely unquestioned is made problematical, what was unnoticed becomes important. From Michelet, Le Goff learnt to value the imagination and from attending Lombard's lectures he got a taste for 'total history', the interpretation of material civilization and culture. His attention has now turned to the birth of purgatory. In essence, it was not until the 12th century that 'purgatory' began to figure extensively in the christian world-view and practice; purgatory, that is, as a fairly definite sphere, increasingly elaborated on in detail by theologians and others, meshed into a whole network of religious, social and economic structures. No one could deny all this. The puzzle is how to explain the emergence of the full-blown purgatory of the later medievals as compared with the relatively vague beliefs of earlier centuries. If we have the theology of our way of life, then Le Goff's project could be summarised as the search for the way of life that went with medieval ideas of purgatory.

There are certain key elements to this thesis, beginning with the late appearance of the noun *purgatory* (in any language); this is given momentous significance. Use of the noun and the elaboration of purgatory are assigned to between 1170 and 1200, and located in the world of Parisian intellectuals and in Cistercian circles. Subsequently the friars gave great impetus to the popular acceptance of purgatory. As purgatory was thought to occupy an intermediate position, intermediate between heaven and hell and intermediate between the death of the individual and the Last Judgment, much scholarship and ingenuity are given over to accounting for this notion of 'intermediacy'. Le Goff explores a whole range of factors to plot the birth of purgatory, what made it thinkable and livable one might say. Ways of thinking and styles of imagination, cartography, mathematics, book-keeping, ideas about space and time in this world and in the next, systems for measuring sin and penance are all invoked, and never in isolation from changing conditions of life. Dyads gave way to triads, making room for purgatory. The essential background is sociological, based on the growth of urban centres and bourgeois groups. As these bourgeois groupings were diverse and in constant flux between the powerful and the weak, so there was found space in the next world for a mixed group in flux between heaven and hell.

Le Goff is not arguing that the bourgeoisie created purgatory. His point is that purgatory was one of a group of phenomena associated with the transformation of feudal christianity. He does, however, still cling to his earlier theory that by using purgatory to make the usurer escape damnation in hell, capitalism was facilitated. Salvation was now possible for the usurer, and for other socio-professional classes previously without hope. On a different front, Le Goff does acknowledge that statements about purgatory also came to be made under the pressure of polemic with dissenting/heretical groups and with the Greeks. The nascent purgatory could thus triumph in the 13th and 14th centuries, a triumph worked out in scholastic theology, the pastoral care of souls and even in poetry (Dante). There is much to stimulate and fascinate in this part of the argument.

Judging by the journals, since Le Goff's book appeared in French in 1981 the debate has indeed started. (Incidentally, there are some bad mistakes in the translation). It is impossible to respond to such a complex and many-sided thesis in a few lines, except to say that 'birth' is too strong a word for what was really one of the highest points of growth. But any Thomist will soon be alarmed by the way Aquinas is treated. Not enough texts are discussed, and the basic assessment seems flawed. It cannot be that for St Thomas purgatory did not occupy a very important place, and that he only dealt with the topic because it was obligatory, part of the syllabus, and not because it was a crucial issue. Near the end of his life we find St Thomas preaching in

Naples on the importance of aiding those in purgatory, and there is evidence that he believed his own sister had appeared to him from purgatory and asked for masses and prayers. Le Goff, of all people, would not want to ignore a theologian's practice.

In the end, even were Le Goff's study to turn out to be a work of inconclusive brilliance, there would still be much learning and *déjà* in it. There is also a remarkable degree of self-involvement for a scholarly author, of hesitation even, and an engaging humility before the elusive truth. Historians and believers could find *themselves* called in question, having to explain why purgatory has been erased from their map.

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IN VITRO VERITAS: MORE TRACTS FOR OUR TIMES. Edited by Tom Sutcliffe and Peter Moore. St. Mary's, Bourne Street, London, 1986, Pp. 101. £2.00.

That St. Mary's, Bourne Street can conjure up these ten essays is a sign that there is still plenty of life in the 'Catholic wing' of the Church of England. It cannot be reduced to the right-of-Archbishop-Lefebvre fantasies of William Oddie nor has it, in the main, succumbed to the militant tendencies of the Jubilee Group. Anglo-Catholicism is diversified. The version presented here is liberal and traditional, radical and thoughtful, critical yet spiritual. It has power and appeal. This was the Church T.S. Eliot and C.S. Lewis joined.

Perhaps the best exponent of the tradition is Andrew Louth, until recently chaplain of Worcester College. In 'The Mysterious Leap of Faith' he shows that Anglican theology has been at its best when it appealed to the Fathers, especially the Greek Fathers, 'not as a brake' but rather as a 'launching pad for speculative flights' (p. 87). In the same robust tradition Michael Moreton shows that Cranmer set himself against the Fathers in his rewriting of the eucharistic rite and that the modern revisions of that rite happily restore the Catholic and patristic doctrines of anamnesis, oblatio and epiclesis (p. 45).

The veteran Eric Marshall demolishes with some zest Edward Norman's 1979 Reith Lectures. Norman's reluctance, indeed refusal, to admit that the Church has anything positive to say about 'human rights' is attributed to a basic error: 'That is that the Incarnation was a passing episode and is not an abiding reality' (p. 13). All of which is splendid, cutting and worth saying.

Some of the contributions from lay people have less theological grounding. This is not an *a priori* judgement. Thus there is nothing wrong, and much that is perceptive, in Margaret Hewitt's account of Anglican hesitations on what to do about marriage breakdown. But she writes as a sociologist, and is facing a problem that no Church has so far 'solved'. Graham Turner of the despised *Sunday Telegraph* writes a piece called 'Why go to Church?' This clearly comes from a man who has sat in many awkward pews and had his Christian intelligence insulted time and time again. But what are we to make of Sara Maitland, whose book *A Map of the New Country—Women and Christianity* Tom Sutcliffe praises at length in his own contribution?

Sara Maitland opens the volume and gives it its unhappy title—a joke about *in vitro* fertilisation. She begins with a conventional enough statement about Galileo (though recent research has overturned it, and shown that it was his rejection of hylemorphism that 'could not be reconciled with Catholic teaching'). On this flimsy basis she paints a grim picture of a Church that persistently ignores the findings of modern knowledge 'from Marx's (and others) macrocosmic analyses, through anthropology and sociology, to Freud's (and others) intrapersonal investigations' (p. 2). If you've taken all that aboard, you get something called 'contemporary consciousness' which has this to say about Aquinas: 'Thomistic theology was based on a natural universe that no-one believes in any more: not just geo-centric, but anthropocentric, individualist and