

## CATHOLICS AND POLITICS

I WONDER that the Editor of BLACKFRIARS is not afraid that the formidable figure of St Thomas will appear to disturb his slumbers with reproof, for he set great store by accurate definition and precision of language. What accuracy or precision is there in the March editorial when the Editor writes: 'French Catholics crossing the Channel are amazed to find that while the numerical majority of Catholics vote Labour and consider themselves as leaning towards the Left, the Catholic voice in journalism, etc., is almost without exception "*true blue*" Conservative, and therefore still wholly immersed in the politics of a past age'. Really? 'Wholly immersed in the politics of a past age.' While he was writing that, I and my colleagues were preoccupied with that most immediate contemporary question, whether and how Europe can be saved, and restored, were writing about the Brussels Conference and the Atlantic Pact.

We might even claim to have shown a little prescience. In domestic politics, which were presumably more in your mind, so far from being immersed in the past, we are preoccupied with the future, with the later developments implicit in the present changes. Whether people agree with us or not, they must admit that we are preoccupied with the future, with the direction social change is taking and the direction we hold it should take. It would be a more substantial criticism to say that we are too far ahead for the public to follow us, that we have got up very early and we have gone out before the milkman, not that we have stayed out too late and come home with the milk. By definition the most vocal Catholics are those who write and edit the Catholic journals which appear most frequently and circulate most widely. The most widely read of all, *Universe*, does not figure in this discussion, for it does not consider it as part of its function to formulate general policies on public questions, other than those directly affecting the Church, where it is very vital and up to the minute. But what ineptitude to describe the editors of the *Catholic Times* and the *Catholic Herald* as 'true blue Conservatives', or so to label their views, views so clearly and trenchantly put forward. There are plenty of matters in which they reason differently from each other. But one of the things that they have in common is the immense difference between the Catholic sociology they expound and orthodox conservation. All I think BLACKFRIARS really means is that they are anti-Socialist. But that does not make them Conservative except in the eyes of the more hide-bound and less intelligent Socialists, or of foreigners.

So, too, when I went on to read in Dom Aelred Graham's article

a reference to the 'unimpeachable high Toryism' of *The Tablet* I wondered, not for the first time, why a man who writes so valuably on theology, because he writes so carefully and appreciates distinctions, should be content when he enters another field to use language so loosely. 'High Whiggery' would have done much better if he means the old high Toryism, long since vanished, which was in part the political expression of the National Church of England, and, in part, a creed of autocratic paternalism, far removed from our ideas. From the moment the Catholics began to reappear in English public life a century ago, they went much more with the Whigs, for the simple reason that they were a small dissident minority, still discriminated against, and the Whig tradition stood for the more open form of society. It was in that camp that *The Tablet* began in 1840. But I imagine Dom Aelred Graham means the Toryism of the present day; if so, I reply that I profoundly wish it were true that a great contemporary political party saw things as we see them but that, alas, no great party does. I think it is reasonable to have more hopes of the Conservative than of the Labour Party coming to understand and accept the Catholic social philosophy we try to expound, of the plural society and subsidiary function, and voluntary associations, of the family unit and of personal responsibility, of diffused ownership; this last item has, at length, reached the party programme. Is there any particular point in labelling this outlook and its practical applications as 'unimpeachable high Toryism'? Those who can distinguish between labels and ideas will not be impressed; nor will those who will stop to reflect and test Dom Aelred's generalisation about the Catholic journalist, whom he represents as going from a Catholic school via Oxford or Cambridge, where he is envisaged reading classics or history before setting up as a political journalist, when he bases himself on Burke. I read this and I think of my two brother editors of the *Catholic Times* and the *Catholic Herald*, both with the background of just those ecclesiastical studies, not neglecting first those philosophical studies whose deficiency Dom Aelred postulates. Then I think of the two directors of *The Tablet* who concern themselves with public questions and have made their impress in particular on our treatment of domestic issues. One is Mr Richard O'Sullivan, whose education was in Ireland and whose main studies are legal and preeminently concerned with the philosophy of law and with the social doctrines of the Church. The other is Mr Christopher Hollis, who was received after he had finished his school and college days. In all his twenty-odd volumes, many of them biographies, there is no Burke. Nearly all the Catholic laymen who write on

public questions are, in fact, converts. Since the historical training is declared by Dom Aelred to be one that has 'developed the memory rather than sharpened the intelligence' it is relevant to point out that neither of these pillars of *The Tablet*—pillars they are though the editorial responsibility is mine—had that historical formation at the university which so lamentably fails to sharpen the mind, as we are told.

This product of the English Catholic schools—'Downside, Stonyhurst, or even Ampleforth', to quote a cryptic phrase from Dom Aelred, is in this field a figment of his imagination; the person who can most nearly answer it is, I suppose, the individual writing these lines; there are various indications in Dom Aelred's article to make me think that if I did not exist, he would not have written what he did. Even if this is vanity on my part, the general issue remains so important and so interesting that I should like to make my comments on his views.

He seems to me, perhaps because he has been engaged in teaching, to make too much of school and college days and too little of the education a man gives himself or that his work gives him after that. He asks 'how effectively equipped for understanding the modern world' is his imaginary young Catholic at the end of school and college. The answer surely is that in most cases he has, at best, made a beginning. If I may speak for a moment of myself, my chief debt to Oxford is that under Joseph at New College—a great tutor he was, wholly concerned with precision of thought and statement—I really read both the *Ethics* and the *Politics* of Aristotle; it was a time when men could read the philosophical part of *Lit. Hum.* before the History School, a combination which, I believe, is not possible today, but should be. But Aristotle seems to me a much wiser man now than he did then, and when I left the University I was still a rather noisy and confident Liberal in English politics. It was some months spent travelling in Asia and the ten years spent as colonial editor and leader writer on *The Times* which are the more relevant background for the conclusions and outlook which I brought to *The Tablet*. The expression 'poor' immediately calls before my mind a Rangoon or Calcutta rickshaw coolie and not the English artisans, and in this I have learnt that I am an exception, even among Catholics whose obligations of charity are towards all men and not only to their fellow countrymen. No one could study the relation between Britain and the colonies over a period of years without coming to regard all the population of Great Britain as a privileged class or seeing the issue of social justice as most acute between whole communities. To study a number of

communities is to learn the capital importance of creating and sustaining a middle class. This is a momentary digression, relevant because Dom Aelred makes, it seems to me, far too little allowance for what a man learns after graduation or ordination, and I happen to be a case in point. I remember when I joined *The Times* in 1926, telling the editor I was not a Conservative. Dom Aelred writes of priests and their deductive habit of mind, without allowing for the way parish life, with its absorption in a succession of particular events, can correct a tendency to deductive pedantry. He allows also, I think, too little place for the value of serious reading, not undertaken to pass an examination. His priests, apparently, know no history and his laymen no philosophy or theology. It is a needlessly disheartening view, this suggestion that books, or personal intercourse of friends, or the activities of learned societies are of very little effect. If I do not quote St Thomas more often on my own subjects it is not because I do not know what he says. It is partly because so much of his political and social writing was in a very different context from our own, and because with non-Catholic readers the asset of showing for how long the Church has had articulated views is offset by the impression, which we can so easily give, that we use St Thomas instead of exercising our own intelligences on contemporary issues, invoking his authority and sheltering behind it, much as he begins his answers by referring to what the Scriptures have to say. But then he goes on to use his mind.

Dom Aelred is altogether too kind when he writes of a man like me being 'through no fault of his own unversed in the Church's theology and philosophy' and so 'having to find it at a less abstract level than St Thomas Aquinas'. If we were unversed it would be a grave fault: to study the original texts of Marx and Engels and Lenin so carefully and not to study the great Catholic texts and sources! On the tests for just wars, on trade and on town and country life, on civil government, I would find St Thomas more useful if he were more abstract and universal and less a man of his own time.

I wonder why Burke looms so largely in Dom Aelred's guesses at the sources of inspiration. Why Burke more than, say, de Tocqueville or Acton? First Burke is fathered on us, then Burke is accused of limitations and in particular of a 'vision in the past, neither deep nor broad, confined within the limits of nationality'. *The Tablet* is often thought too European and not national enough. Then it is said that, being Burke's disciples, we of course share his 'Narrowness and rigidity of outlook'. That Burke was narrowed

by his Protestantism I should agree: the Protestant view of the past is neither deep nor broad. But the Catholic view is; and it is a wholly illegitimate piece of legerdemain first to make up an intellectual pedigree and then to argue that the disciples are to be judged by the deficiencies to be found in the master so arbitrarily assigned to them.

Is it merely that Dom Aelred happened to have been reading the book he quotes by Mr John Bowle of Wadham and thought Mr Bowle's criticism of Burke was apt for his own critical purpose? To me it does not seem apt because the other limitations found in Burke, his imperviousness to the new world of industrial revolution, are the exact opposite of the criticism that can be made, as it is, by the pastoral distributists, that we accept too much of the industrial revolution and the liberal economies which it brought with it, and think altogether too quantitatively and too much about raising the standard of living everywhere. I will not pursue that criticism, since it is not Dom Aelred's, but it shows that Burke can be, at best, like Adam Smith, one tributary source today. No doubt Dom Aelred means that just as Burke had his limitations in his day, so we have ours today. No doubt we have, but not what he suggests, an ignorance of relevant Catholic thought or practice.

I could not agree more heartily than I do when I read that 'Catholic action is largely a waste of time when it is not the result of Catholic thought', and I too should like to see better facilities here for otherwise educated laymen to acquaint themselves with Catholic philosophy and theological thought, especially on subjects on which they contemplate writing. I believe that the more of such study there is the better, and that those who undertake it will come to understand that there is a main highway of Catholic sociological teaching which is anti-collectivist for profound and abiding reasons. This brings me to the great omission and blind spot in Dom Aelred's paper—the absence in it of any recognition that there is distinctively Catholic sociology, widely held, which is anti-Socialist in character.

When he recommends steering a golden mean between the *New Statesman* and *The Tablet*, I feel a sense of humiliation, because what *The Tablet* expresses an outlook—not of course the only, or the Catholic, outlook, but certainly one based upon Leo XIII's encyclicals; notably *Immortale Dei* and *Libertas Praestantissimum* (only matters are rather more strongly worded by Leo XIII), whereas the *New Statesman's* standpoint is not merely secularist but materialist. Dom Aelred is writing here about the news of the current world that these weekly reviews give. When they see things

differently abroad or at home, it is because reviews profess to interpret news and approach it in the light of different philosophies. They are not news agencies, their special business is interpretation, though sometimes they are, as *The Tablet* is, also newspapers, concerned to give news of a special character. The function of weekly journalism is to deal with what is happening, and it is, in the main, an exercise of practical judgment. A weekly review stands a little way back to survey the scene, further back than the daily paper, but it is essentially journalism, where monthlies and quarterlies stand back a little further and can be more philosophical. In *The Tablet* we believe we see more clearly than they do in the *New Statesman*, because we are not obfuscated by false philosophy. They think the same of us; but we ought to be so much more intelligible and acceptable to Catholics, with whom we share so much common ground. Generally speaking, we are. But when I come to the practical conclusions to which Dom Aelred's paper leads, I understand his middle position much better, for he thinks, just as the *New Statesman* does, that it would be a good thing to make less fuss about liberty, selfish personal liberty, to be less afraid of the State, and lastly that Catholics should be rather ostentatiously aloof and apart from the dominant conflict of our time which the Communist challenge has precipitated. About liberty, I will only say that the amount of personal responsible choice which can be preserved for the ordinary man and woman, is the greatest issue of our domestic politics. It is one where the English Catholic tradition—that of a small independent minority, which had the State for stepfather for so long, rejoins a main national tradition, whereby the English saw themselves personified in the sturdy independence of John Bull. Much the most useful form for the love of our neighbour to take when our neighbour is an Englishman with this great tradition behind him, is to defend his status, instead of concentrating upon material benefits, the scriptural mess of pottage at the price of a birthright. In a quantitative and materialistic age like this there are any number of people anxious to concentrate upon the material benefits. In this country the English are weak, just where the Catholics, by their own accumulated minority experience and by their social doctrine are strong. For the English cannot envisage or look ahead, they are practical empiricists and improvisers, men without doctrine. They do not understand Socialism as they do understand cricket. When in the BLACKFRIARS editorial it is asserted that the majority of Catholics vote Labour, the editor is repeating something which is, I know, often said to foreign Catholic visitors, who then falsely imagine that there is here a

strong Catholic movement for Socialism. What evidence is there that Catholics vote more for the Labour Party outside certain great areas like Liverpool and Glasgow, Cardiff or Tyneside, where there has been a great Irish immigration, traditionally against the party that opposed home rule. The most Catholic town in England is Preston, 37 per cent, but Preston did not return a Labour member in 1931 or 1935, and only did so by a small majority of about six thousand in a sixty thousand vote in 1945. The Glasgow and Liverpool Irish are not voting to express any Catholic philosophy, and the Catholics who vote Labour accept very tamely as their parliamentary representatives men and women whose policies at home and abroad take no account of the Church. Mrs Braddock and Mr Zilliacus must both have found plenty of Catholics to vote for them and the Labour movement could, and for a long time did, prefer Signor Nenni to Signor de Gasperi, without thinking that it had to consider its own Catholic members. These Catholic voters accept what their politicians tell them about religion needing to keep clear of politics in preference to what the Church has to say on that difficult question, and at the time of the trial of Archbishop Stepinac it was common enough in the North of England, if the Archbishop was mentioned in the pulpit, for parishioners afterwards to deplore the introduction of 'politics'. The trial of Cardinal Mindszenty has made a change for the better. But I wish there were more Catholic thinking and speaking and less party loyalty in the Catholics who vote Labour.

In proportion as the Catholics at all economic levels become politically conscious as Catholics, they will become more alive to the primary importance of preserving their personal liberty in matters so intimate to themselves and their families as education, health, employment, savings. Liberty is, indeed, more essential for them, as members of a minority apart, with beliefs and standards their fellow countrymen do not share, than for those whose beliefs and values are those of the majority. It will help them later that even in the 1940's, when the issue had not been properly appreciated, the vocal Catholics had understood its importance.

The tendency of the State to grow into exorbitance is again something which English Catholics are particularly well fitted to appreciate. When Dom Aelred suggests we should do better not to use rude names like Behemoth or Leviathan, he implies that we are addressing ourselves directly to the State, the politicians and civil servants, and that they would be gentler and more modest if they were stroked a little. But we are not addressing them. We are addressing public opinion, the electorate, which is the ultimate

political authority. Anyone who has been a government official—I have been one for short periods of a year or two each three times in my life—knows how easy it is to acquire a contempt for the unofficial public, the private suppliant men, if public opinion forgets them. If there is a sense in which all professions are conspiracies against the laity, no profession is more exposed to the temptation to aggrandise itself than the public service and something composed of men and women who are individually very good and reasonable people who can grow insensibly into a most vexatious and oppressive bureaucracy. All the press, not just the Catholic press, has a great responsibility to prevent such developments: and this makes journalism one of the key callings of this age.

Lastly there emerges in Dom Aelred's recommendations the one to which he clearly attaches most importance; that we should make it very plain just what the Catholic opposition to Communism rests on, that we are concerned to defend a spiritual against a materialist conception of man. So far so good, were it not also implied that we ought as far as possible to keep the Church dissociated from the great combination now being organised to withstand and, as I hope, to repel the encroachments of the Kremlin. It seems to me that while it is accurate to say that the Church opposes Communism on grounds which, however important and momentous, are less wide than those on which the states and peoples of the non-Communist world oppose Communism, it is a class-room distinction to make today, unless what is really hoped and intended is for the Church to profess indifference to the result of the struggle. Some of the Italian Christian Democrats, some of the French M.R.P., have attempted to argue like that, but less confidently every year, that the wise course for Catholics is to follow the line which Dr Benes followed; and how did Dr Benes end? Perhaps Europe will be destroyed, the Catholics with the rest, for we Europeans are dangerously underprepared for a great struggle either morally or materially. The promise that the Church will survive to the end of the human story does not apply to any particular part of the globe, not even to Rome. It would not be surprising to any reader of the Bible if this proved to be the punishment for the mass apostasies of the last two hundred years. But our history shows us many enemies who looked much stronger than Europe; Arabs, Mongols and Turks, who were, in fact, held and defeated, and so it can be again. There is no mere economic conflict between capitalism and Communism from which Christians can stand aside. To think there is is either to accept the narrowing Communist conception of man as driven by economic motives alone, or to depart-



mentalise his activities in a quite unreal way. Economic interests are merely one part, not at all the most important part, of the American determination to withstand Moscow. The Americans do not want to see China and Europe and Africa closed to them; but they are much more alarmed at the prospect of that cruel and fanatical idea being dominant through the great land masses of Europe and Asia and Africa.

Dom Aelred ends by recommending that we should speak the truth and seek charity. If our great mission is to speak the truth let us not refuse to see it when it is as tragic and melodramatic as it is today. And our charity today is more owing to the victims, individuals and nations, than to their oppressors. This charity is also owing to each other. If I cannot think Dom Aelred's practical advice really very practical, or his general line a very wise one, or calculated to help either our fellow countrymen generally or the Catholic body in particular, I think it derives, like so much in a similar key on the mainland of Europe, from a natural and far from ignoble passion for peace among men. Among Catholics on the Continent there is an excessive preoccupation with good relations with Socialist movements, a belief that we have entered, for good or ill, on a new state of human society, much more highly organised than before, which cannot be resisted and should therefore be accepted with a very good grace. I think Dom Aelred sees us like dogs who bark while the collectivist caravan marches on. I find in all this a needless defeatism, especially for Great Britain and its population, for I do not believe we are at heart a proletarian nation, and I believe that as a nation we shall prove faithful to the higher conception of the responsible man which Catholic theology gave to our forefathers and which they made so much part and parcel of themselves that it weathered the Reformation and endured into the last century, and still persists. But however strong my intellectual dissent, I salute and admire the spirit in which he has written of Catholics whose convictions do not commend themselves to him. Only at one point do I feel he has lapsed from his own high standard. He suggests that it shows what sandy and slight theological foundations the Catholic journalist has who brings in the New Testament doctrine of Vocation and does so with the motive of telling 'the poor and dispossessed they must not try to improve their lot'. He says that the New Testament doctrine of Vocation refers to the call to become sons of God, relates to the final victory of man. When we write of the doctrine of vocation it is because a Christian must, on occasions, indicate what is the great Christian answer to what Dom Aelred himself describes as the modern

thirst for some satisfying reason for work. Under any possible political or social arrangements it will be necessary for men to see their work as their duty. There is a mirage in social reform, so that as soon as one is achieved it recedes into the background, it is taken for granted, discounted, and the old pattern of restless dissatisfaction with what is reassembles in the minds of men who have only the notion of progress to sustain them. A half-century of far-reaching social changes and improvements in this country are today crystallising into an imaginary picture of a miserable past, just because what was done could not out of its nature satiate the real hunger of men which is spiritual. If we echo the copybook and observe that true happiness is to be sought in contentment, we are not denying anybody's right to agitate for particular reforms; we are pointing out a general and today much neglected fact about human kind. The Church does, in fact, teach a doctrine of vocation. When George Herbert wrote

‘Who sweeps a room for the love of God  
Makes that and the action fine’

he was not explaining something learnt since the Reformation: and the great Anglican catechism came from Dean Colet with its teaching that ordinarily men should accept their station and duties in society. Most men live in the status of their fathers and a great amount of needless unhappiness is generated by encouraging everybody to rise above his birth. If it is agreed that the Christian has a doctrine of vocation in society as the way in which he sanctifies his life, it is so important and so little understood by Christians that it needs to be mentioned, even by laymen who generally, out of respect for theology and theologians, leave the elaboration of these themes to them. We must expect to be misunderstood on sight by Socialists, who do not want to think there are any other courses open to mankind but their course or the course of the blank negation of all collective activity. We are not surprised if they, the moment they read the word ‘vocation’, think it is all part of a plot to arrest the forward and upward march of the working classes. But we are surely entitled to expect more than such snap conclusions from our fellow Catholics.

I feel about this as I imagine Dom Aelred would feel if a Left-wing critic fastened on his sentence that ‘human liberty in its essence has nothing to do with the abundance of things we can choose from. St Francis in his nakedness and poverty was freer than the millionaire, able to gratify his every whim’, and said this was the priests at it again, humbugging the poor and dispossessed, and likened him to the assiduous church-goers of whom he writes,

men not concerned to raise the standards of the poor. This would be altogether unjust to Dom Aelred, for I credit him with as keen a desire to see those standards improving everywhere as I have myself, although he does not share my conviction of the best ways to bring that improvement about. These ways are the opposite to what might, on a first and over-simple view, seem the way to proceed; the prerequisites for making the poor richer are a high moral sense in a community, respect for law, and law that safeguards property, political stability, the conditions which release the greatest source of wealth, human energies, freely and hopefully employed. I hope we show the same charity of mind to the Catholics who are so slow to recognise that there is a distinctive Catholic sociology, plural, distributist, which is a providential corrective for the particular political excesses of the twentieth century, with its mass parties of semi-literate voters and its ambitious politicians professing to serve and gratify them. This sociology is not, of course, binding on Catholics, but so much of it has been developed from very august quarters that it is not to be dismissed as 'true blue conservatism' or 'unimpeachable high Toryism' merely because it is in opposition to the Socialist current. Those who want to go more with that current should reflect on the harm the Church has suffered in the past from those who have always wanted to identify her with the dominating fashion and mood of the age, with the Kings, in the age of absolutism, and with the rich in the heyday of capitalism, and with the organised mass politics of today; and in the immediate context they should, I submit, be careful not to qualify for the observation of Cardinal Tisserant about some of the young Italian Christian Democrats who foregathered at Grotto Ferrata last autumn, that 'they want to be neutral in a conflict which is about their own survival'.

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