

Thomas, ethics is concerned with doing what the natural tendencies and needs of human nature demand (S.T. 1.2ae Q.94, 2). What God commands is right because it accords with man's nature, not the other way round, and a command which is inimical to that nature (say to commit suicide) would on that score reveal itself not to be from God. Ethics is the discussion of what, as a human being, I fundamentally need to do or not do; not of whether, or how, I ought to obey some known set of commands from outside. To say that I ought to obey God is not to put an end to ethical discussion, but merely to say that following-out his commands is part of what I need, as a human being, to do.

It still remains to discuss what these commands are and how they apply to me. The real difference between the humanist and the Christian here is likely to be that the humanist does not believe that human nature has any needs except the expressed wants of individuals. For him these are sovereign. The idea that mankind, as a species, can have needs which may be different from personal wants and which ought to take precedence, is rejected as authoritarian. Everything is a matter of mature personal conscious decision

and consent. What is at stake here is a profound *philosophical* difference about what it means to be a member of the human species.

But instead of arguing this out (which would have shown an interesting, and significant difference between humanism and Christianity) Fr Jarrett-Kerr lets the Professor get away with his 'challenge'. I suspect this is because he is so anxious to emphasize the dangers of intellectual imperialism by Christians, that he forgets that the way to avoid this is not to try to alter Christianity to suit the 'challenge' but to see that the 'challenge' arises only because of an inadequately 'humanistic' view of ethics. St Thomas is much more like a humanist in his ethical thinking than Fr Jarrett-Kerr is. This kind of situation is continually cropping up in confrontations between non-Catholic Christians and agnostics. Not being used to a philosophy which is itself highly agnostic about many things, the Christians panic when agnosticism rears its head. For the Thomist, at any rate, the problem of secular humanism is not how to grapple with a philosophy which seems so alien, but how to define one's differences with a philosophy which seems so familiar.

Brian Wicker

MYTH AND REALITY by Mircea Eliade. *George Allen and Unwin (World Perspectives), 16s.*

'Myth' is a word which has enjoyed a complete change of reputation during the last two generations. Professor Eliade begins this book by considering the older meaning of the word, according to which a 'myth' was a 'fable', 'invention' or 'fiction'. But in the primitive societies in which myths are born, a myth is regarded as a true story expressing ultimate realities, a story which is sacred, exemplary and significant. 'The function of myth is to reveal models, and in so doing to give a meaning to the world and to human life' (p. 145). It is this meaning of 'myth' which has been grasped afresh during the present century; and Professor Eliade has written a most valuable introduction to the subject, in which he shows the characteristics of myths and their development, and their relevance in contemporary society.

Myth is essentially practical, and also 'liturgical'. For it ritually re-presents the 'supernatural' power by which things were ordered in the beginning, so that they can now be restored according to the primitive model. Myth always has this reference to origins. It tells either of the origins of particular things or customs in order that power over them may be renewed and maintained; or of the origins of all things, of the primeval creation. If a myth tells of the end of time it is because the end is regularly seen as a restoration of the primeval creation, as a return to the primitive paradise and never as a simple annihilation. Myths have in common therefore this preoccupation with time – the desire to destroy time, the time which separates the present from the mythical past in which the gods or heroes laid down the patterns

to be followed, and so to renew now the creative power which operated then; and the time which separates the present from the mythical future in which the golden age of the past will again be renewed.

Professor Eliade illustrates his theme with a mass of detail drawn from the whole range of human cultures. One is struck by the determined recurrence of the same main patterns, running through a fertile and bewildering variety of times, places and nations. And one is forcibly reminded that we do not nowadays consciously live by myths. To some extent Professor Eliade deals with this problem by showing, in the last chapter, how mythical themes appear in unexpected

places today: in the ritual of the Motor Show, in the strip-cartoon 'Superman', and in the élite-appeal of some modern art forms. But is this the only kind of myth by which twentieth century man can live? To what extent is, can—or should—myths be deliberately created? These are not questions which Professor Eliade sets out to answer, but his book makes one ask them. Nor does he deal fully with the other great problem, the relation between myth and theology. But this is more specialized, and requires study on its own. For the general reader who wants to be introduced to myths by an expert this book is excellent.

Fabian Radcliffe, O.P.

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