

must be, whether or not expressed in external ordinances; and psychology has strangely confirmed what theology has always maintained, that sacrifice can only be complete and perfect when it is the free and whole self-oblation of a dying man, who must also be the Dying God.



VIDETUR QUOD NON

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I HAD just switched on the light in my reputedly haunted room when the door of the cupboard swung slowly and purposefully open and a heavy thud behind it proclaimed that the skeleton therein had decided to take action.

It was a suitcase, precariously balanced on a mound of junk, that had, by its pressure, forced the door open at last, and the hollow sound of its falling was a proof that the policy of keeping a room tidy by throwing everything into a cupboard and slamming the door shut is no policy at all. It is a short cut, and a short cut is often an evasion of responsibility. Tidiness is not order.

Among the results of the fall of man, this attempt to take a short cut back to Paradise is perhaps the most disastrous in its consequences. Mankind was scarcely on the hither side of the flaming sword when it was first essayed, and Cain murdered Abel in order to obtain an illusion of order by destroying the evidence of a righteousness superior to his own. Abel's sacrifice was visibly accepted, Cain's rejected. The Lord God showed Cain that the cause lay in his own bad will. 'If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? But if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?' Cain found the rebuke to his pride intolerable. He murdered his brother to remove the offending evidence of his own inferiority. Whatever his previous sin had been, he committed a far graver one to erase its consequences. It is the classic picture of fallen humanity failing to acknowledge its own perversity and sinning more deeply still in order to create an illusion of being in a state of justice. Slam the skeleton into the cupboard and close the door firmly.

But the door will eventually swing open. It is part of the

persistent legends of humanity that nature will participate in the hunt and punishment of the criminal. The tree points at him its accusing fingers. The tiny bird that witnesses the crime will scratch and flutter at his window. The sea will give up its dead. 'The blood of Abel cries from the ground.' Murder will out.

There is some comfort in the thought that no Iron Curtain can prevent the migration of the starlings. Their clamorous descent upon Trafalgar Square is echoed under the eaves of the Kremlin. At this moment of the year the poppies are already preparing to flaunt their scarlet petals across the fields of the Ukraine as well as over Sussex and Manitoba. The northern hemisphere will see their scarlet whatever happens to Josef Mindszenty. For all man's marvellous techniques, he has yet only partially directed into limited channels the fundamental germination of living things. Nature, as well as murder, will out. *Revelabunt caeli peccatum Judae.*

It is nature in her perverse as well as in her fruitful actions that teaches man that he is a fallen, limited creature. When humanity was excluded from Paradise it found itself in a world of weeds and wasps, passion and inefficiency, treachery and the failure to answer letters. The greenfly on the rose and the green in the eye of the beloved alike proclaimed that Eden was irrecoverable. There were two possible attitudes: to mourn the lost and accept with humility the fallen state; or brazenly to deny the facts and proclaim that man was better off than before, that everything in the new garden was lovelier than in the old. This latter was the deliberate choice of Cain and involved—it still involves—an appalling succession of ever graver sins. For it is the policy of the Iron Curtain: exclude the contrary evidence, or murder it. If the weed grows within, eradicate it. Let the cockle and the wheat grow until the harvest? No; make a desert and call it peace. At least a desert is tidy. But tidiness is not the same as order.

It is in this attitude towards order that the contrast between St Thomas Aquinas and the revolutionary intellectual is so acute. The most obvious quality of St Thomas' work is that it is architectonic, a balanced and orderly structure. But he does not achieve that balance at the cost of shirking a difficulty, or of taking a short cut past an awkward fact. The difficulties are the first things he announces. *Videtur quod non.* And nowhere is the significance of this method more apparent than when he is dealing with the

relation of nature to supernatural. For St Thomas is perfectly aware of the intrinsic nature of things and never blind to their incapacity to be other than they are, *unless a superior principle is introduced*. But therein he enjoys the enormous advantage of accepting the Creation and the Re-creation. Nature is God's instrument and can be supernaturalised, though not de-naturalised. The water can become wine. Grace can perfect nature, not by destroying its perverse tendencies, but by redirecting their essential goodness to the objects for which that goodness was created. For sin is the misdirection of a faculty which has a substantial goodness. Grace will direct it to its proper end. It does not mutilate, it realises nature by properly co-ordinating it.

This is a delicate and complex process, whether in the direction of souls or the organisation of *matériel*. Order is not the same thing as tidiness. But the descendants of Cain have constantly been convinced that the disorder with which they are confronted will yield to a simple formula, Liberty-Equality-Fraternity or The Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They are convinced that within nature, and without an appeal to a super-natural principle, its discords can be resolved. The very first difficulty, to explain how any trouble ever arose in an essentially perfectible world, receives a typical slam-the-skeleton-in-the-cupboard answer. Certain limited classes of persons, they say, out of unnatural malignity, have prevented nature from having its course. 'Strangle the last king with the entrails of the last priest' or 'liquidate the bourgeoisie': that will settle the matter. The new Adam will then arise out of his natural, inevitable potentialities. Proletarian man is the full reality of the material universe. When he is established the state will wither away, for we shall be back in Paradise which, indeed, we never left. Any hold-ups there are on the way come from the old trouble. There are traitors in the camp. Hunt for the deviationists still lurking among the elect. Draw an iron curtain round your paradise and weed out the intractables. And so the gruesome murder of Abel goes on within the ideologic Eden until all is a peaceful desert within and the earth shall not yield its fruit.

There is a temptation, to which George Orwell succumbed, to regard this modern Cain in Canaan with panic. There seems to be a successful plot to dehumanise the entire race, to turn it into mindless bodies operating mechanical brains. Not only is the conspiracy backed up by the largest military force the world has

ever seen, but it looks as if it had accomplices everywhere. Who knows whether that untidy scholar hurrying by with his load of books is not bound heart and soul to the torture and degradation of his colleagues, the sabotage and destruction of a society desperate for survival?

Cain will always have his adherents, those who have not the humility to acknowledge their fallen state. The short cut to world order offered by the Marxist formula is as tempting as any other short cut. The danger from our own side is impatience, the failure to remember that the direction of souls, to which political virtue is a contribution, is a complex and delicate thing. Regimentation is a comparatively easy, and very primitive, form of organisation, as the commercial world is beginning to realise. An organisation which *works* does not necessarily look as tidy as a battalion. And any organisation, as M. le Corbusier is careful to show in his architectural works, is much less complex and efficient than an organism. The councils, committees and conferences of our Christian world, the ramifications and delays of our bureaucracies, are worthy of our patience if they are part of a policy which recognises the complexity of our race and nature and will not therefore try short cuts.

The Catholic Church, above all, will regard this situation with a robust though rueful confidence. The Iron Curtain cannot shut out supernature any more than it can the starling; it is as penetrable to prayer as to the poppy. The Church, secure in her age-old knowledge of man, his mysterious needs for priesthood and ritual, sacrament and kingship, will continue to build up the Second Adam in the Body of our Lord, knowing that there will never be a third. Now, no more than in the past, will she try short cuts, but will adhere to that steady re-formation of man that is vocal in her bishops and priests, confessors, directors and associations of the faithful. She will not be blind to any difficulties or awkward facts, whether they are mosques or mosquitoes. 'It would *seem* as if it were not so, but . . . ' is the approach of St Thomas, and although the Cain in us feels impatient and tries to crush the difficulties into a glory-hole, grace and, eventually, glory will burst it open and reveal the truth, that truth which St Thomas built up superbly upon an illusionless view of reality and over whose Himalayan snows the abominable No-man cannot drag his footsteps. The desire for clarion calls, clear-cut solutions and

short cuts to Utopia is part of the desire to retrieve our primal innocence, a desire that can never be fulfilled. We may not disregard the difficulties of our fallen state; we must approach them always with the patience of St Thomas in his opening formula: *Videtur quod non*.



PLAY

DONALD NICHOLL

THERE is an interesting little paragraph in St Thomas Aquinas' works¹ which refers to play. He has been describing how every action is performed towards some end, with some *aim* in view. Then he breaks off, and says that there are some actions which do not seem to be for any end, such as contemplating, playing—stroking one's beard! Leaving aside the beard-stroking (which St Thomas accounts for as would a modern analyst), he sees close similarities between contemplation and play. That is to say, contemplation does not have any end outside itself, because it is its own end; likewise with play, for although we sometimes play so as to study better afterwards, we also play for the sheer delight which is in the game itself. Therefore there is obviously a close similarity between the playful and the contemplative attitudes: they have no end outside themselves.

St Thomas begins an exposition of Boethius² by quoting from the book of Ecclesiasticus (XXXII, 15) where man is told on rising to run first to his home, and there recollect himself and play. St Thomas uses the quotation to explain that he is undertaking this exposition because to contemplate wisdom (the recollection) is itself a delightful game which requires no exterior aim for its justification. Furthermore, he points out, the Scriptures themselves compare the divine wisdom to the delight of play, for in Proverbs VIII, 30, we hear how 'I was with him forming all things; and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times'. In view of which one is not surprised to discover St Thomas saying that a man may commit sin by not playing sufficiently.³

1. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, Chapter 2.

2. *Expositio super Boetium de hebdomadibus*.

3. *S. Th.* II-II, CLXVIII, Art. 4.