

Father and his, showing them how he himself had found the way home.

He saw that the first field of his apostolate lay with his own family. There is a charming letter to his daughter Abra, in which he tells her the tale of a splendid young man whom he has seen, who possesses a marvellous dress and a precious pearl which he covets for her. The dress can never wear out, become moth-eaten or torn, dirty or outmoded. The pearl gives its owner everlasting youth, health and life, and there is nothing harmful in either of these treasures. But they can only be obtained on condition of despising other gems and vanities of dress. Besides the promise of these gifts, he sends her a hymn he has written, and begs her to let him know if she desires them. If she cannot understand any parts of the letter she is to ask her mother to explain them. He ends 'God who gave thee to us guard thee everlastingly, my beloved daughter'.

We have no better witness to Hilary's great qualities than the letters written after his death by those who knew him. They often speak of him as 'happy Hilary'. 'The excellence of his doctrine gives him the title "light of the Romans".' The patrology quotes ten letters from St Jerome in his praise, and Augustine calls him 'a most eminent doctor of the Church'. Venantius Fortunatus speaks of him as the highest peak of faith, virtue and honour, whose eloquence shines like a precious stone. In conclusion may we quote the prayer from an old missal: 'Grant we beseech thee, Almighty God, that what happy Hilary thy confessor affirmed of the excellence of the word, we may become worthy to understand and truthfully to confess'.

Reviews

THE BASIS OF BELIEF, by Dom Illyd Trethowan; Burns and Oates, 8s. 6d.
PROVIDENCE AND FREEDOM, by Dom Mark Pontifex; Burns and Oates, 8s. 6d.

If both these contributions to the *Faith and Fact* series are well worth reading, this is because both are genuine inquiries; the problems they discuss are real problems for the two authors. These are already well known as Catholic philosophers of independent temper. With a common Benedictine background, they share also, though expressing it very differently, a certain dissatisfaction

with Thomism, or what they take to be Thomism, and a good deal of their work has been more or less critical of this tradition as they see it. And certainly a critical attitude of this sort can be a salutary antidote to dogmatic slumbers. Yet it does not always prove an advantage to the critics themselves. Dom Illyd in particular is inclined to sound irritable in polemic, and he sometimes seems to decide rather quickly that an opinion he rejects is objectively indefensible; an example comes to hand in his attack, in the book under review, on the Thomist arguments for the existence of God by inference from the mode of existence of creatures. I shall return to this question presently. To be sure, *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* is not the place for strictly philosophical discussions, but since the *Basis of Belief* is offered as an 'essay in the philosophy of religion', it can hardly be reviewed without at least coming in sight of such discussions. I agree, of course, with Dom Illyd that 'the Church does not teach a philosophical system', and I freely admit that he is perfectly within his rights in preferring (as he does) an Augustinian approach to religious problems to the Thomist one, if he finds the former more illuminating. But I would query, at least, his statement of the particular issue mentioned above.

But first, a few remarks on *Providence and Freedom*. This distinguished little book is a very honest and, for its size, thorough piece of popular theology. It is excellently 'dry' in tone; not a trace of sentimentality or mystification; and no difficulties have been dodged. It is all at a high intellectual level and yet in the plainest of plain English. It is perhaps the best book Dom Mark has written, which is high praise. The main problems dealt with are three: the possibility, given the existence of God, of free choice; the nature of sin; the nature and justification of punishment, especially of eternal punishment. Chapters I to III sketch a theory of free choice and of what reason can discern about God. The appeal, as always in this book, is primarily to reason, not to revelation; the author seems to refer as little as possible to the Christian fact or Christian teaching, even where—as when he raises the question whether one can speak of God as sharing human suffering—a mention of Christ might have been expected. He does, however, call in the authority of the Church, at an early stage, to confirm the existence of human free choice, since he finds that 'from the point of view of reason alone there are . . . undoubtedly strong arguments on both sides'. Throughout he stresses the limitations on our free will, but the stress falls on limitations imposed by our existence as creatures and not on the tug of original sin. It is perhaps revealing that St Paul is never, I think, mentioned by Dom Mark.

The core of the work is an analysis of sin in relation to God's causality, and it is here (cc. IV-VI) that Dom Mark joins issue with a 'strict Thomist view' represented by Fr Garrigou-Lagrangé. But it is not very clear how far he means his critique of Thomism to go. To the three problems mentioned above—free choice in general, sin and hell—the solutions proposed seem in each case to be presented as new, or at least as non-Thomist; yet I cannot see any clear conflict of view except with regard to the third problem. This conflict emerges when

Dom Mark attempts to resolve the fundamental dilemma to which his reasoning has so far led him. He has explained that, since all that is positive in the universe is from God, and since sin is precisely the wilful contradiction of God, it follows that sin must be essentially negative, a *failure* to act for a possible good. And a failure as such, 'being merely negative, requires no cause', and so need not be traced back to the first cause. Yet it must come from something, and so we are told that 'the creature initiates it'—*God's* creature. Hence the dilemma; for it would seem then either that God does, after all, cause sin inasmuch as he moves the creature to some positive act which, as less good than it might have been, entails a 'failure', or that the creature by initiating the failure somehow forces God's hand, compelling him to cause less perfection in the creature than he would otherwise have done.

Faced with this dilemma, Dom Mark resolutely rejects its first horn. Moral failure is not due to God's 'giving less perfection than was possible'; rather he 'gives less perfection *on account* of the creature's failure' (my italics). Logically, sin is not preceded by God's permission of it; God can have no reason, so to say, to permit a sin, except the sin itself; it is only the creature's failure which—to use a phrase which Dom Mark admits could be misleading—'negatively determines' God. Hence the conflict with Garrigou-Lagrangé's opinion on hell. For this theologian, God's permission of reprobation logically precedes the sin (it is *ante prevista demerita*); but for Dom Mark it logically follows the sin. For him all God's action with regard to sin—to the sin itself and to its punishment—logically follows the creature's negative initiative. Thus the final issue is over God's purpose in permitting sin; for the 'strict Thomist' this is ultimately a determination to manifest justice in the punishment of the sinner, and it is hard to see what else one can say if one is determined to maintain the absolute logical priority of God's decisions, even with respect to evil in the universe. But Dom Mark rejects this view because it seems to him self-contradictory to say that 'God wills sin for some further purpose'. On the other hand, his own explanation leaves sin—at least in its ultimate consequence, hell—without any further purpose at all. It is simply allowed by God; that is all one can say. The matter cannot be argued out here, but it seemed due to Dom Mark to give even so brief an account of his thought on the most difficult question he discusses, even at the risk of frightening off those readers who would rather not speculate so ardently. To these I would say that *Providence and Freedom* has much to offer to anyone who wishes to think intelligently about religion.

So has *The Basis of Belief*, although this is altogether a lighter work both in style and in substance. Its theme is not (as the title might suggest) the credibility of Christianity, but such natural knowledge of God as is 'available for all men', whether Christians or not. Dom Illtyd wants to show that an obscure 'apprehension of God' is part of normal human experience. This apprehension, he says, is related to Christian faith as a 'summons' to it which can reach any man anywhere; in this sense it is the 'basis of belief'. Moreover it is by reflecting on this datum of experience that men can reach that rational certainty of the exist-

ence of God upon which the Vatican Council insisted. Thus we are concerned here with what might be called the religious dimension of human intelligence as such.

From the Catholic point of view it is obviously of capital importance to show that intelligence has such a dimension. It is a pre-condition of faith; for without it how could the mind recognize God's message as God's? On the other hand, it must be accurately defined. Hence the double polemic that fills two-thirds of this book. For Dom Illtyd is fighting on two fronts: against the fashionable positivism that denies all knowledge of God; and against Thomism which tries to ground it on a syllogistic proof. Since such proofs do not prove anything to the purpose, he says, the only effect of trying to construct them is to bring religion into discredit with the intelligent. And they fail to prove anything to the purpose because they always start from premisses of which one at least is only evident to those who already accept the conclusion; they never start from 'neutral ground . . . which the agnostic may be expected to acknowledge'. In any case they are quite unnecessary; for we all have, whether we recognize the fact or not, a direct non-inferential apprehension of God—direct yet not immediate, Dom Illtyd is careful to say, in view of the charge of ontologism which that 'direct' is likely to provoke. And where, above all, we thus directly yet mediately apprehend God is in our own souls: 'it is . . . in his action on the soul that we know him'—for example, in the idea of truth. At this point it is natural that Dom Illtyd should recall St Augustine's notion of *contuitio*; in his positive doctrine he is firmly Augustinian.

And most valuable this positive doctrine is; and not only witty but very cogent, so far as it goes, seems to me the author's defence of it against its clean contrary, the positivism which tends to reduce all thinking to a 'looking at' that never 'sees' anything. But I am much less happy about his anti-Thomism; and I don't think this is merely my prejudice. The objections he puts have been put before, of course, and will be put again. Here I can only offer two brief comments. The first concerns the sufficiency of Dom Illtyd's 'direct apprehension' of God for grounding a judgment of existence. It is clear that for him this apprehension is mediated through such 'transcendental' notions as truth and goodness, or through our awareness that our power to know transcends all particular objects (an awareness that certainly springs from the root-notion of being). And it is also clearly his opinion that through or in these notions we know that God is. In other words, if we can give the idea of God a positive content, then at once we know his existence. At bottom, then, the whole question is, have we really got an idea of the infinite being? If we have, then we know God and no further inference is required. The idea proves the reality. Is this St Anselm's argument over again? Not exactly; for at this point we are told that the idea of God implies his existence, not (as in Anselm's argument) simply because that idea includes existence, but because the human mind could not have been the cause of it: 'the idea of the infinite . . . could not have been generated by the finite'. But surely this is to have recourse to just such syllo-

gistic inference as the author has been telling us to discard. For why cannot the idea of God come from anything less than God? Only because an effect cannot be greater than its cause. So after all Dom Illtyd too is arguing from effect to cause, using the said principle as one of his premisses. And does not this implicit recourse to inference suggest that he himself is not wholly satisfied with his 'direct apprehension' of God as a means to certainty that God actually exists?

My second point concerns the way he states the Thomist proofs themselves. On a rather flippant page near the end of the book (p. 129) they are caricatured. Earlier (pp. 44-51) they are taken more seriously, but still in a somewhat off-hand way, I think. The nerve of Dom Illtyd's objections is that every syllogism concluding to God's existence must already have affirmed his existence in one of the premisses. This is a real difficulty, no doubt. But I would ask Dom Illtyd to reconsider the argument from movement. Are not three syllogisms involved in this? (a) movement is potency-to-act; every potency-to-act requires a prior active act; ergo: (b) every potency-to-act requires a *first* active act (a First Mover); this movement x is potency-to-act; ergo: (c) this movement x is the effect of a First Mover; a First Mover is 'God'; ergo. Now of these three syllogisms it is the first two, clearly, which do the real work; and they work, it is true, by the force of a metaphysical principle discovered in the analysis of movement into potency and act. But this principle does not of itself, I suggest, entail the *existential* conclusion 'God is'; to get this conclusion we have to combine it with the existential proposition 'a given movement is'.

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LE CHRIST, SACREMENT DE LA RENCONTRE DE DIEU, by E. H. Schillebeeckx, O.P.; Editions du Cerf, NF 10.50.

It is a mistake to think that nothing has happened in theology since the death of St Thomas. Far too little has happened, it is true, and far too often a theological training has meant nothing more than an exchange of theological *clichés* and the manipulation of unreal problems. In the last thirty years or so, however, in response to a period of intense social and moral unrest, when all values have been under revision, theology too, which is the self-consciousness of faith, has taken a fresh lease of life. We have had no theologian of the stature of Karl Barth, who put through, single-handed, a revolution which affected Catholic theologians almost as deeply as Protestants. But we have had a whole generation of gifted theologians, mostly Jesuits, whose curiosity, learning, compassion and invention have done much to enliven our understanding of the faith, and to fortify us to confront the stress and the adventure of our environment. Few of these writers and teachers have more to offer than Fr Schillebeeckx, a Flemish Dominican who is professor of theology in the Catholic university of Nijmegen. He has done the most massive and decisive work in recent years on the doctrine of the sacraments. Most of his work is accessible so far only in Dutch, but it is