

support to the social reformers, notably the Franciscan 'Spirituals' of the thirteenth century. Joachim was a visionary struggling to convey spiritual meanings that lie beyond the usages of grammar and the power of words. As a consequence, confusion arose when his sayings were torn from their context.

As a mystic he was unusual in seeing the spiritual destiny of the individual, in relation to that of the whole of Christendom, and of all mankind. He was the precursor of St Francis of Assisi and foretold the coming of the two new Orders who 'would live not according to ordinary monastic life but in apostolic poverty among the people'. These would be the regenerators and spiritual movers of men in a new age. Not unnaturally, the followers of St Francis and St Dominic saw in this prophecy an assurance of their spiritual leadership in the third epoch; while the seer's vision of 'the angelic man' led the Franciscans to identify their founder with the Angel of the Everlasting Gospel.

Happily for Joachim, he did not live to know of the controversy that arose around his name, nor of the spurious works fathered on him in the thirteenth century. He died in ecstasy at Flora in 1202. In Calabrian churches they sang for a long time an antiphon in honour of the great prophet, of whom Isaias might have written: 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty and behold the land that is very far off.'



POINT OF VIEW

The Apostle as Poet: An Objection

MICHAEL SHAYER

THERE are two ways of receiving Fr Pepler's article. The first is *contextually*: a man is writing in a certain intellectual tradition, writing for others like-minded, and his remarks should be interpreted by the effect they were designed to have on that audience. With this first I am not concerned (though I am not hostile to the design); the second is *abstractly*—Is it true?—and it is in this way that I wish to comment on it.

Examine carefully the description he gives, in his first paragraph, of

the Christian setting out to be an apostle for Christ. He 'enters an Order such as that of the Dominicans' and 'reaches down from the shelves of the library large tomes of Christian doctrine and theology' so that 'he will store in his mind a great system of Christian ideas'. 'He will study also the world-movements so that Communism, by the time he has finished his studies, holds no mysteries for him', and 'read about the industrial revolution and grasp the principles that underlie the unrest among the working-classes'. Finally 'the pagans of today who know not Christ are before him in his books and in his mental system'. (I have altered punctuation and tenses to aid quotation.)

The conclusion to be drawn parenthetically from this is that Romanticism is the particular weakness of the scholar. Indeed it is a straw-man the author is creating; and it is just here that he gives himself away so decisively. For he clearly thinks that he is filling in the details of a good Christian and Dominican (after all, he learns his theology on his knees, and on occasion takes his *Summa* to his half-hour periods of prayer!) whose only failing is a deficiency in the poetic faculty: he is not very good at getting it across. But he is mistaken: this straw-man is the typical pedant, afraid not only of life and experience but also of the content of the intellectual works he studies. Such a man is more of an enemy to the real life of the intellect than the popular preacher, for he betrays it from within, substituting for the intense moral effort that thinking requires the easy abstract systematising of the bureaucrat. The Pharisee of the intellectual world (Matt. 23, 27).

Having deceived himself about the real character of the straw-man he is drawing, it is not surprising that the author goes on to overvalue 'the poet' antithetically to the point where his picture becomes not merely exaggerated, but untrue. This becomes apparent in the phrase 'Christ himself was the greatest poet'. Clearly he wasn't, any more than he was the greatest philosopher of his time—unless you stretch the meaning of 'poetry' and 'philosophy' to the extent where they cease to be either, as such. (Undoubtedly there are higher things than philosophy, and doubtless philosophy is trying to become them; but when it succeeds it is no longer philosophy.) What meaning can you assess to the concept 'poet' which will cover the activities of Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare and Racine on the one hand, and also be applicable, on the other, to that of Christ? Similarly suspect is the suggestion that the would-be apostle might have had his imagination dried up by prayer. Clearly if that could be the case it would not have been prayer that he was experiencing, but some substitute activity.

At this point the objection will probably occur that, after all, this is only a quibble about words. Am I not merely saying the same as Fr Pepler, but using a slightly different terminology? Did he not say, in

his last paragraph, that the would-be apostle's theology and prayer would not be sufficient unless linked with the nature of things by means of a true and creative imagination? I think it possible we have the same *end* in mind: I would argue, though, that since he has postulated unreal entities his solution is correspondingly false; from the synthesis of barren thought and undisciplined imagination only a blurred condition of mind can result engendering neither good theology nor fine poetry.

I see this blur particularly in the paragraph where he begins: 'The poet, in effect, is the man who makes things by means of imagination as well as of thought. . . . From what he finds around him in the entire universe the poet creates, makes something new; old truths become new and living through the action of his imagination and thought.' The effect of this collocation with the previous straw-man of a scholar is to encourage the reader to lower his mind to the primitive level at which the activities of making poetry, seeking truth, and practising rhetoric have not yet differentiated themselves from a primary unity (the level, presumably, of Theaetetus). Dismissing the mention of 'the entire universe' as nothing worse than hyperbole, I should have thought that his description fitted the minimum requirements of the theologian and philosopher closer than they fitted the poet. But no! the author is prepared for this objection: his would-be apostle has not worked this way, 'he has restricted his experience, as far as he has been able, to the ideas he has been considering, and to his own limited world of prayer and doctrine'. Can it be that a Dominican can have so little idea of the essential processes of thinking that he can put this forward as a serious possibility? Surely it is obvious that such a man is the intellectual equivalent of a librarian rather than a thinker—a curator of dead men's bones? Ideas and sacred doctrine simply do not exist in any way comparable to solid objects in a museum: they exist only in the minds of people who are living at this present instant who have performed the arduous task of giving them life by reasoning on the basis of their own experience. There is no other basis. The man who spends his time trying to understand ideas on the basis of experience of other ideas is either laughable or too valueless even to be mentioned as a straw-man. What the author has said suggests that his straw-man's thinking is excellent as far as it goes, but requires the assistance of some blarney before it can have universal appeal; but it is clear that, since his conception comes so far short of the activity of real thinkers, he cannot provide the answer to why they, too, appear to be ineffective as apostles.

This is the first of two serious consequences which follow from this faulty conception of the nature of thinking, and, since it certainly is important to find out why 'apostles' have so little effect, I must discuss it at some length. There is, to begin with, an important distinction to be

drawn between those who have the ability to speak to many varieties of people, each in their own language, and the mass-movers. With the latter the problem appears to be this: if you want to move large numbers of people you must first find some function at which they attend in large numbers, and then use that as your medium. But, as Aristotle pointed out, each kind of assembly dictates, within rather narrow limits, the kind of rhetoric which is permissible within it. The kind of things that are said at after-dinner speeches would be inappropriate at a political meeting. To move as many people as possible you must look around for the assembly with the greatest attendance. This is the football stadium and this is, of course, where Billy Graham functions. But this brings with it the disadvantages of specialization and corruption. It is an odd fact that the larger the attendance at an assembly the more specialized and discontinuous with everyday life outside its activity tends to be. We have been sufficiently troubled by the split between the activities which occur on Sunday in church, and everyday life: this problem is obviously going to occur in a more acute form with the stadium crowds—there will appear to be no connection between their everyday behaviour and the admittedly intense emotion they experience in the stadium. And the corruption will occur in this: the most obvious way in which people are degraded today (and we are all infected) is that they cease to act as individuals, but act as mass-men instead. But they can *only* be saved as individuals. Thus the dilemma of the evangelist is that he is to shake people to awareness of the need to take responsibility for their own lives; yet he has to do this at an assembly which permits only rhetoric which engages them in the mass. Hence the impiety of the statement that ‘the apostles who have the greatest effect are not always the most learned nor even the most pious or saintly’. It is literally true, but its implied sense, that Billy Graham is obviously a better apostle than a quiet scholar, is false. To measure the *value* of a man’s work by the disturbance and publicity it arouses cannot bear scrutiny. We simply do not know how far the wave may spread, from individual to individual, from a single man who has found peace and shuns publicity.

The value of the ‘effect’ of the mass-movers, then, is questionable, and is not what the would-be apostle should be aiming at. But the man who can be ‘all things to all men’ is what the would-be apostle should take as his end, and there is little in common between him and the mass-mover. And it is my burden that there is nothing wrong with the traditional type of the intellectual apostle; and that what is needed is not the rebirth of their poetic faculty, but simply more of them. It is here that Fr Pepler, by losing sight of this simple truth, offers advice which surely would be disastrous. He suggests that the would-be apostle keeps

on with his studies as before, but, by opening his senses to the symbols and images which *other people*, modern man, respond to, so translates into language which *they* can understand the truth and experience which he has found so valuable in his own world. Thus he would be accepting a picture of the process of study and thought which would prevent his ever beginning the true labour of the intellect, and coupling this with an evangelizing which exhibited only what is dubious in the activities of the mass-movers. 'Talking to people in language they can understand' usually means despising and insulting them: the terms in which the author expresses the apostolic process can only encourage intellectual pride—the feeling that 'they' need to be taught, at their level, what is beyond criticism at one's own. And the straw-man that he sketches has nothing to offer anybody.

The way in which the scholar can genuinely be of use to others is surely very different from this. I am told that St Thomas explained in the Prologue to his *Summa* that it was especially meant for beginners and Christ's 'little ones'. The kind of humility (a word not mentioned in the article) required of him—the only way in which he needs to be able to talk other people's language—is that which enables him to put his own way of grasping reality, the intellectual one, into direct contact with that of very different types of people in such a way that each will be felt as equivalent. Then if his intellectual labour has been good it will bear fruit, and if it has been bad he will receive chastening correction: he may find that his apparently clear concepts expressed only some valueless banality, concealed from him by his pride in using them; or worse still, that his most cherished subtlety was in reality a damned heresy. The truth of the matter is that Fr Pepler's would-be apostle is a modern man, is 'of the world', whether he likes it or not; if he believes he is not of it, that he is of the world of prayer and sacred doctrine, and requires merely his imagination to express this to those who are in this world, he will be a pitiable figure either in or outside the cloister. The process of learning the truths which it is his lot to study *can* only take place by reasoning on the basis of his experience in this world (though this experience may well include that of Grace), so that the system of signs he reads in books can emerge newly abstracted from that experience—and the wider it is the more use his intellectual labours will be to others. He is in the cloister to avoid the more obvious distractions of the world, and to gain from the charity that the acceptance of the formal discipline of brotherhood brings. But he is of this world as long as he lives. He must never forget that the particular sins of the modern world, which he may think he can perceive very clearly in different *types* from himself, in reality infect him just as much, and will corrupt *his* thought-processes as they corrupt *their* mores. If there are so few successful

apostles in the world today it is not because they do not use their imagination, or that the mob won't listen to them: it is because there are so very few *good* people, apostles or otherwise.

The second serious consequence of this interpretation of learning as merely anatomizing the systems of the past, is that, not only will it inhibit true learning, as I hope I have already shown, it will also hinder the making of poetry and the practising of rhetoric. For these are not one glorious unity: they differ in principle. All need to be 'tuned to in the whole universe as it exists': this is certainly not the special province of the poet. But while the first seeks to make it intelligible by means of concept and inference, the second tries to *present* it by the conjunction of rhythms, words, and dramatic action, and the third practises the art of addressing groups so as to bring them into right relation with it. These are all valuable activities: confusing one with another devalues each.

Had he not crippled himself at the outset with a faulty analysis, the author might well have given us a very valuable article. It is a well-known fact that, however they may all be taking the whole universe as their ground, those who pursue the philosophical path tend to lose their sensitivity to words used differently, as they are in poetry; those who produce poetry tend to become hostile to the philosophical use of language; while the rhetorician seems usually to lose discrimination in both. What we would like to know is to what extent the philosopher loses *in his philosophical work* by his lack of contact with the poetic use of language, and to what extent the poetic use of language loses form and emotional precision from its distance from the philosophical. In the very rare case where the two are in communication—in Dante—there is little doubt of the gain; it is so great as to make the effort to discuss it very worthwhile.

FATHER PEPLER writes: I must necessarily agree that I am 'not very good at getting it across'. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and I have certainly failed 'to get it across' to Mr Shayer. Perhaps that is because I am no poet. But certain things need to be said in an attempt to make myself understood. Firstly, the apostle is not primarily a philosopher; he is concerned with mysteries of faith which are above the reach of pure philosophy. The mystery can be conveyed only by symbol—the work of the poet. Secondly, my opponent takes a far more limited view of 'poet' and 'poetry'. It is not necessary to limit the poet to a type of versifier. Our Lord's parables and metaphors have proved to be the most moving and convincing works of poetry in the larger sense—and that is what we should expect, for not only is he 'The Master' but he is teaching the mysteries that are beyond the comprehension of the human intellect. It is surprising to find Mr Shayer suggesting that the

apostle should not speak a language intelligible to his hearers—this is surely Pentecost without the Gift of Tongues. And finally, it might well be argued that far from the picture I painted being that of a non-existent man of straw, we have here at least one concrete example of the man I was trying to depict, in the person of my critic.



REVIEWS

THE WORDS OF MARY. By Salvatore Garofalo. (Mercier Press; 6s.)

We are still relying heavily on translations for our books about our Lady. This one was written in Italian in 1943. Mgr Garofalo was then described by Father Roschini, reviewing the book, as 'a young professor of real worth'. He is now described on the cover of the English version as 'one of the foremost living Scripture scholars'. Father Roschini, incidentally, praised the book highly. Later, in 1948, Father di Fonzo called it 'the best exegetical and ascetic commentary on the subject'. Father Vaccari, S.J., who introduces it, says: 'It is a good example of how a rigorous exegetic science can make the words of the Divine Scriptures attractive and nutritious to modern man, without admixture of pious, doubtful legends or imaginative embroidery.'

With such praise, the like of which is given to few books about our Lady, this English translation is bound to make a great appeal to all who love our Lady and wish to have by them a sound, reliable study of the few recorded words we have from her in the Gospels. It seems that no serious work had been written on the subject since the time of St Bernardine of Siena. It is to be hoped that this book, which is not exhaustive, will stimulate further devotional commentary. From the point of view of exegetics there is, one may say, little that could be added to it.

The author considers all our Lady's recorded words and gives first the literal sense. On this he speaks authoritatively, though with no pretension to have said the last word on each word. His treatment of the incident at Cana, for instance, is a straightforward explanation with no list of the varying opinions which have been put forward, by Catholics as well as non-Catholics, on the force of our Lord's words, 'What is it to me and to thee?' In this connection his interpretation differs from that which was given, three years later, by the great Hebrew authority Eugene Zolli, who maintains that in the New Testament the phrase 'Quid est mihi?' always implies agreement rather than (as Mgr Garofalo has it) 'a denial of a sense of fellowship'. True, Garofalo takes the actual sense, as apart from the literal force of the phrase, to be 'Why do you ask this of me?', but it is good to know that the words taken literally are