Introduction

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Many others would have liked to contribute to a collection of essays in memory of Herbert McCabe, and authors might have been commissioned to write on many other topics that interested him.

Herbert did not patronise the same central Oxford pubs as Elizabeth Jennings used to do. Her Dominican friends included Hildebrand James and Osmund Lewry, to name only those who have died and to whose memory she dedicated poems. Herbert loved to read poetry, aloud to friends whenever possible. As Tim Gardner contends, themes in Jennings' poetry are very much among the ones which often appeared in Herbert's preaching.

It was never a good idea to assume Herbert knew nothing about things that were not his favourite subjects. True, he was sometimes utterly astonished at what was taken seriously in some quarters. Once, as a participant in ecumenical discussion with Anglicans, he found himself reading, for the first time, *The Crucified God*, by Jürgen Moltmann: a classic of modern theology, as many would say. On the face of it, he might have been attracted by Moltmann's insistence on the importance of a 'theology of the Cross' for politics and social reform. But he could not accept Moltmann's premise, that God shares in human suffering, not solely in the Incarnation and Passion but somehow within the Trinity. He was amazed that theologians accepted what he regarded as grotesque caricatures of the classical doctrine of divine impassibility.

Herbert was certainly familiar with the theme of 'being as communion', taken as the title of John Zizioulas's book, *Being as Communion*, another modern classic: for Herbert's Aquinas, *agere sequitur esse*: being is always already self-communicating. He would have greatly valued Tom Weinandy's book, *Does God Suffer?*, by far the best exposition of the doctrine of divine impassibility; he would have enjoyed the exposure of the logical holes in much currently dominant thinking.

As regards patristic theology, Greek and Latin, Herbert inclined to the view standard among Thomists in the 1950s: whatever was fruitful had been assimilated by Aquinas; time would be better spent studying his thought than attending to inchoative, largely superseded literature. Perhaps he knew more than he let on. He would, anyway, have appreciated Tom Weinandy's disentanglement of the strengths and weaknesses in John Zizioulas's theology of the Trinity.

Herbert had a considerable interest in history, particularly in the

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history of Ireland and Britain. He would have liked hearing about the very different history of Catholic recusancy in Scotland, much less bloody than in England, let alone than in Ireland.

In the end, always, it was to Thomas Aquinas that Herbert kept returning. Thomas's doctrine of creation Herbert regarded as fundamentally important, quite as helpful in modern discussion as Francis Selman suggests. As Vivian Boland notes, Herbert was among the students of Aquinas who preferred to read him as a disciple of Aristotle; he would have had to agree, however, that the focus in recent scholarship is on Aquinas's neoplatonic inheritance. No doubt he knew that: he had read Chenu and must have dipped into the likes of Geiger.

The first posthumous collection of Herbert's writings is in the bookstores now: *God Still Matters*, edited and introduced by Brian Davies OP with a Foreword by Alasdair MacIntyre (London and New York: Continuum, 250 pages, paperback £16.99). Following much the same pattern as *God Matters*, the contents fall into four groups: six essays on God (with an emphasis on prayer and the Trinity); six essays on Incarnation and the Sacraments (including two on the eucharist); six essays on People and Morals (including the lovely essay claiming that Jane Austen's 'good sense' is the best English equivalent of Thomas Aquinas's *prudentia*); and the texts of seven sermons.

Alasdair MacIntyre reminds us of Herbert's education: St Mary's College in Middlesbrough ('that solid grounding of a conventional kind that is indispensable for those who are going to be able to break out into genuine originality'); Manchester University, chemistry but changing to philosophy with Dorothy Emmet ('whose fate it was to provoke her most gifted pupils into sharp, but constructive disagreement of a dialectically skilful kind') and finally Blackfriars, Oxford and Victor White (whose gift was 'not to interpose himself between the student and the text, but to teach his students how to be open to what the text discloses'). Herbert, it may be noted, was never a student of theology at a British university (though the possibility of PhD research was briefly floated in 1967: often offered in those days as therapy for displaced clergy), let alone in any Catholic institution on the Continent.

We don't make Catholic theologians this way any more. In due course, Brian Davies hopes, he will be able to edit one or more volumes of Herbert's sermons. Every typescript Herbert left behind, many almost as frail and illegible as some ancient palimpsest, reflects the mind of 'one of the most intelligent Roman Catholic thinkers of the twentieth century', as Brian puts it: hyperbole, some will no doubt think; they should ask themselves who better they would turn to.

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