New Blackfriars

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Introduction

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In 2021 the English Dominican Province celebrates the eight hundredth anniversary of the first friars being sent to England by the Dominican General Chapter of Pentecost 1221. They were instructed to found a house in the university town of Oxford, which they reached in August of that year. From them a new province would in time develop throughout the British Isles. This in turn would give rise to further provinces in Scotland and Ireland and contribute, many centuries later, to the development of the Church in the Caribbean and the formation of a province in Southern Africa.

To commemorate the anniversary just noted, *New Blackfriars* is presenting its September 2021 issue of the journal, which consists of articles dealing, in one way or another, with aspects of the history of the English Dominican Province. With two exceptions, all of the articles were commissioned for the present issue.

To begin with, Timothy Radcliffe OP (former Provincial of the English Province and former Master of the Dominican Order) considers the present state of the English Province following a difficult period in the mid 1960's. He notes how the Province has developed with a diversity of backgrounds on the part of members comprising it, with sensitivity to tradition and newness, with respect for communal dialogue, and with genuine friendship between the friars. Fr Radcliffe's reflections on what he calls 'our British way of being Dominican' contains personal reminisces, historical information, quotations from notable English friars, and reflections on the nature of religious life in general. Anyone interested in the English Dominican Province as it exists today will find much in it to inform and enlighten them.

The next two articles, from José Filipe Silva and John T. Slotemaker, focus on two distinguished medieval English Dominicans: Robert Kilwardby and Robert Holcot.

Kilwardby was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1272 until his death in 1279. He taught in Oxford and Paris, was one of the earliest medieval commentators on Aristotle, and wrote copiously on a range of philosophical and theological topics. Holcot flourished in the 1330's. He produced scholastic treatises, biblical commentaries, and sermons. He taught in Oxford, possibly Cambridge, and Northampton. He died

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of plague in 1349 while reputedly ministering to the sick in Northampton.

In his article, Professor Silva concentrates on Kilwardby's account of how scientific knowledge is acquired. He also draws attention to the seminal work of Osmund Lewry OP — an English Dominican who died in 1987. As Silva notes, Lewry, who taught in Oxford and Toronto, became internationally recognized as an expert on Kilwardby. In his article on Holcot, Professor Slotemaker focuses on Holcot's theology of the Trinity while noting why it cannot be easily classified as 'Dominican' or 'Franciscan' as those terms have often been used to characterize theology in the middle ages.

The articles by Silva and Slotemaker engage with philosophical and theological theories. What follows them draws attention to austerely historical matters: the not-well-known story of the Dominicans in Scotland from the time that the friars first arrived in England to the time when the Scottish Province of the Order, founded out of the English one, ceased to exist. Fr Allan White OP (a former Provincial of the English Dominican Province and a former editor of *New Blackfriars*) expertly tells this colourful story with great attention to detail.

The sixth article below brings us to more modern times and to Fr Vincent McNabb OP (1868- 1943). Born in Ireland, McNabb became an English Dominican novice in 1885. He worked in several houses of the English Province and contributed regularly to *New Blackfriars* (then known simply as *Blackfriars*). He devoted a lot of his time to promoting reunion between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. And he was revered by people such as G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, and Ronald Knox. He became especially famous for preaching on behalf of the Catholic Evidence Guild at Hyde Park's 'Speakers' Corner'. Yet, as Fr Richard Finn OP explains, McNabb also had deep interests in social justice and published a lot on Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Fr Finn details the development of McNabb's writings on that encyclical. He also notes how McNabb's understanding of *Rerum Novarum* differed from that of some of his contemporaries while proving to be a reading that prevailed in Catholic circles for years.

McNabb was one of the most notable of twentieth century Dominicans. But there were others to come, and some of these are discussed in five further essays below: Victor White (1902-1960), Gerald Vann (1906-1963), Cornelius Ernst (1924-1977), and Herbert McCabe (1926-2001).

In '"To Do For Our Own Age What Thomas Did For His": Victor White OP' Clodagh Weldon explains how White strove to study and write about Aquinas while engaging, as did Aquinas, with a wide variety of thinkers. As Weldon notes, White strongly believed that it should be 'the aim of the modern Thomist to integrate all

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modern discoveries and scientific achievements, all that is truly valuable and permanent in post-medieval thought, into the Thomistic synthesis, for the good of mankind and the glory of God: in short to do for our own age what Thomas did for his, building on the foundations he laid'. In 1952 White published *God and the Unconscious*. This came with an introduction by the famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), in which he said 'Although the book is addressed in the first place to the theologian, the psychologist and particularly the medical psychotherapist will be able to glean from it a rich harvest of knowledge'. Jung and White had a close association. This is also noted by Professor Weldon.

As well as being friendly with Jung, White acted as a tutor for Elizabeth Anscombe when she was an Oxford undergraduate. Anscombe (1919-2001) is widely regarded as one the most significant twentieth century British analytic philosophers. She taught at Somerville College, Oxford, and was Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge University from 1970 to 1986. She was also one of the literary executors of someone who preceded her in her Cambridge position — the very famous philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). White instructed Anscombe in 1939. In his article Professor John Berkman evaluates the influence of White on Anscombe's thinking. He also appends the text of the first thing Anscombe ever published, which was a short article in *The Catholic Herald* titled 'I am Sadly Theoretical: It Is The Effect of Being at Oxford'. Professor Berkman provides helpful explanatory notes for this article.

Victor White was a Dominican novice together with Gerald Vann, and their interests overlapped to some degree. Both, for example, were keen to explore and present the thinking of Aquinas.

Unlike White, however, Vann served for many years as a teacher at the Dominican boarding school at Laxton, of which he eventually became Headmaster. In their article on Vann, Richard Conrad OP and Nicholas Crowe OP suggest that 'Vann's role shepherding young people into adulthood in the complex social and political world of the 1930s and 1940s helps explain his intellectual fertility'. As Frs Conrad and Crowe also explain, Vann became a distinguished writer, preacher, and broadcaster. He published more than twenty books. Like White, he aimed to link the thought of Aquinas to philosophical and scientific discoveries coming after Aquinas.

The same can be said of Cornelius Ernst. It has often been lamented that his death at the age of fifty three cut down a promising publishing career. Yet Ernst, in spite of multiple teaching duties, produced a book on the theology of grace and did a substantial job translating and commenting on 1a2ae, 106-114 for the Blackfriars edition of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (on which more below). And we have a substantial collection of essays from him published under the title *Multiple Echo:*

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Explorations in Theology (edited by Timothy Radcliffe and Fergus Kerr in 1979). In his article on Ernst for this issue of *New Blackfriars*, Oliver Keenan writes about the thought of Aquinas via what he takes to be Ernst's 'ontology of meaning'.

People sometimes complain that Ernst's writings are hard to follow because of their obscure literary style. But nobody has that reaction to the writings of Herbert McCabe, whose prose was always crystal clear. McCabe was a born communicator and had a gift for presenting complex thoughts in a lucid and understandable way. With a notable interruption (sometimes referred to as 'The McCabe Affair'), he edited *New Blackfriars* for many years and, with support from the Bushey Congregation of Dominican sisters, enabled it to survive so as to become what it is now. I suspect that he has influenced more people outside the Dominican Order than those of them in it. He was much admired by people such as Anthony Kenny, Alasdair MacIntyre, Denys Turner, and Terry Eagleton. In 'Herbert McCabe on God and Humanity', Simon Hewitt provides a fine introduction to the two topics in which McCabe was most interested.

I have to confess that I have a special interest in McCabe since he made me his literary executor. After he died, I arranged for unpublished writings that he left behind to appear in print. They have all been well received, and McCabe is very much on the current map when it comes to philosophical theology in the light of Aquinas. He is increasingly quoted in contemporary literature and is now the subject of several doctoral dissertations. As I have noted, Simon Hewitt's article nicely (albeit briefly) presents what McCabe thought about God and us. I might (rather shamelessly) add that anyone who wishes to find the best of McCabe in one volume might consider reading Brian Davies and Paul Kucharski (ed.), *The McCabe Reader* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

McCabe features yet again in the present number of *New Blackfriars*. In 'Dominican Ditchling and Herbert McCabe's Sacramental Politics: Backwards to a Radical Future', Dr Nick O'Brien relates some of McCabe's writings to the ideas influencing the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic, which in 1920 set up a short lived lay community of artists in Ditchling, Sussex. Notable members of this community were the sculptor and printmaker, Eric Gill (1882-1940), and the painter and poet, David Jones (1895-1974). Dr O'Brien argues that 'McCabe's concern with communication, politics, and sacrament resonates with Ditchling's attempt to construct meaningful community, and in a way that maintains solidarity with the Dominican tradition of social and political critique'.

In the English Dominican Province this tradition has often surfaced with a special concern for peace. And Brian Wicker (a former Vice-President of *Pax Christi UK*) writes about this topic in 'Making Peace

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at Spode'. In doing so, however, he pays special attention to Spode itself and to Conrad Pepler OP (1908-1993) in particular. Spode House, located in Rugely, Staffordshire, at one point became the (now defunct) English Dominican conference center, and Pepler was its 'Warden' from 1953 to 1981. He was the son of Hilary Pepler, who was much involved with Eric Gill and David Jones at Ditchling (see above). Together with Elizabeth Anscombe, Pepler was also present at the death of Wittgenstein. Like many others, Dr Wicker asserts that it is hard to think of Spode House without thinking of Conrad Pepler and his role there as Warden. Under Pepler's Wardenship, many frequented Spode for lectures and meetings. Dr Wicker provides a lively reminiscence of his own experiences of Spode House and Conrad Pepler. I should note that his article below is a reprint of one that he published in *New Blackfriars* in 1981. I judged it worthy of being reproduced in the present issue since it provides an engaging account of an important side of the English Dominican Province in the twentieth century.

Another such side is the monumental 60 volume Blackfriars edition of Aquinas's *Summa Theolgiae*, whose Editor in General was Thomas Gilby OP (1902-1975). As Fergus Kerr OP says, this edition, which appeared between 1964 and 1976 is 'the greatest collective scholarly achievement of the English Dominican Province'. The word 'collective' is correct here since a number of English Dominicans participated in it. But Gilby was the 'prime mover', and he sought aid from Dominicans outside the English Province and from a number of lay scholars.

The Blackfriars *Summa* project began in 1958 when Fr Gilby was deputed by a Provincial Chapter to get on with the business of producing a new translation of the *Summa Theologiae*. But the Blackfriars *Summa* is more than a mere translation. It reproduces a version of Aquinas's Latin text alongside every page of its translation. Each volume also contains numerous notes and Appendices. In 'Gilby's *Summa*' Fr Kerr tells us a lot about Gilby himself and his role in the production of the Blackfriars *Summa*. He also explains how people who were not English Dominicans contributed to the end result. In addition, he reflects on the kind of Thomism that the Blackfriars *Summa* displays or echoes.

Rounding off this jubilee edition of *New Blackfriars* is an essay by an American Dominican friar — Fr Richard Woods of the Province of St Albert the Great. Fr Woods has been a welcome visitor to the English Province for more than twenty years, and he now reflects on his experience of the Province and of some of the people in it that he came to know. His article is beautifully written and will help people to see how at least one Dominican not in the English Province views that Province after long acquaintance with it. When reading it I was strongly reminded of Bill Bryson's book *Notes from a Small Island*

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(1995). In Bryson-like style, Fr Woods provides a narrative that is both autobiographical, informative, and sometimes humorous. The terrain covered by Fr Woods is smaller than that covered by Bryson. But it is reported in an equally entertaining way.

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