ANTHONY ROSS OP 1917-1993

Oscar Wilde is alleged to have said that there is only one thing worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about. Fr Anthony spent a great deal of his life being talked about. Many people have commented on his list of achievements: Catholic Chaplain at Edinburgh University, Deputy Chairman of the Scottish Parole Board, Chairman of the Scottish Catholic Historical Association, Provincial of the English Dominicans, Rector of the University of Edinburgh and many other distinctions. But, like many priests, his most valuable work as pastor and counsellor was hidden. During his long career he was an instrument through which many were brought to glimpse the edge of the mystery of God, and through whom many came to hope in God's goodness and to trust in his mercy.

It was often said of Fr Anthony that he was a man ahead of his time. In many ways he was precisely a man of his time, but in an age which could not make space for prophets. Like many of his generation, his experience was indelibly marked by economic depression and by war. He said himself that in the thirties he, "lost faith in bullets and ballots as a way of re-shaping society, and thought some kind of spiritual revolution was the only hope for the future." It was this conviction which led him to the Church and to the Order. At the same time a group of theologians in France were stressing the need for a re-centring in the person of Christ and in his paschal mystery. Motivated by a concern that theology was absent from, rather than present to, the contemporary world and that the rupture between theology and life was issuing in a non-historical and rationalistic way of thinking, they proposed a re-engagement with the mystery of God. An engagement that was to issue in a concern for the study of history and an attempt to return to the sources of the Christian tradition. Their efforts sparked a revival of pastoral life and practice within Catholicism, including a mission to workers and those marginalised or alienated from the institutional Church. It was precisely these concerns which motivated Fr Anthony in his apostolate in Scotland. Many of the founding fathers of this "new theology", as it was disparagingly called, men like Henri De Lubac, Jean Danielou, Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar spent some years under a cloud for their pains. They came into their own at the Second Vatican Council and two of them ended their days as Cardinals of the Roman Church. Thus, what often seemed a spontaneous response to circumstances on Fr Anthony's part was actually part of a sustained evangelical and theological strategy which in turn was linked to his own view of Scottish life and culture.

Fr Anthony was proud of his country. He devoted a substantial portion of his life to its history, culture, literature and traditions. For him it was a varied and spacious place. He had no time for parochialism. In his writings he emphasised, sometimes unfashionably, the ethnic and cultural

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disunities of the country and cited them as an example of its richness. Scotland, for him, was a spacious place, a meeting ground of different European cultures and of Scotsmen who felt part of cultures that extended into the European mainland. It was this strain in his character, and his impatience with what he saw as cowardice with regard to analysis of what he called "Scottish myths", that led him to the establishment of the *Scottish Catholic Historical Association* and the *Innes Review*. The aims of the *Scottish Catholic Historical Association* as he defined them were, "As far as is humanly possible we hope to be fair and objective in the work we do, to avoid the passion of controversy and to try to understand those who differ from us. We will attempt to make truth known without suppression or distortion, believing this to not only a scientific but a religious duty." The pursuit of truth is a religious duty. It is the truth that sets us free.

During an exchange between Archbishop Cranmer and Thomas More in Robert Bolt's play *A Man For All Seasons*, Cranmer suggests that More's willingness to face martyrdom smacks a little of the sin of presumption. More replies, "Not so My Lord, He will not refuse one who is so blithe to go to Him." If we were to isolate a quality which characterised Father Anthony's life, especially in his last years, it was blitheness. He displayed a patience and acceptance of his increasing infirmity which surprised many of those who had known him in more active days. Above all he seemed to have no fear of taking leave of this world. That might seem odd in one who so obviously loved life. Fr Anthony gives a clue to interpreting this in the introduction to the edition he did with Peter Walsh of St Thomas *On Courage*.

> "Our life is difficult in all its aspects, and even more difficult as virtue increases. We must learn to overcome fear if we are to live fully; fear of personal injury, of loss of reputation, or property, fear of death above all. if we face death with courage and have come to terms with it, the rest will follow. to come to terms with death we have to know where we hope to end; all else depends on the goal, which for Thomas is eternal union with God in truth and love. The way through this life is one of involvement with God's creation, with the things and above all with the people, whom we encounter. That is why we need the long view in our difficulties, large-mindedness and generosity in our use of material goods, patience and perseverance at all times. that is why, if we are to come through heroically, we need the special assistance of God which we call the Gift of Courage, which will lift us to a heroic endurance far above what we could otherwise undertaken.

Eternal rest give unto him O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.

AJW

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