

destructive fights which no one can win, through which we will all lose and which could end by destroying us all. Until we reach the Kingdom of God, responsible, mutually worked out compromise will again and again be of the essence of true godliness and true humanity.

Anyone who rejects compromise as a matter of policy, programme or conviction, is putting himself or herself in the place of God, and Christians and atheists can surely agree that, whether there is a God or not, no person or set of persons from our human race is suitable for divine appointment. Consider the bearing of this on our most pressing social tragedy, the Miners' Strike.

We'll leave Bishop Jenkins there. His next remarks were widely reported. I don't know where he went to school, and it doesn't much matter, and I don't know how he votes, because we have a secret ballot in this country. But I'd bet a year's subscription to *New Blackfriars* that he votes SDP.

PETER HEBBLETHWAITE

THE EDITOR RESPONDS...

In the early 1920s we were already being reproved for printing 'rank bolshevism'. What Peter Hebblethwaite says to us is at least more subtle. His main criticism is that *New Blackfriars* may be drifting into becoming an organ of a particular political party, or, more exactly, one sector of a political party, with a clearly recognizable ideological position. He thinks he can already sniff, very very slightly, the smell of the smugness of those who claim to know all the truth—he sniffs out ideological smugness with almost as much ardour as the inquisitor in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* sniffs out heresy. So he quotes the Pontiff with relish, pointing out that *Laborem Exercens* attacks the ideologies of both the left and the right. And the conclusion which he draws from that document is that our readers must adopt the urbane and genial open-mindedness of the political centre, with its ability and preparedness to compromise. 'Readers of *New Blackfriars* need to be jolted out of two-party complacency', he says. (This could bewilder some of our readers, seeing that half of them live outside the U.K.) By implication, he is telling us to take more notice of the centre parties in British politics than—in his opinion—we have so far.

If one uses the word 'theology' in its classical sense, we are a 'theological journal'. If one uses the word in its narrower, 19th-century sense, we are at least a journal that publishes a lot of theology. However one defines the word, I think it would be generally agreed

that we have a deep commitment to the theological enterprise. So we must, as a matter of course, oppose any ideology, in so far as an ideology claims to define and encapsulate the ultimate meaning of existence.

We, on *New Blackfriars*, are trying to make sense of our world in a rigorous fashion from a radical Christian perspective, but we are always profoundly aware of the limitations of our enterprise. For, as Christians, we believe that the goal and the fulfilment of man is to be found only in God, in the Kingdom in which God will be all in all. The God whom man seeks as his final happiness is the God who transcends definition. What he is, as Aquinas said, we cannot know. It follows that any political ideology which claims to define man's significance, whether as a function of the economy or as a pawn of the State, is idolatrous. 'Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

What consequences do we draw from this fundamental theological principle? Up to this point Peter Hebblethwaite and we on *New Blackfriars* are walking hand in hand. But he seems to conclude that a position in the centre, that of the SDP, would be that of the *anima naturaliter christiana*. After all, the liberals are open-minded and without preconceptions. But that, it seems, is a false conclusion. Here my objective is not to bombard the liberalism of the centre, but simply to point out that the liberalism of the centre itself conceals an ideology, an image of man as the free detached agent, the genesis of which has been so brilliantly described by Alisdair Macintyre in *After Virtue*. It is no less an ideology for not normally being systematically articulated.

Clearly *New Blackfriars* cannot be the tool or mouthpiece of any particular political party or programme. That would be a negation of its fundamental theological task of seeking to understand a humanity made in the image of the transcendent God. This, however, does not mean that it can air no opinions as its own. It is precisely because theology must always be a shatterer of images of man that Christians, if they are going to be true to the Gospel, must find themselves on the side of 'the marginalized', the broken, the 'people who don't add up to anything'. We say something about the indescribable mystery of man and turn our freedom from ideology into something concrete precisely by making what has come to be called (perhaps misleadingly) 'a preferential option for the poor'. This is evident both from the teaching of the gospels and from an abundance of recent papal teaching.

It is quite true that Michael Knowles seems to be unaware of the extensive and radical teaching of popes in recent years on the evils of capitalism. There is indeed a tradition of Catholic social teaching. If it

had been attended to with the same intense interest as papal teaching on sex, then the political consequences would have been considerable.

I published Michael Knowles' article primarily because of the important thing it had to say to many of our highly-informed academic readers with forward-looking sympathies. It was written by an intelligent and dedicated man whose knowledge of the Church is, nevertheless, almost entirely based on what he hears and sees in his local parish church—as is the case with the overwhelming majority of Catholics. His 'conservative ecclesiology' is, I agree, very clericalist, but what has he heard to make him think there is any other? He is unaware of all sorts of official institutions concerned with social justice, and the documents that have appeared through them, but what has he heard to make him think that they exist?

The Knowles piece is a damning comment on the silence—the wrong sort of silence—which persists in the Church. It is a silence that can persist in other places too, including magazines (sometimes without the editors noticing). I think much of what Peter Hebblethwaite has said to me is mistaken, but I agree with what he says about the need for room for exchange.

Correspondence disappeared from *Blackfriars* with the outbreak of World War II, and we certainly have not got room to bring back a conventional correspondence column. But in 1985 we plan to give regular space (necessarily very limited) for selected responses from readers running up to 700 words, ones which contribute to a discussion but are not substantial enough to make articles. This will give more people at least some room to be heard. We enter the second half of the 1980s stronger, perhaps, because we now know for certain that many of the dreams and hopes of the Sixties have been blown away and will not return. A genuinely new way of seeing the world is needed. We prepare for a new voice. The preparation—including the modest part of the task we think is ours—will be the work of many many voices.

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