

In Memoriam

Kenelm Foster OP : 1910—1986

Father Kenelm Foster, of Blackfriars, Cambridge, died after a short illness on 6 February.

Born in 1910 at Chuppra in Bihar, he was a son of the Raj. His father was a judge of the High Court of India who, when a scholar of Peterhouse, Cambridge, was received into the Catholic Church by Father Luke Rivington. As a result of his long absences in India, he was a stranger to his children. Only three times did Kenelm remember his coming home on leave. He died in India in 1927. Kenelm's mother was a Digby-Beste with roots going back into the mists. Her great-grandfather was Henry Digby Best, the 'precursor of the Tractarians', a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, who became a Catholic in 1798. The dominant figure in the home was his dictatorial grandmother, in whose house in Florence they lived.

Kenelm was sent to a preparatory school, St Mary's Lodge, St Leonard's-on-Sea, founded 'for the sons of Catholic gentlemen'. It belonged to the Misses Stevens; highly qualified visiting masters attended. Kenelm remembered Miss Polly and Miss Fanny with appreciative humour; such Victorian ladies were adept at providing a full educational foundation.

In 1922 he went to Downside. It must have been a shock to exchange Miss Polly for the daunting Father Sigebert Trafford. He remembered the school with critical affection; 'wealthy, self-contained, feudal and debonair; a setting that encouraged individuality because there seemed to be nothing to fear from it.' On the whole he was happy there. He boxed for the school; he felt that his family were not 'well off' enough to manage the required standard. But he emerged having obtained a scholarship at Christ's College, Cambridge, and then a First and the offer of a Fellowship. This he declined because he hoped to become a Dominican; he had met the Order in the person of Bede Jarrett.

When Kenelm left the novitiate house in 1935 he went to Hawkesyard to 'start' the study of philosophy. He was already learned and cultured, an artist and poet, more educated than some of his teachers. In those days the twenty or so philosophy students were kept *incommunicado* from the rest of the Hawkesyard community; so together they grew into a community with a lasting feeling for each

other. I remember the surprise at finding myself at the same level as so educated a man, so sharp a mind, so beautiful a person.

Both at Hawkesyard and Blackfriars, Oxford, Kenelm was thought to be not properly docile in his approach to the studies. English universities were still regarded with suspicion. So when the time came for the students to be divided into intellectual sheep and goats—those who would proceed to theological degrees and those who would not—he found himself among the goats, although a few years later he returned to work for the lectorate in theology. He was sent to Holy Cross, Leicester, as a curate and to be chaplain to the Children of Mary. He never regretted this experience.

In 1948 Kenelm was elected to a lectureship in the Department of Italian Studies at Cambridge, later being appointed Reader in Italian. He retired in 1978. He had a stint as superior of our house in Cambridge, and also on the provincial's council. In 1976 the Master of the Order appointed him Master in Sacred Theology. In 1979 London University awarded him the Edmund Gardner prize in recognition of distinguished published work in Italian studies. It was a unanimous decision. He also received an honour from the Italian Government.

I believe that Kenelm has a special place in the modern English Dominican province. Perhaps I may try and explain.

He was nearly 24 when he joined the Order. The 1920s and '30s were his seedbed; there he remained firmly rooted. Hence, Hopkins was the modern poet in whom he took greatest delight, understanding and perhaps sharing the poet's tension between his religion and artistry. Christopher Dawson he thought was probably the greatest Catholic educator in England since Newman—'the fault is ours' not to have profited from him. D.H. Lawrence was a writer of tragic genius whose peculiar gift, he thought, was 'in being extraordinarily aware of non-rational modes of being—the life of plants, animals and human feeling'. When Kenelm rejoiced in David Jones' manner of prose-writing, with 'its rambling sweet disorder, its frolicsome imagery', he not only recognised its 'heart-lightening quality; for the images do not merely frolic, they really aid intelligence', but he was reminded that this sort of writing is 'the human spirit's representation' of what Paul Claudel (a further influence on Kenelm) called *la sainte réalité*.

This brings us to the centre of things, his search for '*la sainte réalité*'. Aquinas and Dante were his two masters. To go with them, all that his mind had accepted from his study of literature, history, art and poetry were integrated into his theology and his understanding of the Word.

Perhaps his life-long knowledge of Italy helped to put St Thomas into context. 'The respect due to him is no longer confused with that due to theology itself—as though his *Summa* (method and all) were somehow

Theology Absolute.’ The capacity to read St Thomas as a thirteenth-century text made him able ‘to respond to what the great master offers us: an expert guidance into the inmost recesses of spiritual being’.

Kenelm dedicated his *Life of St Thomas Aquinas* to the friend we shared from those days at Hawkesyard. He has been dead for twenty years. The dedication is *spe sociae exultationis*—in the hope of shared exultation.

BEDE BAILEY OP

Editorial note:

We are planning a special commemorative issue dedicated to Kenelm Foster—it will be one of our autumn issues. More information about it will be appearing later.

J.O.M.

Reviews

THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE, edited by Henry Wansbrough. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1985. Pp. xv + 2106 incl. tables, + 7 maps with gazetteer. £25.00.

It is of course impossible to review any version of the Bible. If it is the Bible indeed it has to be lived with as the word of God. I would not be able to do that with this version even if I had two years for a review rather than a month, and a complete issue rather than a thousand words.

The Jerusalem Bible seemed to me the best of a very bad bunch of new translations. It had a better idea of what it was trying to do than, say, the New English Bible, and it was not so scandalously far from the texts translated as the Good News Bible so oddly favoured by evangelical protestants. It had some faults common to all the contemporary versions in English (notably an unnecessary departure from the syntax of the original Hebrew and Greek texts so ably imitated into English in the traditional versions, and a complete inability to rise to the parts of the Bible that are awe-inspiring or mysterious or the parts that are poetry and that therefore have to be rendered into poetry) as well as a few of its own, especially an occasional unwillingness to translate at all and an undue intrusiveness of editorial notes.

It so happens that a magazine I run, *The Gadfly*, has just accepted a detailed account of some of these shortcomings in the first Jerusalem Bible, and so perhaps the best I can do is look at whether the new version has improved on the bad things discussed by A.C. Capey in that essay. ‘Accuracy of translation has been a prime consideration. Paraphrase has been avoided more rigorously than in the first edition’, says the General Editor’s

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