

■ In the first number of *Blackfriars*, forty-four years ago, an article explained the choice of its improbable title: a nickname for Dominicans in medieval England. It was a 1920 choice, nostalgic but hopeful too. But 'Blackfriars' had long since come to mean streets and bridges and a station on the London Underground: for that matter a gin distillery, Rhine wines and a range of paints as well. So the name was never as Gothic as it seemed. It was a convenient title for a review that could hardly have endured the strait-jacket of an exactly descriptive name. But, whatever its shifts of interest and insight, it retained a sturdy confidence that truth could be known and should be commended. It was 'ecumenical' long before it was fashionable to be so, and it inspected many moral dilemmas with a confidence that seemed audacious then but now seems usual.

After the second war a second Dominican review appeared, *Life of the Spirit*, originally a supplement to *Blackfriars* and concerned with the roots of prayer and contemplation from which any effective Christian action must spring. The return to a single review does not mean any lessening of emphasis on spiritual foundations. On the contrary, the need now, above all else, is to realize the true dimensions of the 'truth in charity' to which Pope John and the Council have called the world. Nothing has so marked these recent years of renewal within the Church as the sense of unity which springs from the Christian spirit. It is the total resources of Christ and his truth that must be brought to bear on a world that is to be totally redeemed. That is why a social problem – of political freedom, economic justice or sexual ethics – is always a spiritual opportunity, for the human condition is of this order: it is to be wholly healed, not alleviated now and again, in some chosen small part. And that, too, is why the spiritual life is always a social reality, for however separate the work of prayer may seem to be it remains a human work, a declaration of a humanity that is shared and which cannot, this side of eternity, be cast aside.

*New Blackfriars*, then, is new in the sense that every day is a fresh awakening to an actual need. It hopes to look at the world as it is and not as it might have been. The questions it wants to ask – and even to answer – are not fictitious ones. They are here and now, but too often they seem insoluble because they are isolated from an order which alone gives them meaning and which alone assures some hope of reconciliation in the end. 'There can be no peace between men unless there is peace within each one of them: unless each one builds up within himself the order wished by God'. The wise words of Pope John are not a pious aside. They strike at the heart of all our discontents, and any review of Christian inspiration must want to make them the starting-point of all it has to say.

This review inherits the good-will of its predecessors and looks to the continuing support of its old friends. But it addresses itself in a new form to many new friends as

well. It looks to them for support, and for criticism too. A review cannot grow in the vacuum of its editor's choice, and *New Blackfriars* has no other purpose than to use the resources of theology, not as a private language for specialists but as a contribution to a living debate that concerns us all.

■ The third session of the Vatican Council is unlikely to attract the publicity that marked its earlier meetings: the alarms of high debate may be expected to give place to the business of implementing decisions that by this have been largely taken. This does not mean that discussion is at an end or that a first fervour has been supplanted by the habitual procedures of the curia. But in retrospect the earlier exchanges, prolonged and inconclusive as they seemed to be, were the necessary prologue to reform. For reform is only possible if the need for it has been realized and – however confusedly – expressed. The Council may now seem to have become a more domestic affair, but in a true sense its real work begins as its novelty declines. No one can any longer suppose that the response of the conciliar fathers to Pope John's original call has been slack or insincere. What is expected now is an ordered expression of that response, especially on the issues that most crucially affect the Church's encounter with the modern world. The truth is poorly served by demands for short cuts to the solution of problems which are complex or even, this side of eternity, insoluble. But the truth is not only to be told: it is to be commended to men. And that is why the Council itself, and the national conferences of bishops on whom the responsibility falls of interpreting its mind, must find a language that lives and does not fall back on the arcane technicalities of ecclesiastical speech. At the level of simple communication an important work needs to be done, which, it has to be admitted, has hardly been helped by some recent episcopal utterances, nor for that matter by the very constitution on the media of communication which was promulgated at the end of the last session. The English-speaking bishops might do worse than commission writers who are theologians (and the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive) to help them to interpret the Council's work as well as their own share in implementing its decisions. They would then have less reason to complain of fragmentary and gossip-ridden accounts that are the inevitable alternative to reliable information.

■ 'We should like to be given a few more reasons for the change.' *The Times*, in what one must suppose to be a selective correspondence on Latin in the liturgy, recently reflected the sense of loss that many Catholics undoubtedly feel at the prospect of a largely English Mass. And one correspondent's demand for more information underlines once again the need for theological communication that reaches the root of the matter. The news of the liturgical changes at once released a tide of reactions that was

emotional and nostalgic, though founded in the special circumstances of English Catholic history. It is ungenerous to dismiss such regrets as merely retrograde. And one may question the speed with which new texts have been devised, especially in view of the more radical liturgical reforms envisaged by the Council which are still to come. But the answer to the demand for reasons why is plainly set out in the Vatican constitution on the liturgy, a document more talked about than read. The Council is committed to the total work of making the Church's mission more evident to men. And the primary impact of the Church is through the worship that proclaims her mission to men. It is in the daily renewal of the work of Christ that the word of God is uttered afresh, and it is a word that must be heard – and understood. The bishops of England and Wales preserve in their proposals for the Mass a legitimate distinction between the liturgy of the word and the sacrifice itself, a distinction which the respective use of English (or Welsh) and Latin underlines. It is not enough for the change to be merely made, as though it were a pragmatic concession to the taste of the times. It needs to be seen as the first fruits of the Council's work of renewal: the evident sign of that pastoral concern which inspired Pope John's calling of the Council in the beginning and by which all its decisions must be judged.

■ As the confident predictions of the politicians grow ever louder, the reluctant voter may be tempted to think that his best contribution to the common good is to stay silent and even to refuse to be corralled into the voting booth at all. In the monolithic structure of English and American elections the individual can indeed seem to have little effective choice unless he supposes that the political truth of things is neatly divided into two (or three) parties, each claiming to be the sole repository of salvation. That is why candidates must expect to be asked about their consciences as well as about their parties' manifestoes. The party system should not be invoked to evade the obligations that human freedom confers. There are issues – in the context of the General Election one thinks immediately of the moral aspects of defence policy, the taxing of speculative profits, the future of voluntary aided schools, the retention of capital punishment, the reform of the trade unions – which are properly ones on which a voter may expect to be given more than a blanket assurance of the party line from a candidate whose labelled loyalty cannot dispense him from holding opinions of his own. And the elector is entitled to know what they are. Perhaps the best one can hope for is that parliamentary candidates should at least be made aware of the widespread suspicion of monopolist claims to wisdom and, however committed they may be to the general lines of party policy, should recognize the claims of minorities not only to be heard but to have their views considered. The floating voter, one is constantly assured, needs to be wooed. He should not underestimate the worth of his dowry.

■ The television psychiatrist has by this become one of the guardians of the national conscience, ready to scold or reassure, applying his wisdom as the expected footnote to any discussion that touches our anguish and our need. In a recent programme no fewer than six experts drawn from the World Congress of Psychotherapy meeting in London surveyed the whole range of man's misery, or so it seemed. Their conclusions were so general that one wondered a little about the value of the large theory, the all-embracing answer, which the individual can too easily interpret to confirm his own particular case. This is the peril of the mass media: they speak to millions of matters that are meant for you and me. And the psychotherapists admitted indeed that many of our mental anxieties and disturbances can be solved or at least made bearable by talking things over with a friend. But the friend has become a television personality, relaxed, discreetly lit, and his words have the euphoric appeal of the commercials for healing other maladies, more easily defined. The psychiatrist is not to be blamed. Often enough he does the useful work of canonizing mere common sense, and his authority is a plain enough sign of the lack of acceptance of more traditional therapies. But there is no reason to suppose that a wisdom acquired from the clinical treatment of individual cases should qualify him to be the consultant to 'a world in anguish' (for such was the programme's title). Psychologists – and priests, for that matter, and many others besides – can find it hard to believe that a particular knowledge may be an inadequate interpreter of a universal malady. But television, the press – and even such paragraphs as these – can too easily forget that people are persons, and not the least urgent of our needs is to recognize the limits of the mass media as well as the vast new opportunities they give.

■ The Penguin publication of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* is a reminder – and the events of this summer have underlined its urgency – that the Negro crisis in America has long since passed out of the region of rational debate. There is indeed little that is reasonable about race: you do not argue about the fact of your humanity, and to deny it is the abrogation not only of reason but of humanity itself. Mr Baldwin's passionate denunciation of the hypocrisies and fears that still confuse an issue that must now be seen in all its moral starkness is firmly directed to the conscience not only of Americans but of mankind. And rightly so, for what is at stake here is not a programme of civil rights but a truth about the human situation which is, with all its implications, the single issue of our time.