

sort of presence until 1820. When the Franciscan Donatus Mooney reflected on the reasons for the survival of the friars, the most potent reason he gave was divine providence. His words deserve to be considered by present-day Irish clergy: 'Nor have we any doubt that God will sustain us, and give us increase from day to day as long as we shall be useful labourers in his vineyard of Ireland, living purely and devoutly according to our state'.

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ERIC GILL: WORK IS SACRED edited by Martin John Broadley, *Catholic Archives Society*, in association with Koinonia Press, Manchester, 2013, pp. ix + 92, £15.00, pbk

Since the publication of Fiona MacCarthy's biography in 1989, any discussion of the work of Eric Gill inevitably falls under the shadow of the sexual revelations disclosed there by the author's close examination of his private diaries. As Conrad Pepler OP (son of Hilary Pepler, co-founder with Gill of the community at Ditchling) remarked in a review of MacCarthy's book in this journal in April 1989, the life revealed poses a 'glaring challenge to what society even in the second half of the twentieth century takes for granted as established human and religious behaviour'.

The occasion for the present short but engaging volume of essays is the recent centenary in 2013 of Gill's conversion to Catholicism. As such, it is faced at the outset by that challenge and by the apparent tension between what an earlier biographer (Malcolm Yorke, *Eric Gill Man of Flesh and Spirit*, 1981) identified as the 'two great moving forces' in Gill's life, namely, religion and sex.

Yet as the editor Martin Broadley explains in his comprehensive Introduction, the intention is to limit the present exploration to 'the significance of Gill's faith and how it influenced and fashioned his work and thought'. Analysis of Gill's 'sexual antinomianism' lies beyond its scope. The response to the challenge here is, in other words, one of apparent evasion, the separation of the life from the work, the sex from the religion. Yet the eight tantalising essays that follow, of varying length and ambition, arranged in chronological order and interspersed with more than thirty illustrations, nonetheless captivate.

The chronological span ranges from Gill's early years in Chichester between 1897 and 1899, up to his design of the church of St Peter's Goreslton, Norfolk shortly before his death in 1940. As befits a publication of the Catholic Archives Society, each essay is firmly, and admirably, rooted in primary archival sources, notably those held by West Sussex Record Office, the newly re-opened Ditchling Museum of Art+Craft, the University of Notre Dame in the USA, Westminster Cathedral and the Clark Memorial Library at the University of Los Angeles, including some 'hitherto unknown or unexplored'.

The first two essays effectively set the scene. Timothy McCann's essay on Chichester, although dealing with the period before Gill's conversion to Catholicism in 1913, nevertheless evokes the importance for Gill of Chichester as a model of humane urban environment, reflecting the 'beauty and order of a Roman city'. Joe Cribb (Co-ordinator of the Eric Gill Society) then offers a reflection on a single letter from Gill to Everard Meynell (dated 18 January 1912) seeking 'information, instruction and enlightenment' on Catholicism.

As Cribb points out, it was about the same time that Gill, briefly working in association with Jacob Epstein, carved a large relief, *Ecstasy*, which was to be the model and inspiration for his *Divine Lovers*. The latter visualizes Christ as husband of the Church his bride, and so represents the concept which Cribb recognises as central to Gill's Catholic faith and which reveals 'the religious thought behind his otherwise startling sculptures and engravings'.

It was in fact Gill's brief association with Epstein that framed the Royal Academy exhibition *Wild Thing* in 2009–10, which demonstrated how Epstein, Gill and Gaudier-Brzeska became pioneers of a modern British sculpture whose sexual explicitness and boldness of form shocked contemporary viewers. In the case of Gill, the aftershock reached the Catholic hierarchy and the English Dominican Province (of which Gill had become a lay member in 1913) in especially acute form. In answer to the question posed by the present volume, 'How far did Gill's faith influence his work?', their contemporary answer was, 'Clearly, not enough'.

The subsequent chapters ostensibly redress the balance in favour of a more positive estimation of the 'influence' of Gill's Catholic faith, with insightful essays by John Sherman, Naomi Billingsley, Michael Curran, Ruth Cribb and Andrew Derrick, respectively on the production of illustrative posters to promote the work of St Dominic's Press, on the Stations of the Cross for Westminster Cathedral and for St Augustine's Church, High Wycombe, on the BBC sculptures of Ariel and Prospero and on the design of St Peter's Church, Goreleston.

Cumulatively, they leave the impression that not just the overtly (or, in the case of the BBC sculptures, implicitly) religious content but the distinctive form of these various creations confirm a profound debt to Gill's faith, and in particular to his embrace of Aquinas, made possible by the work of Jacques Maritain: Gill wrote the introduction to the 1923 St Dominic's Press translation by the Rev. John O'Connor (model for Chesterton's Father Brown) of Maritain's *Art et Scholastique*, which he described as 'cooling medicine' for the English people, 'heated by the burden of overproduction'. The text became compulsory reading at the Ditchling dinner table.

In contrast to the other contributions Martin Broadley's own essay on *Eric Gill in Manchester* deals with 'opinions fashioned in spoken word, hewn from notions of industrial society and belief in social justice, rather than by stone-carving or letter-cutting'. It is here that the attempt in this volume to divorce the work from the life, the sex from the religion, breaks down most conspicuously.

It is, for example, apparent that, whilst working on a sculpture for Manchester Cathedral and incidentally preparing a lecture on *Money and Morals*, Gill was staying with his long-time mistress and future model for his *25 Nudes*, May Reeves, who was also the sister of John Baptist Reeves OP. The gist of *Morals and Money* is that no one can be expected to live a good life under the conditions imposed by industrial capitalism, and that the Catholic priesthood is complicit in this travesty by failing to speak out against the capitalist system and 'the beehive state': 'being good is economically impossible... there would be no sex problem, no marriage problem, no prostitution problem, no birth control problem, no population problem, no unemployment problem if our economic problem were solved'. As Broadley points out, the juxtaposition in this way of personal ethics and public pronouncement raises important and unavoidable questions about the relationship between sin and virtue, nature and grace. Critically, for Gill, 'an immoral life might not be a sinful life'. As Broadley concludes, until those issues of nature and grace, sin and virtue are adequately addressed in relation to Gill, it is unlikely that a more positive study of Gill's attitude to work and social justice 'will, or indeed can' be made.

However, as the editor also points out, the recent re-opening of the Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, the depositing of the archives of the English Dominican Province at Douai Abbey Library and the cataloguing of the Gill Archive at Westminster Cathedral 'will greatly facilitate' further research into aspects of Gill's work of which the present volume by its concise nature can offer only 'glimpses'. Three aspects in particular afforded by those glimpses invite future exploration.

First, there is the question of 'influence'. At several points there is reference to the 'influence' of Catholicism on Gill's work, whether it be the recognition that his 'new found faith would influence his more intimate art work', such as the transgressive and 'startling' image of *The Nuptials of God*, or the 'highly influential' impact of Vincent McNabb OP and other Dominicans in the creation of the Guild of St Dominic and St Joseph at Ditchling or of 'Thomistic theology' more generally. However, as Aidan Nichols OP has demonstrated both in his contribution to *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (2007), and in his monograph *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (2007), the relationship between Gill, his Arts and Crafts predecessors and the various cross-currents of French Catholic aesthetic theory is fertile but complex. It is the distinctive and active 'use' and appropriation of that tradition by Gill rather than his status as passive recipient of its 'influence' that can offer the necessary context to his genius as artist and social 'prophet', and thereby provide the framework within which further archival research might be best interpreted.

Secondly, Gill's incursion into social ethics would also gain salience if seen as part of that broader interest in political pluralism that marked English political thought up to the Second World War and that, as exemplified in the writing of Bede Jarrett OP, the Prior Provincial of the English Dominicans for much of Gill's life, had a certain resonance with the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, cited in this volume as central to his social activism. Gill's experiments in communal living, his commitment to Distributism and social justice in the face of industrial capitalism, and his reflections on the nature of human labour can be seen to occupy the space that falls between the very differently accentuated anti-statism of Belloc's *The Servile State* on the one hand and the guild socialism of G.D.H. Cole on the other. Despite its sub-title, there is in fact relatively little in this volume that explicitly addresses Gill's views on the 'holy tradition of working', and the editor's own contribution on *Eric Gill in Manchester* concedes that it amounts to 'merely pointers for possible further research'. The broader hinterland of English political pluralism remains largely neglected.

A third topic for more comprehensive investigation is that of Gill as 'preacher'. At several points in the present volume reference is made to the importance of individual Dominicans in Gill's life, including most famously Vincent McNabb but also Hilary Carpenter, Hugh Pope, Austin Barker, John Baptist Reeves and Bede Jarrett. As a member of the Dominican Third Order, Gill espoused not just the teaching of Aquinas but the ideals of the 'Order of Preachers'. Yet the extent to which Gill's identity as a 'preacher' in stone, wood, words and lettering might provide coherence to his life and work is largely unexamined.

Gill's views on the relationship between erotic love and divine love admittedly have more in common with 'hot' Cistercian and Carmelite spirituality than with the 'cooler' Dominican identification of divine love with friendship. Yet in other regards it is clear that Gill found much in the Dominican charism to help shape his genius. Had Gill conformed to Dominican thinking on 'love as friendship' (*caritas* as *amicitia* rather than as *amor*) he might just have strayed less eccentrically into the byways of sexual antinomianism. The current volume's avoidance of the issue may be prudent, but the relationship between Gill's views on (and practice of) religion and sex remain fundamental to an integrated assessment of his life and work. His Dominicanism offers a potential prism through which to view his complexity afresh.

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