

COMMENTARY

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

HISTORY and philosophy of science is a subject (a single subject, each aspect throwing light on the other) which has become important in English universities only since the war. At some half-dozen universities there are special lectureships; London has a full-scale department; elsewhere at least some lectures are given. The reason is obvious enough. By introducing the science student to the fuller implications of his subject and its relationship with others, whether by consideration of its foundations or by reflection on its developed form, and by giving the arts student some idea of the power and interest of science, history and philosophy of science does much to combat the increasing departmentalism of specialist studies at the university. The last few years have seen the publication of several important books, and a flourishing journal has appeared quarterly since 1951.

Nor is it difficult to see why the new subject has been of especial interest to Catholics; the proportion of them who teach in this faculty is noticeably higher than in others. Theology has never really come to terms with modern science: if the days of skirmishing are temporarily over, it cannot be denied that a cold war still goes on, with an iron curtain down—a state of affairs which the medieval mind would have found intolerable. Here too history and philosophy of science gives promise of mediation between opposed sides, and this promise cannot fail to concern Catholics. Since 1954 there has existed a Philosophy of Science Group for all Catholics engaged in science, which operates as part of the Newman Association, and produces a quarterly bulletin for its members.

No excuse is needed, then, for devoting an entire number of *BLACKFRIARS* to this important topic. Traditionally it has always been valued in the Dominican Order. St Thomas did not have that wide and rather erratic sort of curiosity which had given St Albert an interest in science itself, but he too saw the value of its philosophy. He did not develop the subject, not being a professional philosopher, but he used it most effectively in order

to turn theology upside down. What he would make of the subject as fossilized into the cosmology of the modern scholastic manual, were he to return today, is hard to say: he would surely be glad to see it alive and cared for, and in a Dominican journal too.

THE POPE AND THE COUNCIL. His Holiness Pope John XXIII has in the few months since his accession endeared himself to the Church and the world to a degree which scarcely seemed possible so soon after the immense public respect and popular favour which surrounded his immediate predecessor at the end of a long pontificate. One is tempted to think that perhaps no succession has ever so brilliantly set in display the combined continuity and diversity of the Papacy.

Of these two, it is, however, the Papacy's genius for continuity that is chiefly stressed by Pope John's latest and most important move so far, the calling of the General Council. For many outside the Church (and perhaps for some inside as well who held an insufficiently nuanced notion of the Magisterium) the definition of papal infallibility in 1870 made the Vatican a Council to end all councils. They forgot that that Council ended prematurely with much else that had been tabled for discussion concerning the nature of the Church undealt with. More serious, they failed to realize that if the Papacy is supreme authority, it is authority at the service of tradition, and therefore bound, under the Holy Ghost, to hold in the highest reverence such a time-honoured instrument of tradition as the Ecumenical Council.

The note of continuity is also sounded by what the Pope has declared the principal topic of the forthcoming Council to be. For the question of the reconciliation of East and West was the major preoccupation of many medieval Councils. Humanly speaking, the hope of healing this great schism may appear even more remote today than in those Ages of Faith. Yet it is precisely to the faith of us modern men in the Church today that the Pope's initiative comes as a challenge—to our faith and to the prayer which that faith inspires. It is the Bishops of the Catholic world who will in due time be called to assemble in Council: meantime, with the Pope's announcement, it is already the whole flock of Christ which has been called to pray for the ends for which the

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because of the motion it formerly shared with the earth.

This point was explicitly made in the fourteenth century by Nicolas Oresme. He professed to believe that the earth was at rest, but he denied that this could be demonstrated, and from his time the motion of the earth was a possibility that could be canvassed. Impetus did not of course *dispose* of the physical objections to the motion of the earth either on its axis or, more particularly, around the sun. Difficulties remained to become the centre of Galileo's scientific work, and it was he who eventually abandoned the concept of impetus as unworkable and replaced it with something that was nearly, but not quite, inertia. What impetus did was to *weaken* the objections and to show that the issue of the stability of the earth was not as irrevocably decided as had been thought. This development in the understanding of projectile motion made it possible for the Renaissance to take seriously the matters of taste that formed the basis of the heliocentric case.

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Council meets, as also—in order that this prayer may be the more fervent and fruitful—to a deeper sympathy, knowledge and understanding of those ancient Christian traditions of the East for the present-day representatives of which the Holy Father has, throughout his life, so often shown his affection.

FATHER BERNARD DELANY. As this number goes to press it is with regret that we hear of the death of Fr Bernard Delany, O.P., the first Editor of this review. Of his devoted and generous pioneering work in laying the foundations of BLACKFRIARS throughout the 'twenties we hope to print an appreciation in a subsequent issue.
