

## REVIEWS

PRINCIPALITY AND POLITY: Aquinas and the Rise of State Theory in the West. By Thomas Gilby, O.P. (Longmans; 30s.)

In this entertaining book Father Gilby draws upon his profound knowledge of Aquinas's works to give a detailed picture of what Aquinas had to say about political society and the bases on which it should rest. The general outlines of the picture are already familiar: Aquinas's burning conviction that reason and faith are not in conflict with each other; his justification of nature and secular power, and his acceptance of their positive values; his outstanding contribution to the idea of natural law; his demand that human laws should be both reasonable and equitable; and from this his belief that all men should have some say in their own government, with a consequent insistence upon the limited powers of the ruler. This is not new, but it will bear with constant restatement, and Father Gilby has earned the gratitude of both the student and the general reader for the lively way in which he has done this. Indeed at times his style is positively racy: philosophers 'go the whole hog'; constitutions are 'stodgy'; the mendicant orders are like 'the Light Division in Wellington's army'. The canonists, whom Father Gilby dislikes, become in turn 'unsuccessful Whigs', 'Young Turks', the medieval version of the Standard Oil organization, and 'nagging Welfare State officials'. He makes his points by reference to Mr Khrushchev, the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the Suez Canal and *The Times* Law Reports. We hear about spivs and shaggy dog stories.

All this is rollicking good fun, and Father Gilby would maintain that it is appropriate to his subject. Aquinas, he says, lived at a moment when the medieval world took on the freshness and sweetness of spring. The winter of the Dark Ages was past, and in every field there was joyous activity: the Manichees had been mastered; the crusades had not yet failed; Rome and Constantinople were in communion; England and France were thriving under noble rulers; cathedrals and universities were springing up; commerce was expanding; the arts flourished. Economic depression, the Black Death, and popular heresies were things of the future: 'the Spirituals had not yet gone queer'. The times were congenial and Aquinas himself was infected with the spirit of a 'liberty-loving age'. He produced 'a genial polity' suitable for the occasion. He took the world as he found it, and saw that it was good. There was no need to swallow the gloomy prognostications of those obscurantist sobersides, the Augustinians, to whom reading Aristotle was playing with fire.

But this can be overdone, and it produces an over-idealized picture of the period. Nor is it always effective. Are we really helped, for example, to appreciate Innocent III's most important consistory speech, the *Deliberatio*, by having it compared to 'the derogatory picture of Toryism' drawn by British Socialists in the 1920s? And although Father Gilby warns us of the danger of applying modern criteria to the thirteenth century, these constant modern comparisons invite misrepresentation. A case in point is the phrase 'State theory'. What does the author mean by 'State'? Sometimes he means the lay power, kings and princes, and is thus led to speak of State and Church, which, he asserts, the great body of moderates had no difficulty in distinguishing because they kept a sense of proportion. But such modern notions are entirely alien to the medieval way of thinking. Gelasius, for example, did not establish a tradition of twin authorities (p. xxi), but was careful to point out the difference between the governing papal *auctoritas* and the subject lay executive—the regal *potestas*. Both were to operate within the framework of the universal Christian society (*mundus*), which was the medieval equivalent of state in the sense of a political society. As J. N. Figgis pointed out long ago, 'the real State of the Middle Ages in the modern sense—if the words are not a paradox—is the Church'. Thirteenth-century 'State theory' was concerned entirely with this society, termed either the *Ecclesia universalis* or the *imperium Romanorum*. But Father Gilby merely mentions it in passing: for him, state in the sense of society means the self-sufficient kingdom of Reformation Europe.

The reason for this, he repeatedly insists, is that no real notion of sovereignty existed in the thirteenth century. But the basis of the dominant papal-hierocratic system was the idea that the head of the Christian society possessed a plenitude of power which *nihil excipit*, and was exercised over a community whose real personality was invested in the ruler. Perhaps the most valuable section of this book is that which deals with Aquinas's modifications to the Augustinian acceptance of the corporate reality of the society seen as an entity distinct from its individual members. In fact the papalists produced a very complete 'State theory', and the rise of the modern secular state came when the lay writers applied these ideas to their own kingdoms. There were two preliminary stages to this. First the denial of universalism in favour of nationalism—a process already well-developed in the thirteenth century, but one on which Aquinas had no comments to make. Secondly the curtailing of papal sovereignty, and it was here that Aquinas made his great contribution, by advocating a general principle of limited rulership, and by justifying the semi-autonomous existence of a lay community on the basis of natural law.

In the event the Augustinians were right: one did have to choose between political systems based on extremes of faith and reason, between a divine right papal absolutism and the lay writer's ultimate popular sovereignty. A denial of one opened the door to the other, and it was Marsilius's Averro-Aristotelianism which triumphed. By granting nature its place in the universe Aquinas aided this trend of the age. It is true that Aquinas himself made no attempt to apply his theories to specific contemporary problems. Nor did he clarify his views. Simplification, says Father Gilby, is dangerous. Aquinas favoured the oblique approach. But circumstances forced his successors to simplify, to clarify, and to apply. Perhaps they did deprive Thomism of its founder's 'spirit' (pp. 276-7); probably their conclusions would have been unpalatable to Aquinas himself; certainly they were highly dangerous to the existing order—but they were also irresistible. It was the legal implications of Aquinas's political philosophy which were a vital factor in the growth of the modern European state, and for which he deserves due appreciation. For this reason Father Gilby is to be thanked for emphasizing a highly important subject with a book which will stimulate interest and debate.

MICHAEL WILKS

LETTERS FROM HILAIRE BELLOC. Edited by Robert Speaight. (Hollis and Carter; 30s.)

It might well be thought that for the present no more could be published about Belloc; that nothing was left that could illuminate that loved figure. There are already, and above all, his own varied and voluminous productions, with their extraordinarily wide range of subject, mood, style and treatment. There are critical assessments of his work. There are reminiscences by his family and his friends. There are those two complementary full-length studies which together give the reader the sense both of knowing him and of knowing about him: Mr J. B. Morton's book, which carries as it were in colour and mass and sound the immediate impact of his personality, and Mr Speaight's concise and comprehensive biography, showing in what matrix that personality developed, its interactions with time and place and people and events, and its objective achievements.

Yet, surprisingly, there *is* more to be known, and it appears in happy accumulation in these letters; in accumulation, since only relaxed continuous reading shows to what extent he wrote differently to each one of his many friends, instinctively tuning himself to the pitch, adjusting himself to the tempo of each separate personality with whom he felt himself alone and at ease. In general talk he was apt to speak—sometimes over-vehemently—through the *persona*, or rather the set of *personae*, those masks exuberant, gay, bluff, sad, ironic, dogmatic,