

# Editorial

We are often accused of living in the past, and at first sight our attitude to Christmas might only appear to confirm the accusation. 'Traditional' becomes a term of approval then more than at any other time: not merely approval of the Dickensian trappings, snow, and yule-logs, and over-eating, but of the more fundamental image, the child in the manger, divine indeed, but sweet and gentle, not yet concerned with the harsh realities of sin and death. Yet that is hardly the picture the Church is offering us in the liturgy. Advent, for instance, prepares us for a future event as much as for a past one, beginning as it does with the tremendous vision of judgment at our Lord's return. It insists on the scriptural emphasis that we are men waiting for Christ, lamps in hand, watching through the night of this world: but waiting now with new certainty, because he has already come and is present. We are waiting now not for that first coming but for the return, and though we look to the past for understanding of the mystery yet to be fulfilled, it is the future event which has to dominate our thought and action. There must be a tension inherent in our belief between the past from which tradition has brought us the contents of faith, and the future towards which faith is directed in hope, each with its meaning for that present to which God has committed us. 'Now is the judgment of this world', says our Lord: it is now that we are to make him present to men, not merely because he once came into the world in his own person, but because he is to come again and hand over to his Father that kingdom which he has enabled us to build up.

This is the attitude with which the Church asks us to face the demands of today. This Christmas the crisis of war is closer to us than for many years past, and calls not for passive resignation but for positive thought and action. It is only the most striking of the many requirements for renewed Christian thought about the problems of the modern world; by the very force of its challenge this one has already called forth mature solutions by Catholic thinkers, as is shown, for instance, by Mr Stein's book reviewed in the present issue. But in every case it is ultimately our attitude to theology which determines thought and action in these practical matters; ultimately it depends on the way we see Christ. Shall we still see him sentimentally this Christmas as merely the Babe in the Crib; or shall we see him as also the one to whom 'all judgment has been given' by the Father; the one who in

Isaiah's prophecy is called Wonderful Counsellor before he is called Prince of Peace?

## Our Lady in Scripture—III: The Child and his Mother (Matthew I and 2)

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As it stands now, the infancy narrative of the first gospel is the work of the Greek writer who perhaps translated and certainly expanded the original Aramaic gospel of the apostle Matthew. But equally certainly he did not invent the episodes which he has used to construct it; they came to him, perhaps already somewhat moulded or schematized, from the traditions of the earliest communities. His narrative falls into two parts, coincident with our two chapters; the first traces and proves the Davidic descent of Jesus, the true king of Israel; the second narrates his danger from the actual usurping king, Herod. Within the narrative in its final form, there are secondary themes; in the first part, the defence of the purity of Jesus' mother, in the second, the homage paid to him by the Gentile world and its co-operation in preserving him. The whole narrative is commanded by and written round the fulfilment of prophecy, an important element in the defence and theology of the primitive Church, and in particular of the first gospel, as it was of Jesus himself. This reference to the scriptures could be made in two ways, either explicitly by quoting the passage that was fulfilled or implicitly by writing the narrative in such a way that it echoed the passage of scripture.<sup>1</sup> In doing this the writer was likely, without depreciating the historical basis of his narrative, to mould the scriptural text or the details of the event or both towards one another in order to emphasize the bond of prophecy and fulfilment or to bring out the

<sup>1</sup>See René Laurentin, *Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II*, Paris 1957. pp. 93-96.