

Philosophy and Theology in the Monastery: The Thought of Dom Illtyd Trethowan

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Dom Illtyd Trethowan, monk of Downside, died on October 30, 1993.¹ One of his last publications was a recent review in *New Blackfriars*, but his writings, and his efforts to make available works of theology and philosophy by others, go back a very long way.² His first article appeared in *The Downside Review* in 1935 (he subsequently came to be Editor of *The Downside Review*).³ His first book, *Certainty, Philosophical and Theological*, appeared in 1948. Before then he translated Eugène Masure's seminal study *Sacrifice du Chef* (1944), and, as early as 1940 (together with Frank Sheed) he translated Etienne Gilson's *La Philosophie de Saint Bonaventure*. Between 1948 and the time of his death he published 110 articles, plus numerous book reviews. He also produced seven substantial books, an edition of the writings of Walter Hilton, and several translations of important authors not much known in the English-speaking world—most notably, Maurice Blondel, Louis Lavelle, and Louis Bouyer.⁴

Dom Illtyd was not a monk who travelled to teach and spend lots of time outside his monastery. In 1969 he lectured for one semester in the U.S.A. (at Brown University in Rhode Island), but he was otherwise a fixture at Downside from the day that he joined the community there. Yet simply in terms of pages printed, his published works and translations clearly place him in the forefront of twentieth century British Catholics writing on religion and trying to make available the writings on religion of others. And his value as an author has been acknowledged by many notable theologians and philosophers both in Britain and abroad.⁵

In this article, and to mark Dom Illtyd's passing, I try to provide a brief introduction to his writings for those unfamiliar with them, as many will be.⁶ I also offer some comments on them, comments which I offer as someone who knew and loved Dom Illtyd. I disagreed with him about certain issues, but what follows is presented as a tribute to him

from a Dominican who feels privileged and graced to have found in this rare Benedictine a teacher of unusual excellence and inspiration.

I

The first thing to say is that Illtyd Trethowan was an author not to be neatly pigeon-holed. Was he a theologian? Yes, because he wrote at length about matters of Christian doctrine (e.g. the Incarnation, Redemption, Grace, the Eucharist). But his treatment of doctrine always bore the stamp of someone with a keen eye on argument and ways of making doctrine seem intelligible to non-Christians. He also wrote much that made no appeal to doctrine, much that would have to be classified as philosophy. For this reason, his literary legacy may be justly compared with that of someone of whom Dom Illtyd was often critical.

Here I am thinking of St Thomas Aquinas. People have tried to pigeon-hole him. Some take him to be exclusively a theologian (as opposed to a philosopher). Some think of him as a philosopher (as opposed to a theologian). The truth is that Aquinas was a Christian who tried to think about his religion as well as he could. And so was Dom Illtyd. On his account, philosophers would be wrong if they contradicted what the Catholic Church teaches as matters of revelation. But, so he thought, theologians would be wrong if they disparaged reasoned discourse or wrote without concern for it, and if they suggested that Christian teaching is essentially something to be swallowed with mouth open and eyes shut.

Aquinas wrote in an age of faith, so, only a fraction of his output was concerned with showing to unbelievers why there is sense in what Christians teach. Dom Illtyd wrote in an age of doubt, so much of his output reads like apologetics or philosophy of religion. But the two men had a common project and a common way of pursuing it. The project was that of declaring (a) that God is the beginning and end of all things, and (b) that this truth ought to be appreciated by any serious thinker. The common way of pursuing it was to try to show that God's work, including his work in Christ, is something which people can believe in, give reasons for doing so, and reflect on with profit. Both agreed that nobody is saved by virtue of intellectual ability. Both agreed that God, in his love, shares himself with anyone who wants him and can pray the prayer of the tax collector: "God be merciful to me a sinner". But Dom Illtyd and Aquinas were also convinced that what Christians proclaim is something that can be thought about and presented to the world as true and worthy of belief. And both were convinced that the Christian message is exciting and engaging and something to be grateful for. Both

were convinced that it is something to proclaim with joy, something to offer as grounds for hope for those who feel hopeless.

II

How might one start to present such a conviction in a systematic way? For Illtyd Trethowan we need to return to basics. So, in his judgement, the first thing to say is that people are conscious individuals able to know both themselves and things distinct from themselves. On his account, this is an obvious and inescapable fact, and it is one with important implications.⁷

As Dom Illtyd knew well, his thesis here is one which has been frequently denied. It has been said, for instance, that what we call knowledge of things apart from ourselves is nothing but a set of thoughts internal to us, thoughts which tell us nothing about a world distinct from us. It has also been said that there is nothing which can be seriously taken to be self-knowledge. For Dom Illtyd, however, positions like this are just wrong, and they can be seen to be wrong by people patient enough to attend to their experience. As he writes at the start of his book *Mysticism and Theology*.

When anyone mentions his "experience" in the ordinary way he is taken to mean that he has come across something in the past, just as when anyone's "knowledge" is mentioned in the ordinary way we think of information already stored up inside him. But if we are philosophising it is the actual process of coming across things, of getting to know them, with which we are concerned when we raise questions about experience or knowledge.⁸

Dom Illtyd fully acknowledges that people can make mistakes over what they take themselves to be aware of. He never advocates a policy of assuming that things are always as they seem to us to be. But he constantly maintains that there is such a thing as awareness of things distinct from ourselves. He also holds that there is such a thing as awareness of ourselves.

Why should it matter that we agree with Dom Illtyd here? In his view there are various answers to the question. One is that we would thereby escape from a total and self-refuting scepticism according to which we know nothing (self-refuting because it is presumably telling us that we know that we know nothing). More importantly, however, Dom Illtyd's line on knowledge is, in his view, important because it brings us back to all we have to go on as we live. For it brings us back to the fact that sooner or later we have to say that we simply see that

something or other is the case.

Suppose I wonder whether or not there is a rat in my room. Seeing a rat in my room will normally make me accept that there is one there. But someone might suggest that I am suffering from an illusion. So what do I say now? Well, I might end up agreeing with that diagnosis. But on what basis do I do so? I might just believe what someone tells me. But I might make my claim because I see that what I say is true. So I see something. I may again be wrong. Yet what must be going on when I come to admit this or when someone else tries to persuade me of it? According to Dom Illtyd, there will be an offering of a statement based on how things appear to one. And there will be this whenever one makes statements seriously intended to say how things are.

You might think that all this means is that people must ever be affirming how things seem to them, and that there is nothing more to be said. For Dom Illtyd, however, it makes sense to ask whether we are not sometimes doing more than affirming how things seem to us. "It seems to me that there is a frog on the table" is something I can say without committing myself to there being any frog there. Yet can I not come to see that there is a seeming that something is the case which cannot just be written off as a mere seeming (even if it cannot be proved to be the case apart from appealing to how things seem)? And can I not come to see that there is a seeming that actually puts me in touch with things distinct from me that impinge on me? To both these questions, Dom Illtyd offers an affirmative answer.

A fly settles on my nose while I am asleep. There is physical contact, but I am not conscious of it. Then I wake up and become aware of something tickling my nose. The fly has now established contact with me in a new way. It is present not just to my body but to my mind . . . It is perfectly true that we cannot *prove* the existence of objects independent of our own thought. That is to say, if anyone doubts it there is no logical argument which can make him see it. Are we, then, entitled to say that we are *sure* of it ourselves or is it only a well-grounded assumption? . . . We must take our own experience as the final arbiter. This is true all along the line. In following an argument we have to *see* that it works. (It may work, of course, although we fail to see it.) But if we are asked why we are sure that it does we can only answer that we just *see* it somehow. Anyone who doesn't see that, if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$ has to be written off. You can't prove it to him, but you know that you are right and that there is something wrong with him.⁹

On Dom Illtyd's account, therefore, we cannot but fall back on our awareness that something is the case. And, so he repeatedly insists, this

is not a piece of dry and dusty philosophy of little general import. It is something which ought to lead us to a view of ourselves and of the world in general which is quite at odds with certain alternatives on offer—alternatives which were enthusiastically defended by philosophers writing when Dom Illtyd was producing his major works, alternatives which are still supported by many thinkers.

Should we, for instance, say that people are nothing but complex bodies going through a series of physical changes? Bodies are themselves, and we can give a complete description of them in physical terms. But will any description of a body capture the reality of awareness and knowledge? According to Dom Illtyd, the answer must be “No”. Why? Because awareness and knowledge in people are not physical things and because people can distinguish between physical things of which they are aware and the fact that they are aware of them. On Dom Illtyd’s account, it is obvious that our knowledge of ourselves, including our knowledge of ourselves as knowing, is not a matter of knowing something physical.

Our experience, if we attend to it, can assure us that it is *different* from our merely bodily processes . . . When the activity of consciousness is completely in abeyance—and this certainly happens sometimes, even if we think that it does not happen in sleep—other activities go on, and to say that these activities are of the same *kind* as consciousness seems to make no sense.¹⁰

But Dom Illtyd wants to say more than this. According to him, though we might not be able to explain why it is so, and though we might not be able to talk about the matter in ways which a philosopher might deem cogent, we are, if we are honest, able to accept that we know ourselves as individuals and that we know ourselves to have had a history. We know, without inference or argument, that we are distinct things (conscious subjects), and things with a past.

Is there in fact anything permanent about ourselves? Are we in any sense the same as we were fifteen years ago? We all know we are, unless we have become muddled by reading philosophy. This is certainly a fact of experience, and a philosopher who overlooks it makes a mistake. And unless we are going to say (most implausibly) that this sameness is just an affair of our bodies, we cannot fail to see in it something of peculiar significance.¹¹

There are philosophers who will say that personal identity over time requires physical continuity—that, for example, Illtyd Trethowan could not have been at Downside in 1950 and 1960 if there was no physical

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continuity between a man there in 1950 and a man there in 1960. But, though a cursory reading of his writings might suggest that he thought otherwise, and though this might (reasonably) be taken as an objection to him, there is nothing in Dom Illyd's writings which could be cited as a rejection of this opinion, and passages in his writings can be cited which suggest that he positively supported it. He seems, for example, perfectly happy to agree that physical continuity is a requirement for personal survival after death.¹² He does, however, want to say that, whatever else might be true of human beings, it is at least true that they are conscious subjects who can be aware of themselves as more than merely physical.

III

But why should such theses matter even if they are true? Dom Illyd defended them at great length. Five of his books begin by propounding and elaborating on them, though each book is chiefly concerned with Christianity and with what Christians can say about God. For Dom Illyd, therefore, the theses are very important and much to be upheld by someone trying to talk about God and Christianity. Many people, however, might wonder why on earth he should have thought this. Why was it so important for him to insist that people are conscious individuals aware of themselves and able to know what is different from them? Why was it so important for him to insist that people are not just bits of matter in motion? Why did so many of his books start with discussions of knowledge and awareness?

The answer is that, in his opinion, God is something known to us. People who agree that God exists do not, he thinks, assent to a proposition which cannot be known to be true. But how can they know it to be true? According to Dom Illyd, there is no deductive proof which might lead us to knowing that God exists. He denies, for instance, that the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas (or anything like them) give us proofs of God's existence. He also suggests that a purported proof of God's existence must always assume what it purports to prove. "Unless the Infinite is somehow contained in the arguments's starting-point", he writes, "it cannot emerge in the conclusion. This is true of all versions of the causal argument when it is supposed to be of the cast-iron type".¹³ But that, Dom Illyd adds, does not mean that we cannot know God. For might it not be true that human knowledge extends to a knowledge of God which is a matter of awareness rather than inference? And might it not be true that we can find in ourselves a knowledge of God which, though unique, is not unfamiliar? According to Dom Illyd the answer to

these questions is “Yes”. We cannot, he thinks, prove God’s existence without already supposing it, so all the traditional proofs of God’s existence do is “draw our attention to features of our experience which provoke or bring into focus an awareness of God”.¹⁴ But there is an awareness of God, a *direct* awareness of him, albeit mediated by finite things.¹⁵ And, so Dom Iltyd most frequently emphasizes, this awareness (or as he sometimes puts it, this “apprehension”) is most notably there in our moral experience. In this, he says, we are confronted by God since we are confronted by absolute moral obligations and by absolute value. “The notion of value”, he suggests,

is bound up with the notion of obligation. To say that people are worth while, that they have value in themselves, is to say that there is something about them which makes a demand upon us, that we ought to make them part of our own project, identify ourselves with them in some sort . . . I propose to say that an awareness of obligation is an awareness of God.¹⁶

In Dom Iltyd’s view, the most reasonable way of accounting for what we are aware of in morality (or in “moral experience”) is to say that its object is absolute, unconditioned, and the source of all creaturely value, especially that of people. “We have value”, he explains, “because we receive it from a source of value. That is what I mean, for a start, by God. We know him as giving us value. That is why the demand upon us to develop ourselves is an absolute, unconditional, demand”.¹⁷ And, so Dom Iltyd also maintains, we can reach a similar conclusion when we reflect on the topic of truth. For can we not recognize that there is truth to be apprehended? And does it not matter that we reach the truth?

Doesn’t it *matter* that you should know the truth about the business in hand, the formula for human happiness or whatever else it may be? Hasn’t it an importance because it is the truth? Isn’t there a demand for truth in the human mind? Isn’t there a *duty* to know the truth or at least avoid self-deception?¹⁸

According to Dom Iltyd we can, without inference, simply come to see that the answer to all these questions is “Yes”. And, so he suggests, this means that people are confronted in experience by something absolute, something drawing them to itself, something that Christians have called “God”.

We are in touch with God not only in our moral aspirations and in our intimations of absolute perfection but also in the basic awareness on which these depend. When we are certain of anything

and say that it is absolutely true, we are saying, on this view, that it is grounded on the absolute and that we in knowing it are grounded on the absolute . . . When we are certain of something, when we come across what is here and now infallibly and indefeasibly a reality, we are aware of *the other* as an immovably solid foundation. And *this* “otherness” is not simply that of bodies interfering with our own. It is a solidity for which neither these bodies nor ourselves account. We are not infallible nor are they indefeasible in virtue of resources originating from ourselves and themselves.¹⁹

IV

Yet where does all this leave us when it comes to saying what God is? One might represent Dom Illtyd’s talk of awareness of God so as to make him seem to be saying that God is like some object in the world which we can bump into, something comprehensible. And many modern authors have spoken of God as if that is what he is. At this point, therefore, readers should note that, though he might have been critical of Aquinas, Illtyd Trethowan was a card-carrying disciple of St Thomas in at least one respect. For he utterly rejected the view that God is something comprehensible, something existing beside us in space and time, something acted on by any of his creatures, something mutable, something to be put in a class of which there might be more than one member (except metaphorically). Dom Illtyd, as he often says, is convinced that people are “in touch” with God. But he never speaks of God as of something in the world. And he regularly insists that nobody should do this.

He rejects, for example, the currently reiterated assertion that God is something undergoing change. The assertion is now standard orthodoxy among many people (both philosophers and theologians) writing in defence of, or, as they see it, in conformity with, Christian doctrine. It would have horrified Aquinas, just as it would have horrified writers like Augustine and Anselm. And it also horrifies Dom Illtyd.

He touches on the subject of God and change while rejecting Karl Rahner’s curious assertion that “while God remains immutable ‘in himself’, he can come to be ‘in the other’, and that *both* assertions must really and truly be made of the same God as God”.²⁰ But in his last book he offers a full-scale defence of divine immutability with an eye on writers other than Rahner—writers such as those known as “process theologians”. The basic message of this book is that the maker and sustainer of the universe, cannot be a mutable and finite individual. You might think that the thesis is obviously true, but it does not seem true to

many who say that they believe in God. And Dom Illyd's defence of the thesis is a significant indication of his whole approach to God. For him, God is knowable, but also incomparable. We talk of him as best we can, but the reality cannot be captured in words. It is familiar, but it is also "wholly other". Someone might wonder how we can know that God is this. For Dom Illyd, however, the answer, as usual, lies in experience. We encounter God as incomprehensible, but we can find ourselves to be glimpsing him somehow.

V

Yet to say but this does not seem to be saying what Christians typically say when they talk of God. It might seem compatible with Christian teaching, but it is not what one thinks of when one thinks of what Christians typically say. For what about the notion that God is Three in One? And what about the notion that God became incarnate? What, too, of the notion that people are saved by Christ, and the notion that Christ is at work in his Church? What does Dom Illyd say about these matters? And does he have anything to say about them which connects with what we have so far seen him to be saying?

Taking the last question first, the thing to note is that all Dom Illyd's writings on Christian teaching take up and take further all that I have attributed to him above. For his approach to Christianity, like his approach to belief in God, is constantly governed by the conviction that God is known to us directly (though mediately) in experience. As we read, for example, in *Mysticism and Theology*:

What I am proposing . . . is that faith is the "seed of glory" and so the seed of mysticism: it must therefore itself have a mystical character. It must involve a sort of *seeing* . . . We can be aware of God as summoning us in the context of the Christian message. This is itself a knowledge of him.²¹

According to Dom Illyd, Christian faith is always a response to God's presence to us as creatures able to know. On his account, therefore, it is first and foremost a matter of awareness of God, albeit one which admits of varying degrees of insight. Dom Illyd continually insists that it is also a matter of response to God, that those with Christian faith act and speak differently from those without it. But, so he argues, the actions and speech of Christians are ways in which they respond to an awareness of God which can, at least for purposes of discussion, be taken as something basic—i.e. something to be experienced and something which makes sense of Christian teaching

(though not necessarily something which will seem to people obvious for what it is).²²

But what sense can we make of the major Christian teachings? Dom Illtyd's most sustained attempt to answer this question comes in *The Absolute and the Atonement*, which has sections on the Incarnation, Original Sin, the Redemption, the Resurrection, and the Eucharist. The account which Dom Illtyd offers is not easily summarized, but here are some of his main conclusions.

1. God is changeless. But he is also essentially love because he is Father, Son and Spirit. Love in God is not a matter of being affected by something. It is not something emotional. It is a union of which we get only a glimpse when we think of what we take to be the fullest union between people that we can conceive of (though God is not to be thought of as three centres of consciousness, three people).

2. God, from eternity, is one who offers to his creatures a union with him, something which will take them into the love which constitutes the Trinity. This offer is one which can be accepted at all times and by anyone.

3. Christ is God incarnate. So we have a sense of what God is (though God is indescribable) simply by attending to him.

4. The Incarnation need not be thought of just as an answer to the fact that people sin. It can be seen as God's way of coming to sinful creatures and bringing sinners to him. It can also be seen as a way of teaching people that they are more than things of flesh and blood. It can be seen as a way of showing that humanity is able to have union with God (because one who was God was also a man).

5. By virtue of the Incarnation, Christians have a means of salvation. This means that God, in Christ, expresses his eternal will that all shall be saved. It does not mean that God has arranged for someone acceptable to him to calm him down because people have offended him. It does not mean that union with God depends on the fact that Christ died. It means that God, in Christ, offers himself to the human race as one to love and be loved by. The death of Christ does not make any difference to God's love for us (it does not make God love us). But it does show us what God is like for us, and what we are. "Christ came to live human life to its consummation by living that life completely and so he died a human death. That was the price which he had to pay in order

to fulfil his mission (and the manner of his death was due to the sins of his contemporaries).” Christ was God incarnate living a human life in a world in which people could reject him (though they might not have done so). His whole life was God’s way of offering himself to us. And it shows us that God offers himself to us, eternally and without reserve.

What now seems necessary, in the first instance, is to make people realize that God is love and that Christianity is the religion of love. . . God is the loving father, who will do everything for us if we only allow him to act on us. It is the risen glorious Christ whom we meet in prayer and who unites us with himself. So it would seem that we rise from our sins in the power of his resurrection, the power of the new life which he came to bring; he has won it by passing through the gates of death to the victorious state in which his manhood is definitively empowered; we are empowered through our union with him.²³

6. God in Christ was not just doing something for those who knew Christ in his lifetime. He was founding a community able to report what Christ said and did. And, in this way, he was doing something of import to people today. For he was giving people access to the words and deeds of Christ. These words and deeds as reported might fall on deaf ears. But Christian faith in Christ is not just a matter of reading about what Christ said and did. Christian faith is a matter of finding God talking to one in the words and deeds of Christ, as well as in the words and deeds of his followers. And this “finding God talking to one” can be seen as an awareness of God presenting himself to us.

7. Christ is the head of the Church, and he invites us to union with him. He did this in his life and in his death. So the Church (those who love Christ) is united with Christ in his life and his death. But Christ is not just a figure in the past. He is the risen Lord who is eternally what God is for us. And his Church has the means of being with him as it lives on in time. For it is nothing but the community of those loved by Christ and loving him. And it is founded on Christ, who died and left to it the sacrament which we celebrate as the Eucharist. “The Eucharist is the thanksgiving for the gift of Christ and in celebrating it according to his own instructions on the evening before his passion we have his guarantee that his grace is available to us in pre-eminent form. Unless Christians actually gather together to receive the power won for them by Christ, they cannot constitute a *Church*.”²⁴

That, in summary, is what Dom Illtyd was trying to say. Some will find it familiar—though, since he saw himself as pointing to what lies in our experience, this reaction would be what Dom Illtyd would have hoped for. If someone reading his writings were to say “Yes, of course, that’s obvious”, they would, in his view, be vindicating his major contentions. And though many of these have been challenged in one form or another, there can also be found among them positions which it would be hard to deny.

Take, for example, Dom Illtyd’s conclusions on knowledge. There are reasons why we might treat them with some suspicion, chiefly because they seem to commit us to saying that whether or not I know can be determined by me simply by introspection. On the contrary, so one might argue, whether or not I know depends on whether things are as I take them to be, and it is not my state of mind which determines how things are. Yet Dom Illtyd’s major teachings on knowledge and awareness have a very respectable background in philosophy, and they are not easily swept aside.²⁵ As J.O. Urmson writes:

Does the fact that I sometimes accept a fallacious argument as valid (claim the immediate apprehension of an argument as valid when it is in fact fallacious) show that I can never recognize an argument to be valid? And if a claim to see a fallacy is never admissible, since there is no immediate apprehension, and accusations of fallacy must always be proved, will one not have to apprehend the validity of this proof? Or are we to demand an infinity of metaproofs?²⁶

Many modern philosophers insist on speaking of knowledge as if it were really a kind of belief. Some, for example, argue that it is “justified, true belief”—belief with an added ingredient. Much that Dom Illtyd says about knowledge can be read as a sustained attack on positions like this, and it is an attack which is well worth attention. It certainly seems wrong to hold that when one says one knows one is communicating one’s beliefs with some indication or guarantee of justification.²⁷ Another point to note is that we can specify a piece of knowledge by putting any question in the indirect speech form after the verb ‘know’. This means that knowledge is a capacity to say whether something is true. Yet belief is not a capacity to say whether something is true. It does not make sense to say of someone that he or she “believes whether Illtyd is dead”, as it makes to say that he or she “knows whether Illtyd is dead”. Belief is a disposition to act on the assumption that something is true, that something is the case. So belief is a disposition

while knowledge is an ability or capacity. Knowledge, therefore, cannot be belief *plus* an ingredient. You cannot add to a disposition an ingredient which will make it an ability or capacity. And this is something which Dom Illtyd recognized well.

Above all, however, he recognized the radical difference between God and creatures. God, for him, was never, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, a "magnified and non-natural man" or a "magnified and enlarged Lord Shaftesbury with a race of vile offenders to deal with". Much that currently passes for serious thinking about God takes him to be little more than that (though this sweeping judgement needs more defence than I can here provide).²⁸ As any serious reader of Dom Illtyd will recognize, however, he had quite a different view. He was critical of Aquinas, but what he taught about what we can say about God was very much in line with Aquinas's teaching (as with that of figures like Augustine and Anselm).²⁹ I think that this teaching is sound, so I therefore think that the same must be said of what Dom Illtyd had to offer in the way of a "doctrine of God". For much of his writing life he was trying to persuade a certain philosophical audience that belief in God is not out and out nonsense, as, for example, A.J. Ayer proclaimed it to be.³⁰ In later years, and because of a change in the philosophical climate, he was able to adopt a stand less defensive on basics, one which gave him scope to say what it does and does not make sense to say about God. And what he said then places him in the class of the greatest Christian authors. That is because it is, in modern form, a defence of a way of talking about God which returns to that of the seminal authors of the patristic and medieval periods. For the record, it also accords with what the Church has taught about God in the products of Councils like Lateran IV and Vatican I.

But it does more even than that. People often complain that the God of philosophers is not the God of Christianity. Yet Dom Illtyd never wrote about God without also writing with an eye on Christian revelation. God, for him, was nothing but the God of Christianity (the Trinity), who offers himself to the human race. I cannot here provide a discussion of what it was that Dom Illtyd thought most worth emphasising with respect to Christian teaching. I find his emphases wholly cogent, but readers who are interested by the above summary of his teaching on Christian revelation can turn to his writings and think about them for themselves. If they do that, however, they will, I think, find (a) something very much in line with what Christians have always wanted to say, and (b) a way of saying it which cogently responds to a lot of objections to Christianity and to much that has been offered in defence of Christianity.

They will also, I think, find themselves in contact with a teacher of truth. The contact will be mediated, but also direct as Dom Illtyd took our knowledge of God to be.

- 1 Dom Illtyd's baptismal name was Kenneth. He was born in Salisbury on 12 May 1907, the son of William and Emma Trethowan (née Van Kempin). He was educated at Merton Court, Sidcup (1914—21), Felsted (1921—25), and Brasenose College, Oxford (1925—29). At Oxford he contracted polio, which subsequently left him without the use of his left arm. Originally an Anglican, he became a Catholic in 1929, after which he taught briefly at the Oratory School and at Ampleforth. He entered Downside Abbey in 1932 and was ordained priest in 1938. He was Subprior of Downside from 1958—91 and Cathedral Prior of Ely from 1991.
- 2 The review was of Volume XXIII of Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations*. This review appeared in the October 1993 number of *New Blackfriars*.
- 3 The first article was "The Beautiful in Art", *The Downside Review*, October 1935. He was Editor of *The Downside Review* from 1946—52 and 1960—64. As Dom Sebastian Moore has said: "During his early period as editor, he revolutionised *The Downside Review*, which became, just after the war, the only periodical to awaken Catholics in England to the dawning, in France, of the theology which was to acquire *droit de cité* at the Second Vatican Council. The work of de Lubac, Congar, Chenu and others, found its way, in translation, into the Review. (*The Tablet*, 6 November 1993)
- 4 The books are: (1) *Christ in the Liturgy* (1952), (2) *An Essay in Christian Philosophy* (1954), (3) *The Basis of Belief* (1961), (4) *Absolute Value* (1970), (5) *The Absolute and the Atonement* (1971), (6) *Mysticism and Theology* (1975), (7) *Process Theology and Christian Tradition* (1985).
- 5 The July 1977 issue of *The Downside Review* is a tribute to Dom Illtyd offered to celebrate his seventieth birthday. It is worth noting that, as well as being appreciated by Catholic writers in Britain and abroad, Dom Illtyd was held in great respect by a number of non-Catholic thinkers—e.g. E.L. Mascall, Austin Farrer, H.D. Lewis, and H.P. Owen.
- 6 Dom Illtyd was a great reader. In his books and articles he often (too often, some would say) presented his own thinking while linking it to that of many other writers, some of them very well known, some of them less well known. In what follows I make no attempt to indicate what in his thinking can be found in other authors. I focus, in an introductory way, on his main contentions and his own way of presenting them.
- 7 As an undergraduate at Oxford, Dom Illtyd studied under H.A. Prichard (d. 1947), who was a vigorous defender of the idea that people can recognize themselves to be certain in a sense that guarantees that they know (cf. *Knowledge and Perception*, Oxford, 1950). The influence of Prichard on Dom Illtyd's thinking will, I think, seem clear to those who take time to read both Prichard and Dom Illtyd.
- 8 *Mysticism and Theology*, p. 1. The thought conveyed in this quotation can be found in many of Dom Illtyd's writings.
- 9 *Mysticism and Theology*, pp. 1 f. Cf. *Absolute Value*, p. 51.
- 10 *Mysticism and Theology*, p. 4.
- 11 *Absolute Value*, p. 30.
- 12 Cf. *Absolute Value*, pp. 34—35, 41—42.
- 13 *Mysticism and Theology*, p. 28; cf. *An Essay in Christian Philosophy*, pp. 62 ff., *The Basis of Belief*, pp. 44 ff.
- 14 *Absolute Value*, p. 123.
- 15 Dom Illtyd frequently says that in holding to this judgement he stands in an

- “Augustinian” tradition taken up in various ways by writers like St Anselm, St Bonaventure, Pascal, Newman, and Maurice Blondel
- 16 *Absolute Value*, pp. 84f.
 - 17 *ibid.* p.89.
 - 18 *The Basis of Belief*, p. 100.
 - 19 *Mysticism and Theology*, p. 25.
 - 20 Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol.1, discussed in *The Absolute and the Atonement*, pp. 153ff.
 - 21 *Mysticism and Theology*, pp. 47ff.
 - 22 For the notion that the awareness of God which is had in faith might not be recognized for what it is, see *Mysticism and Theology*, pp. 46 ff.
 - 23 *The Scale of Perfection*, by Walter Hilton, abridged and presented by Illyd Trethowan (London, 1975), pp. 5f. The quotation is part of Dom Illyd’s introduction to Hilton.
 - 24 *Mysticism and Theology*, p. 76.
 - 25 In the *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle taught that there must be some non-derivative knowledge to serve as a foundation to all other knowledge and opinion.
 - 26 J.O. Urmson, “Prichard and Knowledge”, *Human Agency* (ed. Jonathan Dancy, J.E. Moravcsik, and C.C. Taylor), Stanford, 1988, pp.14 f.
 - 27 Urmson brings this point out well in the essay cited above.
 - 28 I try to defend it in a section of a commentary on the new Universal Catechism (forthcoming from Geoffrey Chapman). I also try to defend it in “God and Some American Philosophers” (forthcoming from Tulane University Press). See also my *Thinking About God* (London, 1985).
 - 29 As we have seen, Dom Illyd disagreed with Aquinas on the question of arguments for God’s existence. In my opinion, his various discussions of Aquinas (and comparable writers) on this matter need serious correction. The same, I think, is true of his views on God and human freedom. But this is not the place to try to defend such judgements.
 - 30 A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (2nd edn., London, 1946).

Reviews

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Some people have held that Aquinas never wrote any philosophy — either because he was not prepared to follow wherever the argument might lead (as Bertrand Russell suggested) or because the philosophy in Aquinas is indistinguishable from the theology, (as Etienne Gilson held). But the importance of Aquinas as a philosopher is becoming more and more acknowledged. You might say that it has been acknowledged for a long time in Catholic circles. And so it has. But we are now witnessing a change of climate when it comes to Aquinas and philosophy. For, as never before, Aquinas is being taken seriously as a philosopher in the world outside that of the Catholic community.