

# Father Daniel Callus, 1888-1965 by David Knowles<sup>1</sup>

609

The Order of Preachers, which has such a clear individuality in the Church, has nevertheless among its gifted sons many different shades of character and fields of achievement. To the outside world it is the order of the great theologians, the order of strict orthodoxy, the order of St Thomas, of Cajetan, of Bañez, of John of St Thomas, and in our own time of Père Gardeil and Père Garrigou-Lagrange. The historian thinks also of the great inquisitors, of Jacob Sprenger and his *Malleus Maleficarum*, of Torquemada and the formidable Melchior Cano. By contrast with these there has always been a strain of the revolutionary, of the liberal and of the *avant-garde*, Savonarola, Las Casas, Lacordaire Vincent McNabb and Yves Congar. And finally, there is the recurrent type of the dedicated scholar, William of Moerbeke, Heinrich Denifle, Pierre Mandonnet and Père Vicaire. And where shall we fit in Eckhardt, Tauler and Suso? Into which of these groups shall we place Fr Daniel?

His *curriculum vitae* is a varied one. Angelo Callus was born in 1888 in Malta, of Maltese parents but ultimately of Greek ancestry, and I am told the first Callus in the island was Greek physician to the Grand Master De La Vallette, the hero of the first siege of the island. He became a friar sixty years ago at the age of seventeen, and studied at Florence and Rome with a brilliant record, becoming Master of Sacred Theology at the unusually early age of thirty-six in 1924. He had taught at Malta (1914–21) and Hawkesyard (1921–3) and had been Regent of Studies at La Quercia, near Viterbo (1923–4): subsequently (1924–31) he was in Malta as Regent of Studies and Professor of Holy Scripture at the University of Valletta. His earliest interest in medieval studies came from Dante, on whom he worked while at Florence. Until the age of forty and more, therefore, he had lived the normal life of the student and teacher of theology, though with unusual distinction and perhaps more movement than is usual. In one way or another he became familiar with several languages besides Hebrew, Greek and Latin, without ever, perhaps, becoming fully intelligible in the spoken and written word.

The great change in his career came in 1932, and it was due to the initiative of Fr Bede Jarrett. It is thirty years now since Fr Bede's premature death, and the memory of that dynamic personality may have

<sup>1</sup>A sermon preached at the Requiem at Blackfriars, Oxford, on 17 June, 1965.

become dim among a new generation. His significance in the life of the English province and of the Catholic Church in England has yet to be critically assessed. But it would ill befit us to forget him, in this place which is his particular monument and in regard to Fr Daniel, whom we owe to him. It was he who recognized Fr Daniel's great potentialities as a medieval scholar, and he who persuaded him to devote himself primarily to scholarship, to join the English province and to come to Blackfriars. Fr Bede conceived of this house as a centre of historical and patristic studies in close contact with the university. Fr Daniel accepted this idea, and in his forties became a research student under Professor Powicke who, recently appointed to the Regius chair, was beginning to widen the scope of medieval studies at Oxford in sympathy with the shift towards religious and intellectual history that had for some years gained impetus on the Continent. Powicke and Fr Daniel had each something to learn from the other. Powicke introduced Fr Daniel to Dr E. A. Lowe, who made of him an expert palaeographer. In return Fr Daniel showed his friends all unconsciously what a living friar was like, as Fr Bede had done to Ernest Barker a generation before. It was a notable instance of genial co-operation between three men of such different allegiances, but with a common enthusiasm for scholarship and recognition of the worth of medieval culture, and Fr Daniel never minimized his debt to both his masters. He continued to teach theology and was Regent of Studies for a dozen years (1942–54), but his interest in manuscript work and research grew ever deeper, and his work in the university as teacher, supervisor of research and examiner absorbed him more and more. He was one of a group, never large but always distinguished, which, led at first by Powicke, gave Oxford a reputation at home and abroad as a focus of the study of medieval theology and philosophy – a group which contained among others Fr Gervase Mathew, Beryl Smalley, Richard Hunt and, as 'corresponding members', Professor Southern and Dr Pantin.

In this field Fr Daniel found for himself three particular topics: the introduction to Oxford of Aristotle's writings on the natural sciences, metaphysics and ethics; the evolution here in the period before the condemnations of the 1270's of the Aristotelian doctrine of the unicity of form in being in general and man in particular; and the bio-bibliographical study of the Oxford masters up to and including Grosseteste. Gradually he was able to show that Oxford was in advance of Paris both in the study of natural science and in the reception of major philosophical works of Aristotle. He travelled widely in search of manuscripts, like Denifle and Grabmann, to Germany, Italy and Spain. His eminence in this field made him the obvious choice as editor of the centenary volume of essays on Grosseteste, and his success here and in his other work was recognized some years ago by a *Festschrift* presented to him by his

friends at Oxford and elsewhere. In this field he did work that will stand, and upon which others may build with confidence. Still more recently he initiated a long-term project in which he undertook the editing of a work by the early Oxford master and near-archbishop John Blund, to be the first volume of a series of medieval English philosophical texts published by the British Academy.

Fr Daniel was a scholar of the first water. He had a mind and a skill in palaeography and all critical work which enabled him to attain a very high degree of precision. It was thus that he showed forth the *veritas* of his order's proud device. He pursued truth and found it in his particular field, and his absolute integrity and scrupulous exactness were an example to all who came into contact with him or who read his work. He was also a man of unusual simplicity and kindness of heart, together with a shrewdness that preserved him from misfortune. He gave all he could of help to all who sought it of him, and all who knew him felt that he was a friend as well as a master. Though most of his disciples were Oxford men and women they were not confined to the history faculty. Theologians, philosophers and students of English literature were among them, and from Cambridge, among others, came Gordon Leff, John Robson and David Luscombe. As for myself, he found time to read in proof all the pages in my books that touched on theology, and I felt secure in his *nihil obstat* whether or not that of another appeared in print. Always charitable, he never let pass a deviation from the pure word of Thomism. On one occasion I hazarded the opinion that the great cardinal Ehrle was a faithful Thomist. 'No', said Fr Daniel, 'you will see 'ee is not quite right'. He did not specify; it may be that *scientia media* was the cardinal's foible. He could on occasions be incisive. I once asked him, rather maliciously, why Grosseteste had never attained the canonization for which he was so often recommended. 'Ee was alright, but 'ee was not a saint. That was it', replied Fr Daniel. We can all remember instances of similar firmness of judgment.

To which, then, of our four classes of Friar Preacher did Fr Daniel belong? He is not among the inquisitors, surely, nor among the revolutionaries. I cannot imagine him handing over anyone to the secular arm, with a conventional recommendation to mercy. And I have a suspicion, though no evidence, that Fr Daniel smiled at the new look in theology, well aware that though you may drive out St Thomas with a pitchfork he will come back again. But his career as Regent reminds us of St Thomas, and his work as scholar puts him by the side of Mandonnet.

The life of a priest and a friar must always be in large part unseen. Those outside the walls of a religious house do not know how many hours of the day and of every day go to the direct service of God at the altar, in choir and in private. I cannot speak of this, the deepest reality in Fr Daniel's life. All we can say is that in all the years we knew him he

appeared as the tireless scholar, always occupied, content and ageless, without any narrowness, bitterness or mannerism, and without the slightest trace of vanity, ambition or egoism, devoted to his work and giving to others help, ideals, strength and something of his own peace of mind. No one can give to others what he does not himself possess. It is not generally known that, some twenty-five years ago, he was the British Government's candidate to succeed Archbishop Caruana in Malta. Caruana, a Benedictine monk, had been picked out of a Highland glen by agreement between the Curia and the Foreign Office and now it was to be the turn of a Dominican friar in an Oxford cloister. Fr Daniel, who knew of the move, did his best to circumvent it, and things turned out otherwise. He would have been a beloved archbishop, and more learned than many. In any case he was to die in Malta, whither he had gone to keep his diamond jubilee as a Dominican, and he was buried among his own people. He died as he would have wished with a time for preparation and a clear mind, repeating the verse from the psalm *Cum defecerit virtus mea, ne derelinquas me Domine* and *Sancte Pater Dominice, ora pro me*. He received the Holy Viaticum about an hour before he died. A few hours previously he had dictated a letter in which he declared 'his deep love for every member of the English province and gratitude for their kindness'.

And so we, with gratitude for his example, his achievement and his friendship, may pray that his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed may, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

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## The Hermit

Father S—, who had to go to the doctor in Louisville, came back with a clipping about a man out in the Kentucky Mountains, an old coal miner who, for thirteen years, had lived as a hermit with his dog in a pitiful little shack without even a chimney. He used an old car seat for his bed. When he was asked why he chose to live such a life he replied: 'Because of all these wars'. A real desert father, perhaps. And probably not too sure how he got there.

From the (unpublished) *Journal* of Thomas Merton.