

MORAL DILEMMAS by Gerald Vann, O.P., *Collins, 18s.*

I am very glad to have been invited to write a notice of this little posthumous book by Father Gerald Vann, O.P., for it gives me an opportunity, as an Anglican, to say a word of appreciation of a priest whose writings have had a great influence far beyond the confines of the Church of Rome. His wisdom and charity, his imagination and wit, his lucidity and learning are apparent in all his books and have brought enlightenment, comfort and spiritual help to thousands of Christians of every kind. This notice enables me to say 'thank-you' on behalf of many members of the Church of England.

*Moral Dilemmas* consists of some fourteen essays and lectures selected for this book by the author before his death in July 1963. Most of them have appeared in print before – many of them, indeed, in *Blackfriars*. But it is good to have them thus brought together. Though for the most part addressed to the priest-confessor, their deep simplicity makes them a valuable introduction for the layman to moral and ascetic theology. To an Anglican they are particularly interesting as showing the impact of modern psychology on the study of moral theology – the greater recognition of the limits within which our human freedom works and of the difficulty of distinguishing between what we think to be and what in fact are the grounds and motives of our actions. We find here, too, the greater emphasis on charity and the recession of that legalistic quality which characterizes the older text-books of moral theology.

If I single out one or two of the chapters for mention, it is not that they are better or more important than the others, but that they interest me

more. In the first two chapters, which discuss the nature of morality and the difference between holiness and virtue I find all the recent Cambridge criticisms of religious activities and of legalism taken into account, but treated at much greater depth and set beside a sane appreciation of the place and necessity of moral principles in the Christian, and indeed, the human life. Chapters one and five contain a very clear and simple and orthodox re-statement of what is meant by natural and the natural law in moral theology.

Other chapters speak directly to confessors, laying especial stress on the need of humility and understanding in the confessor and a continual regard to his over-riding aim – to send away the penitent in peace. Two chapters on the problem of pseudo-virtue and the problem of pseudo-vice (the latter never before published) contain much wisdom on the hidden and secret motives which often govern our actions and attitudes, and on the obsessive feelings of guilt over actions for which, in fact, the agent was not wholly responsible or not responsible at all.

And lastly I mention a witty attack on ecclesiastical jargon, which is a timely warning to all those who are engaged at the present time in revising or translating liturgies for public use, and to all those who are responsible for giving religious instruction in our schools.

Gerald Vann was a priest of great humility, deep charity, wise, understanding, gentle, of lively wit and imagination and above all a man of God. He being dead yet speaketh, through his little book which is his last gift to us. May he rest in peace.

✠ Robert Exor