

before that split occurred'. The perspectives opened up there are surely very encouraging for those who would read the Easter stories *as stories*, and who find it is precisely that approach which deepens and sustains their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In any case, as has often been observed, Catholics should feel no discomfort at this modern understanding of the gospel stories as largely the product of the loving reflection and devout imagination of the Church, for their high doctrine of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit should help them to accept some such view.

Contempt for the Past

Ann Dummett

'L'immensité de ces espaces infinies m'effraie', said Pascal, and we are all familiar with the ways in which European attitudes to the place of man in the universe have changed since astronomy rendered him small, lonely and vulnerable. But the idea of the expanding universe in infinite space, while it robbed man of a central place as lord of creation below the heavens, did not take away the idea of brotherhood between men. That deprivation has to do with another kind of frightening immensity: the unthinkable length of the human past.

It is less than two hundred years since educated Europeans believed that Adam was very close to them in time. Lemprière's Classical Dictionary, first published in 1788, the work from which Keats took his knowledge of classical mythology, begins with a chronology following the guidance of Dr Blair and Archbishop Ussher: the creation of the world is given in 4004 B.C. and the birth of Moses in 1571. Thus the gap between Adam and Moses was of the same length as the gap between Moses and Basil the First at Constantinople in 862 A.D. Chronologies varied, but none placed the first man so far away in time that imagination could not encompass the distance. Moreover, this nearness was a matter not only of time but of human nature. Adam was no less human than they, no less intelligent, no less feeling: there was a real sense in which he was not only an ancestor but a brother. Made in the image of God, he was of noble appearance; fallen through sin, he was a fellow-sufferer of human misfortune; formed out of dust, he was lowly; speaking with God in Paradise he was touched with glory. The first man was a *full* human being. And, as father of all men, he conferred on all men this fullness, this potentiality for both great-

ness and misery. 'What a piece of work is a man!' exclaims Hamlet, 'how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty; in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet', he adds, 'to me, what is this quintessence of dust?' And to Lear, turning mad in the extremity of despair, the naked Edgar is 'the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Is Man no more than this?' All the marvel of creation and the appalling pitiableness of a human being in a world from which God has withdrawn his presence are there in Adam, are present in every man.

Or were. The European, or western, vision of human nature in the twentieth century, has shrunk and faded. Adam has disappeared. The first men are depicted, in those children's books and encyclopaedias that have taken the place of church paintings and mosaics in popular instruction, as shambling ape-like figures that have neither seen glory nor committed sin. Ugly, uninteresting and stupid; if these are the fathers of men, men are a poor lot; certainly these are not in any sense our brothers. Their foreheads are low and their jaws prognathous; their hair is unkempt (although archaeologists have unearthed bone combs from their graves); they wear garments of fur worn leaving one shoulder and half the chest bare, when if they had any sense they would cover themselves up more adequately, and they crouch like surreptitious burglars.

No evidence supports these absurd pictures. Those off-the-shoulder fur garments are fictions; what evidence there is, as of recent French excavation of portrait drawings on bone from palaeolithic sites, shows humorous, individual drawings of faces surmounted by well-made caps and above the collars of perfectly reasonable clothes. The exaggerated primitiveness of primitive man is not a scientific reconstruction but a legend illustrating a distorted view of human nature. This is not a matter of science versus religion but of an uninspired contempt for humanity versus inspired love of it.

Twentieth-century European culture is obsessed with its own superiority and importance. Its pride cannot be satisfied with vaunting its own achievements; it has to deny the worth and value of all other achievements but its own. Books on art lump together the creations of Pacific fishermen and sophisticated African city-dwellers as 'primitive art': Eskimo and Aztec sculptures, different from each other in date, significance, style and technique, are both 'pre-Columbian'; beautifully shaped and polished stone spearheads and flint scrapers are both 'Stone Age tools'. Racism and contempt for the past are both aspects of pride in the localised present, a pride that blurs distinctions between all aspects of the world that are not contemporary and western. Of course the specialists in particular fields do not share this view. Archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians, respect the people they study. But the prevailing mentality of the western world is undeniably one of a contempt for human nature which finds its typical expression in sub-

stituting an uncouth ape-man for Adam as the image of the universal father.

It is worth stressing how particularly European is this modern vision of human nature. Chinese and Indian civilisations never shared the European mediaeval or Renaissance views of the Universe; the successive shocks of discovering the frightening immensity of space and the frightening distance of past time, which have had such profound effects on western views of human nature, have not afflicted them in the same way at all. 'The idea of an evolutionary process', writes Joseph Needham, 'involving social as well as biological change, was commonly entertained by Chinese philosophers and scientifically interested scholars, even though sometimes thought of in terms of a succession of world renewals following the catastrophes and dissolutions assumed in the recurrent mahakalpas of Indian speculation. One can see a striking echo of this open-mindedness in the calculations made by I-Hsing about A.D. 724 concerning the date of the last general conjunction. He made it come out to 96,961,740 years before—rather a different scale from "4004B.C. at six o'clock in the evening"'. Ancient Taoist thinkers looked back to the golden age of the Great Togetherness or Great Community (Ta Thung) in the past, a time when selfishness, scheming and robbery were unknown, and held that the world had declined from those happy days, while the Neo-Confucians emphasised social progress and moving towards the Great Peace. But both these ideas co-existed against a mental background of belief in recurrence and renewal, a compensating ebb and flow in nature and in history, an immensity of time that was not frightening but stable. Against this background, reverence for the sages of the past was not contradicted by an awareness of progress in knowledge and scientific technique, nor by ideal visions of the future. 'In our own time', remarks Needham, 'the charismatic phrases of old became the nationwide watchwords of the political parties, Thien hsa wei kung (Let the whole world be One Community) for the Kuomintang, and Thien hsia ta thung (The world shall be the Great Togetherness) for the Kungch-hantang (the Communist Party)'.

In India, Hindu and Buddhist cosmology saw the universe, from of old, as 'limitless in space and infinite in time, and had never found any difficulty in peopling both with uncounted "worlds"' (R. C. Zaehner, *The Convergent Spirit*). Moreover, beliefs about the soul, which was eternal and distinct from all the body's attributes, could not be affected by new theories of merely worldly and temporal events like the evolution of species. Lasting value was in the timeless, not in the circling wheel of human existence.

For different reasons, then, new scientific discoveries and theories concerning the antiquity and development of man on this planet have not made any fundamental alteration in the traditional framework of Chinese and Indian views of human nature. European civilisation, however, has in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had its beliefs about human nature shattered by a series of blows from different

directions. Both popular understanding of evolutionary theory and intellectual application of it to fields outside biology itself produced not just a new view of man in general but new theories of gradation of human beings on a scale. Some men were more human than others : going back in time, men became closer to beasts; going outside the familiar framework of European civilisation into the rest of the world, some men who were contemporary in time but distant in geographical location were reckoned by an unwarrantable analogy to be less fully human than Europeans. Racism was a false deduction from theories of European history and European science.

The psychology of Freud later dealt a blow from another direction : human beings were less free, less self-knowing, than they had supposed : the universe of the mind contained a frightening immensity of darkness. And in the twentieth century, archaeological discoveries have claimed an existence for man far longer in time than had seemed possible : forty years ago, man was deemed half a million years old, but his age has been made greater and greater : a million years, two million, two and a half million and more. Imagination can hardly grasp this length of human time; and against its background, known history and known human development and achievement now seem extraordinarily brief and fragile : even the cave-paintings of palaeolithic southern Europe become as of yesterday, while the vast unknown human past before them stretches backwards out of sight, through aeons of supposedly primitive and undistinguished lives and deaths. Adam has disappeared.

It is not much use, in this situation, adopting the comforting compromise that many Christians have settled for : that Darwinian evolution and an unimaginably long prehistory of various kinds of *homo* before *sapiens* are scientific facts and the given truth, while the life of Adam can be retained as a useful myth that cloaks in layers of symbolism whatever we choose to believe about grace, knowledge and sin. Intellectually, this is a sloppy compromise; emotionally, it is unsatisfying; spiritually, it has no power. There have, of course, been attempts to resolve this difficulty, such as the grand synthesis of Teilhard de Chardin. But the difficulty of attempting a synthesis between evolutionary theory and Biblical authority goes beyond the fact that these two accounts of the human past are now taken to describe different *kinds* of truth : one physical, scientific and matter-of-fact, one spiritual, symbolic and verifiable only by subjective measurement of the power of an idea. A synthesis between two kinds of truth would be possible if both converged on the same meaning; but these two accounts have fundamentally different meanings, one from another, concerning the nature of man.

Teilhard's solution is to make evolution a divine process, spreading outward to the universe and inwards to the spiritual development of mankind : his theory comprehends immensities of space and time and sanctifies science but it obliterates that material, human, single Adam who was our father and our brother. It tries to

retain the spiritual significance of his story, it deals with sin and grace, but it loses the human being formed out of dust and touched with glory; it loses the bodily Adam who worked for his bread in the sweat of his brow, and it is that bodily Adam whose loss matters to us. Once he is only a myth, he is not even a myth; he has no significance.

One of our greatest difficulties is that European thought and Christian thought have been so closely intertwined. But Christianity was not founded in or for 'the West', and now that the heyday of European power is over and so-called 'western culture' foundering in a hundred uncertainties, it is being forced upon our attention at last that the Catholic or universal religion of Christianity cannot be dependent in truth upon the cultural style and traditions of thought of one part of the earth only. Christian missionaries have, notoriously, often attempted to impose European customs and ideas on other parts of the world, not being able to discern the difference between Christianisation and Europeanisation. Those who distinguished the difference, like Father Ricci in China, have been rare and their efforts often nullified by the work of others. One can find excuses for, say, a nineteenth-century English Nonconformist of conventional education being unable to see that the wearing of European clothes is not an important part of Christian behaviour, even if one does not condone his actions, but there is no excuse for anyone now, who is at all aware of the outside world, behaving as though Christianity drew its strength from a long association with European culture. 'Many shall come from the East and from the West', but we can hardly suppose they will reach the Kingdom by virtue of a western education. Christ crucified was foolishness to the Greeks; Christ transfigured, Christ resurrected, the new Adam, are foolishness to modern western culture.

When it was believed, securely, that Adam was the first man and father of all, a recent man and a brother, human history was seen as a part of the divine plan for the universe. Now that our ideas about the universe and about human history have been drastically changed, people try, rather, to see how the divine plan can be understood as a part of human history. One of the great strengths of Marxism is that it answers this problem: the plan it offers is not divine, but it is quasi-divine: grand, cosmic and inescapable: men's brotherhood and progress, men's morality, and, above all, men's sense of hope, are consistent with existence in the frightening immensities of space and past time. You know where you are; you know how things work; you know that the classless society is coming. There is no need for a Marxist to fear the past, or to feel contempt for human beings in the past. There was no need for Christians to do so while they still had Adam, but, without him, they turn away in contempt from the past and concentrate on Modern Man.

Modern Man is a creature whose vision of the world has shrunk to the recent and the parochial, but in his small-mindedness he is overweeningly arrogant. The permanent hard questions in ethics that have concerned human beings in many different times and cultures can be

side-stepped or easily explained, because he is 'post-Freudian'. Miracles do not happen for him, because he can explain them all away by modern physical science or modern psychology. He has no sense of mystery: a mystery is either a device to delude the ignorant or a problem that is undoubtedly capable of solution in flat, modern-man terms. The non-Christian modern man writes off God very easily as an entity former generations or less enlightened cultures than the modern western one have naively believed in just because they lacked modern western knowledge; the Christian modern man is magnanimous enough to fit God into the world by making him into a function of healthy human activity, a name for the psychological benefits of group interaction, an abstraction of approved human qualities. God is not even, any more, a residual explanation of difficulties like the origin of life itself; he is a shadowy spirit lurking somewhere on the edge of the physical explanation that will one day be discovered by bio-chemists. Modern man's mentality has lost the capacity to understand a great part of other people's human nature and also, therefore, his own. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' becomes a primitive idea belonging to a naive tribal culture: the capacity has disappeared to reflect that, if God, who must by definition be something far greater than man, really exists, the implications of the fact are terrifying: nothing else can be so important. The denial of the full humanity of Adam and of all his sons, leads easily to the denial of the full divinity of God.

But how are we to recover Adam as a reality without denying the physical proofs of man's antiquity and slow evolution? I do not think a solution is impossible. But it can be found only by reasserting the value of the least fashionable of Christian virtues: humility. It is characteristic of modern western culture that humility should be its least favoured, and so its least discussed, virtue: the concept makes people uneasy, and is associated with servility or weakness, blamed as an obstacle to political and social progress, or misunderstood as a passive state of mind. Intellectual humility, however, like other aspects of humility, requires strength and active effort. It must constantly review, analyse and distinguish, must admit the enquirer's own limitations, must know how to attempt the most difficult of intellectual tasks, the disentangling of certain truth from the accretions of speculative opinion and subjective images. If the past is approached with humility rather than with contempt, the first obvious fact about it is not the extent of our knowledge of the past but the extent of our ignorance. Most of what we say we know about the human past is not fact but inference. Yet even if we accept all the present structure of inference concerning the past, we have still to admit that we know nothing at all about the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived, and that we cannot be certain even of the extent of our ignorance when many peoples and cultures have disappeared without leaving enough physical traces or spoken traditions to give us a clue. The further back into the past we go, the greater is this ignorance: the physical facts are bones and stones and all the rest is supposition. If there were songs and poems

and theological speculations, we cannot know them. If there was geometry, its traces are lost in the earth it sought to measure. We cannot assert that there were these things, but just as certainly we cannot say there were not. We have some idea of what was lost to us in the great fire at the library of Alexandria; we can have no idea of much else from the past that is lost. We know that we have only a few plays by Aeschylus preserved; by a fluke, we could have been denied those we have. We know that Homer composed in an oral bardic tradition; how many other epics have there been that have perished for ever? In recent years, archaeologists have replaced earlier suppositions about the builders of Stonehenge (Druids, simple farmers, etc.) with new suppositions about sophisticated astronomical observation; these latest speculations pay the builders of Stonehenge the compliment of regarding them as sons of Adam rather than as primitive men, but all speculation about the distant past is tied to the random physical traces that are left, and work on such a basis can give us at best an uncertain and a hopelessly incomplete picture.

We have no solid basis for supposing that men in the distant past were stupid, unimaginative and brutish, no reason beyond our own inferences from tiny pieces of evidence and from lack of evidence. If we look at the tangible evidence from the past we possess with humility instead of with contempt, Adam reappears, walking with God in a garden: we cannot know much about him with certainty, but we can reasonably suppose that this first human being was a full human being, and that the narrow arrogance of modern western culture is yet another passing show. Immensity is no longer frightening if the first human being is recognised, over however great a distance, as father and brother.

The Papacy and the Historian VIII: The Perennial Papacy?

Eric John

In the preceding papers I have looked at the papacy historically, from the borderland of history and theology, but historically none the less—and socially. I have tried to relate developments in the papacy to certain features in the social structure of the day. I have passed a good deal by. I have said little about the Reformation, what I did say was by way of a criticism of Calvinist notions of Catholicity, a criti-