

and training resources. The economy needs to be entirely redesigned. However, with a massive deficit of f50 billion per year there is no prospect of this happening. Who is responsible? When anyone in authority is held to account they answer 'Not me gov. I was there but I didn't see anything. If only the nasty media did not whip up these unfair campaigns everything would be alright.' Nobody would need even to think of resigning. If nobody is running the country then nobody is responsible.

What we are seeing in the twilight days of the political settlement established by the 'Glorious Revolution' is that breach of covenant between word and reality. Speech is too cheap. Language too loose. Vaclav Havel, the President of Czech Republic, has pinpointed the crisis of our time as a crisis of truth. He says the threat to our civilization is perhaps not just that we speak untruthfully, that we tell lies, but that we speak easily words that have become empty. This is more than a little local difficulty.

Vincent McNabb OP 1868-1943

Robert Ombres OP

Fr Vincent McNabb was a friar who tried to make more or less all that he did into a sermon. This must be why he was so striking, so memorable. People speak of his firm and fierce love. He has been described as a firebrand Irishman whose face grew increasingly red as he swung a sickle under the hot sun at Ditchling. He appeared a strange figure walking the streets of London, with his distinctive habit and boots, and he could seem a visitor from another century who had strayed into our modern world. It was said he had a zeal unparalleled in the history of our Order in this land.

At his Requiem, the Provincial told the outside world of the hidden, daily life of Fr Vincent: the utter self-abnegation, the rigid asceticism, the complete unselfishness, that chair in his room on which he never sat, that bed on which he never slept. Yet at the same time he was the

happiest, least depressed member of the community. His ready wit was famous, and members of the Catholic Evidence Guild will appreciate its usefulness. Once he was asked 'If Christ knew everything, why didn't he invent wireless?' He retorted, 'Shall I tell you why He didn't?— Because He knew what wireless is like'. One could speak of his having the fighting spirit of a crusader. When he was dying he said: 'I must not take death lying down'.

Fr Vincent quoted the wise warning, still valid today, 'Beware of a Mysticism that does not rest on sound Asceticism'. The public could guess at, the brethren would be witnesses to, the sound asceticism. This could be a key to understanding the practicality of real mysticism, and the mystical quality of ordinary life. McNabb was the kind of mystic who stressed that love of the land was primary, who worried constantly about dreadful social conditions, who denounced the same imperious few who had martyred the people of England and of Ireland, who raised money for Belgian Relief in the First World War. The frugal and celibate friar was keenly appreciative of motherhood, the family, children, the home, household objects. He was the kind of mystic who never dodged the demands of grace on his natural temperament (craggy and fiery and showy as it could be), and did not resist the transforming Spirit. From the age of seven onwards, he went to confession every week of his life.

If the sound asceticism, sound because chosen wisely and lived in the consciousness of Christ's love, led to mysticism then the mysticism influenced the asceticism. It gave Fr Vincent an existence not limited by the senses or the constraints of life in this world. He was a man of prayer as much as he was a campaigner, he taught that our relation to our neighbour is focused in Holy Mass as in nothing else. He knew that it needs divine Love to save human love. Hilaire Belloc testified that in McNabb he had known, seen and felt holiness in person. Hilary Pepler came to regard McNabb as a Pentecostal fire. He did not have an excluding sense of religious life: he acknowledged that 'most of the contemplatives I have met are in the world, and these have found union with God through the Rosary'. The last purification, accepted with a note of joy, was to know that he, the famous public speaker and preacher, was dying of an incurable disease of the throat.

Fr Vincent published prolifically and had the job of priory librarian here, yet there were just about four books in his cell: a Bible, a Breviary, the Dominican Constitutions and the *Summa* of St Thomas. These were the written foundations for his whole life as a friar. From them he developed the mysticism and the asceticism which, as he put it, prove themselves to be the redemption of economics. It has often been

remarked that McNabb was an eccentric. Yet, as Bernard Delany OP remarked, 'eccentric' is a relative term. It depends where you place your circle or fix your centre. Fr Vincent placed the centre in God and God's eternal truth and glory. The world being what it is, this was bound to make him odd, eccentric. His meditation upon the widowed land of England and the crowded slums of St Pancras ('thirty thousand families living each in one or two rooms') grew into the conviction that all the apostolic work would be useless without some order of contemplatives going back to the land. Being 'eccentric' meant he could also reach well outside the safe bounds of Catholicism.

McNabb's ideas are beginning to return to fascinate and stimulate an ecologically minded generation. The vision behind the details was stark: study not merely to give God His due by worship, but to give man his due by justice. Let not individual poverty beget, as uncurbed it will beget, collective riches. Measure your lands by your needs. Measure not your needs by the world's measures. Let your standard be not Babylon, or Thebes, or Paris, or New York, or London but Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capharnaum, Calvary. G.K.Chesterton considered McNabb to be one of the few great men he had met in his life—great mentally and morally and mystically and practically.

McNabb could be rhetorical, he could be poetic, he could be paradoxical—he never lapsed into irrationality. He could be oblique as well as direct in his approach. He remembered thinking when he was first assigned to Leicester, 'Here is a town I should like to bring God into'. His first offering was a lecture on Shakespeare and he did not mention God once during the whole evening. But, he recalled, 'it was all done for Him, preparing the way to get God into their minds'.

Reflecting on the contents of The Children's Catechism he, a Master of Sacred Theology in our Order, concluded that an institution (the Church) which offers even its children such solid philosophical food is doing its duty by philosophy.

Why meet to remember Fr Vincent McNabb half a century after his death in 1943? To keep his memory alive; to tell another generation of his vision; to invite prayers for the repose of his soul till he enjoys the vision of God. Amen.