



Bede Jarrett, Sir Ernest Barker and the Political Significance of the Dominican Order

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Abstract

This article seeks to reappraise the scholarly work of Bede Jarrett OP by drawing out his debt to Sir Ernest Barker. A shared interest in medieval political and social institutions, and in the constitution of the Dominican Order as a model of voluntary association, infused Jarrett's thinking with the tenets of English political pluralism and enabled him to produce a body of work that paid as much attention to concrete political form as to social ethics. As such his work establishes links with nineteenth and early twentieth-century Christian Socialism, as well as echoing certain current preoccupations within political theology.

Keywords

Jarrett; Barker; political pluralism; socialism; Dominicans

Introduction: Jarrett at Oxford

The reputation of Bede Jarrett OP rests largely upon his part in the return of the Dominican Order to Oxford in 1921 and the settlement of a Dominican house in Edinburgh, the establishment of the journal *Blackfriars*, a series of scholarly but popular books on medieval social ethics, and various spiritual works. In addition to the biography published in 1952, his work has attracted attention for its interest in social theory, and his life, reflected in extensive published correspondence, for its distinctive engagement with English society in the years either side of the First World War.

Jarrett's work on aspects of specifically Dominican history has, however, attracted less serious attention, appearing perhaps to be of esoteric or antiquarian interest only. Whereas his exposition of medieval social theory, of medieval mentalities in respect of property, women, almsgiving, usury, education and law form part of an identifiable tradition of social criticism, his close attention to the constitutional forms of early mendicant life and its place in English

history appears isolated from any intellectual context that might lend it lasting interest. Yet it is arguable that his work on Dominican history was not only central to his own personal concerns but central too to the broader intellectual context within which his life and work found their distinctive shape.

In 1921 Jarrett published *The English Dominicans*, a history of the Order in England from its establishment in Oxford in 1221 to its nineteenth-century restoration and subsequent development, to coincide with the return of the Dominicans to Oxford in the seven-hundredth year of their arrival there. The return to Oxford marked the accomplishment of a personal ambition held by Jarrett since his novitiate, now brought to fruition during his tenure as Provincial. In the same year the Catholic Truth Society published a compilation of essays on *The English Dominican Province 1221–1921*, with contributions from Jarrett, Fabian Dix OP, Walter Gumbley OP and others.

Jarrett's *The English Dominicans* was dedicated to 'Ernest Barker My Master and My Friend'. Barker had already acknowledged in print his own affection and respect for his former student. Although a Nonconformist, born in Stockport in 1874 and educated through a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School, Barker had nevertheless during his time as a tutor at Merton College, Oxford found himself responsible for a number of extra-collegiate Catholic students from the Benedictine and Jesuit Halls in Oxford. He was, however, happy to concede that none of his students surpassed Cyril (later Bede) Jarrett. When in 1913 Barker published his own *The Dominican Order and Convocation*, he acknowledged a large debt of gratitude to his former pupil.¹

On the publication of Jarrett's posthumous study *The Emperor Charles IV* in January 1935, Barker contributed an introduction in which, echoing his obituary notice at the time of Jarrett's death the year before, he noted Jarrett's scholarly passion and his standing as 'in all things, and above all things, a Dominican Friar, the living exemplar of the long tradition of his Order – the tradition of Scholarship, the tradition of Preaching'.² When he published his memoirs in 1953, Barker recalled once more his admiration for Jarrett as a scholar and 'statesman'.³

This reciprocal intellectual bond between Jarrett and Barker has not escaped notice, at least insofar as it bore upon Jarrett. Aidan Nichols OP, has, for example, drawn attention to Jarrett's lifelong

¹ E. Barker, *The Dominican Order and Convocation: A Study of the Growth of Representation in the Church during the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1913).

² E. Barker, Introduction, Bede Jarrett, *The Emperor Charles IV* (London, 1935), p. xvi.

³ E. Barker, *Age and Youth: Memories of Three Universities and Father of the Man* (Oxford, 1953), p. 54.

debt to Barker and his other teachers in the Oxford History School, noting that ‘His Oxford sources stayed with him, and permeate his work’;⁴ and Jarrett’s biographers, Gervase Mathew OP and Kenneth Wykeham-George OP, also noted the decisive influence of Jarrett’s studies at Oxford, notwithstanding that his time there was relatively short compared to the full span of his more conventional Dominican formation.⁵ It should be recalled that Jarrett was the first English Dominican to attend Oxford University since the Reformation: as Allan White OP has observed, this was an ‘imaginative and bold’ break with convention, ‘to allow one of the brightest Dominican students of his day to enter a secular history school, especially since the Modernist crisis was just about to break against the certainties of Catholicism’.⁶

Since the relative demise of Ernest Barker’s reputation during the 1960s, and notwithstanding the revived interest in his work during the 1990s, it is more difficult now to appreciate the full significance of Jarrett’s debt to him, and indeed to that broader tradition of English historiography that found its focus at the end of the nineteenth century in the relationship between law and history, and that included in its number Sir Henry Maine, Sir Paul Vinogradoff, Sir Frederick Pollock, Viscount Bryce, A.V. Dicey and F. W. Maitland.⁷ It was within that broader tradition that the Oxford History School of Jarrett’s day established its collective character, comprising individuals whom Jarrett heard lecture, such as the Christian Socialists A.L. Smith⁸ and A.J. Carlyle⁹, whose work concentrated upon the

⁴ A. Nichols OP, ‘The English Dominican Social Tradition’, in F. Compagnoni OP and H. Alford OP (eds.), *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (Dublin, 2007), p. 399.

⁵ K. Wykeham-George OP and G. Mathew OP, *Bede Jarrett of the Order of Preachers* (London, 1952).

⁶ A. White OP, ‘Father Bede Jarrett OP and the Renewal of the English Dominican Province’, in D. A. Bellenger (ed.), *Opening the Scrolls: Essays in Honour of Godfrey Anstruther* (Bath, 1987), p. 221.

⁷ See S. Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 7.

⁸ A. L. Smith published *Notes on Stubbs’ Charters* in 1906. His Ford lectures on the *Church and State in the Middle Ages* were published in 1913, in part delayed by his agreeing to compile a bibliography of Maitland’s work following his death in 1906 and to deliver two lectures on Maitland as Oxford’s public memorial to him. Smith also associated himself with ‘progressive politics’, promoting women’s education in the university, tutoring students at Lady Margaret Hall, representing the university in its dealings with the Workers’ Educational Association from 1907, and encouraging the African and Asian students who gravitated towards Balliol. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Of Smith, Barker remarked in his memoir, ‘Who that knew him and had been quickened and encouraged by his alert and darting spirit, could ever forget A.L. Smith, once my tutor, then my colleague, and always my inspiration?’ Smith in turn Barker recognised as a profound admirer of Stubbs, Vinogradoff and especially Maitland. See E. Barker, *Age and Youth*, pp. 20 and 328.

⁹ A.J. Carlyle, in addition to serving as a lecturer in politics and economics, was from 1895 to 1919 the rector of the Oxford city church of St Martin and All Saints. In that

relationship between church and state in the Middle Ages, as well as upon Aristotle's *Politics*.¹⁰

In his introduction to the *Letters of Bede Jarrett* Simon Tugwell OP described Jarrett as a precursor of what would nowadays be regarded as the strategy of 'inculturation'. As Tugwell puts it, 'The Dominicans in England must be genuinely English, at home in and acceptable to English culture'.¹¹ Allan White OP also has drawn attention to Jarrett's ambition that the Dominican house in Oxford should not so much be part of an attempt to minister to the Catholic minority, still less convert Oxford, but rather to learn from Oxford through a rigorous encounter with modern scholarship and modern problems.¹² Gervase Mathew OP, writing in 1937 in an appendix to his brother's *Catholicism in England*, offered an earlier, but not dissimilar assessment, when he remarked that Jarrett was 'intensely English, intensely Dominican... It seemed his life work to reconcile Catholicism and the English mind, a new synthesis of Catholic and English traditions – an uncompleted synthesis'.¹³ A significant part of that synthesis was achieved by Jarrett's receptiveness to his studies at Oxford.

Jarrett's deep immersion in what Barker called 'statesmanship', notably as long-standing Provincial and then Prior at Blackfriars, Oxford, tends to limit the attention paid to his scholarly work. As a result, Jarrett emerges as an administrator who skillfully cultivated English benefactors, with the foundations of new priories in Oxford

capacity he earned a reputation as a liberal thinker and Christian socialist, and became an associate of the Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and the high-Church Anglican, Charles Gore. In 1912 he published two short works on *The Influence of Christianity upon Social and Political Ideas*, and *Wages*. His chief scholarly work, upon which he worked from 1895 until the publication of the sixth and final volume in 1936, was his *History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*. It is significant that the main theme of this work has been described as 'the rule of law, firmly rooted in the nature of things, as the basis of the search for and maintenance of justice and liberty'. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁰ Jarrett's surviving notebooks indicate that he attended A.L. Smith's lectures at Balliol on *Stubbs' Select Charters*, on his *Notes on Political and Social Questions*, and on Aristotle's *Politics*. A.J. Carlyle lectured at University College in Jarrett's time on The Theory of Natural Law and Social Contract. Jarrett's notebooks contain carefully arranged notes on the Laws of Nature and Justice, Natural Law and Law of Nations, the Early Christian Fathers' distinction between the primitive and actual state, Their Justification of Government, Slavery and Property, Their Idea of the Nature of the State and of the Law, and the Political Theories of the 7th–12th centuries. He also attended four lectures delivered by Vinogradoff in 1906. See the English Dominican Archive, Blackfriars, Edinburgh.

¹¹ S. Tugwell OP, Introduction, in B. Bailey, A. Bellenger and S. Tugwell (eds.) *Letters of Bede Jarrett* (Bath and Oxford, 1989), p. xxxi.

¹² White, 229, citing Wykeham-George and Mathew, p. 88.

¹³ G. Mathew OP, 'The English Dominicans', Appendix 1, in D. Mathew, *Catholicism in England 1535–1935 – Portrait of a Minority: Its Culture and Tradition* (London, 1937), p. 269.

and Edinburgh and the establishment of the journal *Blackfriars* as his chief legacies.

It is arguable, however, that those practical achievements should be set in a broader intellectual context of which Barker and the tradition of which he formed part are central ingredients. That realignment in turn invites fresh consideration of the way in which Jarrett engaged with secular English culture and of how that engagement generated an intellectual legacy that has something to say more generally about the options available to Christian political theology.

The Legacy of Sir Ernest Barker

Sir Ernest Barker's academic career spanned three quarters of a century, Oxford, London and Cambridge, and a range of academic disciplines that included classics, history and political science. At Oxford, he took a First in Greats from Balliol in 1897, held a fellowship at Merton from 1898 until 1905, combined with a lectureship at Wadham in modern history from 1899 to 1909 and a tutorship for non-collegiate students from 1899 to 1913. This was the period of his direct acquaintance with Jarrett. He subsequently held fellowships in modern history at St John's (1909–1913) and New College (1913–20) before becoming Principal of King's College, London from 1920 to 1927. In 1927 he took the newly established chair of political science at Cambridge, where he remained until his retirement in 1938. During an exceptionally fruitful and long retirement, Barker continued to publish scholarly works, with an increasingly European flavour, until shortly before his death in 1960.¹⁴

It is possible to disentangle from this diverse output those aspects of Barker's intellectual legacy that are especially pertinent to Bede Jarrett's own intellectual development. As Aidan Nichols has suggested, 'It does not seem excessive to suppose that he [Barker] alerted Jarrett to, in particular, three aspects of medieval life: the role of political notions – chiefly jurisprudential in character – within the total complex of medieval society and its state, and early anticipations of socialist ideas and economics'.¹⁵

Jarrett was a student at Oxford, where he read history, from 1904 until 1907. During that time he was resident at the Benedictine Hunter-Blair's Hall, but had Barker as his personal tutor. It is in the early phase of Barker's career that the themes most pertinent to Jarrett's debt might be expected to surface.

It was, in fact, in 1906, during the period of his tutorship of Jarrett, that Barker published his first, and arguably most durable, book, *The*

¹⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁵ Nichols, p. 400.

Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle. Barker's intellectual biographer, Julia Stapleton, has identified in that early work the synthesis of ideas that would characterize his later work in the decades ahead, a synthesis of idealism, whiggism and pluralism. On this account, Barker's work interpreted the writings of Plato and Aristotle from the perspective of a modern liberal concerned to uphold the values of both personal liberty and government based on the rule of law, while at the same time recognizing the central role of society for the development of individuality.¹⁶

Barker, in other words, used his work on Plato and Aristotle to articulate what might be described as a 'third way' between the negative attitude towards the state of a whiggish liberal like Dicey and the enthusiastic identity of state and society which characterized the more wholehearted forms of idealism current at the turn of the century. Barker inherited, and acknowledged, from T.H. Green a degree of scepticism about the ability of the state to deliver in practice the ideal described in theory, whilst from Maitland he absorbed an interest in political pluralism that enabled him to acknowledge that the state co-existed with other communities and that unity was dependent on diversity. He also demonstrated a significant debt to his school-friend from Stockport, George Unwin, who became Professor of Economic History at Edinburgh in 1908, and whose work on economic history gave particular emphasis to the creative impact of guilds and other forms of voluntary association.¹⁷

To that extent, it might be said that Barker found a measure of sympathy with Aristotle that was absent from his appraisal of Plato. That Aristotelian turn also chimed with Barker's sense of, and admiration for, what he regarded as English national character. As he put it, there was 'something French in Plato's mind, something of that pushing of a principle to its logical extremes'; whilst of Aristotle he observed 'it hardly seems fanciful to detect more of an English spirit of compromise'.¹⁸

In this early phase of his career, Barker had identified the central place within his thought of the balance to be struck between individuals, voluntary societies and the state. As Stapleton points out, the balance was for Barker always uneven and at various stages he favoured one at the expense of the other. In these early years, before the First World War, and despite some reservations, he was

¹⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁷ J. Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge, 1994) pp. 79–81; see also, J. Stapleton, 'Pluralism as English cultural definition: the social and political thought of George Unwin', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991) pp. 665–84; J. Stapleton, 'The National Character of Ernest Barker's Political Science', *Political Studies* 37 (1989) 171–187.

¹⁸ E. Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (London, 1906), p. 162.

strongly drawn towards political pluralism, an attachment that would be moderated by the experience of the First World War and seriously damaged by what he saw as the unhealthy upsurge of groups in continental Europe during the inter-war years.

Nevertheless, at the time of Barker's tutorial supervision of Jarrett at Oxford, he was still broadly sympathetic to the pluralist movement, which was developing in the first decade of the twentieth century, in large part in response to the dismissive treatment of 'voluntary associations' in the Taff Vale (1901) and Church of Scotland (1900–1904) court cases.

As Stapleton remarks, the 'lure of pluralism' for Barker comprised several distinct aspects and a 'nodal point around which several of his concerns' converged: first, the Aristotelian sense of the diversity of society; secondly, the notion that the state was a legal corporation with rights and responsibilities like other public bodies; thirdly, the recognition that sensitivity to the wide range of groups in society entailed, perhaps paradoxically, a strong state as a centre of 'adjustment'; fourthly, a 'progressive' model of state-society relations which sought a balance between social innovation and political order; and finally, the particular relevance of pluralism to English national political development.¹⁹

Underpinning Barker's attraction to pluralism was a particular respect for the place of law in political theory and practice. For Barker, it was the Oxford jurists Dicey, Vinogradoff and Bryce, together with Maitland at Cambridge, who drew the conviction that 'political science lies in the interstices between law, history and political philosophy'.²⁰

Stapleton detects that realisation even in the early work on Plato and Aristotle: 'There was already in "Plato and Aristotle" an evident sensitivity to law as the institutional essence of the state, even if the ethical perspectives of ancient political thinkers formed the primary focus of the book's analysis'.²¹ Indeed, as Stapleton also observes, for Barker, the initial view that political science was, as the Idealists had it, a matter in essence of political and moral philosophy, was even by the time of his early publication on Plato and Aristotle 'becoming overshadowed by a view of law as the cornerstone of political understanding'.²²

Political pluralism, English national character, and the centrality of law to political thought: these features might, therefore, be taken as among the central aspects of Barker's legacy and as the most

¹⁹ Stapleton, *Englishness*, pp. 90–91.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 62.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 64.

²² *Ibid.*

important during the period of his contact with Bede Jarrett as his tutor at Oxford.

Barker and the Dominican Order

Barker published his *The Dominican Order and Convocation: A Study of the Growth of Representation in the Church during the 13th Century* in 1913. From his own remarks in the preface and footnotes, it appears that Barker owed a considerable debt to conversation with his pupil Bede Jarrett for his interest in the history of the English Dominicans, and indeed for his copy of the early Constitutions of the Order.²³ Although various contemporary general histories of the Middle Ages had paid some attention to the Dominicans, there was as yet within English historiography nothing on the Dominicans to rival the enthusiasm of scholars such as A.G. Little for the Franciscans. To that extent Barker was breaking new ground.²⁴

The chief polemical import of Barker's book is to propose that representative government, the central institution of English parliamentary democracy, was based on the constitutional arrangements of the Dominicans. His argument is based on the identification within the Dominican Constitutions of an embryonic form of representative democracy and the hypothesis that the English monarchy's generally favourable reception of the Dominicans, as well as the coincidence of timing, creates strong grounds for supposing a measure of Dominican 'influence' on national political development.

In the course of constructing this argument Barker paints a portrait of the Dominican character that reflects his attraction to political pluralism in that pre-War period and to the broader critique of the sovereign state, which he expressed in his essay *The Discredited State*, delivered first as a lecture in May 1914.²⁵ He sets his analysis of the Dominicans firmly within the discipline of the 'history of institutions'. It is in that context that he observes that the Dominicans are the 'most finished model of representative institutions' and that St Dominic himself had demonstrated genius as a 'constructive statesman'.²⁶ Comparing St Dominic to his fellow-Spaniard, St Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, and drawing a contrast with the (supposedly) better known St Francis of Assisi, Barker remarks of St Dominic that 'those who find in the study of institutions a

²³ E. Barker, *The Dominican Order and Convocation*, pp. 3–4, and footnote 13 on p. 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 4 and 9.

²⁵ E. Barker, 'The Discredited State', a Paper delivered before The Philosophical Society in the University of Oxford in May 1914, *Political Quarterly* 1915, pp. 101–21, reprinted in E. Barker, *Church, State and Study* (London, 1930), pp. 151–170.

²⁶ Barker, *The Dominican Order and Convocation*, p. 7.

charm as great as in the study of personalities are bound to look at his building to discover its materials and to trace its influence'.²⁷

What Barker discovers among the materials sustaining St Dominic's Order is a measure of centralized government combined, crucially, with democratic spirit, representative institutions, and a 'clear-cut' constitutional arrangement. 'The Dominican', he remarks, 'is general and universal. He belongs to a house, to a province but far more to the whole Order; and he has a cure of souls wherever he may preach. He is delocalized, and he is centralized. He is delocalized: he is not under the vow of *stabilitas*. He is not a member of a particular abbey, in charge of a particular parish that is under that abbey; he is essentially a member of the whole Order, who will preach at any point in the scope of its action. He is centralized. He is not primarily under the control of a particular abbey; he is a soldier in a *militia spiritualis* controlled by its generalissimo'.²⁸

The contrast with Benedictine monasticism is explicit, as is the debt to Praemonstratensianism. Yet whereas the Praemonstratensians were 'aristocratic', it is the 'democracy' of the Dominicans that arouses Barker's interest, notwithstanding what he sees as the compatibility of that democratic impulse 'with what we may call Caesarism', the Master General of the Order often being its 'moving spirit'.²⁹ More particularly it is the arrangements for ensuring effective election of priors and provincials and effective representation of non-office holding friars at the provincial and central chapters of the Order that led Barker to adopt the observation that the Dominican Order is 'the most perfect example that the Middle Ages have produced of the faculty of monastic corporations for constitution-building'.³⁰

That observation goes to the centre of Barker's sense of the character of the Dominican Order as an entire society, a model of community based upon constitutional principle yet free of the state, in dialogue with, yet not subservient to, it. In identifying the bond that had existed between St Dominic and Simon de Montfort's son, Barker expounds a view of community and sovereignty that is resonant of political pluralism and its debt to Maitland and the Anglican theologian, J.N. Figgis. At the heart of that view is 'the idea always cherished by the Church' of 'power as a trust given by the community, and of the community as in some sense sovereign of itself, even if it delegates its sovereignty to a *magister*'.³¹

It is that sense of the community or group as sovereign, and of power as held on trust by ruler for ruled, that informs Barker's

²⁷ Ibid. p. 9.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 17.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

³¹ Ibid. p. 27.

identification of the Dominican Order and its representative institutions as of political significance beyond the confines of ecclesiastical concerns. As he remarks, 'Whenever men conceive of a group clearly and strongly as a community or brotherhood, they must conceive of it as sovereign of itself; whenever they seek to realise that self-sovereignty in deed as well as in word, they are driven beyond the conception of power as in its nature representative to the actual use of representative institutions'.³²

For Barker the English Dominicans of the 13th century were such a 'brotherhood'. Moreover, it was what he calls 'the vogue for the Dominicans' in England in that period, expressed for example by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, in his admiration for Gilbert of Freynet, by the early establishment of priories in Oxford, London and Leicester, and the reputation of individual friars such as Robert Kilwardby, John of St Giles, Robert Bacon and Richard Fishacre, that led to the Dominicans becoming the preferred confessors of the Plantagenet monarchs and so to their purported 'influence' on the experiment of representative democracy, first at Convocation within the Church in England at large, and thereafter within the national political life, with Parliament itself conceived of as a federation of separate communities, a '*communitas communitatum*', brought together by their representatives.

Critically, for Barker the 'centralised government' of the Dominicans, and of the state, through the adoption of the principle of representation, paradoxically in fact becomes a vehicle for preserving local freedom, thereby achieving a critical measure of unity whilst sustaining life-giving diversity. Barker comments, 'The representation of the vigorous local life of the shire (after all the supreme differentia of England from the rest of Western Europe) finds its counterpart in, and lends its support to, the representation of the clergy of archdeacons and dioceses, who are bound up in that local life'; and he goes on, 'Thus we should find in the strength of a representative principle permeating both clergy and laity, in the strength of a local life in which the clergy share with the laity, in the strength of a national representative system expressing that principle and drawing vigour from that local life, the reasons for the nature of the English convocation'.³³

These observations lead to Barker's resounding conclusion, which is, in his view, of general application: 'The study of the institutional development of the Middle Ages is an organic whole. We cannot isolate Church and State; not only do they develop side by side, but they interact in their development. The development of representation

³² Ibid. p. 27.

³³ Ibid. p. 72.

in Church and State must not be figured in the mind as the advance of two parallel lines in two separate squares; it is the growth of one idea into an institution, in that one and single *respublica Christiana* under two governments (the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium*) of which Dr Figgis has taught us to conceive. Further we must not in our insular way isolate the institutional development of England from that of continental Europe'.³⁴

Jarrett on St Dominic and the English Dominicans

Bede Jarrett substantiated his appreciation of the Dominican 'charism' in two works that appeared in the early 1920s: *The English Dominicans* (1921) and *The Life of St Dominic* (1923). In various ways these assessments echo Barker's characterisation.

In *The English Dominicans*, Jarrett is especially concerned to demonstrate the way in which the Order from the outset established for itself a place at the centre of English intellectual and national life. As he remarks in conclusion, 'The House of Lancaster, crafty, unstable, usurping, turned to Carmelites and Franciscans; the House of York and Tudor to the secular priesthood; but the wildest, fiercest, noblest of all the kings since the Normans found in the brethren of St Thomas Aquinas their guides, philosophers and friends'.³⁵ The discharge of such royal counsel Jarrett located especially in the role of Royal Confessors exercised by the Dominicans, chiefly in the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Edward II.³⁶

Beyond the immediate confines of Westminster, Jarrett notes that his predecessors in the role of English Provincial had responsibility for more houses than anywhere else in the Dominican world (68 including Ireland and Scotland); they could draw upon members of the Order better educated than any other religious in England; and they could rely upon a curriculum unique for its order, thoroughness and high standards of attainment.

Drawing explicitly on Barker's work, Jarrett devotes considerable attention to the possible role of the Order in expanding from this strong material and intellectual base to provide a model for British (sic) representative government.³⁷ As he puts it, 'Working out from this central power the Friars Preachers settled themselves deeply in the national life. They influenced public opinion in favour of

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 75–6. For Figgis' observations, see J.N. Figgis, 'Respublica Christiana', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. V, 1911, pp. 63–88.

³⁵ B. Jarrett, *The English Dominicans* (London, 1923), p. 215.

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 106–126.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 126–28.

representative government, and specially just that one form of it which became established in the British Constitution'.³⁸

The broader characterisation of the Order upon which these specific observations rest is marked, very much in the manner of Barker's work, by attention to its 'elective government' and its 'representative spirit'. These qualities Jarrett attributes to St Dominic's 'personal contribution', with the result that 'Democratic in principle, aristocratic by connection, the order of Preaching Friars in its full activity in England, advising, absolving, negotiating, must directly and indirectly be recognised as a powerful influence. Up till now this influence of the English Blackfriars has been wholly ignored'.

Jarrett in fact credits St Dominic with the achievement of establishing the first religious order in the modern sense of the word. He was in other words ahead of the Benedictines, Cistercians and Praemonstratensians in his 'establishment of a thoroughly organised society, divided naturally into provinces, which had their own assemblies, and yet could deliberate at a central Chapter wherein the whole order met. These legislative bodies, the provincial and general chapters, acted through an executive, the Prior Provincial and the Master General, who being elected by these parliaments were answerable to them'.³⁹ Just as Barker had extolled the virtues of political pluralism by insisting that the power of ruling was a gift held on trust by those who rule, so Jarrett obliquely gives further weight to such views, identifying his own Order as a model of government of that sort. This was, as Jarrett concedes, a form of 'central government', yet it was a form of central government that through the principle of representation and the incarnation of a democratic spirit drew upon and in turn energised those local communities which, more than anywhere else, proliferated in the English province.

Three years later, in his book on St Dominic, Jarrett took the opportunity to enlarge even further his appreciation of the felicitous combination of strong central government and more localised activism. Emphasising once again the innovative quality of St Dominic's creation of a 'modern' religious order, Jarrett this time explains what that modernity entails, namely, 'a compact and corporate body with definite rules running through the whole and organised on lines which constituted it a perfect unity'.⁴⁰ As for Barker, so for Jarrett it is the achievement of unity through diversity that marks the Dominican achievement.

That diversity also expresses itself in Dominican 'mobility', for, as Jarrett contends, the democratic spirit of the order was a direct consequence of its freedom from a vow of stability. Indeed Jarrett

³⁸ Ibid. p. 171.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 128.

⁴⁰ B. Jarrett, *St Dominic* p. 115.

considers that combination to be of more general significance since, as he remarks, ‘It seems to be a law of history that the more stationary life is, the more autocratic will be its theories of government. The “unchanging East” is the home for despotism, whether beneficent or otherwise, whereas the movement of trade, the turmoil of cities, the noise of traffic, the frequency of change, lead to the rise of democracy, and as these progress in volume and importance, to the extremes of radicalism’.⁴¹

What was true of ‘society’ at large was true of those forms of corporate life that comprised the religious orders: ‘The free cities of medieval history are types of what was commonly noticeable among the more active religious orders. The more they make their home in towns, the more democratic grows their rule; the further and further they retire to the country, the more completely do they put themselves into the hands of a single life-superior. At least this was the natural development of religious life in medieval times’.⁴² Not for Jarrett, then, the ‘back to the land’ mission of his brethren, Vincent McNabb OP and the Dominican tertiary, Eric Gill. For Jarrett, what he referred to as ‘popular rule’ went hand in hand with the bustle and diversity of urban life.⁴³

At the heart of that ‘popular rule’ Jarrett once again identifies a model of government that has its roots in Barker’s political pluralism and the work of Maitland and Figgis on which it rested. According to the Dominican model, the gift of ruling is at the behest of the ruled, the rulers themselves in effect the ‘executive’ for giving effect to the wishes of those whose trust they honour. Jarrett is quite emphatic that ‘the Dominican government in legislative and in executive rests on these two ideas: first, that all holding office of superiority should hold it by the free votes of those whom they are to govern; and secondly, that in the selection of rulers...election shall itself be carried through by means of representation. Further, this also must be recognised, that, in the order of St Dominic, the superiors are only an executive. They have no power of themselves to make laws, but are empowered only to administer the laws of the Order or province, and to see to it that these are carried out by their subjects’.⁴⁴

For Jarrett, the mark of this elective and democratic form of government is ‘freedom’, an essential signpost on the path to that other mark of Dominican life, the pursuit of ‘truth’. Jarrett speaks of the Dominican ‘spirit of freedom’ and its ‘deep trust’ in the principles of democratic rule, however perilous to bureaucratic efficiency such qualities might be. ‘Truth’ for Jarrett, is not attainable in this life;

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 120.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 121.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 122.

yet 'those who so vainly search and follow it have this measure of success, that though they miss perfect truth they achieve perfect freedom'.⁴⁵ The exercise of freedom through the operation of Dominican government becomes, therefore, a form of *paideia* or self-cultivation. As Jarrett observes, autocratic government might be more efficient than democratic government, it might make someone work harder and with greater success, but it is doubtful whether it makes that person any better for it: 'After all, it is not what a man does but what he is that is of supreme importance in the sight of God . . . True self-culture is the purpose of faith and hope and love'.⁴⁶ For Jarrett, 'That is the bequest of St Dominic to his children, to search for truth and to become free'.⁴⁷

The *Respublica Christiana*

The application of that model by Jarrett beyond the confines of the Dominican Order is apparent in his posthumous publication, *The Emperor Charles IV* (1935), which takes as its starting-point the life of Charles, King of Bohemia 1347–78, and Emperor 1349–1378. Here Jarrett's focus shifts to the government of the Holy Roman Empire, a focus that also bears the mark of having been conceived in the inter-war period when the trials and tribulations of the League of Nations were at their most pressing. As Jarrett remarks, 'The problem of the empire was the problem, therefore, of international unity'.⁴⁸ The solution to the problem, on Jarrett's account, came from Charles IV, trained in Paris, the product of Dominican scholarship, and whose plans were, as a result, 'always simple, clear and the result of intellectual effort'. Charles IV, 'the Priests' Emperor', was for Jarrett 'a philosopher turned king'.⁴⁹

That combination of simplicity, clarity and intellectual effort led Charles IV, on Jarrett's account, to conceive a solution based on an ideal of 'community, resting not on organised uniformity, but on organic variety of spontaneous local growth'.⁵⁰ However, as in the case of the Dominican Order, that spontaneous local growth had to be nurtured by a protective and centralised government. The so-called Golden Bull of Charles IV by which he 'made custom into a code' and sought a constitutional settlement for the Empire was credited a success by Jarrett because it secured both 'local autonomy'

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 126.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 127.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 128.

⁴⁸ B. Jarrett, *The Emperor Charles IV* (London, 1935), p. 163.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 170.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 178.

and ‘central authority’: ‘the “Glory of the Holy Roman Empire”, its variety and unity, were thus to be preserved intact’.⁵¹

At the centre of the problem facing Charles IV Jarrett identified the emergence of the secular state. As he remarks, ‘Life was moving away from the sanctuary round which it had so long been centred, was becoming natural rather than supernatural, losing contact with the invisible in the fascination of its new appreciation of the visible, no longer gazing at the heavens, coming down altogether to earth’.⁵² Of this emerging ‘culture’, Charles was, Jarrett observes, ‘the determined foe’, not because he opposed the emergence of a new culture but because he opposed a new culture that was not ‘derived from the old’.⁵³

As Barker noted in his Introduction, Jarrett chooses to emphasise how Charles IV sought an effective partnership between the Empire and the Papacy, a partnership founded in ‘the unity and peace of Christendom’.⁵⁴ This was in effect the fading *respublica Christiana* to which Barker had referred at the end of his book on the Dominicans and to which he had linked the Dominican relationship with national government in the 13th century.

Jarrett draws from the example of Charles IV conclusions of even broader application to inter-war Europe: ‘We can definitely see that religion is still the dividing line of world cultures. There are states that are opposed to it; these are vigorous but uncultured. There are states that merely acknowledge its existence; these are vigorous perhaps but lack the serenity of culture. There are states that accept it and build their lives towards it; these can watch the future without fear. The State must not oppose, ignore or even repose on religion. It must minister to it. It should not try to master its subjects’ souls’.⁵⁵

The Possibility of Socialism

The friendship and magisterial example of Barker can, then, be seen to have helped shape Jarrett’s appreciation of the distinctiveness of the Dominican Order and of its debt to the personal charisma of St Dominic. That appreciation is based upon an acute sense of the importance of constitutional matters in the formation of Dominican life and ministry and indeed of the supposed wider relevance for, and influence upon, broader political issues of the distinctive Dominican approach, especially in the national life of medieval England but also in the world of European politics at the time of the Holy Roman

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. p. 217.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Barker, Introduction to Jarrett, *The Life of Charles IV*, p. xiv, citing Jarrett, *The Life of Charles IV*, p. 237.

⁵⁵ Jarrett, *The Life of Charles IV*, p. 218.

Empire. For Jarrett, it was the democratic spirit, representative institutions and attendant freedom of Dominican life that established it as a concrete model of social life more generally, with the Order itself representing a prototype of a corporate body, rule-governed yet free, in partnership with but not subservient to the state, whatever the state's tendency to overbearing sovereignty.

Underpinning that model was what might be described as a 'philosophy of ruling' that drew its inspiration from English political pluralism, as expressed in the early work of Ernest Barker. That 'philosophy' expressed its scepticism of the 'discredited' sovereign state by proposing instead a view of voluntary association and 'community' as the basis of social life, and of the state as guardian of the gift of ruling bequeathed to it by the myriad communities that made up the confederation. This was, in other words, the state as a '*communitas communitatum*', in which the boundary between religion and the secular realm was necessarily porous, even to the extent that they formed two parts of an integrated social and political world.

It is possible to characterise aspects of Jarrett's other scholarly work on medieval society, notably *Medieval Socialism* (1913), *S. Antonino and Medieval Economics* (1914), and *Social Theories of the Middle Ages 1200–1500* (1926) as attempts to describe an earlier world in which such partnership between state and Church was still possible and indeed in which the Dominican Order played a central role as one of those intermediaries between state and society, a voluntary association that both expressed by its very existence the reality of political pluralism and by its intellectual contribution to the life of that society helped sustain social arrangements that were shaped by Christian virtue, by justice and charity.

Taken together, these three central works depict an alternative to modern bureaucratic capitalism, finding in the Middle Ages a society that more readily accords with the model of political pluralism and with the virtues of justice and charity, expressed especially in the social theories of St Thomas Aquinas and his fellow-Dominican, St Antoninus.

St Antoninus in particular represents for Jarrett a specific instance of the conversion of social theory into social practice: 'to set up the standard of Justice, to lay the foundations of society on the laws of God, to make men look at economics through the eyes of Faith, was the high endeavour of this great man'.⁵⁶ Antoninus, in his calling as Prior of San Marco, Florence and later Bishop of Florence, had the tasks of restoring Dominican ideals and of helping to establish democratic government in Florence: 'His passion then was for the poor'.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ B. Jarrett, *S. Antonino and Medieval Economics* (Roehampton, 1914), p. xvi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 53.

Just as Jarrett had argued in his work on his own Order that it was the turbulence of the city that promoted true democracy, so in his depiction of Antoninus it is the baptism of commerce with which he is concerned, not so much to recommend withdrawal from the commercial world but to sanctify the commercial dealings of the community. In conclusion of a chapter on the 'social ideals' of Antoninus, Jarrett remarks of the ideals set out in the *Summa Moralis* and 'put into complete activity in the Greater and Lesser Guilds, and lined in stone along the graceful façade of Or San Michele' that they are 'commercial, it is true, but clean and religious and noble. They sum up a chivalrous and knightly aspect of mercantile adventure. They spell out the splendid Chronicles of the Romance of Trade'.⁵⁸

Those social ideals that the preceding chapter had described pointed towards an ideal city in which there would be hospitals for the poor and the sick, with doctors paid by the state; fair distribution of property; family-life in which husband and wife work together as complementary beings; education about God, letters, useful arts and crafts; peace between masters and labourers; individual property rights recognised but restrained by the state, which might in certain circumstances insist upon common ownership of all wealth; just wages; the avoidance of the extremes of penury and extravagance; the regular practice of almsgiving; and finally, 'over and beyond these obligations comes the virtue of magnificence or generosity'.⁵⁹

It is on the issue of socialism that Jarrett's work is potentially most controversial and enigmatic. Aidan Nichols, whilst discounting the view that Jarrett is in any meaningful sense a neo-medievalist, nevertheless links his study of Jarrett with that of Vincent McNabb OP under the heading '*Back to the Land*' and *Neo-Medieval Socialism*, and suggests, at least indirectly, that Jarrett was, in his work on medieval social theory and on what he somewhat provocatively called medieval socialism, pushing at the edge of what was acceptable to Catholic social teaching in the years after Pius X's publication of *Lamentabili sane exitu* and *Pascendi* in 1907.⁶⁰

Allan White, as mentioned earlier, also describes the reservations held by some members of the English Province, and indeed by the Order in Rome, about Jarrett's enthusiastic embrace of non-Catholic and increasingly secular Oxford University, both as student and as Provincial, and his consorting with all manner of Fabians and socialists in London.⁶¹ It has also been noted by a past editor of *New Blackfriars* that its predecessor, *Blackfriars*, owes its early reputation for controversy to Jarrett's inspiration.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 78.

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 75ff.

⁶⁰ Nichols, *Preaching Justice*.

⁶¹ White, *Opening the Scrolls*.

⁶² John Orme Mills OP, Editorial, *New Blackfriars*, March 1984.

Yet at the same time, Jarrett emerges from his published letters and his biography as what Nichols describes as a generous-minded Tory.⁶³ His devotion to England also, perhaps, brings with it an apparent attachment to the British Empire that befits the son of an Indian Army officer, but hardly fits the mantle of subversion.

However, the connection with Barker's political pluralism, especially in Jarrett's conception of the history and political significance of the Dominican Order, makes it possible to identify Jarrett with the similarly enigmatic, and ambivalent, character of Christian Socialism in the early decades of the twentieth century. As John Milbank has argued, the Christian Socialists, with their various debts to Coleridge and Ruskin, represent a form of non-Marxian socialism that sets them apart not just from the sort of state socialism that came to prominence in the twentieth century but from the forms of Marxian liberation theology that emerged in the Church after Vatican II. Common to many of the various expressions of the Christian Socialist impulse was a suspicion of the sovereign state and an attraction to the ideal of voluntary association, whether as represented by the medieval guild system, the early trade unions, or by syndicalism. Attractive too was the example of the medieval universities as models of corporate centres of learning, independent of the state yet in dialogue with it, and of the medieval religious orders, themselves early forms of voluntary association, autonomous, free, yet rule-bound and governed by written constitution.⁶⁴

On Milbank's account, Christian Socialism did not entail retreat to a form of utopian neo-medievalism, although it did entail a measure of 'conservatism' in the face of capitalism's voracious destruction of all that was solid in earlier forms of social relationship. Yet this was a conservatism that, because of its refusal to accept liberalism as anything other than an entirely contingent, and therefore far from inevitable, stage of social 'progress', had within it the seeds of radicalism. That radicalism in turn drew its inspiration from Gospel values of gift and grace, and found in the virtues of charity and justice a critique of bureaucratic capitalism that was ethical and Christian first, rather than prudential in conception or Marxian in flavour.

In *Medieval Socialism* Jarrett is certainly alert to the need to distance himself from the anachronistic view that the Middle Ages saw the development of a form of social theory that would attract the label 'socialist' in any modern or Marxian sense. He is, for example,

⁶³ Nichols, in *Preaching Justice*, p. 401. Cf. Wykeham-George and Mathew, p. 145.

⁶⁴ See in particular, J. Milbank, 'Were the Christian Socialists Socialist?', in J. Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London, 2009), pp. 63–74; 'On Baseless Suspicion: Christianity and the Crisis of Socialism', in *ibid.* pp. 112–129; 'Socialism of the Gift, Socialism of Grace', *New Blackfriars* 77 (1996) pp. 532–548; 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004) 212–238.

at pains to point out that both the absolute state and absolute individualism were equally unknown to the medieval mind. It was only with the lawyers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that these categories appear, and it is for that reason that Jarrett considers that in the period he is considering the notion of 'socialism' is necessarily quite different from its use in a modern context.⁶⁵ For Jarrett, 'by socialistic theories of the Middle Ages, therefore, we mean no more than those theories which from time to time came to the surface of political and social speculation in the form of communism, or of some other way of bringing about the transference [of ownership in land and capital from private hands into their possession in some form or other by society]'.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, he is quite clear that the medieval friars (if not 'socialist' in the modern sense) were in both theory and practice among those forging a form of social life shaped by charity and justice and therefore at odds with anything that might resemble modern bureaucratic capitalism. It is not so much that some, like Wyclif, suggested that the friars had lent their support to the Peasants' Revolt. More than that, the scholastics, whilst acknowledging that there was nothing absolute or sacred about private property, also recognised that 'peace and rest from faction could be achieved with certainty only on the condition of strict justice between man and man, on the observance of God's commandments'.⁶⁷ Reversing in effect the tenets of communism, the scholastics argued that possessions, although legitimately held in private, were for public use, and so established a theory of almsgiving as 'a matter not of charity but of justice'.⁶⁸ Dominican poverty was a concrete expression of that realisation, founded upon the theory of Christian virtue, not secular social theory.

Nor does Jarrett suggest that political action is the route to social salvation. On the contrary, in *Medieval Socialism* Jarrett is anxious to give priority to the social over the political, citing Aquinas in support of the 'medieval socialist' view that 'unrest and discontent would continue under any form of government whatever' and that 'the more each city changed its constitution, the more it remained the same'.⁶⁹ The critical factor in determining levels of collective happiness and sadness lay outside the strict political realm: 'For it was the spirit of government alone which, in the eyes of the scholastic social writers, made the state what it happened to be'.⁷⁰

By the time he assumed the editorship of *Blackfriars* just a few years before his death in 1934, Jarrett had seen Pope Pius XI's

⁶⁵ B. Jarrett, *Medieval Socialism* (London, 1913), pp. 79–80.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 7–8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 80.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 79.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

publication of *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931 and the papal seal of approval for Catholic Action and ‘Social Catholicism’.⁷¹ William Cavanaugh has detected in Catholic Action the naive surrender by the Church of politics to the state, and the espousal of a form of ecclesiology that rested on ‘a very influential but entirely spurious fairy tale’, namely the separation of temporal and spiritual planes and the idea that by infusing secular life with individual action inspired by Catholic social teaching it might be possible to transform the bureaucratic state, whether liberal capitalist or socialist, into a vehicle for fostering virtue and the common good.⁷²

Jarrett’s debt to Barker and to his prioritisation of legal and constitutional structures in the task of political analysis avoids any such ‘fairy tale’ and instead points towards the possibility of combining social action with a form of politics that posits real corporate bodies, voluntary associations, universities, religious orders, as the building blocks of a transformed state, a ‘*communitas communitatum*’, whereby the Church and its institutions become the site of social transformation, a real and material form of political life that stands as a source of dialogue with, but critique of, those forms of bureaucratic state capitalism and state socialism that would, as Jarrett feared, ensnare mankind’s soul.

In his last published homilies and perhaps his best-loved prayer, Jarrett meditated on the belief that ‘There is No Abiding City’. Whilst his attempts to portray medieval social life bore witness to his scepticism of utopian political visions, his exposure to the tradition of political pluralism and associated forms of Christian Socialism, and his explorations of the political structure of his own Order, enabled him to supplement his concern for the ‘social’ with a political vision that gave substance to the Church as a real, not just mystical, body, a form of sacred community not simply a spiritual focal point for individual social action. Without idealising with longing a lost Christendom, fleeing back to the land or, alternatively, placing unconditional faith in the sovereign state or its modern metropolis, ‘the secular city’, Jarrett nevertheless engaged in practical life, in his scholarship and in his spirituality in the real task of building up the Kingdom, however ephemeral its material and constitutional forms. In that task, it was the Dominican Order itself, its history and constitution, which lay at the heart of his vision and offered the intellectual foundations for his ministry of study and preaching.

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⁷¹ On his editorship, see Wykeham-George and Mathew, pp. 144–45.

⁷² W. T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 137ff.