

Arthur Ryan 1897-1982

Arthur Haydn Ryan was born on the Falls Road, Belfast, on 1 January 1897, the son of a policeman. He was a clever and studious boy and won exhibitions in the junior, intermediate and senior grades while a pupil at St Malachy's College. In 1914 he matriculated at Queens University with an entrance scholarship. He graduated with a first in classics. In 1917 he enrolled in theology at the Urban College of Propaganda (Rome), from which he was in due course to graduate with doctorates in philosophy and theology. He was ordained priest from the Irish College in 1921. After teaching classics at St Malachy's he was appointed to lecture in fundamental theology at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. In 1925 he moved to Queen's University as lecturer in Scholastic Philosophy, in succession to Denis O'Keeffe. In 1946 he was promoted to a readership. Two years later he became parish priest of St Brigid's, Belfast, where he remained until his death, which took place on 16 June 1982. He was a member of the QUB Senate, and at the time of his death was the senior Pro-Chancellor of the university, which had conferred an honorary D. Lit. on him in 1958.

A fine example of Ryan's thought and style may be found in a public lecture on 'The Church and Civil Governments', delivered in Dublin (*Studies*, 1952). The speaker voiced the 'instinctive suspicion that there is something dangerous about a theory which claims either absolute authority or universal competence for a political power' (p. 1). Continuing, he unfolded a critique, conducted in the light of Catholic social principles, of the European phenomenon of totalitarianism during the previous thirty years, and especially of Stalinism.

The broadcast lecture was a feature of the pre-television age, and Ryan mastered the art. His book, *Perennial Philosophers*, gathered his radio talks on St Augustine, Boethius, Abelard, St Thomas Aquinas, the origins of philosophy and the ideals of the neo-scholastic movement—ideals which he promoted in practice through his courses. In these lectures he depicted the personalities of his subjects against a skillfully-painted historical background. His formation as a classicist made up the indispensable background to his writing on patristic and scholastic authors. A second book, *Legionaries of Christ*, also had radio origins. In it Ryan

studied the Christian writers of the post-Apostolic age: Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, the Epistle to Diognetus, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.

Publications

Books

Perennial Philosophers, Dublin (Clonmore and Reynolds), 1946.

Legionaries of Christ, Dublin (Clonmore and Reynolds), 1947.

The Church of Christ, Dublin (Clonmore and Reynolds), 1948. (A work of apologetics).

Articles

'The Church and Civil Governments', *Studies* 41 (1952), pp. 151-62.

'The Early Story of the Department of Scholastic Philosophy', in *Philosophy and Totality*, ed. James McEvoy, Belfast (Queens University), 1977, pp. 7-21.

Ryan wrote numerous articles and occasional pieces in *Studies*, *The Capuchin Annual*, *The Irish News* and *The Collegian* (the St Malachy's College annual). A representative selection of these was edited after his death: Arthur H. Ryan, *Mirroring Christ's Splendour*, ed. Ambrose Macaulay, Dublin (Four Courts Press), 1984, 216pp. This collection of articles and addresses on religious themes, as well as occasional sermons, includes tributes by Bishop W. Philbin (Down and Connor) and Dr Peter Froggatt (Vice-Chancellor, QUB), as well as by the editor.