

The English Dominican Social Tradition

AIDAN NICHOLS

By the end of the nineteenth century the English Dominicans had established themselves in some strength. Starting from something close to vanishing point, the lion's share of their attention had perforce to be given to institutional revival – the creation of priories for spiritual and intellectual formation. Moreover, the needs of the Church in the period caused them to be caught up in the movement to recreate a parochial system, above all in the great towns.¹ There is not much to show for their literary productivity in that great century for English writers, not least theologians (though the little they *did* write has been described as representing a 'sane and practical Thomism'²) But by the beginning of its twentieth-century successor they were ready for other ventures.

'BACK TO THE LAND' AND NEO-MEDIEVAL SOCIALISM: VINCENT MCNABB AND BEDE JARRETT

We begin with two very different figures in the English Catholicism of the opening decades of the new century: Vincent McNabb and Bede Jarrett.

Vincent McNabb (1868–1943)

Joseph Vincent McNabb was the child of an Ulster sea captain who had settled with his wife and family in the English city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (though, owing to his precocity, their seventh son finished his secondary education at the renowned St Malachy's College, Belfast). He received the Dominican habit at Woodchester, cradle of the English Province's mid-Victorian revival, in 1885, and after ordination there in 1891, studied at Louvain, then a notable centre of Leonine neo-Thomism, till 1894. In the first quarter century of his priesthood his services were in regular demand as a local superior in the houses of the Province, as well as lecturer in philosophy and theology. The year 1920 forms something of a watershed in his life. From a London base at St Dominic's Priory, Haverstock Hill, his ministry became thenceforward one of retreat-giving, writing and popular speaking (most famously at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park) on all kinds of matters affecting Church and morality. The 'Social Question' was prominent among these.