



TOWER PRESS BOOKS

## ESSAYS ON MODERNITY

*And the Permanent Things from Tradition*

### PREFACE

These essays were published by the College of Saint Thomas More in *Tradition* between 1998 and 2011 and were a continuation of the *Institute Papers*, the first number of which appeared in 1986. Visibly the College of Saint Thomas More was a community of undergraduates and tutors, but its mission was supported by a larger group of benefactors and occasional participants whose generosity made its corporate life possible year after year. Both the *Institute Papers* and *Tradition* were aimed at engaging this wider audience, and especially our benefactors, in matters of cultural and intellectual significance.

The phrase “permanent things” occurred in a broadcast talk T. S. Eliot gave in 1937 which was published in *The Listener* and appended to his *Idea of a Christian Society* in 1939. “Conservatism is too often conservation of the wrong things; liberalism a relaxation of discipline; revolution a denial of the permanent things.” The phrase was then popularized by Russell Kirk in his *Enemies of the Permanent Things* in 1993. *Essays on Modernity and the Permanent Things* was the subtitle of *Tradition* during the years of its publication.

If these essays share a theme it is the critical relation between an idea or ideal that belongs to the intellectual patrimony of Christendom and modernity, that nexus of cultural pathologies which while it offers unbounded technical progress involves the unwary and unguarded in spiritual desolation. Ours is an age of revolution which was incipient in the fall of Lucifer, prophesied by the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and perfected in the series of wars between the motley crew committed to the defense of Eliot’s permanent things, broadly the flawed, humane, Christian tradition, and the apostles of modernity,

that succession inaugurated by Ockham and perfected in his contemporary auxiliaries, Richard Rorty and Peter Singer.

The essays that comprise this volume are eclectic, touching on matters theological, literary, political, and cultural. The topics were generated partly by events, partly by my own interests, but most significantly by the topics important in the College, in which there was an on-going conversation based in the books and ideas that formed the curriculum. Occasionally these essays touch on current events, and in one or two cases may have been outrun by them.

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