

In an interesting article in this week's Tablet the contribution to the European Union of the French Catholic statesman, Robert Schumann, is explored and the time seemed ripe for such a move because of the strength of the Christian Democratic movement in the early post-war years. Jacques Maritain's hope that the nations of Europe were subject to the action of God's grace seemed to make this moment and movement propitious. But the commentator notes that, though a Union has come about, its rootedness in the Christian philosophy of Jacques Maritain is largely unknown or unrecognised today. It's seen as just one more secular power bloc among many and he attributes this to the failure of Jacques Maritain and perhaps Robert Schumann to realise that although God's grace does indeed build on nature, nature itself – that is us – has to seek the kingdom first if a Christian vision is to be both realised and acknowledged. This line of thought was prompted by the vision of angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man – a vision Christ later applied to himself and which condemned him to death; he had crossed a religious/political or human/divine divide in doing so. And this is where perhaps the significance of angels comes into play. Their importance lies in their role, as Gregory the Great pointed out last night, rather than their nature: they signify the continual commerce of God with us and, indeed, all creation: the dynamic of grace which sustains everything but which we, in a sense, have to buy in to. Nathanael is open to this dynamic and is able to recognise that Jesus is also, but in an even more significant way. For us, it's a way of accessing divine life; for Christ, it's an acknowledgement of who he already is: *one like a Son of Man* already conferred with *sovereignty, glory and kingship*; one like us in all things but sin, and divinity. But, if we seek this kingdom first, we too may find ourselves entertaining angels, and part of that dynamic of grace which will one day bring us to heaven, and divinity.

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