

in the midst of the world, bringing the 'good news' to all with whom they come in contact by the very strength of their dedication to God. Our Lord's prayer for his Apostles after the Last Supper can be applied particularly to these modern apostles in Secular Institutes: 'I am not asking that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them clear of what is evil. . . . Thou hast sent me into the world on thy errand, and I have sent them into the world on my errand: and I dedicate myself for their sakes, that they too may be dedicated through the truth.' (John xvii, 15-19.)



## THE FIRST-BORN OF MANY BRETHREN: I

### He came down from heaven

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**T**HE death of Pope Pius XII made the Catholic Church and the Papacy a headline news item for several days. Through the newspapers, the radio and the television we had a glimpse of the Church's world-wide embrace, and of its ancient origins. For instance, the vast body of people in the two-mile long procession from Castel Gandolfo and lining the route, were only a symbol of the millions all over the world who look to the Pope as their spiritual father and acknowledge his authority as the successor of St Peter. And one was reminded how the Pope himself during the years of his pontificate received many of these millions there in Rome, and spoke to many of them in their own language. During the course of the procession the body of the Pope was borne through ancient Rome, past the ruins of the Colosseum and the Roman Forum; the body of him who as the latest of an unbroken line of Popes which began long before the world of the Colosseum and the Forum had come to an end. The facts so presented, Catholics gratefully interpreted in the light of the divine commands and promises to the Apostles: Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of

hell shall not prevail against it. Behold, I shall be with you all days, even to the end of the world.

The predominant quality that must have impressed itself upon the audience generally, was the vast size of the Church. One could be hypnotized almost into thinking for a moment that here was the final fulfilment; here was the whole world with its eyes on Rome; here was the final leavening of the loaf.

But it was only for a few days that Rome was the centre of interest. Very soon we were back with the familiar headlines of wars and rumours of wars. Like our Lord coming down from the mount of the Transfiguration and meeting the epileptic. That was the kind of world he came down to; a world of epilepsy and sin. The kind of world in which we live is world of suspicion and hatred, a world of greed and injustice.

So we ask, what was the *quality* of this world-wide interest in the affairs of the Church? Without in any sense overlooking the achievement of the late Holy Father in continuing to make of the Church and the Papacy an important factor in world affairs, can we not see traces of a gospel precedent?:

Now there were certain gentiles among them who came up to adore on the festival day. These therefore came to Philip who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying: Sir, we would see Jesus.

These gentiles were trippers, who after adoring in the temple, wanted to see the sights, including the miracle-worker. They wanted entertainment. But our Lord is not an entertainment, a pastime. It was with an almost brusque preoccupation that he brushed aside the request of the Apostles:

And Jesus answered them saying, the hour is come when the Son of Man should be glorified. Amen, amen I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.

The following of Christ is one of sacrifice. If we would see Jesus, we can do so only through a life of self-sacrifice.

If that comparison reveals anything of the quality of the world interest in the Pope, what was the *object* of that interest? Was it the living Body of Christ, which is the Church?

The Kingdom of God is not like any other kingdom. It is not

the pre-eminent kingdom among the kingdoms of the earth, and cannot be compared with them. 'My kingdom is not of this world.' But a kingdom it is, and Christ is its King. To establish it he came down from heaven. But it is the nature of his coming that gives us the clue to the nature of his kingdom, and to the relation between Christ and his subjects, the members of his Body. The real point of the story of the yeast in the measures of wheat, and the mustard seed growing into the tree, is not the loaf and the tree that harbours all the birds of the air. The focal point is not the end of the story but the beginning; the little grain of yeast and the tiny mustard seed. The real point about the Body of Christ is not its universal magnitude, as if it were some sort of perpetual rally, some vast universal Wembley Stadium. It is not its vast size but the littleness and secrecy of its source of life.

The divine attention was, and continues to be, concentrated on something small and confined, something insignificant, something in the eyes of the world even paltry.

For the foolish things of the world God hath chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world God hath chosen, that he may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that he may bring to nought the things that are: that no flesh should glory in his sight.

Here are passages that tell us of Christ the Source of life, and faith in him. (There is no separating the son of God made man, and faith in him, just as there is no separating the known and the knower. The Church is primarily a believing body.)

God so loved the world as to send his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.

I came that you should have life and have it more abundantly.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

For two thousand years that life has been poured out over the world. But it is the source of life that is important; and the power to recognize it (which is already the beginning of sharing in it) is God's greatest gift. We must look for the little grain of yeast and the tiny mustard seed. God's plan is to renew the whole world. The Church exists as a great tree, for all to see. It is a city set on a hill, visibly endowed with the holy life of Christ and having its origins

in the witness of his Apostles. But the vigour and vitality of the tree is the fruit of the divine care and attention given to the tiny seed. God wants all to have the life, but his glance was directed in the first instance to his chosen people, and within that race to her who is full of grace. And out of that glance was born one in whom the Godhead is.

Here is the tiny mustard seed. The World was made flesh. The divine fullness was incarnate in a small parcel of the created world, in *one* of the human race. According to the standards of the world, his coming down from heaven, and all the circumstances of it, were little things, things of no account, things of no news-value. Here was just one more birth, the commonest thing in the world. The whole of our Lord's life was in the same key, in spite of the miracles. Above all was his death in that key. He was tidied out of the way to make the place respectable for the feast day, without even a minimum of consideration. Even if he did not deserve death, well, what of it? He was just one among so many. The human race can spare one. In any case, said the High Priest with the solemn hypocrisy so often found in high places, it is a good thing that one man should die for the people.

Our Lord's life in the flesh was bounded by the horizons common to all mankind, birth and death. It was out of these that God brought forth life.

That death was described by St Paul as being a stumbling-block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks. And that states for all time the difficulties we have in grappling with the reality of the mystery of God's presence. There is part of nature that will find the mystery a stumbling-block; and there is part of our nature that wants to deride it. Both arise from the nature of God's presence. And in fact the basic difficulties would seem to be antecedent to the revelation of God, in and through Christ. They would always have been there in some form or another.

When he came down from heaven, he came into a world that was already permeated with his essence, presence and power. He came into his own. The Word was made flesh for the renewal of an ancient relationship. God is the Father because all things were made by him. The Son, in the flesh, comes into an ancient heritage. While the hypostatic union, the two natures in one person, constituted a new mode of existence in his creation, it is also a fulfilment of the old. Like the Eucharistic Host; through the words

of Consecration it is the Sacrament of the presence of his Body, but bread is already the sacrament of God's providence. But it was a new mode of presence: perhaps this can be stated by saying that as his creatures we are in *God's presence*, but through the Incarnation he comes into *our presence*. This double relationship seems to be sketched in Psalm 90, the *Venite*:

Come, let us praise the Lord with joy. . . . For in his hands are the earth. . . . Come, let us adore and fall down and weep before the God that made us. For he is the Lord our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. We are the work of his hand and the sheep of his pasture. We are both creatures and chosen ones.

Now the only way in which we can know the presence of God is by faith. He exists among us to be believed in. And the operation of believing corresponds in all things with the presence in which we believe. It is a little thing, a foolish thing, contemptible. Credence can be so easily dismissed as credulity. It has no standing in the world of reason. Indeed, it is founded on the least of the acts of the mind, that of *assent*, which in the world of the mind is nothing of itself and derives all its validity from the perceptions and reasonings that have preceded it. But the believer is one who just *assents* to the truth. He can give an account of it. But finally his motive is one of love, and herein lies the secret of its perfection.

Peace on earth to men of goodwill, sang the angels. The knowledge of faith is a little thing, but unlike any other knowledge it is of itself a leaven, not only of the mind but of the whole man. One of the more remarkable and little-known stories of modern times is that of the reaction of the scientists as they produced, first of all the atom bomb, and then the hydrogen bomb. On the whole, research scientists have not been concerned with the use that has been made of their researches by the technicians. With these bombs, however, it was different. They were greatly concerned about their responsibility, and the morality of the use of such frightful weapons. Such knowledge, when gained, can be put to either good or bad uses. But the knowledge of faith is of itself good, and the foundation of a good life.

Peace on earth to men of good will. The goodwill can be seen in the story of the birth and development of faith in the Gospel: And his disciples came to him and said: Why speakest thou to them in parables? Who answered and said to them: because to

you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For he that hath, to him shall be given and he shall abound, but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath. Therefore do I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not and hearing they hear not neither do they understand.

And how truly was this borne out subsequently. The men of good will are so easily recognizable in people like St Peter, around and in whom the faith of the Church was born. And the men of bad will? Our Lord was surrounded by sinners, towards whom he showed the greatest compassion, but this very compassion was the cause of scandal to some, and it was these who called forth from him the most virulent strictures.

God made man is the seed of life, but it is a life after the model of our Lord. The first stirring of life is faith, which is born out of a desire for wholeness, and follows the Gospel pattern, to the point of the saving sacrifice. Specifically the sacrifice of faith can be seen as a certain stilling of the reason (and the enemies of the faith have lost no opportunity of pointing this out). But the stilling itself allows the mind to leap forward, not recklessly and certainly not haphazardly, but into the very light whose brilliance has dazzled it.

One final point. God so loved the *world* as to send his only begotten Son. He came down from heaven out of an unbounded love for this world, a love which includes sparrows that are worth two farthings, the hairs of the head numbered separately, and all tiny things. It is sobering and healthy to remember that we are made out of the slime of the earth; and the slime of the earth is God's first love. But fear not therefore; better are you than many sparrows. We are placed at the peak of material creation, but the whole of it is God's, and we cannot rise above it, aloof. God made us out of the slime of the earth, and the slime of the earth continues to be the source of our bodily life. It was down into this world, full of the good things that he so loved, that the Son of God came, sanctifying them anew in his human presence, giving them a new dignity through his human experience of them, and drawing all things to himself, even death. Especially death; thenceforth it was death that was to be the source of life. And as if he were fearful that the eternal life that he had come to bring and of which he is the seed, should draw our eyes from the earth

out of which we are made and which God so loves, he planted his life-giving death, like a seed, under the appearances of bread and wine.



## THE PLAY OF GRACE

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**V**ARRO, a naval officer and the most learned of the Romans, refers to three kinds of theology, mythological, physical, and political—*mythicon*, *physicum*, and *civile*: St Augustine discusses the division in the *De Civitate Dei*.<sup>1</sup> The first ranges from fable to myth and includes symbolic and poetic theogonies, the genealogies of heaven and earth; the approach is not scientific, yet Jungians are not alone in agreeing with Plato that the results may be educationally valuable. The last is concerned with public worship largely as a factor of social cohesion, and is accordingly dominated by the requirements of administrators and lawyers in both or either Church and State. Neither represents the theology of St Thomas.

The middle type therefore remains. It rises from the impulse of the early Greek philosophers—Aristotle calls them the *physikoi*, St Thomas the *antiqui naturales*—to discover their explanations in and through the elements of our material environment. 'All very well', remarks St Augustine, 'if we are in quest of physiology and not of theology, if we seek nature and set God aside.'<sup>2</sup> That, however, is not St Thomas's temper, and it is without apology that we carry on the behaviour of the earlier articles of this series and go grubbing about.<sup>3</sup> We do not forget the mystery of our regeneration and adoption by God, but our task, more humdrum than displaying the riches of the *Epistle to the Romans*, is to relate the effects of grace—the Christian virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost—to the physico-psychological system of reference set forth in the *Summa Theologica*.

Grace itself, though not our substance, lies closer to our core than do our other qualities, our traits of character, abilities,

<sup>1</sup> vi, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 8.

<sup>3</sup> THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, February, May, September, 1957. March, 1958.