

ETERNAL WISDOM

BY

JOHN TODD

PRIDE was the cause of the sin of our first parents. The particular part of their nature of which they were thus proud was the intellect; it was and is the most wonderful of the faculties with which God has endowed man's soul. It was with the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge that man, in his pride, desired to glorify his intellect. 'With this knowledge of the Gods', suggested the Devil, 'man will really be able to glory in his own nature for he will be the equal to God.' The Devil made the false suggestion that knowledge of good and evil would give, would in fact be, a divine wisdom.

But God had not created man so that he should glory in his own created human nature, but only in God's creative nature, his uncreated infinity. He required man to be poor in spirit, to fill up the emptiness of poverty with the self-giving power exemplified in the life of the blessed Trinity wherein the Father and the Son so love each other, so give themselves each to each that a third divine Person proceeds, who is the very substance of this love. God wished that man, a creature, but made in God's image, should in a similar way so cleave to and offer himself to God, that his whole life should simply give glory to God and bear fruit in the Holy Spirit of infinite love.

The knowledge, love and fulfilment of this divine wish was more than sufficient to satisfy for ever the intellect which God had given to man. But man was not content with the position of creature. The devil suggested his intellect as the means of bettering himself—this intellect which had apparently as infinite a capacity for knowledge as the heart had for love. Wonderful, infinite knowledge could be man's—at a price. But what knowledge! At what a price! The price was separation from God, deprivation of his companionship: relative knowledge could be gained at the price of knowledge of the absolute; knowledge of good and evil at the price of knowledge of Good. This was the death of which God warned man: *De ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali ne comedas, in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.*

The price was paid and the separation effected; and this was done not by a man alone but by a man and a woman, man tempted through the woman. As they were created for each other and as their subsequent redemption by the God-man was to come through the perfect woman, so also man and woman were together and in

the same relation to each other in their fall. The woman proposed and man disposed. The human race became for ever subject to original sin as a result of the mediation of woman between the devil and man.

God has the perfectly appropriate solution of every ill, of every evil action: for evil is nothing but the absence of God. Since man fell through an inordinate desire for the glorification of his intellect by knowledge it was appropriate that he should be redeemed by God in the incarnation of the Second Person of the blessed Trinity whose first title is The Word, Eternal Wisdom. St Thomas describes in a similar way how appropriate this is, referring to the very nature and to the perfection of man, whose prime faculty and distinguishing mark is that intellect which was the occasion of his fall. He declares that the incarnation of the Second Person of the blessed Trinity was fitting as the means for the attainment of the consummate perfection of man; for this consummate perfection is perfection in Wisdom, since man is rational. Thus it is most significant for us that, in the language of theological appropriation, the first title of our divine Redeemer, who is also our Way of perfection, is the Word of God.

St Thomas's words are: *Alio modo habet convenientiam specialiter cum humana natura ex eo, quod Verbum est conceptus Aeternae Sapientiae, a quo omnis sapientia hominum derivatur; et ideo per hoc homo in sapientia perficitur: quae est propria ejus perfectio prout est rationalis quod participat Verbum Dei: sicut discipulus instruitur per hoc quod recipit verbum magistri; unde dicitur: (Eccl. 1. 5.) 'Fons sapientiae verbum Dei in excelsis'. Et ideo ad consummationem hominis perfectionem conveniens fuit, ut ipsum Verbum Dei humanae naturae personaliter uniretur.*¹

Once again, in this age, man in his pride sees visions of tremendous, nay, infinite possibilities in the power of his mind. Regardless of the conditions of his life, his birth which he did not will, his insecure life and unpredictable death he is willing to pay the price for more knowledge; for every addition to his knowledge promises him more power.

This lust of the mind has made man blind to the general conditions of life itself, blind to the particular conditions of his own

¹ 'Moreover he has a particular agreement with human nature, since the Word is a concept of the Eternal Wisdom from whom all man's wisdom is derived. And hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection as he is rational) by participating in the Word of God, as the disciple instructed by receiving the word of his master. Hence it is said: (Eccl. 1. 5.) 'The Word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom'. And hence for the consummate perfection of man it was fitting that the very Word of God should be personally united to human nature'. (Translation of Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 2nd Edition.)

individual life; for reason has ceased to receive even lip-service in the lives of many men except in matters of their own immediate physical convenience. Although he uses reason for the gaining of scientific knowledge, and in fact because he applies it for this gain, solely on account of the resulting increase of power, man has ceased to be able to order his life on reasonable principles. So long as his knowledge and power are increasing he is regardless of his own life, regardless that this power has no potency beyond the grave, has no effect even in this life upon real happiness or eternal values or on the forces which underlie the culture of civilised societies. However great, this power does nothing but scratch the surface. But what a scratch! What a muddle, what a change! What sort of perfection even of appearance it can produce in so short a time over so great an area on this material surface!

Woman is joined with man in this new display of power. In the modern insistence upon intellectual education and the importance of intellectual power above and apart from every other faculty and virtue, the virtues proper to women decay. Thus in the spiritual sphere the virtues of purity and modesty disappear; the mystical body is deprived, humanly speaking, of many members; she suffers their virtual loss. In family life, in social life, women have ceased to emulate the virtues practised by our Lady; they no longer wish to be mediators of love, to be wives and mothers, to be mediators of wisdom, the companions of men. Rather they seek to attain for its own sake an intellectual perfection which they imagine will make them in some way equal to man, forgetting that he needs a wife and a mother, forgetting that the very Word of God was born of a mother and, in the life of the blessed Trinity, is for ever born of the Father and together with the Father breathes forth the Holy Spirit.

Thus the very springs of the spiritual and physical life of man, flowing from the divine nature itself, are dried up. All order, all beauty, all morality, even all love are sacrificed on the altar of scientific truth. In the search for truth, the Truth is utterly obscured. Not knowing her who is the Seat of Wisdom, nor him who is Wisdom, men and women find nothing but the dry dust of facts and the deceits of human wisdom. And the price of the search for knowledge without God is the gradual dying of the soul, our only immortal possession, or rather the atrophying of its spirit, and the perversion of its faculties. Yet we are redeemed, and the remedy is to hand. The light of God, the Wisdom of Jesus, waits to enlighten the mind of every man, already redeemed, who turns to him and believes. How can man be persuaded to turn thus, to convert his own mind?

The situation today itself gives some grounds for hope: mixed with the desire for power through knowledge is the search for knowledge for its own sake, the desire for truth. European man has simply to learn again in his head what he has learnt in his heart. He has understood that there is little beauty in human love untouched by the Eternal Love: man now needs to learn that there is no light or truth to be found in human knowledge untouched by the Eternal Wisdom. The search for truth is acknowledged even now as semi-religious. The scientists are indeed the little gods of our society. The research worker or explorer is revered for the sacrifices he may have to make to reach his goal. Yet often enough, he makes the sacrifice almost unawares, for he is searching for the Truth, the Word; and the fascination of Jesus casts its light even on those who search for truth without knowing that they search for him. For in him alone the Scripture says are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Wisdom is indeed God's gift to us, Jesus himself, the gift of God's love; and this is a truth which appears peculiarly appropriate today both for Catholics and for those who have not yet found Christ's Church. Jesus not only loves us, he knows us; in fact he loves us because he knows us perfectly. He alone understands us perfectly. And it is in the wisdom of this understanding that he pours out through his Mother to every soul the love of his Sacred Heart.

His Church is the guardian of the wisdom which, in his love, our Lord has poured out into the minds of so many of his children. And we call her Holy Mother Church for this is the same office that our Lady performed on earth. As Père Clérissac wrote: 'The universality of the material mediation of Mary is also realised and completed through the Church'. The Church is then the possessor of those unrivalled descriptions, theological and philosophical, of God and man and the universe, wherein are contained all the truths for which the pagan scientists and philosophers of the twentieth century are searching so vainly. Again in relation to state and society, the Church possesses a fund of principles, penetrated with God's wisdom, logically developed into reasonable political and social theories, and confirmed at various times in various places by just practice.

So may we pray the Church's collect for the Third Sunday in Advent: 'Incline thine ear, o Lord, we beseech thee, to our prayers; and enlighten the darkness of our mind by the light of thy visitation'. So may we hope that as, before, men were induced to return to the love of Jesus and to the Sacrament of that love, so now they may turn their minds towards his wisdom in the Sacrament of Penance.

In that Sacrament we are enabled to receive wise advice from the priest of God, whilst our souls are washed clean in preparation for receiving the Sacrament of love, wherein we also receive Wisdom and every other good gift of God, for we receive Jesus himself.

Let us then pray, especially returning as the Church does, to the ever-repeated *Confiteor*, and make reparation for the manifold abuses of the intellect. Let us fulfil our Lady's injunction to do penance, compassionate her in her seven sorrows and join our tears to hers at La Salette as she sorrows over sin and the martyrdom of Christians, the crucifixion of the mystical body of her Son. Let us pray that she will bring the light of her Son's life to sinners so that they, and we among them, may confess and repent of our sins and may thus be worthy to be the vessels in which the light of God's truth may shine before men in good works.

'Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses.' So Jesus taught us to pray, because the very effect of a communion truly received is to take away the guilt of venial sin for which we are sincerely sorry. Even in the Sacrament of Love, his wisdom is over all and we can say, emptying ourselves and making room entirely for God, '*Confiteor, quia peccavi. . .*' He alone understands. He alone is the true food of the mind. He alone is the Wisdom which reaches from end to end mightily and disposes all things sweetly.

OUR LADY OF THE OAK TREE

BY

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SUCH customs as that of fixing plaques or statues of our Lady on oak-trees, or of giving these shrines titles of 'Our Lady of the Oak', were both widespread and ancient. There was a famous Virgin of the Oak in Norwich and, according to tradition, our Lady of Penrhys, burned at Chelsea with our Lady of Willesden and our Lady of Walsingham, was found by shepherds hanging on the trunk of an oak on the summit of a mountain at the head of the Rhondda Valley. There is reason, too, to suppose that our Lady of Willesden may have been yet another instance of what was originally an oak-tree sanctuary.

By far the most important shrine, however, of this particular cultus of our Lady still survives in Central Italy, in the Shrine of St Maria della Quercia (Oak-tree), just outside the Porta Santa Lucia at Viterbo, on the road to Bagnaia. Whatever may be the history of