

THE WORD

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GOD spoke and the world began. God uttered his word and the echo will not die since reality is that echo. 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy face? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there: if I descend into hell, thou art present.' For evermore we shall be within earshot of God. 'See how the skies proclaim God's glory, how the vault of heaven betrays his craftsmanship! Each day echoes its secret to the next, each night passes on to the next its revelation of knowledge; no word, no accent of theirs that does not make itself heard, till their utterance fills every land, till their message reaches the ends of the world.' (Ps. 18.) The trees speak in their fashion, and the birds in the trees; the fields in spring; the waves roar entrance along the whole coastline. All echo the word of God.

Yet, these we can banish, these we can escape. There are few birds and fewer trees in the *culs-de-sac* of our cities, and the sea and the fields are secure in their allotted places. We may be safe from the word. And man, that image of the Imageless, that replica of God, must he defy our precious privacy? Need he proclaim the attributes of his Fashioner? He was proved fickle from the very outset; and we, we men, can be more faithless still.

Who has not seen our herd, thoughtless and uncouth, with downcast eyes, predatory, depraved, wherever man may be? We make iconoclasts look small, we who can write the message of the beast o'er all the handiwork of our Creator. A little lower than the angels is not too far removed from being beasts. The word must find a more effectual way.

In the long night before the dawn God spoke by the voice of his nightingales, the Prophets, and at the dawn, through the greatest of all his singing-birds, his only Son; throughout the day that has ensued the lowliest of songsters gives voice to him. Formerly, men sought respite between outbursts in the long silence of night; excuses, however meagre, could be sought and proffered. But never again shall we escape: we are caught up in a continual hymn of praise, an unceasing chorus of merciful love, the sacrament of God's dwelling with us men. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us', Love has invaded the inner ring of

our defences: the wall of partition has been thrown down. 'He has made captivity captive.' That word more piercing than any two-edged sword has divided man against himself. God will not be ignored. All else has been ignored and we are quite alone and Christ is of our number. Man is more nearly yet a son of God.

Over the din of the traffic, in the shrill cries of the street arabs and hawkers Christ speaks to us. Through a mother's eyes he watches the comings and goings of a myriad small feet; still broken and abandoned, he dozes fitfully through the long night in a thousand furnished rooms; tired and insecure, he picks his way through the garbage pails. Each day his Passion is renewed next door. 'For inasmuch as you did it to these little ones, you did it to me.' We can root out of man the vestiges of power, we can deface each line of beauty, bring him low even to the very dust from whence he came; and we have Christ before us. We have depicted of a surety the very image of the Son of God. 'He will watch this servant of his appear among us, unregarded as a brushwood shoot, as a plant in waterless soil; no stateliness here, no majesty, no beauty, as we gaze upon him, to win our hearts. Nay, here is one despised, left out of all human reckoning; bowed with misery, and no stranger to weakness; how should we recognize that face: How should we take any account of him, a man so despised?' (Isaias 53.) 'And they spat upon him, and took the rod from him and beat him over the head with it.' (Matt. 27. 30.) No longer is there safety in numbers, for each proclaims the triumph or the needs of Christ afresh. Man is a memory of the Incarnation, who preaches inadvertently the word of God.

'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' But how can we fail to hear him, joyous, plaintive, beseeching? At every turn we are confronted with his presence, challenging, insistent; Christ waits for us at every corner, in every street we see and speak to him. We would seek refuge in ourselves did not our catalogue of tragedies peel off the crust we show for false security. Indeed, thou hast conquered, O Galilean.

'A message to thee from the Truth, the faithful and unerring witness, the source from which God's creation began: I know of thy doings, and find thee neither cold nor hot; cold or hot, I would thou wert one or the other. Being what thou art, lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, thou wilt make me vomit thee out of my

mouth. I am rich, thou sayest, I have come into my own; nothing now is wanting to me. And all the while, if thou didst but know it, it is thou who art wretched, thou who art to be pitied. Thou art a beggar, blind and naked; and my counsel to thee is, to come and buy from me what thou needest: gold, proved in the fire, to make thee rich, and white garments, to clothe thee, and cover up the nakedness which dishonours thee; rub salve, too, upon thy eyes, to restore their sight. It is those I love that I correct and chasten; kindle thy generosity, and repent. See where I stand at the door, knocking; if anyone listens to my voice and opens the door, I will come in to visit him, and take my supper with him, and he shall sup with me.' (Apoc. 3.) The word is all around us: that word that breatheth forth love, that calls us home into the heart of God.

'Lord, that I might hear!', that I too might know thee in such homely things as the breaking of bread.



ST THOMAS AND THE WORD OF GOD¹

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THIS Word of life which was from the beginning, which we have heard and seen with our own eyes, have gazed upon and our very hands have handled—this it is which we proclaim unto you. . . . (I John, I, I.) With burning love and earnestness St John speaks of that knowledge and first-hand contact with the Lord Jesus which was his privilege. And now he can use these same words of the great Saint and Doctor St Thomas Aquinas. For he too loved our Lord, constantly and above all else, and by long familiarity with the things of God and long gazing upon the truths of God was enabled supremely to proclaim to thousands of others the saving truths of God.

But let us start, as St Thomas would surely start, with the Word of God; and meditate *not* on St Thomas and the Word of God, but on 'The Word of God and St Thomas'.

'This Word of life, which was from the beginning . . . this it is

¹ The substance of an address delivered on the feast of St Thomas Aquinas, 1954, at Blackfriars, Oxford.