

COSMIC PRAISE

DIVINE praise and adoration form the heart of religion. As the plot gives life and meaning to the varied characters and actions in the novel, so adoration co-ordinates the many and varied elements of religion and gives them life. And by religion we mean something more than looking pious on Sundays or giving half-a-crown to a beggarman. Religion is not a vestment put over the individuality of the man, nor is it a particular type of action; it is not even the special preserve of man. He may like to think that he alone of all creation can praise God and that the rest of nature is irreligious, but if he does so he will delude himself. For religion pierces to the very depths of being, not merely of man's being, but of all created being. According to St. Thomas, to reverence the one God for one specific reason is the proper action of religion, and that one specific reason is that God is the first principle of creation and of the government of all things.¹ God the creator and director of the universe is the object of religion, so that the whole universe, according to the most fundamental principles of its being, takes some part in religion. God created the universe for his glory, and the universe as a whole, not man alone, glorifies him as its Creator and Governor.

By a glance at God's creating and governing activity we see that the whole of created being and every individual created being lie in absolute dependence upon the Creator for all that they are and for all that they do. They are wholly caused by God not only in the initial moment of their coming into existence, but throughout every instant of that existence. Every individual electric light in the town depends for its current upon the central power station—the source of all the light of the town; so the reality of

¹ *Summa Theol.*, II^aII^ae 81, 3.

every created thing depends upon the one Source of all Reality. All that is real or positive about the stone we kick in the street depends here and now upon the Creator. Even the kick itself receives its impulse from the first Mover, and the impetus of the stone moving across the street is carried forward by the First Cause. The universe is only in so far as it is from God; it is real only in so far as it has its reality from God. This universal dependence upon God constitutes the very universe itself and constitutes all that is in it. The creature is simply an incarnate dependency, a materialized act of obedience; as a recent French writer has put it: 'Nous ne sommes qu'une soumission qui a pris corps.' Every creature is through its relation to God from whom it receives not only its existence but its nature and all that is real and positive about it; and this relation to God is the foundation of religion and an essential adoration. 'Religion,' says St. Thomas, 'strictly implies the order to God; for it is to him that we ought principally to be bound as to an unfailing principle.'² The whole universe is in its very essence bound and ordered to God, whom it thus worships and adores by subjecting itself to Him who holds it in the palm of his hand, and enlivens it with the breath of his mouth. The whole universe is instinct with the praise of God.

If we would see how this cosmic praise is realized we must follow the same train of thought and turn our minds to the act of creation. 'In the beginning was the Word,' '. . . and all things were made by him and without him was made nothing.' Both evangelist and philosopher have taught us that. But revelation was required to show us that the Word, before anything that was made, was the substantial glory of the Father. The Word glorified and praised the principle of Godhead in perfect equality and unity of nature; He was the uncreated and infinite Glory. Yet with the divine hunger of Absolute Goodness God

² *Ibid.*, 81, 1.

willed that there should be another glory in the infinitely lower order of created being, where the one Idea of God, boundless in its content, should be reflected by a vast multiplicity of immaterial and material creatures spread out on the scene of space and time. Together these creatures were to construct a created Idea of the Godhead, expressing in a complex whole the reflection of that glory expressed in the infinite simplicity of the Word. So all things were created in the Word for the glory of God. All things depended on Him with the subjection of religious adoration, and according to this grand plan of the universe their task was to co-operate in a united hymn of praise. 'Thus God Himself is the first exemplar of all things,'³ and all things in their dependence on the unique prototype must needs adore by showing forth 'the figure of His substance' in created mode.

The individual creature, then, is but a speck of colour on the completed canvas. In itself it can but emphasize the limitations of its particular perfection. Its perfection, it is true, is to be found in the Word in Whom it was created. But in the Word all perfections exist in such an utterly higher mode of infinitude that the creature seems wholly incapable of representing the Word and thus glorifying the Godhead even in the created order. The individual creature does not adore singly, but in its relations with the whole of the rest of the created universe, just as the speck of colour plays its part in relation to all the other colours on the canvas. Together, in their lights and shades, in their broad and narrow contours, the colours reflect in the realms of paint the one image of the artist's mind; and, if he is a good artist, they glorify him. In order, therefore, to give fitting praise to God in the created order it was necessary to have inequality, multiplicity and succession to mirror the unique and eternal 'Glory' Who is co-equal with the Father. There must be many things of

³ *Ibid.*, Ia 44, 4.

the same nature each with its own particular individuality, stretching out in succession across the 'moving image of eternity.' Little Johnny Frog with his grandfather's yellow spots, but with his mother's crooked left foot, strikes out across the pond in his own inimitable way, and thus plays his little instrument in the orchestrated hymn of the universe. But more than this, he plays his instrument just as perfectly when he is presently swallowed by the duck busily foraging on the other side of the pond. For there must be an ordered gradation in creatures. If all created natures were equal, there would be sheer static multiplicity of material, disorganized and unrelated for want of a principle of unity; and that could give no more fitting praise to God than the individual creature. By a law of continuity the whole universe is constructed on a plan of gradated and unequal beings from the lowest form of shapeless and inert matter to the highest type of spiritual and immaterial creatures. And in this hierarchy not only does the higher creature contain all that is most perfect in the lower orders, but also each order works for the betterment and perfection of the order above it.

Hence lower creation worships God not only by being what it is in dependence on the creative will of God, but also in ceasing to be when the order of succession or the higher order of being demands it. The universe progresses according to an ordered plan gradually working out in itself a more perfect reflection of the Word of God. Nor is this cosmic view destroyed when the scientists tell us that the universe, according to the law of entropy, is running down, expending and degrading its energy. That is the mechanist's view of the situation, and the mechanist does not look whither the movement proceeds, but only whence it comes. It may be that the divine plan of succession in the material order works itself out according to a declining gradation of energy; but that does not rule out that other principle by which the lower always works for the higher. As energy dissipates itself it helps to perfect and carry for-

ward higher grades of being, and eventually to perfect those beings who, despite their physical construction, contain the undiminishable energy of an immaterial soul. Ultimately, then, the cosmic praise is unintelligible without the lord of the physical universe, the rational creature called man.

The divine Word in the unity of the Godhead has eternally expressed or articulated the Glory of the Father. But without an intellectual creature in the physical universe there could be no articulated or expressed glory from material creation. Every creature would have worshipped the Creator by its very existence, but there could have been no co-ordinated scheme and the process of entropy would have seemed to weaken gradually the picture of the Word. The principle of the lower working always for the higher would have proved aimless, since there would have been no culmination to the process. The universe, then, in its worship needs two things; there must be a being, perfect in its own order, for which the whole could work as for the perfection of creaturely dependence, and an interpreter who could tell God the glory that dumb creation was offering, thus imitating the way the Word tells the Glory of God. Man fulfills both these functions; he is the lord of the world and the ambassador of creation to the heavenly court.

St. Thomas himself has left us a striking description of the place of honour held by the human body as the supreme masterpiece of God in the material universe, and the culmination of the whole. Perhaps it depends in its details upon the science of his day, but the main principle remains unchanged by the new biology. He says: 'The whole activity of inferior nature terminates in man as the most perfect. For we see that the activity of nature proceeds by gradation from simple elements, mixing them until it arrives at the most perfect type of mixture, which is in the human body. It is, therefore, necessary that the body which is united to a rational soul should have such a disposition, namely that it be of the most temperate com-

plexion. And if any one will consider the particular dispositions of the human body he will find that they are planned so that men may have the most perfect senses . . . ' ⁴ St. Thomas continues by showing that man has the largest brain for the sake of the wide range of his imagination and memory, walks erect for the most perfect freedom of action, and so on. Man is the microcosm, for he contains in himself all that is best in the universe. Everything is meant to work for his perfection. That is the first element in the unification of cosmic praise, as the heavens and the earth are led to praise God through mankind.

But this other, the immaterial element in man, not only explains the perfection of its instrument, the body. It also adds another perfection to his headship of creation, a perfection that raises the praise of God from the universe on to a higher plane. For man has a faculty that can identify itself with the natures of all things, but first of all with the natures of the physical things of the universe. Within this one faculty he can gather together an infinite number of things, de-materializing them, co-ordinating them, watching their interconnections and relations one to the other, expressing truths about them and about their reference to the rest of reality. With his mind man can raise up the eternal spheres from the low planes of mere existence where all is silent and inarticulate. He can raise up every creature that has come forth from the creative treasures of the divinity. For he can place them on the supreme eminence of intelligibility where, in the deep and unfathomable mirror of intellect, they reflect the perfections which they have from God and express in this immaterial manner the glory that otherwise they cannot utter. The mind has an infinite capacity and can know all things. But man does not get to know them in their material isolation, for his mind sees how they dovetail into each other, how the lower is included in the higher, how material suc-

⁴ *De Anima*, art. 8.

cession does not break identity of form. And thus he forms a vast synthesis of truth, leading up to and depending upon the One Truth, the *Prima Veritas*, in Whom all truths are contained in the simplicity of a unique Word.

Thus in the scheme of creation man is the mouthpiece of the universe. He alone can give voice to the cosmic praise. Without him the heavens and the earth would dumbly obey in the core of their being the behests of the Only Reality, and in that sense they would adore; but outside God there would be no unified expression of all the glory they contain. And man fulfills this ambassadorial post in a double manner. Firstly, as the perfect microcosm he sums up in itself all that is most perfect in the physical universe. In his active, conscious and wilful obeissance to the majesty of his Creator, he makes the obeissance of all that is implied in his being. By subjecting himself to the Maker of all things in his religious worship and adoration he subjects the whole of the universe and all it contains. Ultimately this element of worship depends on man's willing submission to the Will of God, for while all below him must necessarily subject themselves to the Creator simply by being what they are, his own particular being includes a free will which must subject itself in its own spontaneous way. Fundamentally, therefore, the worship of the universe is expressed in an act of man's will. And when man, by his sin, refuses to praise God he is playing the traitor to the whole of nature. When, on the other hand, the unlettered washerwoman says, 'Thanks be to God' from her heart, or bends her knee in church, Mars and Jupiter stir in their courses, for they are being represented at the court of heaven.

This is man's essential responsibility. It is this that he must first realize when considering the question of cosmic praise. But so long as the will is fixed in its religious adoration there is this other element of knowledge whereby the rational creature can reflect more perfectly the glory of the Divine Word. Here lies the divine vocation of the

upright scientist, philosopher or theologian. As such men increase in the knowledge of the construction and relations of all reality they increase in the knowledge of God, for every new aspect of reality that they discover reveals to them another aspect of the First Cause who made it and of whom it is the reflection. Every aspect of reality tells something new about God, but it does not tell it until some mind discovers it. The vast expanse of nature, the hidden depths of reality contain a myriad facts and truths not yet known and reflected in the mind of man, and all these things have not yet given voice to the adoration that lies in them.

Such is the divine vocation of the learned. Yet few pay attention to it, since it requires an upright will consciously directed to the Creator, its last end. This firm foundation of man's will in the Will of God is an essentially prerequisite, for otherwise the mind will stop at the discoveries it makes. It will rest content with them thinking that it has discovered all. Whereas unless it sees God and the triumphant praise of God in all, in the atom or the neolithic skull, in matter and form, or in the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, all these remain still inarticulate and frustrated in their ultimate purpose. The uprightness of the will leads the mind on to God to Whom the will is firmly attached. Only then can the mind see the gathering together of all things in the simple unity of God. When the mind sees the multiplicity of all things summed up in the Unity from which they all have come, only then has the universe as a whole expressed its praise in thrilled and awe-struck voice. The learned must, therefore, relate all that they know to the source of all. All the truths that they reveal must be brought under the penetrating light of the *Prima Veritas*. There can be no watertight compartments in what they know; no science may be separated from the others and unrelated to them; there can be no parallel lines of truth, but all must converge on the one central point.

No single individual can, of course, achieve a world-view of reality that would give fitting expression to this cosmic praise—save Christ alone, the knower of all things and the centre of all praise. But then man is not meant to achieve any great work in individual isolation. His nature demands corporate activity; he must co-operate with his fellows. And the greater the work the more co-operation is demanded, and where all reality is to be known in a way analogous to the Increased Wisdom of the Word Himself, many must bring their contribution to the one common stock of human knowledge. All the sciences are planned out in a grand hierarchy under the headship of the one Truth. *Deus scientiarum Dominus est.* If the scholars would but play their part we could also say: *Deus scientiarum Dominus est.* God is the Lord of scientists who bring their special subjects and branches of knowledge to the one centre. The branches all grow from a single tree, and he who studies one branch should never forget the rest of the tree, where all the other scientists are labouring, nor the Ground whence the whole springs. Let those who seek and systematize the truth refrain from building high barriers round their particular studies, and from carrying the methods and principles of their own sciences into the domain of others. Let them recognize the conclusions of specialists in other subjects and the influence that these may have on their own work. If men of science and learning would thus work together, with their minds fixed ultimately on the One Reality, then indeed would the universe and all it contains find a fitting expression for its praise through man, its ambassador.

*Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei,
 et opera manuum ejus annuntiat firmamentum.
 Dies diei eructat verbum,
 et nox nocti indicat scientiam
 In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum.*

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.