

WISDOM AMONG THE PERFECT

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WISDOM, however, we speak among the perfect, yet not a wisdom of this world nor of the rulers of this world, who are cast aside. But we speak the wisdom of God, mysterious, hidden, which God foreordained before the world unto our glory. And none of the rulers of this world knew this wisdom, for had they known it, never would they have crucified the Lord of glory. But God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. These things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in the learning of the spirit, preparing for spiritual men spiritual things. For we have the mind of Christ"—I Cor. 2: 6-16 *passim*.

Aquinas, Angelic and Common Doctor, like the sea receiving all into her depths, receives into himself all the rivers of wisdom flowing down through past ages and bearing all that human reason has attained through the heavenly light which radiates from the Gospel. "He arranged this wisdom in such admirable order," declared Pope Leo XIII,¹ "and so organized it that in reality he seemed to have left posterity the ability to imitate it but had taken away the power to supplant it." The late lamented Dr. Martin Grabmann did not fail to note that "the whole intellectual life of St. Thomas bears the imprint of wisdom; it is completely dedicated to contemplation and to the ordering of truth."²

Friar Thomas, his early biographer, Tocco, tells, was indeed a marvellous contemplative, *vir miro modo contemplativus*. Certainly, if St. John of the Cross is the great experimental doctor of that wisdom, born of love and infused as a gift of the Spirit of Love, then St. Thomas Aquinas is its great theologian. And, in the last resort, it is from that same wisdom and on the loving contemplation which is its joyous fruit that the whole Christian order on this earth depends. It is to the Angelic Doctor that lovers of wisdom must turn, for his doctrine radiates in a wonderfully human way the light of the Gospel and of our Catholic faith.

¹ Apostolic letter *Cum hoc sit*, Acta Leonis, vol. II, p. 108.

² *The Interior Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Nicholas Ashenbrenner, O.P., Milwaukee, 1951. p. 19.

Christ is the Head, the First-born of all creatures: it is with Him that we must begin. It is not St. Thomas, it is Christ Who forms and gives life to Christian culture. It is Christ, through the Church and through her Common Doctor; through the contemplation of the Saints and the love which unites them to the Son of Man; through the labors—the study, the prayer, the meditation, the preaching, writing, and teaching—of the theologians and philosophers who follow with Thomas in the footsteps of Christ, and bring to the service of the Son of Man all the virtues of the mind and all its scattered riches. Blessed Pius X cried for the “restoration of all things in Christ.” All things—but not the mind, man’s noblest faculty, the brilliant jewel set in the crown of creation? Yes, the intellect, too; and this is the burden of Thomistic effort in the apostolate today, to restore the human mind to order and so, with the grace of God, to bring the world back to the paths of Truth, the loss of which may well involve the dissolution of the world.

It would be impertinent, not to say pedestrian, to lament here the crying need of order in the world of our day. The age has well been characterized as one of scientific chaos, the appalling disorganization in every sphere and on every level is too obvious to require substantiation. The twentieth-century apostle is faced with what has been called the corrosive cancer of all of modern society, namely, secularism. To meet this crisis every possible resource of thought and action is summoned by the forces of Christianity. The solid doctrine of St. Thomas is called upon now, more perhaps than ever before, to clear away the terrible intellectual debris which clutters so vast an area of present-day thinking, and to present the perennial sanity which is Catholic and metaphysical truth for all who would—who must—receive it. Half a century ago Peguy wrote that St. Thomas Aquinas was a great saint, respected, venerated, celebrated, tried, slain, buried. Peguy is himself dead, fallen no doubt in a valiant battle, but largely forgotten and certainly of no actual moment in the writings and inspirations left behind him. But the doctrine of St. Thomas is by no means “slain and entombed”: for many it is the very embodiment of immortal truth, a glorious living monument to the eternal wisdom which vivifies and orders Catholic thought. The reason for this is not hard to find: for Thomas has the mind of Christ, and the wisdom he would impart is the divine wisdom of the Cross, that seeming folly which men of no spiritual insight, no transcendent vision, no eye except for the ephemeral

and the utilitarian loathe and deride. It is, no mistake may be made, this very wisdom with which the disciples of St. Thomas—and, pre-eminently, his brother Dominicans—must go into the academic and social market-places and confront the unenlightened world. The Holy Fathers, in particular of our own era, have repeatedly beckoned the flock of Christ to go to Thomas. The Thomist knows full well that those outside the fold are little likely to heed this lovingly paternal admonition. Because so much is at stake, the Dominican must not doze or day-dream in this matter of a vigorous contemporary apostolate. The wisdom of the Cross has been hidden, for their blindness and hardness of hearts from the rulers of this world until now. With supreme confidence the bearer of good tidings, of the Gospel, should go forth now to break the chains and cast out the darkness which have bound and enshrouded the minds and hearts of men.

Who are these benighted souls to whom the twentieth-century apostle must go? What do they hold dear, how do they look upon the wisdom which is Christ? The apostle must know the answers to these questions, for no man plows well a strange field. In a general fashion, Father Walter Farrell, of recent and happy memory, has drawn an incisive and compelling parallel between the total world situation which confronted the first Apostles and that before which their successors (in the popular sense) stand today.³ It should be of considerable profit to make a similar excursion, concentrating on the stated experience and reaction of a single Apostle, the Apostle par excellence, Paul of Tarsus. We have chosen a text from one of St. Paul's epistles which, we believe, reveals many aspects of the complex problem which the Dominican apostle faces, and contains within it, if it be carefully and thoroughly examined, a profound insight into the ultimate, adequate solution.

PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

The sprawling city of Corinth, among the three or four greatest in the Roman Empire of the first century, presented a picture of startling paradox. Pagan Corinth was universally infamous for its wickedness (men did not shrink from the word in those days, nor attempt to explain it away on "scientific" grounds), for a brand of immorality so base and so vicious as to

³ cf. *Twentieth Century Apostle in The Thomist*, Vol. X (1947), No. 2, pp. 133-158.

shock even the ancient world. The word "Corinthianize" was actually coined—and used as early as the time of Aristophanes—to describe a life of unrestrained evil and licentiousness. With no aristocracy but that of wealth, and no tradition but that of making money, Corinth had become a by-word for every vice in the short space of a century, its pleasures and the frightful expense of living there notorious far beyond the sea-washed coasts of Greece. And yet, side by side with this extreme moral depravity, there flourished at Corinth an almost fanatical love of wisdom (the definition of philosophy), an exaggerated regard for the abstruse speculations of sages and the practiced art of eloquent orators. We must restrain the temptation here to draw a swift comparison with the arrogant modern metropolis, home of vice and corruption on a mammoth scale, squirming with dull ears itching for the latest scandal, the latest intellectual catch-and-cure-all, the latest false prophet of bad news.

Quite readily, then, many of the Christians at Corinth were captivated by the learning and rhetorical skill of a lately-arrived preacher—no more, really, than a zealous catechumen—by the name of Apollos. Will this Apollos, master of Greek wisdom and polished speech, transform the ruggedly simple, somewhat roughly delivered doctrine of St. Paul into a system of philosophy, a pleasing compound of the original Gospel and secular elements alien to it but familiar to and long-cherished by the current milieu? Are Christians to look to the wisdom of the world for their enlightenment and their salvation? It would be unjust not to recall that such a travesty was never the aim or intention of Apollos himself, whom Paul does not hesitate to commend. In his first letter the apostle drives home vigorously what is to be taken as the answer to these questions: the Good News of Christ is not a philosophic system or an example of the art of rhetoric and worldly accomplishment. The community at Corinth must recognize this basic fact clearly and to it conform their lives.

Christianity is a true salvation, a way of life. The new doctrine is not offered to the world as a reasoned philosophy: none of the Apostles was a "philosopher" in any but the most attenuated sense of the word, as it was then understood. The doctrine is presented as an indivisible body of truth to be received, not by any argumentation, not by any system of deduction or involved judgment of detail, but on the authority of the teacher, who, in turn, speaks with the authority of God. God's ways are not man's ways: nothing is more characteristic of St. Paul's methods, no

note is so frequently sounded as this. Quite simply, it is to be all through the centuries the one answer of the Church to innovators, its one practical test of truth. This primitive apostolic Christianity is a lesson to be learned, articles of faith to be believed, moral precepts to be obeyed, a mystery to be accepted on the divine guarantee which functions through the Apostle who is teaching. Paul urges the Corinthians, implicitly, to scorn the vain philosophizing to which they are so inordinately attached, and to embrace in all its purity and simplicity the wisdom which alone will bring them peace and happiness. He does not intend, however, to allow their minds, ever avid for knowledge, to stagnate and become barren. As we propose to indicate more fully, Paul is desirous of quenching this burning thirst for wisdom, and so he proceeds to lay before his readers the riches of divine truth, the "mystery hidden in God," the study of the Cross.

THE PERFECT

"Wisdom, however, we speak among the perfect," says St. Paul. All Catholic commentators agree that these words do not imply the existence in the early Church of an esoteric teaching such as existed in the pagan mystery religions of Paul's time. No traces can be found of any occult doctrine that could be imparted only to those who had achieved a certain stage of initiation in the Christian "sect," a teaching not communicable to the general body of the faithful. With Christ the day had arrived when no secret should be kept of the truths which it had pleased the Father to reveal to men. "Preach the Gospel to all nations," Christ had commanded: to all men the whole of revealed truth, as I have imparted it to you. No esoteric doctrinal secretiveness existed in the primitive Christian Church—nor is the practice of dismissing catechumens before the beginning of the canon evidence of any such secretiveness. Who, then, were the "perfect"?

By the term perfect is here signified (we know from the terminology Paul uses) those who are sufficiently advanced in Christian instruction to grasp the deeper implications of the "good news" which had already been imparted to them. Men are perfect, St. Thomas remarks,⁴ in two respects, according to intellect and according to will, the two faculties which are proper to them as men. The intellectually perfect are those whose minds are elevated above all carnal and sensual considerations, and

⁴ *Comment. in I Corinth. c. 2, lect. 1.*

therefore capable of comprehending spiritual truths: "But solid food is for the mature, for those who by practice have their faculties trained to discern good and evil" (Hebr. 5:14). Their wills are perfect when, rising above the desire for temporal goods, they seek God above all and cling to His precepts. The great precept of love of God is their life's guiding light, and in that light they attain Christian perfection. And so, after reaffirming the two-fold commandment of love, Our Lord added: "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Identifying more specifically the "perfect" of the Epistle text, St. Thomas continues: "Because the teaching of the faith is ordered to its being carried into action by charity, as we are told in Galat. 6 (*passim*), one who is instructed in the faith must of necessity be well disposed, not only intellectually, to grasp and believe what he is told, but also, by his good will and disciplined affections, to love and to act according to what he is told." Such are St. Paul's "perfect," and he judged, regretfully, there to be too few of these at Corinth!

THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS

It was said at Corinth that St. Paul lacked something which his fellow-laborer, Apollos, possessed to a remarkable degree, and this was *wisdom*. Apparently the fiery Apostle, Hebrew of Hebrews, did not at all measure up to the standards of urbane outlook and polished sophistication of which the world has always been enamored. For the Greeks of the classic age, wisdom suggested the idea of profound and lofty speculation or of consummate art. Aristotle had praised it extravagantly, delighting in it as the knowledge of the ultimate causes of things. For the more practical-minded Stoics, it was the supreme science of things human and divine, the queen of the virtues and the coveted goal of a well-moderated life. The Corinthians might have been bold to assert that Paul had no claim to the title of wise man or sage, either as philosopher, as artist, or as fine speaker. But Paul had been to Athens, he had approached the intellectual elite of the civilized world with the word of truth, the light of the Gospel, and he had been scorned and summarily dismissed. He understood, from experience as well as by supernatural insight, that neither philosophy nor eloquence, neither the subtleties of fine argument nor resounding elocution would convert the world. . . .
Non in dialecticis Dominus.

It would be altogether absurd, as M. Gilson has rightly indi-

cated,⁵ to speak of a philosophy of St. Paul, and if we do find certain fragments of Greek philosophy embedded in his writings, these are either wholly adventitious or, more often, integrated with a religious synthesis which altogether transforms them. Aristotle has not assimilated Christ; Christ is all in all, and He has taken unto Himself all truth and all goodness. The Christianity which St. Paul delivers to his hearers is a religion which supersedes all that we ordinarily call a philosophy and even absolves us from the trouble of seeking one.

Paul wished to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified. This new revelation was precisely a rock of offense for Jews and Hellenists alike. The Jews were seeking salvation by means of a literal observance of the Law and by obedience to the commands of God, Who made His power manifest in miracles of glory. The Greeks sought a salvation to be achieved by way of the rectitude of the will and the certitude afforded by the natural light of reason. What had Christianity to offer either? Salvation only by living faith in Christ crucified. That is to say, a scandal to the Jews, who asked for signs of might and power and were offered the infamy of a humiliated God; and a folly to the Greeks, who sought after the intelligible, and were offered the absurdity of a Godman, dead on a cross and risen again from the dead to save us. In words brilliant with vision and with heart ablaze the Apostle to the Gentiles proclaimed unashamedly the ultimate paradox, the wisdom of God ultimately surpassing the puny judgment of men. This magnificent passage deserves to be meditated as it fell from the exultant lips of Paul:

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ be made void. For the doctrine of the cross is foolishness to those who perish, but to those who are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God. For it is written:

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the prudence of the prudent I will reject' (Is. 29:14).

"Where is the 'wise man'? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputant of this world? For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not come to know God by 'wisdom,' it pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching, to save those who believe. For

⁵ *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*. Transl. by A. H. C. Downes, New York, 1940. p. 20 ff.

the Jews ask for signs, and the Greeks look for 'wisdom'; but we, for our part, preach a crucified Christ—to the Jews indeed a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

"For consider your own call, brethren; that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the world has God chosen to put to shame the 'wise,' and the weak things of the world has God chosen to put to shame the strong, and the base things of the world and the despised has God chosen, and the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are; lest any flesh should pride itself before Him" (I Cor. 1:17-29).

Nothing, at first sight, could be more explicit or more decisive than these utterances; they seem purely and simply to dismiss Greek philosophy in favor of the new faith. That, moreover, is why we should not be wrong in summing up the thought of St. Paul on this central point by saying that, according to him, the Gospel is not a wisdom but a salvation. We must add, nevertheless, that in another sense such an interpretation would be hardly exact; for in the very act of proclaiming the bankruptcy of Greek wisdom, St. Paul prepares to substitute another wisdom, namely, the wisdom of the Cross, the divine wisdom which is Christ crucified. Instead of saying that, according to St. Paul, the Gospel is salvation and not wisdom, we should rather say that in his eyes the salvation he preaches is the true and perfect wisdom, and that for the very reason that it is salvation!

The wisdom preached by Paul is a more perfect knowledge of divine truths: those which comprise the most sublime mysteries of Christian revelation, such as our justification by living faith in Christ, and the reprobation of the perfidious Jews (Epistle to the Romans), our union with Christ and with each other in the Mystical Body (Ephesians and Colossians), the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews), and, in this same Epistle to the Corinthians, our resurrection from the dead unto life everlasting. These are mysteries, which absolutely surpass the natural reach of man's mind; a wisdom, consequently, "hidden and revealed to us by God because before all ages He has predestined it for our eternal glory. Paul purposely avoided "persuasive words of human wisdom," in order not to render of no avail the Cross of Christ, for what he preached was simply the *verbum crucis*, and

he strove with every fiber of his being, and with the plenitude of the grace given him by God, to bring it to germination and fructification in the hearts of men. God, according to the providential design which Paul saw as His surpassing excellence, chose for this work the foolish things of this world, the things that are contemptible, to acknowledge and confirm the terrible folly and the unspeakable contempt of the Cross. Further, this wisdom of Calvary is unknown to all the "rulers of this world," all the high and mighty who trust so smugly in their own wit and strength. St. Thomas adds that the wisdom of the Cross is hid especially from this world's philosophers, false prophets as they are, who put themselves forth as the princes, so to speak, of the intellectual world. The vain "wisdom" of these proud men is now cast out, revealed for the shabby fake it is. There is a new and a veritable wisdom, which has God for its author and for its object. Whoever succeeds in comprehending it here below is initiated into the secrets of God and will enjoy its blessed fruit forever. This Christ Himself has promised us: "Now this is everlasting life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). This was the mystery which the Apostle sought to light, as a consuming fire, in the minds and hearts of his Gentile converts: the wisdom which is Christ, a total wisdom: a synoptic view of civilization, a history of Christianity, a philosophy of life; a human figure wrapped around with attributes which are ecumenical. Historical and eternal, it is Christ who speaks through Paul: He speaks and He is the explanation. St. Paul knew Him not in the flesh, yet is aware of Him as his life, and more: "the image of the invisible God." Wisdom, the aspect of man, nature, and God from the heights of divine enlightenment, sees at the heart of all the Man Who is God, reconciling "all things to Himself, making peace through the blood of the Cross."

THE WISDOM OF THEOLOGY

In his commentary on the Apostles' Creed, St. Thomas remarks that while the Eternal Word, abiding in the bosom of the Father, was known to Him alone, after He was clothed with flesh—as the human word is clothed with sound—He became intelligible to man. Just as the Word had to become flesh, to assume a human form in order to be intelligible to, to be known by the human race, so too the word which He spoke, the truth to which He bore witness, although consisting in the mysteries of

the divine life and love which are ineffable and unutterable, yet has to be expressed in human language in order to be understood, so far as can be, by human minds. Just as the Eternal Word assumed the most perfect human body, so too is it fitting that the word which He spoke, the truth which He revealed, should be expressed in the most perfect and most spiritual form of human language and thought, i.e., in the language of philosophy. It is true that our Lord Himself framed His teaching in the simplest of language and that theology can add nothing to the deposit of faith which He revealed. But in their ardent and loving study and meditation of the truths of faith, the Church's theologians, seeking to penetrate ever more deeply the revealed wisdom, have ordered all of this mystery, so far as this is given to man, in a marvelous system of thought which is at once a science and a wisdom, queen of the sciences and supreme human wisdom. Theology thus can and does unfold the fuller signification of the words of Christ, and expresses His doctrine in clear scientific language so that all ambiguities may be removed. This wisdom is not purely human; far transcending metaphysics, it remains throughout the blessed wisdom of the Cross, the wisdom which Paul preached to the Corinthians and which the Church of Christ has cherished and proclaimed down through the ages.

There is, then, this particular element or phase of the wisdom of the Cross, of sacred Theology, which, by circumstances, by tradition, and by design of God, has become the particular object of the Dominican's zeal. We speak of it ordinarily, and with justifiable pride, as Thomism. It is a wisdom spoken to those of adult mental age, the perfect, and consists (as evidenced by the very words of Paul we have cited) of a body of truths in part centered round and in part deduced from the fundamental propositions of Christianity. It is, we cannot repeat too often, a wisdom of the Cross, the doctrine of the nature of God in relation to the salvation of men—all the implications of God achieving the redemption of man through the sufferings and death of His Son. In its living and sublime depths is set the whole economy of the Incarnation: a doctrine of immense mercy, love, and goodness. All the brilliance of divine truth convenes to it, as well as the warmth of the everlasting love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St. Thomas himself speaks of theology as "food and drink. . . . Other sciences enlighten only the intellect, while sacred doctrine warms the heart."⁶

⁶ *In Epist. ad Hebraeos. c. 5, lect. 2.*

Addressing the Corinthians, Paul speaks in fact of revealed sacred doctrine, of faith illuminated by the gifts of the Holy Ghost. But sacred Theology which is acquired by human effort, proceeds from this faith, and thus it participates in the perfection of wisdom. Unlike other sciences, which do not rise above the level of human wisdom, it deserves to be called divine wisdom. Its primary concern is not with created things but with divine things, with God; it deals with creatures only to the extent that they are related to God, proceed from Him, and return to Him as their final end and blessedness. Indeed, as regards God Himself, the theology which proceeds from faith fastens its gaze chiefly on the interior mysteries of His Godhead, and outside of God follows up mainly the overflow, as it were, of the Trinitarian processions of wisdom and love and the assumption of creatures into the Trinitarian unity. To the dweller in time theology reveals his ultimate destiny as well as the road that leads thereto. It shows him the Supreme Good, in the possession of which he is one day to enjoy superhuman happiness, and grants him even here below a faint foretaste of its heavenly sweetness. Minds seek unlimited truth and long for the knowledge of all things in relation to their beginning and to their goal. The purposiveness of all things unveiled by theology involves a complete satisfaction of all the most intimate yearnings of the human heart, achieved through the unending union with Love Itself. Consequently, theology, like no other science, is a *scientia sapida*, a science full of delights.

The wisdom for which the men of our time, as for those in St. Paul's day, for which our contemporaries hunger is such a profound concatenation of divine truths as one finds in the accepted works of the Church's theologians. It is, above all, the wonderfully systematic organization of Christian doctrine found in the *Sunma Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas. There has been, in recent years, a welcome discontent, increasingly evident, with the stale pabulum of watered-down or artificially stimulated courses in what is called religion. Mature men, the intellectually advanced, will not and need not be content with the bald propositions of the catechism, even though these be artfully contrived and embellished by appeals to "dynamic living" and other emotional enticements. The children of God must grow up intellectually, as well as physically and spiritually. They must seek, and deserve to be introduced to a body of truth, scientifically compounded and integrating the whole of divine Revelation on an

adult level. Thomas' *Summa* is definitely not milk for babes—nor can opponents urge against this potent fact the holy Doctor's modest protest in the Prologue to the *Prima Pars*.

Father Mersch⁷ has pointed out that God could, in His omnipotence, have given us a theology fully formed at the beginning, just as He could have created for Christ a soul and body fully matured, so that they would not be the culmination of a long human preparation. God in His inscrutable wisdom had no intention of acting thus. As He graciously invites us to cooperate in the work of our sanctification, so too He graciously invites us to devote our intellectual industry to the expression of His message. The response to His summons is *theology, the consecration of the human intellect, enlightened by faith and other supernatural gifts, in its scientific and sapiential capacity, to divine truth*. The faith that we receive is to be stirred up, the medieval doctors love to insist on this, by prolonged and serious meditation. If God has spoken to us, He has done so because He wishes us to understand. Obscurities will assuredly persist: we have no more intention than had St. Paul of turning the science of faith into some sort of gnosis or, worse still, pious mathematics. Unaided save by the imperfect light of faith, natural reason cannot grasp God's mysterious gift (I Cor. 1:17 ff.): but this is because our minds are too shortsighted and because the brightness is beyond its range. Still, faith is an intellectual virtue, elicited by the speculative intellect. "To believe is nothing else than to think with assent. Not all who think believe, since many think so as not to believe. But everyone who believes thinks, and thinks by believing and believes by thinking. . . . If faith is not changed with thought it is nothing."⁸ By faith, says St. Paul, Christ, Who is the splendor of the Father, dwells in our hearts (Eph. 3:17), and shall we remain out in the night? There are countless souls out in the night of modern unbelief; it is the office and the solemn duty of the Dominican apostle to go out into that night with the light of Catholic truth, with Christ Who is the light of the world. There is the challenge, there the quest.

WISDOM IN TRUTH

Truth, said the Philosopher, is a divine thing, more excellent than any human friend. To seek the truth is natural to all men

⁷ Cf. *The Theology of the Mystical Body*. Transl. by Cyril Vollert, S.J. St. Louis, 1951, p. 25.

⁸ St. Augustine, *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, 5 (PL 44, 963).

by reason of their very humanity; to attain it, in the possession of the First Truth seen in absolutely clear vision, is the ultimate happiness of those whom God has chosen. Under the shield of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph is emblazoned the single word, *Veritas*, Truth. That word is carved likewise deep in the heart of our whole Order, for it expresses perfectly the spirit of that Order. It is, as we have indicated, a Truth that is the Wisdom of God, taught by His Holy Spirit; it is the wisdom of the Cross, learned where St. Dominic and St. Thomas Aquinas chiefly learned it, at the feet of the crucified Christ. Other Orders have *Pax* or *Caritas* or *Gloria Dei* as their special motto. None of these noble ideals is outside the orbit of the Dominican spirit, but it is in the light of truth that, for the sons of Dominic, they are quickened and take on meaning. If to search after truth is a propensity and a characteristic of all men who would be truly men, then to seek after the wisdom of the Cross is the common goal of all Catholic Theologians. Further, it is the particular phase or phases of this wisdom of the Cross that we seek and the particular manner of its search and exposition that determine if or not we have the true spirit of St. Dominic and are truly following in the footsteps of St. Albert and St. Thomas and the other exemplars of our Dominican tradition.

Certainly it is, first of all, the wisdom of the Cross that St. Dominic wishes to teach—that wisdom which is concerned primarily with the salvation of souls through the merits of Jesus Christ—the wisdom which is best fitted to enlighten one in the work of salvation. But it has ever been the tradition of our Order that our principal study and teaching lie in the fields of more profound theology. Dominicans are not, by tradition, mere catechists and instructors of the ignorant, although of course we do not hold that office in contempt. It is an honorable office, one of the spiritual works of mercy, a work of the love of God in this world. We hold the office of catechist in honor, not in contempt, but it is not an office to which the Dominican as such is primarily or commonly called. The primary Dominican calling has traditionally been in the higher fields of theological knowledge and discussion. It is wisdom in the sense of St. Paul that we must speak, and to the perfect we must speak it.

We turn, of course, for the most excellent embodiment of this elevated knowledge of God, to the *Summa* of St. Thomas, of

which we are, so to speak, the "family heirs."⁹ That wisdom of the Cross which Paul has glorified has many aspects, and in the design of God it has been given to the Dominican Order, following the guiding star of her most illustrious son, to emphasize certain phases of it; notably the particular manner of God's wisdom in His dealings with men through grace; the wisdom of His dealing with men through the Blessed Sacrament; the wisdom of co-redemption through Mary and the efficacy of prayer to the Mother of God, especially by the Rosary and its meditation on the mysteries of Christ. This is an extraordinary privilege as well as an urgent claim on our zeal and energy. Far too few Christians are conscious of the great empire Our Lord exercises over us and of our entire dependence on Him. We do not begin to realize how completely we live *in Christo Jesu*. It is the mystery of Jesus which St. Paul never ceased preaching to the world, and which was a life-long subject of the meditations of St. Dominic.

St. Paul ends his paean to the wisdom of the Cross, as he preached it, with the triumphant declaration: "But we have the mind of Christ." The mind of Christ: this is the state proper to the Dominican apostle, and to attain so eminent a prize he must embrace, under the movement of divine grace, means proportionately elevated. It is a question here of absolute honesty of life, fidelity to the truth, and real holiness of life. It is sometimes disputed among theologians whether or not one can remain truly a theologian when deprived of the grace of God. All dispute aside, there can be no doubt that without sanctifying grace and its virtues and gifts one cannot be a *perfect* theologian, and, as we shall see, without the aid of the corresponding charisms, one can in no manner be an exponent of the wisdom of the Cross in the way that Christ intended and in the way that Augustine and Paul and Thomas and the other great theologians of the Church have been. For the "mind of Christ" is far more than mere speculative achievement or rhetorical and pedagogical facility—to think otherwise would be fantastic. This deserves some consideration.

It does not detract in the least from St. Thomas' intellectual genius to assert that his best illumination was from above. But light comes to those who ask for it: the life of learning must be united to the life of prayer (Paul warned about "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal"). Christ has said: "The words that I have

⁹ We recognize, it goes without saying, that in a very real and most important sense, the genius of our holy Doctor belongs by right to the Church, our holy Mother, and to all her faithful children.

spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:64): books give us the letter, to be sure, but never has study without prayer attained to the quickening spirit. The theologian is occupied with sublime truths, truths which are sacred in their origin and in their content; hence he must approach them with due reverence and cleanness of heart. Not that prayer is to replace the exacting efforts of reasoning; but the reasoning has to be carried on in a prayerful manner. There is question here of an ascent toward God, since it is an ascent toward divine truth and is made in union with this truth. We are in God's house; we must go up to the sanctuary serenely, modestly, humbly. The advance is not slower on that account. On the contrary, such reserve, as the piety from which it flows, is an adaptation to the object; therefore it is objectivity and preparation for the special light belonging to these matters. This is a high ideal, not easy to maintain over a long period of time and in the face of obstacles and all sorts of temptations, and impossible of attainment without the special grace of God. Since it is a requisite of the Dominican vocation, there can be no doubt about the unfailing outpouring of that grace. It is not what the world wants, or thinks it wants, but what is best for it that the Dominican seeks, and having found, spreads abroad. It is, always, the wisdom of the Cross, the mind of Christ Crucified.

THE WORD OF WISDOM

St. Jerome counselled, in one of his letters: "Learn that you may teach. Treasure the words of faith in order that you may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who oppose truth." The assiduous study of sacred Theology by those appointed in the Church as "ministers of the word" is a public service performed, not for the gratification of exposing personal views, but for the purpose of helping one's brethren to contemplate joyously the message of the Father for the benefit of God's people. Our great theologians, Albert, Thomas, Raymond, Antoninus, and the rest, are above all the organs of a living body. The office of theologian, someone has said, is not a genteel occupation reserved for those who close the door on life and study "for the sheer love of it." It is an essential, vital function in the dispensing of truth; and Christianity lives on truth—on "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." As a work of the Church and a function of the Mystical Body, the theologian's work is, we may say, Christ's work, because the Church is the

continuation of Christ. Through this work the word continues to be made flesh, to be made man; the Word utters Himself in concepts and systems, in a way of knowing and understanding that is human.

There must be no false or inaccurate views on this paramount question of the essential, intrinsic ordination of our study to preaching, to teaching the word of God. The laity expect Dominicans to be apostles, which is something more than scholars—far more. “The Order from its earliest days was specially instituted for preaching and the salvation of souls,” the primitive constitutions of the Friars Preachers declare; “the efforts of its members must be directed primarily, fervently, and absolutely to being of service to their neighbor.” St. Thomas Aquinas was fully aware of this situation; he thought it was unfair to the student and would take from him the greatest spur to study, if at the end of study the right to teach were not accorded him.¹⁰ Champions of the truth does not mean amiable admirers of the truth: the wisdom assimilated in divers ways by the apostle is a fire within him which strains to spread and consume the world. . . . *Verbum Dei non est alligatum*, St. Paul cried out.

Even if it be truly charismatic in origin, this divinely learned wisdom is transmissible to others and is transmitted, but not in words and phrases taught by the cleverness and artistry of human rhetoric and human eloquence. There is more here than mere care not to restrain the force and obscure the flame by too much respect for method and system. It is not only by the natural perfection of our natural faculties that we seek to make ourselves speakers of the word of God in the exposition of His divine truth—we await also and expect that supernatural visitation by which is accomplished the supernatural elevation of those same faculties, a superabundance of the virtue of faith, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the charisms of the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom. It is by means of these that one acquires and becomes an efficient exponent of the wisdom of the Cross. The Christians of his time used to say that before John Chrysostom was ever the golden-mouthed he was the golden-hearted, and in an extraordinarily warm and moving passage the Angelic Doctor writes:

“For just as a lamp is not able to illuminate unless a fire is enkindled, so also a spiritual lamp (by which St. Thomas denotes

¹⁰ cf. *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem*, c. 2.

the priest, the theologian as apostle and preacher of supernatural truth) does not illuminate (i.e., receive and then give to others a profound understanding of the truths of faith) unless he first burn and be inflamed with the fire of charity. Hence ardor precedes illumination, for a knowledge of truth is bestowed by the ardor of charity."¹¹

It is the same constantly, throughout the writings of the holy Doctor: theology is a sacred science, concerned with divine things; it must be approached with a clean heart and imparted with all the warmth of a sincere charity. The task of the apostle of wisdom remains the same in this respect in every age: we must not go out into the world as if the world were our enemy and we had to conquer it. It is like the poor wounded man on the way to Jericho; it is hungry and we want to give it something to eat. We have some glorious thing, some Light, which we want those outside to share, like the sunshine. We want it to be theirs as much as ours: and it is, let us say it again, not a philosophic system but something far better we want to share: it is the salvation of all men by the Cross of Christ.

CONFIDENCE IN WISDOM

One of the characteristics of our Dominican learning has ever been great confidence—confidence in the Wisdom of the Cross and in the Common Doctor of the Church, to whom we turn with trust and love for a lofty appreciation of that wisdom. Unfortunately, this confidence of ours has often been put down as pride and arrogance by men who do not understand. When we stand on reconstruction on the solid principles of Thomism and the developed doctrine of the school of St. Thomas, somehow it sounds in some ears as though we were saying: intransigent chauvinism within the untouchable ivory tower of Dominican speculation. We must protest, then, that our apostolate is, and is specifically meant to be, an essay in order, of which the material is the multifarious tissue of modern life and the end is the completion of man and the world to the glory of God; finally, the form and key and solution is that divine simplicity wherein the chiaroscuro of uncertainty is resolved in light. Thomism, that particular phase of the wisdom of the Cross which it is the peculiar heritage of the Order to impart, is not a noble ideal which has for some time been dead and buried. As St. Thomas left it to us it is a vital organism, endowed with untiring capacity for the

¹¹ *In Evangelio sec. Joannem* c. 5, lect. 6.

assimilation of new truth and for adjustment to new conditions and environments without loss of its substantial identity. The Church of Christ has perceived and blessed this stability and perennial character of the doctrine of St. Thomas by embracing it in every age as a cherished heirloom, an ever-vigorous defender and exponent of the truth which is her own.

But we have only to turn to the Epistles to find that Paul himself had this same confidence in his own knowledge; and here we will find the foundation for this self-assurance: he knew that his gospel, his wisdom, was revealed by the Spirit of God and that even his preaching of it was framed in words and phrases chosen under the guidance of the same Divine Spirit, and therefore he could assert his own theological conclusions with utter confidence and security. "We have the mind of Christ." Christ is for Thomas too, the origin and sum total of all wisdom. In his explanation of the phrase: ". . . of Christ Jesus, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" Col. 2:3), Thomas draws this practical conclusion:

"Therefore we must seek wisdom nowhere else except in Christ . . . just as he who had a book which contained wisdom would not seek to know anything except this book, so we should never seek anything more than Christ."¹²

It is the wisdom of Christ on the Cross which is for Thomas the unique source of wisdom and the hearth of his glowing love for God, for in the Cross Thomas beheld "the perfection of the whole law and the art of living well."¹³

Dominicans have the duty to walk in that particular path which St. Dominic, lover of Paul, has marked out for them. We have or must have the "mind of Christ" in this particular way. But it is not therefore becoming for us to glory in that mission—confidence is not pride. The supreme lesson which the authentic teachers of Christendom would have us learn is that it is not in words but by the pouring forth of life in love that one finally gives testimony to the truth. We are given the mind of Christ in an especial Dominican way, but that mind is given us that we might, as St. Thomas interprets it, "prepare spiritual things for spiritual men," and it is in the deepest humility that we must take upon ourselves the interpretation of the mind of Christ—in the humility of Christ Himself and in His untiring zeal!

¹² *In Ep. ad Coloss.* c. 2, lect. 1.

¹³ *In Ep. ad Galat.* c. 6, lect. 4.