

EXPOSITION

ARTHUR VALENTIN

THUNDER voices prefaced the breaking of the four seals in John's heavenly visions, but prior to the sounding of the seven trumpets and the blaze of fire on the heavenly altar 'there was silence in heaven'. So, silence issues forth in trumpet calls and in the angelic prayer-action at the altar alight with flame. All public worship expresses itself vocally, for only such prayer can express corporate worship and fellowship prayer; but the Catholic Church has devised a service of silence, just as she has produced Orders of Silence, and that service is Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. The Rite begins with the *O Salutaris*; it ends with the *Tantum ergo*, but the interspace is Silence. The High Priest, Heli, was an unwise father but wise as a spiritual director, for how great was his wisdom when he bade the child Samuel respond to the voice of God with these words: 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.' Here is the perfect counsel for those who kneel before the Host exposed. All is silence: the Word is silent; silently the candles immolate themselves in honour of the Unseen Light; the flowers praise their Creator by their beauty and fragrance, but silent is their tribute.

Silence is the soul's receptive mood; it is the 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.' When we say prayers, God listens to us; but when we are silent we become listeners to the voice of God. This is not only an affair of the soul but one deeply affecting the body, our brain and nerves. Silence is the lubricating oil of both soul and body, and for want of it we have friction in the workings of our whole being. We of the priesthood, like the angels, have to sound the trumpet of preaching, but before the trumpet can sound the instrumentalist must inhale a deep breath, otherwise the note sounded will be feeble. Perhaps this is why our preaching is not more effective and fails to penetrate the souls of our hearers. Our first concern should be to let our Lord breathe upon us, as he breathed upon the apostles in the Upper Room, and this he will do only when we are silent before him.

Silence creates calm. Look at, say, factory workers today. They live in a din of noise, the crash of machinery, and so their

ragged nerves must be doped with cigarettes one after another. We can get immersed in spiritual noise and bustle, and our nerves demand this and that sedative to quieten them. Carthusians and Cistercians do not find any need to dope their nerves with nicotine! Yet they have nerves, and are men as we are. All well-formed religious have this in common: all have a stillness and silence about them: each can say: 'My house is now at rest'.

We in the world, whether clerical or lay, deeply need formation in spiritual silence as an antidote to the noise of modern life. Those of us fortunate enough to live in the countryside know how nature has this note of silence and contemplation, just as the city is concentrated din. Exposition is comparatively of the modern world, this world of the age of noise, and it may well be for many souls their one effective means for growing strong and spiritually healthy. The adoring soul may not be conscious of any particular experience when in the Hidden Presence, but the influence of our Lord is at work all the time, and there is taking place what we may call spiritual reconditioning, just as after a holiday we usually realize the good it has done us when we come back to our normal conditions.

So, Exposition is a liturgy of silence in a world of rush and noise; the heavenly silence before the trumpets can sound with full resonance; the silence which causes the altar of prayer to blaze up and kindle the incense of our worship and prayer. The silent soul before the silent Host is learning how to master the language of heaven.



THE NATURE OF ACCIDIE¹

JOHN CASSIAN (A.D. 360-448)

WHEN the vice of Accidie has got hold of an unhappy man's mind, it breeds detestation of the place of his habitation, weariness of his cell, and makes him spurn and despise the brethren who live with him, or near him, as all neglectful and unspiritual. For every task to be done within the

¹ A synopsis made by Charles Williamson from W. B. Trevelyan's translation of Cassian's *Institutes*—A Master of the Desert. Readings from John Cassian; with kind permission of the publisher, The Faith Press Ltd.