

## WHY DID GOD THE SON BECOME MAN?

FROM ST THOMAS'S OPUSCULUM 'DE RATIONIBUS FIDEI'<sup>1</sup>

**P**ONDERING the mystery of God taking flesh, we ought to notice that everything which acts intelligently acts through an idea, a *verbum*, formed in its intellect. This we see in a builder or any craftsman producing an article according to the plan which his mind has conceived. Now because the Son of God is the divine *Verbum*, it follows that God has made everything through the Son. Further, the maker of anything is the one to repair it; if a house falls down the architect who built it should be consulted.

Amongst the creatures created by God through his Word, rational beings hold pride of place since all else seem to be arranged for their service. This is understandable because rational beings have control of their actions through their freedom of choice, whereas the others are motivated by the force of nature and not by deliberate judgment. The enslaved are everywhere at the service of the free and are governed by them. By the 'fall' of rational creatures I do not mean any lessening of their existence, but a failure in the right ordering of the will. Failure is specially bound up with that through which anything works. We say a craftsman fails if he lacks some part of his art; or a natural thing is useless if the source of its strength is corrupted, as when a plant can no longer produce seed when the earth is sterile.

Rational creatures act through the power of will and there, too, lies their freedom of choice. Misdirection of the will constitutes failure for these and this is the result of sin. The primary agent in the removal of this shortcoming, which is nothing less than a perversion of the will, must be God, and this through his Word by whom he created all things.

There can be no remedy for the sin of the angels since they are, by nature, unchangeable and cannot turn from that

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Hugh Nash, O.P.

to which they have once committed themselves. Men, however, by their very make-up, have changeable wills; they can not only choose the good or the evil but can revoke a decision in favour of one or the other. This convertibility of the will lasts so long as the soul is joined to the body, forever undergoing change. Once separated from the body the soul obtains that fixity of will proper to the angels. After death, then, the soul can have no second thoughts, nor can it turn from good to evil or the other way about.

It lay, then, with the goodness of God to restore this fallen human nature through his Son. The method of healing ought to correspond both to the sickened nature and to the disease. As regards the first, since man is rational, gifted with freedom, he ought not to be recalled to righteousness by coercion but through his power of choice. As for the disease, a perversion of the will, it needed curing through a realignment of the will. Our wills are properly directed when we love aright, which means loving God above all else as the highest good, and everything else as leading towards him, our last end. There should be, too, an order of importance observed in our love of these lesser things—the spiritual should be preferred to the corporeal.

Nothing could so provoke us to love God than that his very Word, through whom all things were made, should assume our nature, for its healing, and be himself both God and man. We have, in this fact, the greatest sign of his love for us, and to know oneself to be loved strongly urges to love in return. Moreover, man's mind and affections are tied to material things; he does not easily rise above them. Yet anyone can know and love another man. To meditate upon the sublimity of God and be borne to him by a worthy love is for those only who by divine help and long and laborious effort are lifted from the corporeal to the things of the spirit. But, that he might provide a way to himself for all, God wished to become man, so that even the lowly could know and love him as one like themselves. Thus, through that which they could grasp, they might gradually advance towards perfection.

Again, because God has become man we have the hope of obtaining a share in that perfect happiness which belongs

by right to him alone. Man knows his limitations. If someone had promised the happiness of knowing and joyfully experiencing God for which the angels even are scarcely fitted, he would hardly have dared hope for it, unless he had been shown the worth of human nature, which God so highly prized that he became man to redeem it. So it is, through his taking flesh, God has given us the hope that even we may reach union with him in blessed happiness.

Knowing now the value of his nature, which God has seen fit to assume, man ought not to subject his heart to any creature: neither through idolatrous worship nor by submitting himself exclusively to material things. How unworthy it is that man, so lofty in God's estimation and so close to him that he willed to become one, should blindly enslave himself to things less than God.



## ON BECOMING ONE

BR DOMINIC, T.O.S.D.

**W**E know exactly as much as we have suffered; neither more, nor less. If it were not possible to suffer with, and even for other people, what follows would not follow, since it is these to whom it is addressed who are suffering directly. But if these lines contain any value it is only in so far as the writer has been able to suffer with, and for, those suffering directly, who are in need of sympathy and comfort. Should they, in fact, be born of illusion and shallow sentiment they are worthless and will fail to stir any deep longings, in which case may they at least do no harm.

I can scarcely have been the first Christian who has stood beside the entrance to a tube station in the heart of London during the evening rush-hour and been moved in spirit at the sight of all these people careering along, each of them with an eternal destiny, each of them at every moment of