

## Daniel's reflection for week beginning 21st August

### Original beauty . .

There can only be a realistic passion for the possible when we are convinced of the divine power that drives our energies beyond limited horizons. Until we re-vision our theology, substituting a more enlightened model of revelation for the dualistic thinking that has dominated our teaching and preaching for centuries, we will never succeed in making that liberating 'paradigm shift' that transforms us to the core of our lives. And until our theology is renewed to bring it into line with the truest traditions of the church, we will never understand the divinity of humanity. We will forever hesitate about transcendence and immanence, following endlessly uncertain cul-de-sacs about false distinctions between 'God and man,' and falling into ambiguous traps about nature and grace. These 'theological glimpses' are but a faint reflection of the thinking of the finest Christian theologians of all time. This general interpretation of incarnational theology is drawn, in particular, from the work of Karl Rahner, widely regarded within the church as the most influential thinker of these centuries, and from the work of St Thomas Aquinas, doctor of the Church and still the Roman Catholic theologian of divine revelation. I offer a number of revelatory quotations from the latter; 'every creature participates in some way in the likeness of the divine essence ... in all creatures there is a footprint of the Trinity.' 'God is not threatened when creation is honoured.' 'To hold creatures cheap is to slight divine power ... in a certain sense, one can say that God is more closely united to each thing than the thing is to itself.' . . . Referring to the energy and image of God in everything, Aquinas writes, 'all natural things were produced by the divine art, and so may be called God's works of art ... Just as flaming up comes with fire, so the existence of any creature comes with the divine presence.' God's delight in the interconnectedness of creation is also made clear. 'God contains all things and hugs them in an embrace insofar as all things are under the divine providence ... The godhead is both a place and foundation and chain connecting all things.' Aquinas had such a profound sense of the holiness of life, a sense that has largely been destroyed because of a dualistic mentality that dominated later theology. 'It is not possible to find something that does not have (some) being and perfection and health ... There is nothing that does not share in goodness and beauty.' Regarding beauty and light he had much to say. 'God is beauty itself, beautifying all things ... with a holy beauty ... God puts into creatures, along with a kind of sheen, a reflection of God's own luminous ray, which is the fountain of all light ... from this Beautiful one, beauty comes to be in all beings, for brightness comes from a consideration of beauty.' There is something earthly and deeply satisfying in the incarnational approach of Aquinas. He stirs memories in us of the intoxication of the Celtic people in their awareness of God's delight. There is a sense of divine ecstasy in his description of creation. 'The godhead, who is the cause of all things, through its beautiful and good love by which it loves all things, according to the abundance of divine goodness by which it loves all things, becomes outside of itself.' Divine love produces ecstasy. Aquinas inspires us with the poetry of his expression. Referring to those who are restored in God's spiritual 'sweetness,' he writes, 'But what is more, they will be drunk, meaning their desires will be filled beyond all measurement of merit. For intoxication is a kind of excess, as the Song of Songs says, "my beloved, you are drunk with love." May the artist and mystic in all of us reach that moment one day.

The composer Schuman, for instance, was drunk with the music within him. During the last year of his life he wrote over 140 songs, more than his total tally until then. 'I will die,' he said to his wife Clara, 'like the nightingale, from singing.'