



Advent 2017

Dear listener,

With the imminent coming of Christmas, the tone of public life in America commonly becomes softer and gentler. Whatever people actually believe about what the holiday means (or once meant), a mood of beneficence often emerges, betraying the haunting (if faint) memory of faith and Christian hope. Some light still shines within our darkened streets, though it may not be recognized as the everlasting Light of Light.

While we may welcome this seasonal de-Scrooging, the annual commemoration of the Nativity ought to offer more. It is, after all, an occasion to take a deep, restorative breath and meditate on the depth of the restoration commenced on that blessed morn (or silent night, or midnight clear) when the Word became flesh. In recent years, I have come to appreciate how much Advent and Christmas meditations profit from deeper attention to the use of the word *logos* to designate the second person of the Trinity.

In a Christmas homily given about ten years ago, Pope Benedict observed that one of the meanings of the word *logos* is *meaning*. He connected the use of this rich word in the opening of the Gospel of John with some affirmations from the first chapter of the first epistle of John:

Thus we can understand John's words as: the 'eternal Meaning' of the world made himself tangible to our senses and our minds: we may now touch him and contemplate him (cf. 1 Jn 1: 1). The 'Meaning' that became flesh is not merely a general idea inherent in the world; it is a 'Word' addressed to us. The *Logos* knows us, calls us, guides us. The Word is not a universal law within which we play some role, but rather a Person who is concerned with every individual person: he is the Son of the living God who became man in Bethlehem.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul echoes the "Word made flesh" theme from the fourth Gospel: "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." And in the letter's second chapter, he reiterates with greater specificity (just in case his readers missed the point the first time): "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells *bodily*."

Based on some of St. Paul's other assertions in his letter, we may infer that the false teachers in Colossae taught that the physical world was inherently evil or spiritually dangerous. But Paul asserts that the material world is the creative work of the One who has saved them. It was in the physical form of a man born of woman that their reconciliation with God was effected. And that physical body — with its human mind and emotions — was mysteriously the living dwelling for the infinite eternal God. As an ancient liturgical text often set to music declares: *Mirabile mysterium declaratur hodie, innovantur naturae; Deus homo factus est* (A wondrous mystery is declared today, an innovation is made upon nature; God is made man).

The fact that the *Logos* was made flesh has cosmic as well as personal consequences. Christ is the source and guarantee of personal meaning precisely because (as the Colossian letter insists):

by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Unfortunately, modern societies so emphasize the *personal* quality of encounter with the *Logos* as to interpret God's presence in the world as an entirely *private* matter. Modern

culture thus pits the personal against the public. And many contemporary Christians seem quite comfortable with a privatized interpretation of faith. As I hope is evident, the mission of MARS HILL AUDIO has always been to challenge that dualism, and to promote confidence and clarity about the comprehensiveness of Christ's authority and presence.

In rendering *Logos* as "Meaning," Pope Benedict reminds us that Christ — the Light of Light, as the Creed says — is the source of intelligibility itself. Taking the passages from John together with the passages from the Colossian letter, we can affirm that everything in Creation has its integrity, its coherence, its order — and hence its rationality and intelligibility — in Christ. The meaning and meaningfulness of everything is sustained by an intrinsic connection to Christ. All things *are* and are *what* they are in Christ. And still further, through Christ all things in the world now blighted by the Fall and the Curse are reconciled to God. All the disruptive, fragmenting, chaos-inviting effects of the Fall are undone by Christ's bodily action in a specific time and place in history. A *comprehensible* world is held in being by Christ, and by him a *comprehensive* salvation was accomplished, promising the recovery of a renewed harmonious order.

In a related key, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews begins his message by assuring readers that an intelligible and decisive word from God has been received, a comprehensible word from the one who created and has now inherited all things, the one who displays the awesome, magnificent beauty of God as he sustains all that belongs to him in existence:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Of course, Advent is a season in which we connect the two comings of Christ. We are living in the last days, a time in which the innovation made upon nature in Bethlehem extends its effects the fulfillment of which we longingly await. But we are not to wait idly: our lives are to be ordered in recognition of *what is* — the order of Creation, established by the *Logos* — and in anticipation of *what will be*: that order's complete recapitulation effected by the *Logos* now made flesh. This is clearly not a merely private matter. We expect, after all, the descent of a city, the new Jerusalem.

The work of MARS HILL AUDIO has always been to explore the cultural consequences of the order lovingly sustained by the *Logos*. Perhaps because we are living in a time of rising incredulity and official hostility to Christian claims about human nature and the shape of Creation, many American Christians are tempted to accept the privatization of religion as long as they feel protected within their own ghetto. Others — eager to champion a public vision for civic betterment — seem more intent on maintaining cultural influence than in exploring with the necessary depth the specific changes our influence might effect.

In your own quest for faithfulness, I hope you appreciate the efforts of MARS HILL AUDIO. We have long labored to discover and promote thinkers who offer the Church wisdom concerning the cosmic and public consequences of Christ's coming. Their books and our conversations typically amplify rather than marginalize the distinctively Christocentric claims that give a specific shape to our public witness.

We've been striving to serve the Church with these explorations for 25 years, thanks to the support of many of our listeners. I hope you can help us continue (and expand) our work with a generous year-end gift. And I hope the coming year is one in which you are guided ever more confidently and thoroughly by the light of the Morning Star.

Gratefully,



Ken Myers