

AN ORATION UPON THE DEATH OF GOD

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My learned and most reverend Friends: I am indeed overmastered by the gravity of our enterprise this night, my intellection numbed, my spirit emptied of all vital power; it being my sacred and most solemn task, justly obedient to the will of this Society and in imitation strict of men of old, so to discipline your wits, and so to exercise your hearts, that they might soar above the Aonian Mount of human, nay, angelic knowledge; there to contemplate, neither the wisdom merely, nor the love, but the being itself, if such there be, of Almighty God. I am poorly matched. The divine Plato himself hath said, 'Tis impossible both to discover the Father and Lord of this universe and to publish Him in words that all can understand.

Consider, then, the prating we intend, the foolish arrogance of our absurder, because much higher, aim. We, theologasters all: pagans, heretics, heresiarchs, schismatics, and some few schoolmen; would become pathologists, insinuating our clever, curious, sublunary hands, stinking and dripping with the melancholic juice, deep within the Primordial Bowels; prying, stretching, tearing flesh from flesh, auguring in search of omens clear that a sometime God hath died. But how, our garments and our persons drenched, the anatomy complete, the heart held high, shall we then know, beyond reproof, whose heart it be, whether His or ours?

We, shameless, dare to transgress the boundaries both of possibility and of fact, and make the ancients blush. Whether a King of Heaven could peradventure be, congruent to the Trivium and methods sound of consistent predication, is not enough for us to ask; nor would the certain science that there doth exist divinity in fact suffice, such intelligence being far too limited a

prize to match the Grail for which we quest. Nay, we would instead, the catapults in place, all engines of destruction fitted for this Promethean cause, defenders ruining from ramparts high; break down the heavenly gates and enter into Light itself, to be familiar and of privy council with Him, if He be upon His throne, considering not that no man entereth in without himself becoming light.

Some sayeth that God be dead. Mark well the subtlety of these intrepid words and the intimacy thus implied. Such revelators neither doubt nor deny existence merely, but, with discourse unabashed, neither agnostical nor atheist, proclaim instead the Divine Condition; and irrefragably asseverate the very power of God, though they think not, unknowing that their unfaithful speech, like an imperial messenger by night, possessed of broken, earthen discs or bones and seals and tokens only, transports such weight and sense. For beneath the seeming blasphemy, within an otherwise sepulchral meditation, a glorious metaphysic lies.

What is this creature Death, what its lineaments, its form and aspect? Death is, forsooth, a parasite, a blood-filled leech, whose gruesome substance is its feeding, its engorgement its existence, which cannot live apart from life. Or, to speak the simpler tongue of clerks and dons, restrained and measured short, all ornament aside, this Death is limitation pure. But hark, my faithful scholars: as every winter turns the recollecting mind to spring, and night to day; as bitter cold is calculated best, not upon our instruments, however fine, but within this mortal frame itself, in the shivering ache of hands and feet remembering meadows fair, with daffodils and golden sun: so doth limitation surely signify a limitation of its own, its own contingency stamped on every feature, every wound and every death.

'Tis true. 'Tis true that God hath died. 'Tis true that He is dead, yea, that He doth die and shall; albeit not in part, nor in time, as thus we

speaking, but indivisibly and eternally. For whosoever else hath such ability? Whence cometh Death if not from Life? What meaneth limitation apart from that thus limited? The most fantastical imagination, swollen past all common sense and nearly burst with pride, could illicitly construct and deceitfully purvey no more vermiculate a belief, no more unwholesome a conviction, than that Death could ever be sustained, in any universe of worlds, except in God. Of course He dies; and some few of our fellows, do let us be reminded, descendants of an ancient sect first known in Palestine, therefore give Him praise, grateful that, in being God, He need not be; that, in the divine abyss, stretched scorching upon the desert of His emptiness, He Himself His very cenotaph, God doth die impassibly.

My spirit filled, my intellection now awake, the gravity of this eulogy made light; commending my few poor thoughts into your hands, my learned and most judicious friends: I herewith make my end.