

Blessed Cave

October 16, 2010

How absurd it is to separate grace from nature! The two are made for one another! How much more absurd to conceive of grace as though it makes war on nature! It makes war on the fallen-ness of our fallen nature, but not on the nature, coming from God, which underlies that fallen-ness. On the contrary, grace exists to heal that underlying nature from its fallen-ness and falls, and to elevate it to divine heights, to a partaking in the very nature of God (II Pet. I, 4).

Now nature without grace may lead to Revolution, but grace scorning nature leads to a false “spirituality,” for instance Jansenism, which also leads to Revolution. Of the gravity of this Protestantising error, which sets grace against nature instead of against sin, I was reminded on a seven-day visit to Italy which took in a visit to four mountainous sites, to which four great medieval Saints, all in the Breviary and the Missal, fled, to get close to God – in Nature. They were, in chronological order, St. Benedict (March 22, Subiaco), St. Romuald, (Feb.7, Camaldoli), St. John Gualbert (July 12, Vallombrosa), and St. Francis of Assisi (Oct.4, la Verna).

From Camaldoli and Vallumbrosa, high in the hills around Florence, two monastic Orders took their name and origin in the 11th century. In la Verna, high in the Tuscan Apennines, St Francis received the stigmata in 1224. All three locations are now reached with relative ease in bus or car, but they are still surrounded by forestland, and they are high enough above sea-level that they must be bitterly cold in winter. That is where these Saints went to commune with God, far from the comfort of cities with their “madding crowd,” still madding enough even in the rather smaller cities of those days.

Perhaps the site which struck me most was Subiaco, an hour’s car journey east of Rome, where St Benedict as a young man

spent three years in a cave perched on a mountainside. Born in 580 A.D., as a young student he fled from the corruption in Rome, and took to the hills at the age of 20 or, some say, 14! – if so, what a teenager! From about 1200 A.D. a full-scale monastery began to be nested in the mountainside around the spot made sacred by this young man, but one can still guess what he found there in his search for God: clouds and sky above, the torrent rustling in the valley far below, nothing but wild woodland on the mountain-face opposite, and for company nothing but the birds wheeling to and fro off the steep cliff-face . . . alone with Nature . . . God's Nature . . . alone with God!

Three years, alone with God . . . those three years so enabled one young Catholic to possess his soul, with Christ, in Nature, that his famous Benedictine Rule enabled the collapsed Roman empire to mutate into soaring Christendom, now in turn collapsing as “Western civilization.” Where are the young Catholics today, who will save Christendom by re-possessing their own souls by re-possessing, with Christ, their nature?

Mother of God, inspire our young men!

Kyrie eleison.