

THE THOMISTIC CONCEPT OF DEVOTION

323

THE same general influence that was behind false Humanism, and, more important at the present time, behind Liberalism and Humanitarianism, the same influence that was behind the great Protestant heresy, is by no means dormant even today. It can best be described as the anthropocentric outlook and is opposed to the outlook that is theocentric.

In dogmatic theology this tendency has resulted in the over-emphasis of one aspect of certain truths to the exclusion of others. Thus, for example, over-insistence upon man's part in his personal sanctification has led to the neglect of the work of the Holy Ghost in that sphere—so much so that in a very real sense the Holy Ghost has become "The Forgotten God." Again in the problem of man's freedom and God's universal causality, it is responsible for the attempt at solution which starts from the fact of man's freedom and, holding this as sacrosanct, is willing to tamper with the principle of God's universal causality. The result is the proposal of a theory that is completely unacceptable from a theocentric point of view. Yet a third example of the influence of this anthropocentric tendency is to be found in the attitude of mind that can conceive of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament as a prisoner, albeit, "A Prisoner of Love," or that thinks of visits to the Blessed Sacrament in terms of comfort and consolation to the hidden Christ. Interesting in this regard is the fact that Saint Thomas who so wrote—both quantitatively and qualitatively—of the Blessed Sacrament as to deserve the title of Eucharistic Doctor, speaks of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar as "King," as "Hidden Godhead," as "Son of God," as "Loving Pelican," as "Lord," and of the Blessed Sacrament as "Bread of Angels," "Bread of Heaven," "Living Bread," "Life-giving Bread," "Remembrance of Christ's Passion," but never of the "Prisoner of Love," nor the object of consolation or of comfort. His mind was too full of the Eternal Majesty which it "failed in trying to contemplate," to have time for such anthropocentric expressions as these.

In moral theology the anthropocentric outlook is responsible for casuistry—the system which, insofar as such an absurdity is possible, tries to take God out of theology. In worship it has resulted in the encouragement of a multitude of altitudinal devotions. This is true to such an extent that liturgy has become a

THE THOMISTIC CONCEPT OF DEVOTION 411

question of pleasing the people rather than of educating them. In church art it is the cause of a sentimentality and superficiality that is unworthy of the Supreme Being to Whom it attempts to pay homage.

Obviously if these things are the result of an anthropocentric outlook, the theocentric is their corrective. This is effected by a proper appreciation in the life of the Christian of the virtue of religion. And this appreciation in turn means the restoration to its place of supreme importance of the first and principal act of religion which is devotion. For devotion has been cast down from the place that required the greatest theologians of the Church and centuries of doctrinal development to discover for it. So true is this that devotion has again become the nebulous, undetermined anything whatsoever that it was before the great saints and theologians undertook to establish its identity. And even Saint Francis of Sales, whom Cayré calls, "The Master of Modern Spirituality," and of whom he says that he is without equal in influence in that field,¹ has to a certain extent at least, ignored all that preceding theologians have done, and has defined devotion as "a certain degree of excellence in charity."²

It is in an attempt to show how much the true concept of devotion differs from that which is ordinarily attributed to it that this study has been undertaken. More particularly, it is with the object of showing precisely what Saint Thomas has contributed to that concept. For while it is perfectly true to say that his doctrine on devotion is original, it is not true in the sense that it is a complete negation of all the doctrine that preceded him. It is still less true to say that his is the doctrine of a particular theologian or even of a particular school. It is the doctrine of the Church expressed by the majority of her great theologians, though not, we grant, with the clarity, completeness and beauty that is to be found in the *Summa Theologica* of the Angelic Doctor.

No attempt has been made here to determine the sources of Saint Thomas' doctrine, nor to propose all the doctrine on devotion that is to be found in the various periods of the Church's history. It is our purpose, rather, to determine precisely what the Angelic Doctor did in bringing to an illuminating culmination the efforts of his predecessors.

The works in which Saint Thomas treated of devotion are considered, as far as possible, in a chronological order. For his teaching on devotion is not the same in his earlier works as it is in the

¹ Cf. *Patrologie et Histoire de la Théologie*, F. Cayré, A. A. Vol. II, p. 841.
² *L'Introduction à la vie devote*, I, c. 1.

Summa Theologica. After tracing the development of his doctrine through his successive works we shall conclude with a short treatment of the place of devotion in the scheme of Christian perfection, as this has been explained for us by two of Saint Thomas' greatest commentators in applying the doctrine which he refined.

I. SAINT THOMAS' CONCEPT OF DEVOTION AS CONTAINED IN HIS COMMENTARY ON THE SENTENCES OF PETER LOMBARD

1. *Introduction*. Because Saint Thomas defines devotion in the *Summa Theologica* as the act by which man is prompt to worship God,³ there is a strong temptation in tracing his doctrine on devotion in his works earlier than and contemporary with the *Summa* to conclude that wherever he uses the word, "prompt," he has reference to the act which in the *Summa* has so determined a meaning and so important a position. But such a conclusion is not warranted for there is a promptitude natural to man's will, resulting from creation and varying in degree in different people.⁴ There is proper to every virtue a readiness to action that does not require the influx of any special quality or act of promptitude. It is a part of the ease of operation which Saint Thomas many times assigns to habits, as he does, for example, when he says that habits in the will are necessary in order that the will be inclined to operate more promptly;⁵ or again when he says that by the moral virtues the appetites are disposed to give prompt obedience to reason.⁶ Then there is the special promptitude that derives from the gifts of the Holy Ghost, a promptitude so essential to these sublime habits that the Angelic Doctor includes it in their very definition.⁷ It would be unsafe, therefore, to conclude from the isolated use of the word promptitude, a use that occurs time and again throughout the

³ Devotio nihil aliud esse videtur quam voluntas quaedam prompte tradendi se ad ea quae pertinent ad Dei famulatum (II-II, q. 82, a. 1, c).
⁴ Videmus in hominibus ex parte corporis magnam diversitatem, secundum quod unus alio ad bonum et malum promptior est, ut patet in diversis hominum complexionibus. Ergo oportet quod eorum animae ex sua creatione diversitatem habeant (II Sent., d. XXXII, q. 2, a. 3, Sed Contra 1).
⁵ Voluntas ex ipsa natura potentiae inclinatur in bonum rationis. Sed quia hoc bonum multipliciter diversificatur, necessarium est ut ad aliquod determinatum bonum rationis voluntas per aliquem habitum inclinetur, ad hoc quod sequatur promptior operatio (*Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 50, a. 5, ad 3um).
⁶ Virtutes morales habitus quidam sunt, quibus vires appetitivae disponuntur ad prompte obediendum rationi (*Ibid.*, q. 68, a. 3, c).
⁷ Dona Spiritus Sancti sunt quidam habitus quibus homo perficitur ad prompte obediendum Spiritui Sancto (*Ibid.*).

works of Saint Thomas, that the promptitude of devotion is intended. And if in addition it is doubtful, as seems probable, whether Saint Thomas limited the notion of devotion to a very well-defined promptitude, prior to his treatment of it in the *Summa*, then the conclusion that he used promptitude and devotion interchangeably in his earlier writings would be very unsound indeed.

The first work of the Angelic Doctor to be considered in tracing his doctrine on devotion is his commentary on the four books of *The Sentences* of Peter Lombard. The natural point at which attention centers is his tract on justice⁹ and more particularly his question on the virtue of religion,¹⁰ for this is the place in which he treats devotion in the *Summa*. But neither in the article on justice nor in the question on the virtue of religion is the word devotion to be found. And since it is still too soon in this paper to conclude to the use of any expression which Saint Thomas may have considered the equivalent of devotion, there remains the alternative of determining its meaning by the study of its use in other places in the *Commentary on the Sentences*.

2. *Devotion and merit*. In his commentary on the second book of the *Sentences* Saint Thomas, speaking of meriting grace, determines that the degree of merit depends upon three things: the degree of charity and grace; the degree of promptitude or voluntariness; and the difficulty of attaining the object.¹⁰ Since he segregates the promptitude of the will from charity and the degree of charity and places it on a par with that virtue as a necessary determinant of the degree of merit, he seems to require a special promptitude over and above that which charity itself as a habit and a virtue gives to its acts. It is possible, therefore, that even at this early date Saint Thomas began to invest devotion with some of the importance that he assigns to it in the *Summa Theologica*. This possibility is confirmed by the close connection between merit and prayer. And, as shall later appear, Saint Thomas in the *Sentences* links prayer and devotion very clearly together. Against this conclusion, however, is an article on merit in the *Summa* in which Saint Thomas says that the promptitude that increases merit is from charity.¹¹ It is impossible, therefore, to conclude with cer-

⁹ *III Sent., d. XXXIII, q. 3, a. 4.* *Ibid., qt. 1.*

¹⁰ Quanto voluntas promptior est ad operandum, tanto homo magis meretur. . . . Quanto enim majori charitate et gratia actus informatur, tanto magis est meritorius; similiter etiam quanto magis est voluntarium, plus habet de ratione meriti et laudabilis; similiter etiam quanto magis obiectum est arduum, tanto magis est actus meritorius. . . . ceteris paribus (*II Sent., d. XXXIX, q. 1, a. 4*).

¹¹ Unicum est laboriosum et difficile quod non prompta voluntate facit; et talis labor dimittit meritum, et a charitate tollitur (*Summa Theol., I-II, q. 114, a. 4*).

tainty either that Saint Thomas is or that he is not speaking of devotion in this place.

In distinction XI of *Second Sentences*,¹¹ the word devotion itself occurs for the first time. "She merited before God," says the Angelic Doctor in speaking of the widow who cast into the treasury two brass mites,¹² "a greater reward than those who offered a larger amount with less devotion."¹³ From the use of the word here several things are clear. Devotion is essentially interior and from the will. This is evident from the fact that precisely because of the devotion with which the small offering of the widow is given, it becomes more meritorious than the larger offerings of others. Indeed precisely because of devotion, that which is externally smaller becomes larger than what is offered by the others. It is important, too, to note that devotion is here clearly used in connection with an act of the virtue of religion—contributing to the support of divine worship. Its use, however, still leaves in doubt the solution of two vital questions—the status of devotion as an act, a mode of action, or a general quality of the soul, and the precise meaning of the word devotion itself. It could in this place very well mean fervor, for it is in contrast with tepidity of will spoken of in the same article.¹⁴

3. *Devotion and worship.* Third *Sentences* makes important use of the word devotion in the question on latría¹⁵ and connects devotion intimately with piety. In order to determine the significance of its use here, it will be necessary to understand what meaning Saint Thomas attached to latría and piety in this place. "Latría," he says, "is a species of justice. It concerns itself with the worship due to God, rendering to Him that to which He has a right."¹⁶ But this is the virtue of religion. Saint Thomas allows the conclusion, only reserving that religion is latría under the aspect of determined works of worship to the offering of which man binds

ad 2um). See also *IV Sent.*, d. XV, q. 1, a. 4, qt. 1, ad 2um. Similiter diminutio poenitentiae ex promptitudine voluntatis, quod facit charitas, non diminuit efficaciam satisfactionis, sed auget.

¹¹ I. e., St. Thomas' *Commentary on the Second Book of the Sentences of Peter Lombard*. Hereinafter this condensed form of reference to the different books of the *Sentences* will be employed.

¹² *Lk.*, xxi, 1-4.

¹³ Vidua illa plus aliis misisse dicitur, quia efficaciori voluntate illud dedit; unde magis merebatur apud Deum de premio essentiali quam illi qui maiora munera minori devotione dabant (*II Sent.*, d. XI, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5um).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ad 1um.

¹⁵ Reddere debitum est actus iustitiae. Sed latría est cultus Deo debitus; unde exhibet Deo quod ei debetur. Ergo latría est pars iustitia (*III Sent.*, d. IX, q. 1, a. 1, Sed Cont. 2).

himself as to that which is God's right.¹⁷ Piety, he here defines, as latría under the aspect of that which is its first effect, namely, devotion.¹⁸ Hence he makes the clear and significant statement that devotion is the first effect of religion, for religion, latría, and piety are here used by Saint Thomas merely as different names for the same virtue.¹⁹ A little later Saint Thomas insists upon the point that piety as it is accepted here consists in devotion toward God to Whom worship is given and in this precisely it differs from the gift of piety. "The gift," Saint Thomas says, "consists in a certain benevolence not limited or judged by human standards but by the divine, and the object of this benevolence is not only God but man also."²⁰ It is curious to think of man being benevolent toward God. Yet in a certain sense man is. Saint Thomas explains in what sense when he says that the virtue of piety has God for its object but God as the giver of all things to Whom a debt is owed. The gift, however, sees God not as a creditor but as one who is worthy of honor in Himself apart from any of His gifts.²¹ By reason of this distinction between the virtue and the gift of piety, the Angelic Doctor has irrevocably linked devotion with the virtue of religion. He has placed devotion in direct antithesis to benevolence and thus orientated its essential note as one of obligation and servitude. Besides confirming what he has already determined—that devotion is interior, from the will, and pertaining essentially to the virtue of religion—he has added here the important notion that devotion is the first effect of religion. But he leaves unanswered, for the present, the question of the nature of the effect. Is it an act, a mode of action, or a disposition of the soul? Is it restricted in its meaning to promptitude in the service of God, or does it include all that the notion of service includes?

4. *Devotion and the Sacraments.* In the Fourth Book of

¹⁷ Latría dicitur religio quantum ad determinationem operum ad quae homo se obligando in cultum Dei determinat (*Ibid.*, qt. 4).

¹⁸ Latría dicitur pietas quantum ad effectum devotionis, quod primum occurrit (*Ibid.*).

¹⁹ Quandoque latría sumitur pro habitu quo exhibetur obsequium. Hoc modo est virtus. Et nominatur haec virtus quatuor nominibus . . . pietas . . . theosebeia . . . latría . . . religio (*Ibid.*).

²⁰ Pietas secundum quod donum, consistit in quadam benevolentia supra modum humanum ad omnes; sed pietas, secundum quod hic accipitur, consistit in quadam devotione ad Deum, cui latría exhibetur (*Ibid.*, ad 4um).

²¹ Quamvis pietas virtus quae latría dicitur, ipsi Deo exhibetur; in hoc tamen accipit aliquid humanum pro mensura, scilicet beneficium a Deo acceptum, ratione cuius est debitor ei; sed pietas quae est donum, accipit in hoc aliquid divinum pro mensura, ut scilicet Deo honorem impendat, non quia sit ei debitus, sed quia Deus honore dignus est . . . (*III Sent.*, d. XXXIV, q. 3, a. 2, qt. 1, ad 1um).

