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The Doctrine of Justification According to Thomas Aquinas

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then he calls attention to morals. Faith must therefore precede good works; the good works and morals of the Christians are fruits of their faith in Christ. While he does speak of the crucified Christ, he is happiest when he speaks of the resurrected Christ. Cf. his remarks on Heb. 2:14. Christ conquered death, and we Christians need no longer harbor any fears of death. Luther even advises the Christian to wish for death, since it puts an end to his sins, serves as a portal to eternal life, and leads him from this world to his home above. (On Heb. 11:4.) The Christian should always be happy, and songs should ever be on his lips (*semper gaudere, semper cantare*; on Heb. 5:6).

Many other points could be adduced to prove conclusively that Luther was a well-equipped theologian as early as 1517; but what has been mentioned will suffice to prove that he was not a mad monk or an ignorant priest when he nailed his theses to the door of the Castle Church. He was a man thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures, intimately acquainted with the writings of the Church Fathers, well versed in Greek and Hebrew, sound and sober in his Christianity. If would-be prophets and reformers within the Christian Church today would first learn to equip themselves as well as did Martin Luther, the Church of Jesus Christ would not be obliged to suffer and chafe as she must.

Fort Wayne, Ind.

WALTER E. BUSZIN

The Doctrine of Justification According to Thomas Aquinas

Before the Reformation there were two streams of thought within the Christian Church. The one was evangelical; the other was legalistic. The one confessed and restated (though not always clearly) the truth of Scripture; the other was a development of that moralism which was so prevalent in the Post-Apostolic Age. The one may be compared with an underground stream sometimes reaching the surface as in Bernard of Clairvaux (cf. *C. T. M.*, Oct., 1937); the other may be compared to a deep and broad river flowing above the ground and carrying in it all the contamination and filth which it has accumulated from its tributaries.

In the centuries preceding the Reformation this river had become thoroughly polluted. Law and Gospel were not only confounded, but the Gospel was regarded as the Law, the New Law taking the place of the Old Law promulgated on Mount Sinai. Another point must here be emphasized. Even as in the first centuries after the apostles, so the primary emphasis was laid not

on the guilt of sin but rather on its corruption or dominion. The first and foremost question was not: "How may I receive forgiveness of my sins?" but rather: "How can I be healed from the service of sin?" for it was held that forgiveness would necessarily follow if sin was destroyed in the individual. Scripture, however, teaches that in Christ we have forgiveness of sin, and therefore, in consequence of this forgiveness, we are cleansed and healed from all unrighteousness. In other words, justification (being declared righteous) is followed by sanctification (being made righteous). But through the centuries it was taught that through Christ sin is destroyed in us and therefore, in consequence of this healing process, continuing throughout life, we have forgiveness of sin. In other words, it was believed that being made righteous is followed by being declared righteous, and both these elements are included in, and form an integral part of, the act of justification. It is but natural that under these circumstances the word "justification" should receive the meaning "making righteous" instead of, as in Scripture, "declaring righteous."

Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274) is the theologian *par excellence* of the Catholic Church, for at the Council of Trent his *Summa Theologiae* was laid on the altar together with the Bible and the Papal Decretals. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII appropriated 300,000 lire to defray the expenses of a new edition of his writings (we quote from the second, revised edition), and according to the New Canon Law, issued by the authority of Pope Benedict XV (1917), the theological student must devote two years to philosophy and four years to theology, and this "study of philosophy and theology and the teaching of these sciences to their students must be accurately carried out by professors (in seminaries, etc.) according to the arguments, doctrine, and principles of St. Thomas, which they are inviolately to hold." *

Following in the footsteps of the other scholastic theologians, Thomas Aquinas taught that man was created in *puris naturalibus*, i. e., without positive righteousness and without positive unrighteousness. To this was added a supernatural endowment which caused the body to be subject to the soul, the natural powers to be subject to reason, and reason to be subject to God. "For this rectitude [of the primitive state] consisted in his reason being

* Neo-Scholastics are making a determined effort to bring the spirit and method of Thomas Aquinas also into philosophy. Dr. Zybura states that the mere cataloguing of the titles on researches in scholastic philosophy fills 157 closely packed octavo pages. (*Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy and Thomistic Principles*, by R. G. Bandas.) See also chapter on Neo-Thomism in E. E. Aubrey, *Recent Doctrinal Tendencies*. — Ed. Com.

subject to God, the lower powers to reason, and the body to the soul; and the first subjection was the cause of both the second and the third. . . . Such a subjection . . . was not a merely natural gift but a supernatural endowment of grace." 1)

Through Adam's sin "original justice was taken away" and "forfeited," 2) and this "privation of original justice, whereby the will was made subject to God, is the formal element of original sin." 3) Because the supernatural endowment has been lost, original sin is followed by inordinate acts, "not directly, but indirectly, viz., by the removal of the obstacle, i. e., original justice, which hindered inordinate movements," 4) and such "inordinateness," which may be called "by the general name of concupiscence," is the "material element" of original sin. 5)

The privation of original justice and, with it, the inordinate disposition has been inherited by all men 6) and causes man to incur a triple loss. "He incurs a stain, inasmuch as he forfeits the luster of grace through the deformity of sin. Natural good is corrupted, inasmuch as man's nature is disordered by man's will not being subject to God's; and this order being overthrown, the consequence is that the whole nature of sinful man remains disordered. Lastly, there is the debt of punishment, inasmuch as by sinning man deserves everlasting damnation." 7) Note that Aquinas does not consider the corruption due to original sin very great. Here we have a fundamental difference between the Catholic and the Lutheran Church.

The triple loss which man has suffered through original sin cannot be restored except by God. "Since the luster of grace springs from the shedding of divine light, this luster cannot be brought back except God shed His light anew; hence a habitual gift is necessary, and this is the light of grace. Likewise, the order of nature can only be restored, i. e., man's will can only be subject to God, when God draws man's will to Himself. So, too, the guilt of eternal punishment can be remitted by God alone, against whom the offense was committed and who is man's Judge." 8) Three things must therefore take place if man is to be healed: new grace must be infused; man's will must be turned to God; 9) the debt of punishment must be remitted. These, as we shall see later, are the three, or rather the four, elements of justification.

1) *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 95, a. 1.

2) *Summa*, II, I, q. 85, a. 5.

3) *Summa*, II, I, q. 82, a. 3.

4) *Summa*, II, I, q. 82, a. 1.

5) *Summa*, II, I, q. 82, a. 3.

6) *Summa*, II, I, q. 81, a. 3.

7) *Summa*, II, I, q. 109, a. 7.

8) *Summa*, II, I, q. 109, a. 7.

9) This is later divided positively and negatively as free will's movement toward God and toward sin. Cf. *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 6.

Grace, which is "a partaking of the divine nature"¹⁰⁾ or "a participated likeness of the divine nature,"¹¹⁾ was also in Christ,¹²⁾ and that personal grace "whereby the soul of Christ is justified is essentially the same as His grace, as He is the Head of the Church and justifies others."¹³⁾ As the Head of the Church, which is His body, Christ has the "power of bestowing grace on all the members of the Church."¹⁴⁾ Grace therefore "first" filled God's Son made man, and "thence" it "flowed to us" and is "given to us by means of certain external sensible objects."¹⁵⁾ These sensible objects are the sacraments, "whereby we obtain grace."¹⁶⁾

But what of the Passion of Christ if grace is bestowed on the members of the Church through the incarnation of the Son of God? We noted before that not only must the stain of sin be removed, but that it is also necessary that the debt of punishment be satisfied. Christ's Passion "was not only a sufficient but a superabundant atonement for the sins of the human race,"¹⁷⁾ and as such it is the proper cause for forgiveness, "first of all, by way of exciting our charity. . . . Secondly, Christ's Passion causes forgiveness of sins by way of redemption. For since He is our Head, then, by the Passion which He endured from love and obedience, He delivered us as His members from our sins, as by the price of His Passion. . . . Thirdly, by way of efficiency, inasmuch as Christ's flesh, wherein He endured the Passion, is the instrument of the Godhead, so that His sufferings and actions operate with divine power for expelling sin."¹⁸⁾ Aquinas does not know the Scriptural doctrine of the objective justification, that God has in Christ once and for all objectively forgiven man all his sins. His atonement theory is really a conglomeration of thoughts developed before his time and may be summarized as follows: God is now willing because of what Christ has done to forgive man all his sins, provided man does his part. Here again we have a fundamental difference between the Catholic and the Lutheran Church. We shall return to the idea of satisfaction when we treat of the sacrament of penance.

"The end of every Law is to make men righteous and virtuous, and consequently the end of the Old Law was the justification of men. The Law, however, could not accomplish this, but foreshadowed it by certain ceremonial actions and promised it in words. And in this respect the New Law fulfils the Old by justifying men through the power of Christ's Passion."¹⁹⁾ The Gos-

10) *Summa*, II, I, q. 112, a. 1.

11) *Summa*, III, q. 62, a. 1.

12) *Summa*, III, q. 7, a. 1.

13) *Summa*, III, q. 8, a. 5.

14) *Summa*, III, q. 8, a. 1.

15) *Summa*, II, I, q. 108, a. 1.

16) *Summa*, II, I, q. 108, a. 2.

17) *Summa*, III, q. 48, a. 2.

18) *Summa*, III, q. 49, a. 1.

19) *Summa*, II, I, q. 107, a. 2.

pel is therefore nothing but the New Law which justifies men, that is, makes them righteous and virtuous, and implies "a transmutation from the state of injustice to the aforesaid [original] state of justice."²⁰⁾

To justify the sinner, four things are necessary: "the infusion of grace, the movement of free will towards God by faith, the movement of free will towards (Latin, "in") sin, and the remission of sins."²¹⁾ In "their natural order" the infusion of grace is first; the second is the free will's movement towards God; the third is the free will's movement over against sin; and last is the remission of sin, "to which this transmutation is ordained as to an end."²²⁾

First, then, it is necessary that grace be infused.²³⁾ God infuses "certain forms or supernatural qualities, whereby they" (whom God moves) "may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good."²⁴⁾ This grace "puts something into our soul" and is that "whereby a man is made worthy of eternal life."²⁵⁾

The second point in the justification of the sinner is the movement of free will towards God. "God so infuses the gift of justifying grace that at the same time He moves the free will to accept the gift of grace in such as are capable of being moved thus."²⁶⁾ In other words, God turns the mind to Himself. Such return of the mind to God is "by faith," but the "movement of faith is not perfect unless it is quickened by charity; hence in justification of the ungodly a movement of charity is infused together with the movement of faith." Now, when Aquinas speaks of justifying faith, he does not mean trust and confidence in, and the acceptance of, the objective reconciliation and justification but that a man believes "that God justifies man through the mystery of Christ."²⁷⁾

The third step in justification is the drawing away from sin. "The human mind, whilst it is being justified, must by a movement of its free will withdraw from sin and draw near to justice. Now, to withdraw from sin and to draw near to justice in an act of free will means detestation and desire. . . . Hence in justification of the ungodly there must be two acts of the free will: one whereby it tends to God's justice, the other whereby it hates sin."²⁸⁾

The fourth and last step and the end of justification is the remission of sins. "The justification of the ungodly is a movement whereby the soul is moved by God from a state of sin to a state of justice. Now, in the movement whereby one thing is moved by another three things are required: first, the motion of

20) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 1.

21) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 6.

22) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 8.

23) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 2.

24) *Summa*, II, I, q. 110, a. 2.

25) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 2.

26) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 3.

27) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 4.

28) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 5.

the mover; secondly, the movement of the moved; thirdly, the consummation of the movement or attainment of the end. On the part of divine motion there is the infusion of grace; on the part of free will, which is moved, there are two movements: of departure from the term (*terminus*) whence and of approach to the term whereto; but the consummation of the movement, or the attainment of the end of the movement, is implied in the remission of sin; for in this is the justification of the ungodly completed."²⁹⁾ In other words, since grace is infused and the sinner turned towards God, he has forgiveness of sins. However, the various things mentioned, i. e., the infusion of grace, the movement of free will, and the forgiveness of sin, do not take place successively but all take place "in an instant."³⁰⁾

We noted before that grace is obtained through the sacraments,³¹⁾ for through the sacraments "Christ's Passion is, so to say, applied to man,"³²⁾ and thereby "man is made holy."³³⁾ In the Catholic Church there are seven sacraments; we, however, will only refer to the sacrament of Baptism and that of penance.

Through Baptism man is "incorporated in the very death of Christ,"³⁴⁾ and thereby "every sin is taken away"; for, as Augustine says, through Baptism "not only original but also wilful sin is forgiven."³⁵⁾ Since "all sins are loosed" through Baptism, therefore "no kind of satisfaction should be enjoined on one who is being baptized for any sins whatever."³⁶⁾

But what of sins committed after Baptism? There the sacrament of penance, the "second plank after shipwreck," is necessary for mortal sins. Why? "Because charity demands that a man should grieve for the offense committed against his friend and that he should be anxious to make satisfaction to his friend; faith requires that he should seek to be justified from his sins through the power of Christ's Passion which operates in the sacraments of the Church; and well-ordered piety necessitates that man should succor himself by repenting of the pitiful condition into which sin has brought him."³⁷⁾

Distinguishing between venial and mortal sins, Aquinas held that for the remission of a venial sin "it is not necessary that habitual grace be infused, but a movement of grace or charity suffices." But "whenever grace is infused anew, venial sins are forgiven."³⁸⁾ Venial sins are therefore remitted "by the Eucharist, extreme unction, and by all the sacraments of the New Law with-

29) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 6.

30) *Summa*, II, I, q. 113, a. 7.

31) Cf. *Summa*, III, q. 62, a. 1.

32) *Summa*, III, q. 61, a. 1.

33) *Summa*, III, q. 61, a. 3.

34) *Summa*, III, q. 68, a. 5.

35) *Summa*, III, q. 69, a. 1.

36) *Summa*, III, q. 68, a. 5.

37) *Summa*, III, q. 84, a. 5.

38) *Summa*, III, q. 87, a. 2.

out exception." They may also be remitted by the general confession, the beating of one's breast, the prayer for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, a bishop's blessing, the sprinkling of holy water, any sacramental anointing, a prayer said in a dedicated church and anything else of this kind.³⁹⁾ However, "it is impossible for a mortal actual sin to be pardoned without penance, if we speak of penance as a virtue"; i. e., grace must be infused anew, for in mortal sin "it is necessary for man's will to be so changed as to turn to God and to renounce having turned to something else."⁴⁰⁾ Again, in a venial sin, where man "turns inordinately to a mutable good without turning from God," man incurs a debt "not of eternal but of temporal punishment"; but in a mortal sin he incurs both an eternal and a temporal punishment. "In so far as mortal sin turns away from the immutable Good, it induces a debt of eternal punishment," but "in so far as mortal sin turns inordinately to a mutable good, it gives rise to a debt of some punishment," which is a temporal punishment.⁴¹⁾

Since the days of Tertullian penance was divided into contrition, confession, and satisfaction, and thus it is also defined by Aquinas.⁴²⁾

Contrition had been defined as "an assumed sorrow for sins, together with the purpose of confessing them and making satisfaction for them."⁴³⁾ With this definition Aquinas agrees, though he maintains that the "essence" of contrition is the "displeasure of past sin."⁴⁴⁾ Contrition effects the forgiveness of sin inasmuch as, being "part of a sacrament," it operates as an "instrument" for the infusion of grace.⁴⁵⁾ (The forgiveness of sin is "chiefly" effected "by the power of the keys, which is vested in the ministers, who furnish the formal part of the sacrament."⁴⁶⁾ Now, if contrition is "so intense," it will suffice for the remission of both guilt and punishment; but since "a man cannot be sure that his contrition suffices for the remission of both punishment and guilt," therefore "he is bound to confess and make satisfaction."⁴⁷⁾ But contrition

39) *Summa*, III, q. 87, a. 3.

40) *Summa*, III, q. 86, a. 2.

41) *Summa*, III, q. 86, a. 4.

42) *Summa*, III, q. 90, a. 2.

43) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 1, a. 1. (The Supplement to the *Summa Theologiae* was not written by Aquinas himself, but was compiled after his death from his *Commentary on the Fourth Book of the Sentences of Peter Lombard*.)

44) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 3, a. 1.

45) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 5, a. 1; cf. *Summa*, III, q. 86, a. 6.

46) *Summa*, III, q. 86, a. 6; cf. *Summa*, III, q. 84, a. 3.

47) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 5, a. 2.

is also to be regarded as a necessary "disposition" for justification.⁴⁸⁾ However, it may happen, that the sinner is not "perfectly disposed for the reception of grace"; i. e., he may only be attrite and not contrite. Then the sinner will receive "grace at the very time of sacramental confession and absolution, provided he offers no obstacle."⁴⁹⁾ In other words, through confession and absolution attrition is changed to contrition.

In a mortal sin confession is necessary for two reasons: first, in order that the sinner "may receive pardon for his sins" through the ministers of the Church, and secondly, in order that the minister may "apply a fitting remedy," which he cannot do unless he is acquainted with the particular sin.⁵⁰⁾ Through the Office of the Keys the guilt of sin is forgiven,⁵¹⁾ and thereby the debt of eternal punishment is "entirely absolved," and even some of the temporal punishment is "taken off."⁵²⁾ However, even though the sin is forgiven, "the sinner still owes a debt of temporal punishment," which is expiated "by undergoing the shame of confession, by the power of the keys, to which he submits, and by the enjoined satisfaction, which the priest moderates according to the kind of sins made known to him in confession."⁵³⁾

We noted before that Christ has offered a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the world. Why, then, is it necessary for the sinner to satisfy for his sins? Because "it is necessary that those who sin after Baptism be likened unto Christ's suffering by some form of punishment or suffering which they endure in their own person; yet, by the cooperation of Christ's satisfaction, much lighter penalty suffices than one that is proportionate to the sin."⁵⁴⁾ According to Aquinas there are two kinds of satisfaction, that of the God-man, which is condign, and that of man, which is congruous.⁵⁵⁾ Man cannot make a condign satisfaction, for "it is impossible to make equivalent satisfaction to God"; nevertheless, it is possible for man "to make sufficient satisfaction."⁵⁶⁾ Since God is satisfied with such a satisfaction, therefore it suffices. A sufficient satisfaction may be made by penal works,⁵⁷⁾ i. e., through almsdeeds, fasting, and prayer.⁵⁸⁾ However, if sufficient satisfaction is not rendered in this world, then the sinner must endure the torments of purgatory.⁵⁹⁾

48) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 5, a. 1.

49) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 18, a. 1.

50) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 6, a. 1.

51) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 18, a. 1; cf. *Summa*, III, q. 86, a. 6.

52) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 18, a. 2.

53) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 6, a. 1.

54) *Summa*, III, q. 49, a. 3.

55) *Summa*, III, q. 1, a. 2.

56) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 13, a. 1.

57) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 15, a. 1.

58) *Summa*, Suppl., q. 15, a. 3.

59) *Summa*, Appendix, I, a. 1.

In this discussion of justification we have so far passed over a very important question, namely, whether any preparation and disposition is required on man's part for grace. Aquinas was a decided adherent of Augustinianism and taught that God alone is the cause of grace,⁶⁰⁾ and yet he, too, affirmed that a certain preparation and disposition is necessary if man is to receive grace. It is true that Aquinas maintained that this preparation "is principally from God, who moves the free will";⁶¹⁾ nevertheless, man must do what is in him, for "it is in the power of free will to hinder or not to hinder the reception of grace."⁶²⁾ Aquinas claimed that man could only negatively prepare himself for grace; but in this he was not followed by the great majority of theologians of that day nor by the Council of Trent, which declared that adults "may be disposed through His quickening and assisting grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to, and cooperating with, that said grace."⁶³⁾

Another important question is whether man can know that he has grace. In Aquinas we have the same uncertainty of salvation that we find in all Catholic theology since the time of Gregory the Great. Man can never be certain of obtaining salvation, for he can never be certain that God has really infused grace into his heart. "His presence in us and His absence cannot be known with certainty. . . . Hence man cannot judge with certainty that he has grace." Man may know "conjecturally by signs," and thus "any one may know he has grace when he is conscious of delighting in God and of despising worldly things and inasmuch as a man is not conscious of any mortal sin."⁶⁴⁾ But in the last analysis eternal salvation and eternal damnation are dependent on the eternal predestination or reprobation of God. "Predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory; so also reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin and to impose the punishment on account of that sin."⁶⁵⁾ Such predestination or reprobation, i. e., to grant or to withhold grace, "depends on His simple will."⁶⁶⁾ God wills eternal salvation "to some in preference to others";⁶⁷⁾ for though "God loves all men and wishes them all some good, He does not wish every good to

60) *Summa*, II, I, q. 112, a. 1.

61) *Summa*, II, I, q. 112, a. 2.

62) *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, c. 159.

63) *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sess. vi, chap. v.

64) *Summa*, II, I, q. 112, a. 5.

65) *Summa*, I, q. 23, a. 3.

66) *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, II, c. 161.

67) *Summa*, I, q. 23, a. 4.

them all." To the reprobate God "does not wish this particular good, namely, eternal life."⁶⁸⁾

Now, it may be true that Luther never made a thorough study of Thomas Aquinas, but these two thoughts, that man must do what is in him in order that he may be a worthy recipient of grace and that God has predestinated some and reprobated others, these two thoughts which were developed further by the later theologians, especially by the so-called "moderns," caused Luther to be tormented in body and soul. Of this, God willing, we shall treat in a subsequent paper.

Morrison, Ill.

THEO. DIERKS

Sermon Study on 1 John 2:12-17

Eisenach Epistle for the Second Sunday in Lent

In the opening verses of his letter, John had laid the foundation for all his subsequent teachings by recalling for his own and his readers' adoring contemplation the manifestation of the eternal Son of God in the flesh, 1:1-3. His purpose in so doing was to bring his readers — and that includes us — to fellowship with himself and thereby with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and thus to fulfil their joy, 1:3, 4. This joyous message of fellowship with God and His Son is the strongest and most effective antidote against Sadducean sin service, which militates against this fellowship with Light and has no part in the blood of Jesus, 1:5-7, and against pharisaic self-satisfaction, running counter to the work and veracity of Christ, vv. 8-10. In his sincere endeavor to guard his readers against sin and its baneful effects, he once more reminds them of their Advocate and His universal propitiation, but immediately adds that only then do they truly know this Advocate if they keep His commandments and walk as He walked, 2:1-6. And this is not a new commandment but an old and well-known one, v. 7, and yet a new commandment, coming with new strength and with fresh obligation, since darkness is passing away and light is already shining, the light which came in Christ Jesus, v. 8. What an incentive to walk in that light by walking in that love and fellowship with the brethren, vv. 9-11, to which he had already referred, 1:5-7, and in that love and fellowship with Him who is Light, 1:5, 6, which keeps itself unspotted from the world and its lusts, 2:12-17.

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young

68) *Summa*, I, q. 23, a. 3.