

mother'. The symbols of the grass, the flower, and the spray are essentially liturgical. The rising of the dew on the grass symbolizes the incarnation of the divine Word through a mortal mother, for all flesh is grass (Is. xl, 6). The rising of the dew on the flower symbolizes the incarnation of the divine Word in the perfection of mortality, for the Virgin is *flos florum*. The rising of the dew on the spray symbolizes the incarnation of the divine Word from Mary of the stem of Jesse: and there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse: and a flower shall rise up out of his root (Is. xi, 1). The accumulation of praise in the lyric, rising to a climax, suggests the repetition and accumulation of praise in the litanies.

By drawing attention to these few examples of the religious lyric in Middle English, I have tried to show that the poet's aim is to communicate, not to conceal; that the literary forms and conventions he uses are traditional, and that the symbols he employs depend for their effectiveness on their commonplace, homely nature, on the explanatory context, or on a framework of intellectual references which we may have since lost. It is for us to recover, as far as we can, this body of associations, and I suggest we may profitably start with the scriptures, canonical and apocryphal, the writings of the Fathers, and the liturgy.



JUSTICE IN THE TEACHING OF ST THOMAS

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THE purpose of this article is to see with St Thomas some aspects of the moral movement of man towards his creator, those aspects namely that have to do with his fellow travellers on the way to God, man's positive contribution to human social living. And this human social life, being human, should be rational; yet, as St Francis of Sales observes in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, seldom do we meet rational animals who are reasonable! There is so much injustice in the world, in spite of reason's dictating to us that the good things of this world

should be evenly distributed according to each one's need and place in society. Millions of our fellow men struggle to keep alive at bare subsistence level. The more one studies history, the more one sees it as continual warfare, cynics would say a losing battle, to obtain justice. But for the man who sees things in the wisdom of the science of God this is no surprise but the inevitable result of the overthrow of original justice in the fall of man. We must then see, with St Thomas, where justice occurs in the supernatural economy of creation.

Faithful to his purpose, clearly expressed in the prologue to the *Summa Theologica*, St Thomas wishes to teach us, not according to the order of some previously written book, but according to the order of things as they actually exist. And in the very first article of the *Summa* sacred teaching, coming down to us through the light of divine revelation, is shown to be necessary because man does not in fact exist in a merely natural order of things, but in a creation which was ordained by God to be directed to himself in the inner mystery and beauty of his own divine life. In this supernatural sphere all is accomplished. So the theologian admits of no such state as one of pure nature. All good and all evil now have to be seen in terms of the godhead. Before the fall everything was in order. Nothing was out of place, but in a state of original justice, in which everything and everyone was given a due and proportionate share of all good things. After the fall this blissful condition gave place to original sin, with the order and balance of justice confused and overthrown as indeed all men see it today. 'For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain until now.' Thus man's salvation is put in terms of the word 'redemption,' of buying back at a great cost what was by man so recklessly cast away. That is the simple Christian teaching which forms the burden of the message of the Christian teacher and causes him to formulate the classical threefold division of his science: the first part concerned with God and the procession of creatures from him; the second part, the movement of the rational creature, man, back to God; and the third, the way of the Word made flesh and of redemptive suffering with its continuance through space and time in the sacramental life of the body of Christ which is the Church. This is the division as coming from the lips of our Lord himself: 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. The way of human life from birth to death, the truth according

to which men must direct the movement of their minds and wills along that way, and the divine life of God himself from which all things flow, 'in whom we live and move and have our being'. Justice is considered by the theologian as part of that movement ever nearer towards God which is the true meaning of morality. It must be noted that this progress of human behaviour is meaningless for the follower of Christ when it is dissociated from its source and its end, God. So the basic worth of justice is the establishment once more, the restoring, of all things in Christ. This obliges the Christian to be *par excellence* the just man. Having seen where in theology the subject of justice is treated, the next thought must be of the general divisions of the virtue itself. This includes a study of the notion of fair treatment, rights, dues, the attainment of which is the objective of this virtue. This is followed by seeing those subjective dispositions or habits which build up the character of the just person. And in analysing the virtues it is the practice of St Thomas to base his division or analysis on the analogy of the divisions of human nature. He talks of integral, specific and potential parts. By these words he means the component elements which make up the completed virtue, the different kinds of justice, and its allied or kindred virtues, which while not being strictly speaking justice, yet more resemble it than any other virtue.

Firstly then the object of justice is something which is called the *jus*—roughly, right or claim arising out of work, payment or inheritance. This is very fundamental to all of us, so fundamental that at times men are prepared to go almost to ridiculous lengths to obtain or to defend their rights. The case a year or so ago of the strike on Merseyside as to who should drill holes, which caused the loss of millions of pounds worth of orders for shipbuilding, was a sad example of the emergence of this instinct. Often in institutions like schools, hospitals and even religious houses, feelings tend to be roused when the question of rights is under discussion. Phrases like '*It isn't fair*' haunt us through life. It is the business of justice to sort it all out according to the equality of men in their dealings with each other, but always according to the ordered arrangement of things as flowing from the creative hand of God. In this connection it is most essential to see the difference of approach and order of a pagan like Aristotle or Plato from that of the Christian teacher, exemplified for us in the person of St

Thomas. The pagan philosophers were and are influenced by the environment of their native cultures, in the case of the Greeks of the time of Plato and Aristotle, by culture and by philosophy at an extremely advanced level, but nonetheless following the order of man's natural approach to knowledge, namely through his senses, from the lower to the higher. With the Christian teacher the process is reversed. He descends from the light of God's revelation. Whereas Aristotle in the *Ethics* begins with the lower virtues of temperance and bodily pleasure, pain and courage, gradually mounting to the external affairs of society in justice, which leads on to friendship, made possible by the equality rising out of civilized living, and finally to the attainment by a privileged few of the heights of contemplation of divine goodness, St Thomas in his arrangement of the virtues begins with faith, hope and love of God which gives the grace and strength to deal with our disordered passions. This order has an urgent practical significance. The cultivation of the theological virtues is the mainspring of all morality for the Christian. We cannot of ourselves by mere earnestness deal with the ravages of sin. 'Without me you can do nothing.' And since this great gift has been given us the great sins are the sins against faith, hope, and charity. Thus in the tragedy of Judas, the betrayer, his sin is not so much his money-grabbing, his greed, but his refusal in black despair to turn back to our Lord for forgiveness. So there is a great contrast between the severities of the old law and those of the law of the gospel; 'Let him who is without sin amongst you cast the first stone'. Christ did not come to destroy but to fulfil. He was to build up an even greater justice by restoring all things in himself. Since his supreme sacrifice all men can now, if they wish, claim the rights of the adopted sons of God. All can now be born again of water and the Holy Ghost. All can partake, on an equal footing, of the sacred banquet in which Christ is received. This great right transcends all differences of rank, race and class. At the altar rail, pope and prince, cardinal and peasant are all equal. Yet these differences are not destroyed, rather is their dignity enhanced by the higher end to which they are now directed. Therefore the cruellest thing is for man now ever to forget that in his neighbour there resides the image of the Son of God. So both virtue and vice become infinitely expanded into the heroic virtue of the saints and the diabolical cruelties of, for

example, the Spanish Inquisition and the Nazi concentration camps of Catholic Bavaria.

We must now turn our attention to the subjective aspects of justice, having seen in brief its object. This quality is not characteristic of the sensual and imaginative side of man but is the concern of the reasonable appetite, the will. A steadfast and enduring will to give to each his due is the definition of justice. The focal point of the teaching here is that rights are measured quite independently of whatever we may feel emotionally about them. The Latin tag is *medium justitiae est medium REI*. It is evidence, cold, clear and objective, that is dealt with in the act that is most characteristic of justice, which is the act of the judge acting precisely as a judge, namely in the act of judgment. So throughout justice there is great emphasis on precision and accuracy of measurement which, when seen out of context, within the narrow confines of legalism and casuistry, can be exasperating. But there is no other way of being just except by minute and careful attention to the least detail. We talk of the balance of justice and symbolize it in the perfect balance of the weighing scales. This is contrasted with the more subjective qualities of temperance and courage, the virtuousness of which is measured not so much by the quality of their objects, as by what any given individual can take. What is virtuous for one may well be vicious for another. But in justice when half a crown is due to someone then half a crown must be returned, no more, no less. In itself justice is hard and utterly unconcerned with feelings. Skilful counsel for prosecution and for defence often appeal to the emotions of the jury, but the final calm sifting and summing up of the evidence by the judge is done on neutral ground, coldly, with clarity and with great deliberation. This judicial process is but the extension of the way justice should develop within the soul of each individual, a deliberate objective seeing of all sides of the question, what are the facts, and if they are not clear then being content to go on with investigation until they become so. This linking up of the virtue of justice with the procedure of the administration of justice in courts takes up a good deal of the space allotted by St Thomas to this important and lengthy treatise.

We must now return to another element of justice. It belongs to justice to make men equal. Equality is one of the great revolutionary words. It is an astounding thing about St Thomas in all

his teaching that he takes this equality of human beings, precisely as human, almost as an axiom. This notion of equality is indeed a thorny one. Many disastrous movements have been started in its name. But whatever difficulties there may be in this matter of equality, there is no doubt whatever that it is the great truth of Christianity that all men are equal in so far as they are all made in the image and likeness of God. It is borne out in the lives of all the saints that they shared in the infinite compassion of God, who allowed himself in the person of the Word made flesh to be crucified between two thieves. What a lesson is to be learned from the words addressed to the good thief, 'This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise'! The sole obstacle to this true equality is the very root and cause of all injustice, bad will. It is because men will not recognize this basic equality of the brotherhood of man that injustice thrives among them. As the cynics put it, 'All men are equal, but some are more equal than others'. By the disastrous consequences of the fall it is only too true that in fact men are not equal. Only the voice of Christ, re-echoed in his Church and in the heroic lives of his faithful followers, is raised against this state of inequality amongst men. But if we are to understand this teaching of the equal rights of men as made in the image of God, it is of paramount importance to see also that while all men are equal, God and man are not. An infinite distance separates us from our great and transcendent Father. He only speaks to us by an act of infinite condescension, by an infinite generosity of divine distribution. Man is not only a little world in himself, but also he is a part of a whole divinely guided procession of creatures from the hand of God. So apart from having to enter into relations with his fellow human beings as equals, he has also to enter into relationship with the whole of which he is but a very small section. This is the function of what St Thomas calls general, or legal justice, which governs the relationship of the parts, the members of a society to the whole; while it is what he calls commutative justice that governs the relations of the members with one another. The smooth working of society depends on the justice of exchange and commerce between equals being seen within the framework of the much nobler, more divine, economy of general justice. Instead of men dividing themselves into sharply opposed camps of the 'haves' and the 'have nots', justice requires that our sense of our dependence upon the common

good of society should make us contribute to that first of all. Yet how sad it is when we find that we forget our loyalty to the Church, to our country, to our own particular institution whatever it may be, through lack of a sense of this general justice. We tend to take the common good too much for granted, and a lot of what St Thomas has to say, for example, about the right of men to own private property, sounds very like what we think is the sheerest communism! When a man has acquired enough wealth to maintain himself and his family and to keep up his social standing, then he becomes merely the steward to dispense what remains for the benefit of the common good. This is not an option but obligation. The penalty of failing to preserve these two kinds of justice is the gradual disintegration of society; that is to say the integral parts of justice itself, its component parts can become diseased. These parts are again twofold, the avoidance of evil and the doing of good. When individual members of a society lose their sense of sin and cease to appreciate the meaning of true goodness, then society becomes corrupt. The responsibility here lies with both religion and philosophy and the institutions where these are taught. The integral parts of justice, like justice itself, are susceptible of a general reference to all moral behaviour. They are, in the context of justice, the application of those basic moral principles which go with the very nature of man to social rights and duties, what we owe to our neighbours and to the common good. Trampling on the rights of others, or a deliberate lack of recognition of them, and negligent omission are the sins that break up all justice.

Finally we must glance at the way in which this virtuous quality of justice extends itself into fields where justice strictly so called is not in question but where something analogous to it must find a place. This covers the relationships that exist between God and man in religion, between parents and children in family piety, between rulers and subjects in obedience, in all of which relationships a strict equality can never be established. But that does not dispense us from having to do something in return for what we have received from God, our parents, and our superiors. Again in other spheres, not only the notion of equality but also that of what is strictly due from us has to have a certain analogous something which while not being due absolutely yet closely approximates to duty. These are qualities like sincerity, gratitude,

a proper value of the use of punishment as well as of its abuse. Such come under this kind of grouping of virtue. Finally there are those invaluable qualities of generosity and affability or general friendliness which, though not rigidly called for on a *quid pro quo* basis, yet are so necessary for the smooth harmony of social living. These we often associate with charity or love, a sort of superfluous overflow of the love of God. This is not the attitude of St Thomas to these virtues. For him they are seen much more as something akin to justice. This bare enumeration of the potential parts of or kindred virtues to justice must suffice for this short glimpse at St Thomas's treatment of this noble virtue. They are only mentioned here to round off the picture by indicating how wide and fundamental a quality justice is in the domain of morals, in our movement on to God. But as we have been trying to follow St Thomas we must finish as he did in his treatise on justice. Even this great quality only has meaning for him as a theologian in so far as it is informed, vitalized, made powerful by the Holy Ghost inspiring and strengthening us in our journey towards himself. Thus he ends his treatise with a discussion on the supernatural gift of the Holy Ghost which is called piety, that special movement or impulse from God by which we are made supple and docile to the hierarchy and dispensation of the hidden order and meaning of God's justice. God's justice is something infinitely exceeding our ability even to understand, let alone to try and live by, and yet without it and apart from it we are lost. Therefore only by close contact with the spirit of God in the life of prayer, learning from his inspiration in silence and in hope, can we become just with justice from God.

