

REVIEWS

FILS DE DIEU PAR GRACE. By S. I. Dockx, O.P. (Desclée de Brouwer; n.p.)

Although this work does not occupy much space (147 pp.), its construction, writing and publication might well have taken the best part of a lifetime. To read, estimate and review it must be the work of many weeks. Ten years have passed between the *Nihil Obstat* given by the theological faculty of Fribourg and the publication by Desclée.

The author begins by insisting that St Thomas was never content to speak of the friendship established by grace and charity between the human soul and God, but always taught clearly the possession by the soul of the indwelling very Divine Substance and, more particularly, of the Holy Spirit in Person. So there is denied the cleavage, asserted by some authors, between the Greek patristic tradition, dwelling upon the substantial Presence, and the Western scholastic, preoccupied with the created grace and virtues. However the book is entirely concerned with the speculative theology which rests upon the thomistic metaphysic of being, a metaphysic the appreciation of which has been hindered by the scepticism of several centuries. The process of scholastic thought is one that may be called strictly *formal*, presenting truth facet by facet. Long and hard study is needed to appreciate this and always to find one's master's point of view. Without this there may be much difficulty in reconciling texts. Yet St Thomas is exceptional among scholastic writers in that his thought runs right through his work from the *Sentences* of his youth to the *Summa* of his maturity, enriched certainly in the later years but entirely self-consistent. It is thought much in these days to be entirely familiar with the *Summa*. Fr Dockx, however, insists that the *Sentences* are a necessary introduction. His book professes to be a synthesis of whatever is found pertaining to the life of grace in the writings of St Thomas. Footnote quotations help the reader to appreciate this work.

In the *Sentences* the foremost idea is right to inheritance conferred by adoptive filiation: in the *Summa* likeness to the Sonship of the Word. Nothing of the life of grace can be understood save in relation to the beatific vision to which all tends.

The book is so full and concise that a review cannot hope to be a summary. The most important part, round which all the rest is grouped, is found near the middle, about thirty pages, headed *The Love of Charity*.

The question is whether what faith cannot do in this life charity can—reach God immediately, without any interior medium between the act of love and the subsisting Love himself. Can charity realise in the order of love that intimacy which the beatific vision realises in the order of understanding? Naturally, to the *verbum intellec-*

tionis, the term of the process of understanding, there is a parallel reality, *res amoris*, in the process of love, i.e. knowledge and love are not immediate. But the attentive reader is surprised, one might even say thrilled, when it dawns upon him that an exception is being made for divine charity, that, in following St Thomas, the author is going to maintain that this infused virtue gives *immediate* contact with the Being loved. Indeed the will, unlike the understanding, is never satisfied by a representation: its end is attained only when things are reached in their trans-subjective being. The question is whether God can be present in us as Reality of love just as he is in the beatific vision as Word seen and understood. Now if he is really with us precisely by reason of charity, this can only be because charity attains him immediately: otherwise we should have merely an affective presence, like that which we may have of material things which we may love without possessing them in their physical reality. The immediate presence of this supreme Object involves that God himself be in us the *res amoris*, the immanent term of our act of love.

This is little else but the teaching of St Paul. Charity, reaching the divine Essence immediately, attains from the very beginning its specific perfection. So, while faith and hope must pass, charity will always remain. It would not be so if charity were to reach God mediately in this life, immediately in the life to come. Yet, having its *specific* perfection, it can still increase, remaining as it does always finite. Just so the light of glory will vary in intensity from one of the blessed to another. It may be objected that possession of the divine Essence belongs to the future life, not the present. This is true. St Thomas is distinguished from some other scholastics by teaching that *possession*, in the strictest sense of the word, is by satisfaction not of will but of intellect.

There follows the next most important part of the work, in which the author dwells upon the idea of *loving knowledge*, *sapida scientia*, accepting or rejecting, affirming or denying, in the light of the *good* rather than of the *true*, coming from reflection upon the activity of love. St Thomas recognises here Wisdom, the first of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When there is passive reflection, no longer upon the act of love, but upon the indwelling term of that act, there is mystic intuition.

It would be difficult to speak in a few words of a following chapter in which the theology of grace is brought into relation with that of the Blessed Trinity: the question being raised how much said of the divine Persons is merely appropriation, how much goes further.

The publishers hardly say too much when they claim, in their accompanying leaflet, that this presentation of the genuine thought of St Thomas renews the position of the Western theology of grace and that a problem is here raised which for the first time since St Thomas himself finds its right solution.

JOHN MORSON, O.C.R.