

## A CATHOLIC INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

THE work of the philosopher may be considered fundamentally from two points of view: as an activity directed to an object which is of its nature an end and pointing to nothing outside itself, or as concentrated upon an object to be regarded as a *bonum utile*, a means to be employed to some further purpose. Accordingly as either of these tendencies predominates will the mind receive, so to say, its determination and character, its philosophical *habitus*. For those who accept the first point of view philosophy will be an activity formally of the speculative intellect, essentially contemplative; for those who accept the second it will be an exercise of the practical intelligence, a work, in a sense, artistic and creative.

It will hardly be questioned that for St. Thomas Aquinas the object of the speculative intellect, *truth* (or *being as known*) can never be subjected to any kind of intellectual utilitarianism; for the contemplation of truth is the supreme end of man, an end which alone gives point and meaning to all subordinate activities, itself, in an ultimate and sublime sense, completely useless. Consistently then with this view, if the philosopher engages in the practical work of teaching, his task is not one of rendering the transcendental order acceptable to the tastes of his disciples, but of leading their minds to the contemplation of truth in its essential clarity by subtilizing and strengthening their native powers of apprehension; *fortificando virtutem intellectivam*; in this way he participates, in his own degree, in the angelic activity of "illumination": *illuminare nihil aliud est quam manifestationem cognitae veritatis alteri tradere* (Summa Theol. I, cvi, 1).

But it may well be urged that in a sublunary world which is not one of pure essences there is an equally necessary, if less exalted, work to be done: that of making truth acceptable to humanity as we find it, of presenting it to the modern intelligence in some more palpable form. To treat of the things of the spirit in this fashion must be the temptation of

every mind sensitive to the intellectual needs of those who are neither by profession nor inclination philosophers, and when that mind is itself more responsive to the concrete, material, *existential* order (i.e., the order of history) than to that of *abstract essences* (i.e., the order of "first philosophy" or metaphysics) this temptation is likely to prove irresistible. Indeed, it must be conceded that such a procedure would only present itself in the light of a temptation to be overcome to those who accept the presuppositions of St. Thomas's philosophy; for others, to whom that philosophy is but a system to be speculated through *a priori* categories of the mind, or for whom—not being themselves metaphysicians—the supposed requirements of the human spirit are of more concern than any preoccupation with an unchanging order of eternal truth, it will appear merely as the legitimate function of the philosopher. Nor can it be denied that such has been the method of many among the choicest Christian spirits; Pascal, Newman, von Hügel and Karl Adam can perhaps be said to form in the post-Reformation world a lineage of Christian rhetoricians, each possessing, according to his peculiar gifts, that "power to see the possible ways of persuasion," which, for Aristotle, was the very definition of rhetoric. St. Augustine himself, imbued as he was with Platonism and a consequent passion for "the order that changeth not," yet regarded the truths of philosophy as material to be appropriated and used for the purposes of Christian apologetic;<sup>1</sup> it is to the greatest of the Latin Fathers that all subsequent apologists can legitimately appeal for justification.

Accepting the fact of what we may call these two methods of approach to, or treatment of, the object of mind, it is but common wisdom to attempt to understand and appreciate both the one and the other. But before we can do so we must first decide whether after all they are *two* methods of approach, and not, in the last analysis, *one*, whether the apparent thesis and antithesis cannot be reconciled in a

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<sup>1</sup> Vide *De Doctrina Christiana*, lib. II, cap. 40—Migne, P. L., 34, 63.

higher synthesis. A work<sup>2</sup> by a celebrated German Catholic philosopher has recently appeared in which, if not explicitly, at least by implication, such a synthesis is attempted. In what the translator regards as an effective rejoinder to the assertion "that the construction of a philosophy of religion is essentially a Protestant form of activity" Fr. Przywara presents us with an historico-philosophical essay of great interest and subtlety. The English public has already had evidence of the author's "synthetic powers" (*sit venia verbo*) as exercised upon the work of Cardinal Newman;<sup>3</sup> but even those who have this much acquaintance with Fr. Przywara's mode of thought will be but little prepared for the present *tour de force* in the "reconciling of opposites" along the lines of the Hegelian dialectic. To pass from the unifying within itself of the doctrine of a single writer—and that one so basically consistent a thinker as Newman—to the application of a similar method upon the universal field of Christian philosophy is a step which, if it could be taken at all, could only be justified by the possession of Fr. Przywara's immense learning and intellectual endowments. Clearly the interest of such an essay must lie in the presuppositions on which it is based. No attempt can, of course, be made here to examine the validity of the famous method of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; it can even be admitted that aspects of a situation which differ only *conceptually* may effectively be submitted to such a treatment; but when what have hitherto been regarded, by minds not entirely without discernment and penetration, as *real* differences and oppositions based upon the reality of individual substances are "synthesized" with equal facility, we are entitled to enquire how it is done.

It is in his historical judgments that Fr. Przywara is most of all convincing; no doubt it is here that he is most deeply affected by his study of Newman. If he lacks the great Cardinal's psychological insight and sense of the concrete

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<sup>2</sup> *Polarity*, a German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion, by P. Erich Przywara, S.J., translated by A. C. Bouquet, D.D. (London, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford. Price 8/6 net.)

<sup>3</sup> *A Newman Synthesis*. (London, Sheed & Ward, 1930.)

reality, he shares with him the absence of partisanship and capacity to isolate the dominating aspect of the situation which are the indispensable qualifications of the philosopher-historian. Speaking, for example, of the mysticism of the pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine which has lived on, and still lives on, in the Dominican order, he writes (*op. cit.*, p. 106): "That aspect of Aquinas in which he approaches closely to Augustinianism has its most remarkable and evident continuation in this form of piety and its associated theology. And regarding this, two things are noteworthy. First, its firm objectivity, so firm that the Dominican Order has become willy-nilly the servant of the Inquisition, not on account of a sort of fanaticism (the great Dominicans were all men of childlike humility and even of a tender sensitiveness), but on account of an utter abandonment of all individualism to the service of everlasting truth. Second (and the corollary of the first), a clear mystical sense of intimacy with God, which is the specific property of souls of this kind. God is just "the" Truth (a genuine Augustinian phrase), and so the service of the truth is the service of God. The *liturgical* service of God, which is so characteristic of the Benedictine, changes with the Dominican into the service of *Truth.*"

But Fr. Przywara is only incidentally concerned with judgments of this kind. His primary aim is to solve the problem: "Does religion, as relation between Deity and humanity, come into being from above downwards, as ultimately 'Act of God,' or is it formed from below upwards, from men, and therefore ultimately as 'Act of Man'?" (p. 22). He does not—so far as is clear to the present writer from his, at times, extremely difficult pages—reach any definitely stated conclusion; but it is perhaps not unjust to interpret him as meaning that this problem solves itself, or even that it is no problem at all, after it is seen through the process of dialectic to which he gives the name of *Analogia Entis*.

The concept of *analogia entis* as it is first explained by Fr. Przywara (p. 29-34) is sufficiently lacking in precision for the unwary reader to identify it with the all-important "analogy of being" of St. Thomas Aquinas. Such an identi-

fication would be a complete mistake. For St. Thomas *analogia entis* is a metaphysical conception, the cornerstone of his metaphysic *as such*, but in no way dependent on supernatural revelation and consequently making no appeal to any definition of the Church. With Fr. Przywara it is otherwise; for him *analogia entis* appears to be a notion at once metaphysical and theological (and thus is obliterated the distinction between Philosophy and Theology so vital for St. Thomas); it receives "its classical expression" from a decree of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (p. 31). From this starting point the *analogia entis* undergoes a number of transformations and takes on a "concrete" and dynamic character quite alien to the Thomist conception of it. In "the personal religious approach to God" the *analogia entis* is "practical" and assumes a "living form" which is "the tension between self-abandoning love and adoring reverence" (p. 45); it is "above both rationalism and irrationalism" (p. 47); it is "self-operating" (p. 61); it "decomposes itself in the wealth of its aspects . . . from revelation through prayerful experience to scientific reflection" (p. 95-96); it is to be found in the New Testament itself: "For this *analogia entis* of the 'God who hath shined forth in the countenance of Jesus Christ' (II Cor. iv, 6) is assuredly (in opposition to the Old Testament preference for the aloofness of 'God the Lord'), the utterance of the nearness of 'God the Father,' the *analogia entis* of the Lord's Prayer, of Him who has 'numbered the hairs of our head' (Luke xii, 7) and who 'so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son' (John iii, 16)" (p. 98).

Fr. Przywara is, of course, fully aware that he is using the term *analogia entis* in a manner peculiar to himself; he speaks of it having "for Thomism . . . a kind of intellectualist form . . . for Scotism a sort of voluntarist form" (p. 108); but he is doubtless convinced that he has achieved a concept of it which harmonizes and reconciles any apparent opposition in these two notions in a "unity beyond all difference." Unfortunately, the pronounced historical bias apparent throughout the essay, the tendency, not merely to point to the essential in historical development, but to place

a historical generalization within pre-determined categories and then, by implication, to treat the resultant *tertium quid* as a historical fact (i.e., to "philosophize" history according to the dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis in the true Hegelian manner) leaves one in doubt as to whether the *analogia entis* is anything more than a term signifying a confused "idea-image" which, far from being a "unity beyond all difference," is merely the residue arising from over-simplification in the sphere of history combined with an insufficient analysis of the processes of thought.

The following passage illustrates the manner in which Fr. Przywara outlines—of necessity, broadly; but, we may well ask, what cannot history be made to yield on these principles?—the progress of Christian thought from Augustine to Newman: "And thus Augustine is partaker in the thought of the Greek fathers, and Augustine lives on in Aquinas, while the schools originating from Aquinas partake of Augustine's thought in so far as Thomism develops his ethos of God as Truth, Scotism his ethos of God as love; and in this continuation of Augustine's influence there endures the old antithesis between the Greek fathers (the Alexandrian school) and Augustine (as the fulfilment of the ideas of the Antiochene school), since in Thomism the 'God as All' of the Greeks has a new visage, and in Scotism in its connexion with Molinism it has the quality of human activity expressed in the 'Love' of St. Augustine. And so we can understand how, in the further progress of this evolution, a new pair of opposites arises, in which Molinism itself becomes, as it were, the continuation of Thomism, while its own special basic thought of the individual seems to assume the specific form of an antithesis. I refer, of course, to the famous antithesis of recent times between systematically and logically determined scholastic, and historically and psychologically determined philosophy and theology, which has found its classic, if not its final, expression in Cardinal Newman's *Essay on Development in Doctrine*, for the historical aspect, and his *Grammar of Assent*, for the psychological aspect" (p. 112-113). In like manner can the Catholic mystics be fitted neatly into their appointed groove; we

are to observe the contrast "between the visual mysticism of inward-becoming and the dark-night mysticism of un-becoming. The concrete examples are Henry Suso and St. Francis on the one hand, and St. John of the Cross on the other" (p. 66).

But it is when the *analogia entis* is applied to the philosophical systems that its crude arbitrariness stands most clearly revealed. "For classical Catholic philosophy (Augustine and Aquinas), as for classical modern philosophy (Kant and Hegel), the starting point is the reflection of the ego upon itself" (p. 34). After this we need be surprised at nothing that Fr. Przywara may discover in the history of human speculation. But even in this state of preparedness we should scarcely have expected the almost incredible statement that "With him [Aquinas] 'thought' bears, in the first place, a clearly active character, and is not so much 'seeing' as 'doing'; primarily active and not visionary intellect" (p. 104). It would seem that the whole Thomist teaching on the essential part played in knowledge by the *intellectus possibilis* has been misunderstood!—or are we to adopt the more generous hypothesis that Fr. Przywara's vast reading has not included a study of St. Thomas's Commentary on Aristotle's "De Anima," Lib. III, Lect. ix?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> From the context it is evident that by "clearly active character" Fr. Przywara means not the *immanent* activity of intellectual apprehension, but the *transitive*, practical activity which terminates in the formation of an object of knowledge. To attribute such a notion to St. Thomas can only arise from ascribing to the "active intellect" (*intellectus agens*) a factitive, creative power—a misinterpretation, in its turn, perhaps due to attempting to "synthesise" the Thomist epistemology with a theory of knowledge diametrically opposed to it. In reality, the function of the *intellectus agens* is not to construct the object, but to *actualise* its latent intelligibility, so that the object, thus rendered intelligible *in actu*, thereupon actualises the *intellectus possibilis* (from this point of view the act of knowledge is essentially *passive*—"pati quoddam") to form a union of complete identity; the *intellectus agens* no more constructs the object of thought than a light constructs the objects it illuminates—a comparison constantly employed by St. Thomas in this context. (For the more important texts on St. Thomas's conception of the act of knowledge see the "Bibliographie sommaire" in J. Maritain's *Réflexions sur l'Intelligence et sur sa vie propre*, troisième édition, p. 50. Desclée de Brouwer et Cie., Paris, 1930.)

From what has so far been said it must be evident that Fr. Przywara's "interpretation of religion" can only be acceptable to those who acquiesce in his treatment of history as a kind of mathematical *science*, as material patient of the philosophizing to which he submits it. But such a concession will not readily be made by those who are not already committed to an idealistic philosophy; those who hold that knowledge is essentially an apprehension from without, not an evolution from within, will perhaps subscribe to the verdict of so impartial a witness as Bishop Lightfoot: "every historical question must be decided by striking a balance between conflicting probabilities,"<sup>5</sup> a judgment in accordance with the "conjectural probability" which is all that St. Thomas looks for where "human affairs" (*negotia humana*) are in question.<sup>6</sup>

The treatment of history as a "science," as a kind of geometrical process yielding almost mathematically certain conclusions, has recently provoked a noteworthy protest. "The incorporation of history within science, carried out in our day by a number of spirits and in the most diverse orders of reality, is perhaps, after pragmatism, the worst menace which has ever been directed against speculative thought; the continuity within a single intellectual organism (*un organisme noétique unique*) between the intelligible necessities, objects of science, and the contingencies of existence, objects of history, can only be established by ascribing the same kind of intelligibility to the ideal development of essential properties and to the actual unrolling of events; whereupon, either contingency will disappear and the universe will be conceived after the manner of an axiom in pure act which, we know not why, experiences the need of projecting itself in space and evolving in time, and science will rest on a fundamental delusion; or else necessity itself will give ground, and science will rest upon nothing at all."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lightfoot: *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> *Summa Theol.*, Ia IIae, cv, 11, ad. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Yves Simon, *Introduction à l'ontologie du connaître*, p. 127, note 1. (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1934.)



A unity beyond all difference,<sup>8</sup> as Fr. Przywara so acutely feels, is truly the end of the human mind, but not everyone will acknowledge that it is to be found along the path which he indicates. It will be admitted that the *analogia entis* is the key to the solution of the problem; not, however, an *analogia entis* which will appear to many as an impossible fusion of idealism and historical dialectic, but an objective *intellectualist* concept, in no way ignoring the real distinction between "the one and the many," but which, while not being itself "the Vision," does not exclude such a consummation; a consummation vouchsafed, not as the term of some philosophical antithesis, but as a gift from on high, a gesture of graciousness that no philosophy can explain—not even a "philosophy of religion." Such is the *analogia entis* of the Common Doctor of the Church, with whose teaching, both in itself and its development, Fr. Przywara appears so strangely unfamiliar.<sup>9</sup> Nor can there exist, as one might be led to suppose, any "more intellectualist schools of Thomism" (p. 126) than that of St. Thomas himself; as if for him, in dealing with the ultimate questions, there could be any alternative qualification to that of intelligence: *cujuslibet scientiae principium est intellectus*,<sup>10</sup> . . . *divina scientia . . . est maxime intellectualis*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In his own terminology: the solution to the problem of the relation of Deity (the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the "unity of opposites") and the creation (p. 12-14).

<sup>9</sup> In his extensive bibliographies no reference is to be found to the celebrated tractatus of Cajetan's, *De nominum analogia*, a work of capital importance for the study of *analogia entis*; M. T.-L. Penido's recent magisterial treatise *Le rôle de l'Analogie en Théologie dogmatique* (Paris, Vrin, 1931) is also apparently unknown to Fr. Przywara; still less does he show any first-hand acquaintance with the work of the modern French Thomists, who are generally considered to be in the authentic tradition of the master. When it is recalled that the philosophy of St. Thomas has been officially stated to be that of the Church itself ("cuius doctrinam, ut quam plurimis in omni genere litterarum monumentis testata est, suam Ecclesia fecerit."—Litt. Encyc. *Studiorum Duce*m Pii PP. XI, 29 Jun., 1923—Acta Ap. Sed., vol. xv, p. 314), this lacuna in the otherwise great erudition of Fr. Przywara must be taken into account when estimating the value of his conclusions as to what constitutes the "classical Catholic philosophy."

<sup>10</sup> In Boetium *De Trin.*, q. 11, art. 11, ad. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, q. vi, art. 1, resp. ad tertiam quaestionem.

For St. Thomas, the "unity beyond all difference" is to be seen as an intellectual vision; but, by a sublime paradox—a paradox of which he himself was completely aware,<sup>12</sup> and to which his theology provides the key—not as a vision reserved for the "intellectuals." We have received no assurance that "of such is the kingdom of heaven." In the words of one more enlightened even than St. Thomas: ". . . the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise: and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong" (I Cor. i, 27); but here there can be no question of the "folly" and "weakness" which deny man's inherent goodness and belittle the splendour of his intelligence. To detract from the natural perfection of the creature is to derogate from the divine perfection itself; *detrahere . . . perfectioni creaturarum est detrahere perfectioni divinae virtutis*.<sup>13</sup> It is the "folly" of seeking to imitate a suffering Redeemer in the face of a contemptuous world, the "weakness" of submission to a light infinitely higher than its own. By this "wisdom," and perhaps by it alone, can man be strengthened in the realization that in the order of nature as in the order of grace, he has nothing that he has not received. Yet it remains, with all appropriateness, that only by his highest faculty, the intellect, can he even begin to understand the things which "the eye hath not seen nor the ear heard," the revelation of abiding Truth.

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<sup>12</sup> Vide *ibid.*, q. 11, art. 111, ad. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 111, cap. 69.