

## THE BASIS OF SELF-REALIZATION

THE sin-stricken body weighs heavily on the soul which by nature yearns to behold its Maker.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is the consciousness of this clinging burden which causes a man to regard himself as another in endeavouring to express his own personality. Yet the divine figure of the Word Incarnate gives assurance that self-realization may be only reached by the self-abasement of all that is human in the presence of the Divine. At this point are placed in close opposition self-idolatory and the God-centred attitude towards life which is the main-spring of life's worship. But who will deliver us from the body of this death?<sup>2</sup>

Divine revelation informs the erring mind that the culminating point in the Christian life is to be found in nothing less than eternal happiness which St. Thomas describes in no uncertain terms. But the life of grace, "*semen gloriae*," is an eternal life since it holds within it the very roots of glory.<sup>3</sup> It differs not in kind from that life at its apex where God is seen and all things in God, yet a ceaseless effort after spiritual liberty is demanded by a closer union with God in Christ.

The essential note of the life of grace is that its recipients are rendered "partakers of the divine nature."<sup>4</sup> Goodness is by nature generous and its every activity is the bestowal of a gift, and so the human soul is endeared to God by His loving glance towards it whereby it is filled with a newness of life.<sup>5</sup> The supernatural virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost grow out spontaneously from the divinized soul, as branches from a living stem.<sup>6</sup>

St. Thomas is careful to explain that the sharing of divine life which is grace is after the manner of likeness: "For as by the intellectual faculty man shares in divine knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa*, IIa IIae, 25, v ad 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rom. vii, 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa*, IIa IIae, 24, iii ad 2.

<sup>4</sup> II Peter, i, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ia IIae, 110, 1 sqq.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, III, iv.

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through the virtue of faith, and by the faculty of his will he is made to share in the divine love through the virtue of charity, so also in the very depths of his soul does he participate in the Divine Nature, after the manner of a likeness, through a certain regeneration or re-creation."<sup>7</sup>

As Father John Evangelist of Balduke writes, "perfection is union with God, to which the only way is to leave the whole world and all creatures."<sup>8</sup> The very basis of this union of life and activity is a likeness divinely impressed, because says St. Thomas, "a thing is more readily acceptable to God in proportion to its approach to His likeness: whence it is that the Apostles urges (Ephesians v, 1): *Be ye followers of God, as most dear children.*"<sup>9</sup>

In fact this supernaturalizing of man is by a deepening of that image of God which is in him by nature. For all creatures endowed with intelligence have a natural capacity for God. And the divine exemplar upon which man is modelled is the God-man Who is the perfect image of God. "Man has within himself the possibility of being raised to the knowledge of the saints, which consists in the vision of God; and to this end is his life directed: for creatures which are endowed with reason have a capacity for that form of knowledge, inasmuch as they are made to the image of God. But men are brought to this blessed end through the humanity of Christ."<sup>10</sup>

There is no reasonable doubt but that this likeness to God can be the means of coming to the knowledge of God. St. Thomas teaches this in the case of the angels.<sup>11</sup> "Since the image of God is implanted in the very nature of an angel, an angel can know God through the agency of its own nature, inasmuch as it is a likeness of God."<sup>12</sup> "The angelic nature is as it were a mirror reflecting the divine likeness."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.

<sup>8</sup> *The Kingdom of God in the Soul*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> *De Regimine Principum*, lib. I, c. ix.

<sup>10</sup> III, 9, ii, et ad 3; iii; III, 4, i ad 2; III, 23, i sqq.; I, 33, iii; 45, vii.

<sup>11</sup> *De Veritate*, VIII, iii.

<sup>12</sup> Ia, 56, iii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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The reflection of divine beauty and activity which is the created image of God is found chiefly in the mind, the highest in order in the hierarchy of human powers. It is right and fitting that the most eminent faculty should be the one from which blazes forth the divine resemblance.<sup>14</sup> Through the natural light of the mind man shares, however dimly, in the intellectual radiance of Him Who is pure intellect. Thus, whilst in all created things there are ill-defined traces of the Holy Trinity, man is made to the image of God and in him may be seen a likeness to the Blessed Trinity.<sup>15</sup>

God has shown His essential generosity towards us by bestowing Himself through the instrumentality of our own self-movement, that is by the rousing of our spiritual faculties of mind and will. This is part of a general endeavour which is common to all things to stretch out towards the Sovereign Good by becoming like to God.<sup>16</sup> But the soul as the image of God is deepened in its likeness only when, super-endowed by grace, it develops within itself the resemblance that flows from the life of grace. That resemblance is essentially a dynamic perfection issuing forth in acts of faith and love. Here is the highest degree of transformation into the perfect image of God, when the soul is supernaturally actuated by knowledge and love, like to God's own knowledge and love of Himself. The image of God, which is the soul transformed by grace, is brought to its perfection by the indwelling presence of God Who is imaged, for by the loving contemplation of His presence the soul becomes more like to Him. That image is wrought by God's very presence, after the manner that an image in wax is impressed by a seal, or the figure of a man is by his presence reflected in a mirror.<sup>17</sup> The Saints of God whilst on earth have been aware of God as it were reflected in their own souls. And their knowledge and love did not terminate at themselves but passed beyond the image as through a veil which but thinly hid from their view God Himself substantially present. But the complete

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *De Veritate*, X, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ia, 45, vii; cf. 33, iii; Ia, q. 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Contra Gentes*, xix.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Summa*, IIIa, 5, iv ad 1.

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realization of this likeness is only found in that untiring vision of God which constitutes beatitude. Here again the image of God is made to shine out in its full brilliance by the exercise of man's highest faculty, which is an activity of the mind lifted up by the light of glory to the level of the divine.

The perfection of the Christian life demands the constant striving to capture to ourselves something of that perfect likeness to God which is the property of those who behold Him in vision. Herein may be found the perfection of this life to which an invitation has been extended by the evangelical counsels.<sup>18</sup>

The whole universe indeed is a mirror wherein is reflected the divine goodness and beauty, but if only we had eyes to see we might peer into human souls and catch a reflection of the divine countenance. The bringing to perfection of this divine likeness is largely in human hands, for it is the prerogative of man to possess the power of self-determination wherewith to work out his own destiny, and to harmonize his being and activity with the divine design. The leaven of grace which is cast into the soul by the hands of God needs to permeate the whole of human life so that it is lifted up to the level of God, until it be caught up into the very life of the Blessed Trinity. And the effort after divine assimilation comes to rest only when a man is transformed into the likeness of Christ Our Lord, for He is the brightness of God's glory and the figure of His substance.<sup>19</sup> The grace of adoption implies a divine sonship, by an approach to the likeness of the only begotten, "for whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son."<sup>20</sup> Growth in holiness, then, means a deepening of the image of God which is in us, by accommodating ourselves to the divine plan in our regard, in and through Christ Our Lord, and having one mind and one heart with Him. For he is the standard exemplar upon which human perfection must be based, and that perfection is reached by an approximation to the Divine exemplar of him who bears the image.

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<sup>18</sup> St. Thomas, *De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, c. vi.

<sup>19</sup> Heb. i, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. viii, 29.

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To the Holy Spirit of adoption it is given to shape and form us to the likeness of God's Son, Who is wisdom begotten.<sup>21</sup> As St. Thomas says, together with God's presence in the soul as in a living temple, is required also His image, that the image itself may be perfected by His presence.<sup>22</sup> By the increase of charity the indwelling of God is intensified in the soul, and the likeness to the Holy Spirit is participated more perfectly.<sup>23</sup>

It pertains to the dignity of man to be the bearer of God's ensign, His image, which calls for allegiance and the common fellowship of mankind under the leadership of Christ the King. The virtue of charity adds to that which is natural and transforms the members of society into the family of the Saints, of which God is the beloved Father. Moreover charity lengthens vision to see beyond the borders of the merely natural and bestows a sensitiveness to all that is God-like in created things, and which in human beings is a title to a new heritage in God's riches. The new bond relating and linking each to the other in godly affinity is the groundwork of brotherly love. And further this Christian friendship of mankind is the one sure guarantee of that reposeful social order which is peace. Could this ideal state be reached God would be loved, and all would be loved in God, for charity is a partnership in a spiritual life, arising from a heavenly citizenship, leading to beatitude, whence it is that the harmonious bond which brings peace is desired for all whom charity loves<sup>24</sup>; and, as even the pagans acknowledge, in all true friendship there is a liberal exchange of gaiety and affliction, of joy and pity.<sup>25</sup> Personality in subordination to that which is supreme at once finds its full outlet in self-sacrifice and self-restraint, in the bearing of one another's burdens.

During the passage of time self-realization, which is not necessarily captured by a fresh experience, can be attained

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<sup>21</sup> IIa IIae, 45, vi.

<sup>22</sup> IIIa, 5, iv ad 1.

<sup>23</sup> IIa IIae, 24, v ad 3.

<sup>24</sup> IIa IIae, 25, ii ad 2.

<sup>25</sup> IIa IIae, 25, vii.

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by God-fearing humility under the mighty hand of God, wherein lies the beginning of wisdom. Social friendship must grow out of the godly likeness which is rooted in each member of society. And from the parent root may branch forth harmony of desire and sympathy in sorrow which are the beginnings of social peace.

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