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Two Doctrines on Justification: “Fides” and “Caritas”

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Review Article

Two Doctrines on Justification: "Fides" and "Caritas"

BY opening windows to let some fresh air into the Church, John XXIII seems to have succeeded also in presenting Christians, non-Catholic as well as Catholic, an opportunity for seeing each other in better perspective. Since 1958, several books and articles have been published which have given us new insights into the Reformation and into the lives and works of the men involved in it. Though as a matter of fact considerable differences exist between Catholicism and Protestantism, several authors have demonstrated that not a few of the issues dividing Christians have been due either to the polemics of the past four hundred years or to a lack of perspective. Clearing away these pseudo-issues by means of dialogue grounded in Charity has constituted a major phase in ecumenism. John Todd, for example, in his biographical study of Martin Luther,¹ has accomplished the difficult task of studying Luther in the light of his proper historical situation: Todd, one reviewer tells us, "is quite sensitive to Roman Catholic one-sidedness [something new in Catholic Luther scholarship] and frequently analyzes Luther's one-sidedness in relation to the Roman Catholic variety." Joseph Lortz's *The Reformation: A Problem for Today* (1964) opens up

* THOMAS AQUINAS AND JOHN GERHARD. By Robert P. Scharlemann. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964. xi, 271 pp.

¹ John Todd, *Martin Luther: A Biographical Study* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1964). Reviewed by James F. McCue in *Theological Studies*, 26 (1965), 141-142.

"avenues of thought . . . [by which we may] see in a new light the 'orthodox' Catholics and 'rebellious' Protestants of those tragic times."² The same theme is treated with greater theological thoroughness by Jaroslav Pelikan in his *Obedient Rebels* (1964). Similarly, Pastor Max Lackmann suggests in his *The Augsburg Confession and Catholic Unity* that "one is a bad 'protestant' if one irritably refuses to be regarded as a Catholic Christian or if one recognizes no sense of obligation to the Roman Catholic Church."³ To the growing list of published materials which have significantly contributed toward mutual understanding between Protestants and Catholics must be added Robert P. Scharlemann's *Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard*.

Taking his cue from Hans Küng, who in his book *Rechtfertigung, die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung* (1957) expressed the opinion that the doctrine of Karl Barth on justification by grace is not in opposition to that of the Council of Trent, Professor Scharlemann sets out to compare the theological views on man of Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard.⁴ In these two men's works, S. points out, one

² Bro. D. Gabriel, F.S.C. in a review of Lortz's book in *Philippine Studies*, 13 (1965), 889-891.

³ Max Lackmann, *The Augsburg Confession and Catholic Unity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 1. This book was reviewed in *Philippine Studies*, 13 (1965), 743-746.

⁴ John Gerhard (1582-1637) was born at Quedlinburg in Saxony. He was educated as a boy in the humanistic school at Quedlinburg. In 1598 he was stricken by a plague which wiped out over three thousand of Quedlinburg's inhabitants. He was saved by an accidental overdose of medicine. In 1599 he entered the University of Wittenberg to study philosophy and in 1601 turned to the study of medicine. He entered the University of Jena in 1603 to study theology, receiving his *magister's* title in the same year. In 1606 he left the academic life to become bishop of Heldburg. Briefly in 1615 he accepted a call as archbishop of Coburg, but he returned to the University of Jena in the same year. There he spent the rest of his life, becoming rector four times and frequently dean of the theological faculty. His most significant work is the *Loci theologici* written from 1610-1621. He was married twice, in 1608 and 1614. His first wife died in 1611, leaving no children. By his second wife he had six children, four sons named—"with some lack of imagination—Johann Ernst, Johann, Johann Friedrich, and Johann Andreas Gerhard."

deeply interested in "grappling with the present ecumenical questions" will find the "classical formulations of the *status controversiae*." Both men, we are told, represent a vigorous scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas in its first golden age in the thirteenth century and John Gerhard in its renaissance in the seventeenth. Since both used the framework of Aristotle's philosophy in their theological syntheses—the one in his *Summa theologiae* and the other in his *Loci theologici*—their chief differences, which are due to the diversity of their orientation and method, seem to emerge all the more clearly.

Professor Scharlemann's conclusions are: that "first, Thomas and Gerhard vary in their mode of conceptualization. . . . Secondly, there is a difference in the character of these whole systems as they relate to other wholes. . . . [and] Thirdly, it is possible to suggest the vision of a unity underlying the two views even though it is not (or, at least, not yet) possible to articulate that unity" (pp. 11-12). Apart from the introduction and the first chapter which provides the reader with an excellent view of seventeenth century scholasticism and of the Melancthonian dual conception of theology—first as the "exposition of the content of Scriptures in an orderly fashion and with scholarly tools," and second as "the content of the Bible in public and private use" (p. 5)—the main body of the book is a study of the two men's teachings on the creation and the "new creation" of man. This covers chapters two to five; from it are drawn the first two conclusions mentioned above. The sixth and the seventh chapters deal with what S. believes to be the focal concept of the doctrines of Thomas and Gerhard: the former's *caritas* and the latter's *fides*. The final chapter contains the conclusions and some rules for "the analysis and understanding of the theological controversy between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in the period represented by John Gerhard." These rules, in this reviewer's opinion, are very important and are as much applicable to the Reformation period itself and to contemporary ecumenism as to the seventeenth century.

Precisely because the classical formulations of Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines on justification by grace

are not direct contradictories, because they indicate rather a "talking past" each other, S. points out that "it is possible to approximate a view of the one from within the other and to see, in the words of I Corinthians 13:12, 'through a glass darkly'" (p. 252). The questions they try to answer are different. Thomas asks: "What is *adequate* to a supernatural end?" or "What principle is there which can reside in man and lead him to a supernatural end without destroying his humanity?" Gerhard's questions are rather: "What can *please* God?" or "How must God speak to man in order to overcome the complacency or despair which shuts him in and which prevents his doing anything pleasing to God?" (p. 189). To this discussion, of course, Professor Scharlemann's third conclusion is a corollary.

Thomas' rationale is "formal-objective" or "theoretic"; Gerhard's "dialectical-personal" or "acoustic". In a lengthy footnote, Professor Scharlemann explains his distinctions thus:

By "formal-objective" I mean the rationale in which one proceeds from the concrete datum to the abstract form and returns to interpret the concrete by means of that form. The form may be a class (genus or species) which "locates" the particular thing in which it is exemplified, or it may be a general rule which interprets the particular data.

By "dialectical-personal" I mean the rationale whose pattern is the Yes and No involved in the encounter of persons, of one self with another self. In the formal rationale individuals are interchangeable, since they are interesting and intelligible only to the extent that they represent the genus or the general rule. In the dialectical-personal, on the other hand, the individual is not interchangeable; he is not the particular in relation to the general (a specimen of it and a means through which to apprehend it) but the singular Other, the Thou who is the Not-I of the knower.

Thus if I say "X is honest" in a formal-objective rationale, I am placing X in that class of people who are called honest. What I am saying of X can be understood by anyone who knows what "honest" means, independently of what the subject may be. In a dialectical-personal rationale "X is honest" is the assertion in which I record an encounter, or series of encounters, between the other person and me. What I am saying then can be understood only by one who has met and responded to the person or by one to whom my words convey the person rather than the objective meaning. (pp. 11-12)

Because both systems culminate in a paradox and since, as Professor Scharlemann suggests, the paradox of one cannot be accommodated into the other without either violence to the entire system or reorientation on the part of one theologian to the other's approach, Catholic-Protestant relations since the Reformation have been characterized by much misunderstanding and a "talking past" each other.

In treating, for example, the question of man's merit of his supernatural end, what Thomas tries to do is to explain the datum of revelation, i.e., that man can achieve a supernatural end, by analyzing the formal structure of man—his end and the consequent order of his constitution. But Gerhard, on the same question, discusses it in terms of what Scharlemann calls "forensic justification." Rather than examine formal structures, Gerhard analyzes the concrete situation, one in which man, the accused, has been placed in the presence of God, the judge. Where Thomas would teach that even though man achieves his supernatural end with God's help, he still, properly speaking, *merits* it because he accomplishes it as a free creature, the divine aid being as much interior to the will as it is exterior on account of the peculiar nature of the dependence of a free creature on the Creator, Gerhard would hold that "against the concretely heard voice of the judging God" man can set nothing—not his merits "because nothing of man has the power to be a No to God's No; it must come from God Himself." Scharlemann writes that "the paradoxical [in Thomas' position] becomes focused in the concept of the conversion of the free will, which is at once the purely voluntary act of man and the sovereign movement of God" (p. 231). The paradoxical in Gerhard's position emerges "when . . . man becomes aware of himself as nothing more in the sight of God than a sinner who can . . . speak no word of self-defense, [one, therefore, worthy of nothing but total rejection] . . . Henceforth . . . [God] speaks His No and through the No, His Yes-for-Christ's-sake" (p. 234), a Yes which is "audible to the ears of faith" (p. 235). To the dialectical-personal mind of Protestantism, the paradox of Thomas is lost and what is seen is some sort of Pelagianism; to the formal-objective minds of the counter-reformers, the pa-

radox of Gerhard constitutes a denial of human freedom, and, consequently, of man's real participation in salvation.

Caritas, Professor Scharlemann believes, "contains a micro-cosmic view of . . . [Thomas'] rationale of nature and grace. It is the reality *sine qua non* of the new creation" (p. 206). By the gift of *caritas* the agencies of God and of man in salvation are safeguarded: God's because it is a free gift, and man's because *caritas* is a species of *amor* which, in Thomas' doctrine, is the "implanted dynamics in the creature" or "the universal striving of every form for its perfection, its *finis*" (pp. 56-59). By providing man with the helps of *caritas*, God is dealing "with man according to man's peculiar form, the *anima intellectiva*, the capacity to know and freely choose the good" (p. 56). This is as it should be. "In upholding creation," S. writes, "God respects all things in their proper forms; therein is the mystery of His creative power" (p. 56). This aspect of Thomism, it might be noted, has been the center of several currents of thought within Catholicism, those of Maurice Blondel and Teilhard de Chardin and of Joseph Marechal and Karl Rahner.

Quite clearly Thomas' *caritas* is the answer to the question "how can man attain his supernatural end?" It does not, however, answer the other question, the one Gerhard asks: "On what can man *rely* in the face of the annihilating judgment of God against every imperfection?" The answer Gerhard gives is *fides*, this "in spite of Gerhard's concurrence with the view that *caritas* is 'in some sense the sum of Christianity'" (p. 225). What is foremost in Gerhard's mind is a forensic procedure, "in which *man has nothing to do but listen* to the voice of the Judge and the Mediator" (p. 227. Italics are mine).

Though, at first glance, there seems to be a debate or even a dialogue going on between Thomism and Gerhard on justification by grace, as a matter of fact none exists: neither debate nor dialogue. Faith, to Gerhard, justifies because it is constituted as much of trust (*fiducia*) as it is of knowledge and assent to God's Word. To Thomas, however, faith is purely an act of the intellect—"bare knowledge" and assent, in it-

self "not sufficient to be a principle of actions which attain the ultimate end" (p. 197). It consequently needs, if it is to be a saving faith, to be informed by *caritas*, which, in Thomas, is "the unity of the will with God," not, as it is in Gerhard, "the name of a type of action theoretically capable of being performed by anyone . . . one which, judged externally and objectively, is unselfish, even if the subjective motive may be selfish" (p. 197). S. puts it well: "Trust [*fides* or *fiducia*; any faith which lacks *fiducia* is incomplete] makes an act of *caritas* (that is, 'works') *pleasing* to God (Gerhard); *caritas* makes an act (that is, 'works') *meritorious* of its supernatural end (Thomas)" (p. 198). When, therefore, the counter-reformers, on the basis of Thomism, anathemized Gerhard for his *sola fide* doctrine on justification, they did so because their notion of *fides*, unlike that of Gerhard, was not constituted of an act of the will. When, on the other hand, Gerhard chided the Thomists for their *fides caritate formata*, he did so because his understanding of *caritas*, unlike that of the counter-reformers, was merely that of a "name of a certain act (namely, an unselfish one)" (p. 195).

Professor Scharlemann concludes his monograph recommending two general rules "for the analysis and understanding of the theological controversy between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in the period represented by John Gerhard." The first is that "anyone examining this controversy should be aware of how its terms are used, and should judge them according to the criteria which are applicable; he should, in other words, not divorce doctrines from methods." To examine Thomas' *caritas* in terms of dialectical criteria would be as unfair as it is to evaluate Gerhard's *fides* in terms of formal criteria. The second rule advises students of the controversy to "be aware that the modes of conceptualizing have not only their legitimate and necessary functions but also their distinctive dangers (p. 238). S. observes that "the overriding danger for the formal mode is that its concepts deaden rather than enliven the material being interpreted. . . For the dialectical mode the chief danger is that the doctrine which is effective in one situation is not effective in another" (pp. 238-239).

To a student of the mind of St. Thomas, Professor Scharlemann's treatment of him seems unfair and oversimplified. The method of the *summa*, Thomas himself pointed out, is a teaching method. It would be a mistake, I think, to assume that Thomas' mode of teaching was also his mode of knowing. Knowledge, in the Angelic Doctor, involved more than merely the conceptual. To one, however, who has followed the debates of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation closely, who has thereby seen the use to which Thomas' *summae* was put, apropos of what the *summae* had become in the hands of many thomists S. 's thesis seems justified and to the point. If the thinking of St. Thomas himself was not straight-jacketed by his teaching method, the same cannot be said of the thinking of many later thomists and Catholic apologists. What in Thomas was purely a mode of teaching had been transformed by those who came after him into what S. has called a "mode of conceptualizing." During the Reformation and in the Counter-Reformation, where love for the Word in all its fullness should have opened hearts and minds to new and different perspectives in a new and rapidly changing *cosmos*, the fear of error prevented many among both sides from deviating from the already lifeless formularies of a decaying scholasticism and from understanding and appreciating the statements of some who did deviate from them. That Thomas himself saw the "overriding danger" of formalism is fairly clear in his continual emphasis on the fact that sacred doctrine involved more than the apprehension of formal structures; it involved also "a way of perception closer to things, if more confused," a knowledge *propter connaturalitatem—cognito affectiva sive experimentalis*.⁶ This, for instance, Gerhard did not realize because to him *caritas* meant other than what it did to Thomas.

The question may be asked: but is it not a *tour de force* to have Gerhard theologizing in "personalist terms" several

⁶ See *Christian Theology*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Gilby, O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 124. This book is the first volume of the projected sixty-volume Blackfriars edition and translation of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. See also Thomas Aquinas, *III Sent.* 35, 2, 1, 1; 33, 3, 3, 2 and 2. *Summa theologiae* I^a, 43, 5 ad 2; I^aII^a e 49, 3, 4, 57, 1; 68, 1 ad 4.

centuries before the advent of personalist categories in theology? The answer seems to be, No.

As early as the middle of the fourteenth century the need for a reorientation and for a new method of studying and teaching theology was being felt throughout the West. The direction this reorientation was taking was towards what we today know as personalism. Humanists on the one hand, like Petrarca and Coluccio Salutati, and pietists on the other, like a'Kempis and Erasmus, were searching for a "more moving" theology, a less impersonal one, that would bear fruit in the total life of the individual, not just in his abstract understanding of theological concepts and judgments. Among both humanists and pietists this meant the reorienting of theology from the "sterile" Dialectics of the schoolmen back to the Grammar and Rhetoric of the Fathers because it was the "more moving"⁶ and because it was the most fruitfully accurate in the study of the written word, in the study consequently of Scriptures.⁷ In either case the result was an acoustic or a "dialectical-personal" approach to theology, one that, in this reviewer's opinion, constitutes the beginnings of contemporary personalism. The same tendency, of course, was making itself felt in philosophy, culminating in Michel de Montaigne's "I am myself the matter of my book" and in Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum"—a movement from objectivism to subjectivism. God was no longer sought in the glory and grandeur of nature; rather He was sought in the inner recesses of human subjectivity. Pierre Charron, a French priest and humanist of the sixteenth century (d. 1603), condemned by many as a sceptic, put it well: "by the knowledge of himself man arrives sooner and better to the knowledge of God, than by any other means, both because he finds in himself better helps, more marks and footsteps of the divine nature, than in whatsoever besides he can anyway know, and be-

⁶ See for example Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolarum de rebus familiaribus*, I, 7 and 12. Also Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, ed. Francesco Novati (Rome, 1891-1905), III, 290-291, and IV, 306.

⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, "Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam," *Opera omnia* (Leyden, 1703-1704), V, cols. 75-A to 138-C, especially cols. 77-E to 83-F.

cause he can better understand and know that which is in himself than in another thing.”⁸

How men reacted to the need for a reformation is history now. Professor Scharlemann deserves our praise and gratitude for having offered us significant insights towards the proper understanding of the controversies that arose because men reacted the way they did. One shortcoming of S.’s monograph needs mentioning here, but it should not detract from the total value of his work. Precisely because his is a type of work that encourages readers to follow-up references for added insights, it is unfortunate that Professor Scharlemann left some quotations from Thomas and Gerhard and several of his own assertions unfootnoted. The book, nevertheless, remains a valuable contribution to ecumenism.

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⁸ Pierre Charron, *De la sagesse* (Paris, 1604), p. 25.