

The Predestination of Christ and The Motive of the Incarnation

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ONE of the most discussed problems in Dogmatic Theology is certainly that of the Motive of the Incarnation: Since the time of Robert Grossetete, the first master of the Franciscans in Oxford, and Guericus de St. Quentin, master of St. Albert the Great and professor in the University of Paris from 1233 to 1242, this problem has been treated by all the subsequent professors not only in the University of Paris but also in that of Oxford (1). Among theologians, however, St. Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus are commonly held as the champions of the two opposite opinions on this subject. The Angelic Doctor, who bases his opinion on Revelation, teaches, that had sin not existed, the Incarnation would never have taken place. This, of course, is so in force of the present decree as is known to us through Holy Scripture (2). He lays stress on the present decree, because we don't know what God would have done in force of another decree or in another order of things, nothing being said about it in divine revelation. "For who among men can know the counsel of God or who can think what the will of God is?" (3). Scotus, on the contrary, considering rather the excellence and the dignity of the Incarnation, holds and defends an opinion opposite to that of the Angelic Doctor. According to him, the Son of God would have become incarnate even in the hypothesis that Adam had not sinned; in this case He would have assumed an impassible flesh (4). Thus the Subtle Doctor establishes two decrees in God, the first terminating in the substance of the Incarnation, the other in its circumstances. Scotus, however, unpressingly defends his opinion : "Sine praeiudicio dici potest" (5).

(1) See G. Grech O.P., *De Ratione Incarnationis in primitiva Schola Dominicana ac Franciscana*, Melitae, 1939.

(2) See St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* P. III q. 1 a. 3.

(3) Sap. IX, 13.

(4) See Scotus, Oxon., in III Sent. d. 7 q. 3 nis. 3-4, ed Vivès, Parisiis 1894, t. 14. p. 354.

(5) Idem. *Ibid.*

It is not the aim of this paper to make a thorough study of the problem of the Motive of the Incarnation according to St. Thomas and Scotus, but rather to examine and answer two objections raised against the opinion of St. Thomas by Scotus himself on this subject. The Subtle Doctor does not speak on the motive of the Incarnation *ex professo*, but rather occasionally, while dwelling upon the question of the predestination of Christ (6). He teaches that this predestination is not dependent on man's sin, and so it would have taken place even without it. This assertion he tries to prove by eight arguments, of which the first two are based on the nature of predestination in general and on the predestination of Christ in particular. In the first proof he argues from the gratuitousness of predestination; in the second from the primacy of Christ. It is not possible to examine in a short article, all the eight arguments, so let us restrict ourselves to the examination of the first two objections, which are, after all, the most important and the most difficult.

From the doctrine of the gratuitousness of predestination it seems to follow that nothing on the part of the predestined can be the reason or motive of this predestination and that it is altogether God's gift. Now if this be true, the predestination of Christ to his natural divine Sonship, or, in other words, the Incarnation, does not depend on the merits of Christ himself or on those of any other creature. Still more, it cannot depend on the faults of others, in our case that of Adam, as the opinion of St. Thomas seems to suggest. Therefore it should be concluded at first sight, that the predestination of Christ is altogether independent of sin. Besides, Christ is the first of the predestinated. He is the exemplar, efficient and final cause of our own predestination and therefore his predestination is before ours at least *prioritate naturae*. This means that in the first instant God decreed the Incarnation or the predestination of Christ, and then that of men; consequently the latter cannot be the reason of the first.

What are the facts? Is the opinion of St. Thomas a false one? Have the arguments of the Subtle Doctor any value in themselves? What are the relations between the predestination of Christ and Adam's sin? These are the questions which we intend to answer in this article. But in order that these questions be easily understood and before we examine these two objections

(6) See Scotus, l.c.

it will not be amiss to make a brief exposition of the gratuitousness of predestination and of the primacy of Christ. In this exposition every complicated question on this^o subject discussed by later theologians will be avoided. We shall strive to give exclusively the genuine doctrine of St. Thomas and that of the Subtle Doctor.

THE GRATUITOUSNESS OF PREDESTINATION

The classical definition of predestination is that given by the Doctor of Hippo in his book *De dono perseverantiae*: "Foreknowledge and preparation of God's benefits" (7). This definition has been illustrated by the Angelic Doctor in his *Summa Theologica* in the following words: "Predestination is a kind of type of the ordering of some persons towards eternal salvation, existing in the divine mind" (8). From this definition it clearly appears that predestination is an objective part of divine providence, whose object comprehends all creatures, while that of predestination comprehends only the rational ones, and those only that really reach their supernatural end (9). Hence, predestination, like providence, is an act both of the intellect and of the will, nay, formally, according to St. Thomas, it is an act of the intellect connoting also the will (10). Scotus holds an opposite opinion on this subject. However, this discrepancy is of no importance to our question.

Predestination does not only connote the act of the will, but it also supposes love and election. Hence, God predestines someone because He loves him and in loving him, He chooses and elects him from others who are not directed in like manner to everlasting happiness. The reason of this is, that the love of God is not like our love. While we pre-suppose the existence of good in the creatures we love, God, on the contrary, in loving creatures is the cause of that good possessed by some in preference to others. Hence no one is better than another unless he is more beloved by God (11).

(7) See St. Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae*, l. 2 c. 14, PL 45 1014.

(8) See St. Thomas, *Summa Theol. P. I q. 23 a. 1.*

(9) *Idem*, *De Verit. q. 6 a. 1.*

(10) *Idem*, *Summa Theol. P. I q. 23 a. 4.*

(11) *Idem*, *ibid.*

Having thus determined the nature of predestination, we may pass on to examine the question of its gratuitousness. St. Thomas proposes it in the following terms: "Whether as regards the effect, predestination has any cause; or, what comes to the same thing, whether God pre-ordained that He would give the effect of predestination to any one on account of any merits" (12). It is a question, therefore, of the foreknowledge of merits, that is, whether this foreknowledge can be the reason of predestination. By foreknowledge of merits is here meant, the merits existing in those who are predestinated. Predestination can be considered objectively and subjectively. In the first sense it is the act of the predestinator; in the second it is the effect of predestination. Now, when we speak of the gratuitousness of predestination, we take predestination in this latter sense. Indeed, as we have already pointed out, though predestination considered objectively or formally is an act of the divine intellect, yet is also connotes an act of the will, and, therefore, to speak of the cause of divine predestination formally considered, is the same as speaking of the cause of the divine will. But "in no wise has the will of God any cause... In Him to will an end is not the cause of his willing the means, yet He wills the ordering of the means to the end. Therefore, He wills this to be as a means to that; but He does not will this on account of that: "*Deus vult hoc esse propter hoc, sed non propter hoc vult hoc*" (13). "Wherefore, concludes the Aquinas, nobody has been so insane as to say that merit is the cause of divine predestination as regards the act of the predestinator" (14).

St. Thomas dwells upon this question in many of his works, expounding everywhere the same teaching, yet his exposition in the *Summa Theologica* is more simple and more accurate. Having excluded the opinion of Origen, which is based on the supposition that merits pre-existing in a former life are the reason of predestination, and then that of the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, admitting that merits pre-existing in this life are the cause of predestination, and thirdly that of others, belonging also to the Semi-Pelagian School, who taught that merits following the effect of predestination are the reason of predesti-

(12) See St. Thomas, l. ult. c.

(13) Idem, l.c. a. 5.

(14) Idem, P. I q. 19 a. 5.

tion, he distinguishes two effects in predestination itself, one in particular and the other in general. If it is a question of one particular effect: "There is no reason why one effect of predestination should not be the reason or cause of another; a subsequent effect being the reason of a previous one as its final cause; and the previous effect being the reason of the subsequent one as its meritorious cause, which is reduced to the disposition of matter" (15). But if we take the general effect of predestination, on which precisely the problem is centred, we find this explanation: "Thus it is impossible that the whole of the effect of predestination in general should have any cause as coming from us; because whatsoever is in man disposing him towards salvation, is all included under the effect of predestination; even the preparation for grace... Yet predestination has in this way, as regards its effect, the goodness of God for its reason; towards which the whole effect of predestination is directed as to an end; and from which it proceeds, as from its first moving principle" (16). And in the third reply of the same article St. Thomas says: "The reason for the predestination of some and reprobation of others must be sought for in the goodness of God ... Yet why He chooses some for glory and reprobates others, has no reason except the divine will" (17).

Scotus is in perfect agreement with the teaching of St. Thomas on the gratuitousness of predestination. Hence, there is no reason why we should engage in the exposition of his doctrine (18).

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PREDESTINATION OF CHRIST AND OUR PREDESTINATION

Having seen that predestination is altogether gratuitous and, therefore, nothing on the part of the predestined can be its reason, we have to see now what are the relations between the predestination of Christ and our predestination, that is, in what sense the predestination of Christ is said to be the cause of our predestination. But there are several kinds of causes, and Christ

(15) See St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* P. I q. 23 a. 5.

(16) *Idem.*, *ibid.*

(17) *Idem.*, *ibid.*

(18) See Scotus, *Oxon.*, in I Sent. d. 41 q. unica ed. Quaracchi n. 1153 p. 1256.

is the exemplar, efficient and final cause. This needs an explanation and in order to proceed logically, first we shall see in what sense Christ is the exemplar cause of our predestination; secondly we shall speak about the efficient cause and thirdly about the final one.

Christ the exemplar cause of our predestination. To ask whether Christ is the exemplar cause of our predestination is the same thing as asking, whether our predestination with reference to its effect is the same as that of Christ, and whether we obtain this effect in the way Christ obtained it. The answer of the Angelic Doctor to these questions is in the affirmative: "First in respect to the good to which we are predestined, for He was predestined to be the natural Son of God, whereas we are predestined to the adoption of sons... Secondly in respect of the manner of obtaining this good, that is by grace" (19). Hence St. Augustine illustrating this doctrine says: "The Saviour Himself, the mediator of God and man, the Man Jesus Christ, is the most splendid light of predestination and grace" (20). However, the predestination of Christ is not a homogeneous exemplar of our predestination, whose end is the adoption to the sonship of God; so also different is the manner of obtaining this end, because the predestination of Christ was preceded by no merits neither on the part of Christ Himself nor on the part of any other creature, while our predestination, though not preceded by our merits, was preceded by those of Christ.

Notwithstanding these differences the analogy between the two predestinations still holds true, because though our predestination was preceded by the merits of Christ, yet on our part we have in no way contributed, and therefore like that of Christ it is altogether gratuitous. Hence, the predestination of Christ remains the exemplar cause of our predestination (21).

Christ the efficient cause of our predestination. The efficient cause is twofold, physical and moral. The physical efficient cause of our predestination is evidently God. The moral efficient or meritorious cause of the predestination of men not only in general but also individually is Jesus Christ, who is the author of our

(19) See St. Thomas, Summa Theol. P. III q. 24 a. 3.

(20) See St. Augustine, De praedestinatione Sanctorum, c. 15, PL 44.

(21) See C. Friethoff O.P., De Incarnati Verbi mysterio, Romae 1935, t. 2 p. 335.

salvation according to the teaching of the Apostle: "Who (God) hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ" (22). This doctrine was later confirmed by the Council of Trent: "The causes of this justification are... the meritorious one His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ" (23). This can be proved also by reason, because there is no one of the predestined by Christ who is not redeemed, and therefore there is no effect of predestination which is not the effect of Redemption. Hence the Angelic Doctor concludes: "Christ's predestination is the cause of ours, for God by predestinating from eternity, so decreed our salvation, that it should be achieved through Jesus Christ" (24).

Christ the final cause of our predestination. This truth is also taught by the Apostle: "All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (25). From these words it clearly appears that God has decreed the salvation of mankind for the glory of Christ. This doctrine is also expressed by the already mentioned Council of Trent: "The final cause is the glory of God and of Christ" (26). St. Thomas in his commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard expresses briefly and beautifully all the doctrine of the relation of the predestination of Christ to our predestination in the following words: "The cause of our predestination is the predestination of Christ; it is the efficient cause, because He is the mediator of our salvation; it is the formal one (extrinsic and exemplar), since we were predestinated sons of God conformable to his image; it is the final cause, because our salvation redounds to his glory" (27).

On this point too, the doctrine of the Subtle Doctor is not contrary to that of the Angelic Master (28).

(to be continued)

(22) Ephes. I, 5.

(23) Trid. Sess. VI c. 7, Denz. 799.

(24) See St. Thomas, P. III q. 24 a. 4.

(25) I Cor. III, 23.

(26) Trid. l.c.

(27) See St. Thomas, in III Sent. d. 10 q. 1 a. 3 q. 1 a. 3.

(28) See Scotus, Oxon., in III Sent. d. 19 q. unica n. 8.