

# The Predestination of Christ and the Motive of the Incarnation \*

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## THE PREDESTINATION OF CHRIST AND THE OPINION OF ST THOMAS ON THE MOTIVE OF THE INCARNATION

AS we have already pointed out, the Subtle Doctor strives to prove the independence of Christ's predestination of man's sin by eight arguments, the first two of which we are now going to examine:—

**First argument:** "As the predestination of any one to everlasting happiness naturally precedes from the part of the object the foreknowledge of sin, this is more so of the soul of Christ which is predestinated to the highest degree of glory" (29). This argument which is based on the doctrine of the gratuitousness of predestination, if well examined will easily lead to the detection of its fallacy. Indeed according to the doctrine of the gratuitousness of predestination no merits or demerits on the part of the predestined can be the reason of predestination, which is strictly verified in the predestination of Christ; since this predestination was preceded neither by the merits of Christ Himself, who from the first instant of his conception was hypothetically united to human nature, nor by the merits of the Holy Fathers, born before the Incarnation, who had merited only in view of the grace of Christ. Now the principle of merit does not fall under merit (30). Nor can the foreknowledge of Adam's sin be brought forward as the mainstay of contradiction, since this foreknowledge does not enter in the predestination of Christ, either as a merit or demerit, but only as an occasion. And in this, there is nothing against the doctrine of the gratuitousness of predestination, since in this way the predestination of Christ depends on the foreknowledge of Adam's sin, not as on a *finis cui*, but only as on a *finis cui*, which is the material cause to which the predestination of Christ is beneficial.

(\*) The first part of this article appeared in Vol. I. No. 4. pp. 17-23.

(29) See Scotus, Oxon., in III Sent. d. d. 7 a. 3.

(30) See St Thomas, Summa Theol. P. III, q. 2 a. 11.

as it will be better explained in the examination of the second argument.

One should not wonder at this. It is a fact which happens in our daily life. For example, the persecutions of the tyrants were the occasion of the martyrdom of the martyrs. The persecution of St. Stephen was the occasion of the conversion of St Paul. God allows evil to happen in order to elicit a greater good therefrom. This doctrine is illustrated by the Angelic Doctor: "Predestination, he says, pre-supposes the foreknowledge of future things, and hence as God predestines the salvation of any one to be brought about by the prayers of others, so also He predestined the work of the Incarnation to be the remedy of human sin" (31). It is to be noted, however, that in these words there is nothing contradictory to what St. Thomas taught elsewhere regarding the gratuitousness of predestination, since the future things which predestination pre-supposes, as Cajetan rightly points out, are not constituted by predestination. They will come into being not in force of predestination, but in force of the general providence (32). In this way the predestination of Christ pre-supposes the foreknowledge of Adam's sin, in view of which Christ is predestinated to be the natural Son of God, through the necessity of the atonement of that sin.

Hence arguing from the gratuitousness of predestination, the independence of Christ's predestination of the foreknowledge of Adam's sin is falsely deduced. Besides, it is also clear that the opinion of St. Thomas on the motive of the Incarnation contains nothing against this doctrine. On the contrary, it is in perfect harmony with it.

**Second argument:** "Universally an ordinate willer first seems to will that which is nearer to the end, and so, as he wills the glory to some one before the grace, in like manner among the predestinated, ordinally, first he seems to will the glory to whom he wills to be nearer to the end. In this way he wills the glory to the soul of Christ before he wills it to any one else, and he wills the grace and glory to anyone before he foresees the opposite of these habits, that is, sin and condemnation. Therefore he willed the glory to the soul of Christ before he

(31) See St Thomas, I. ult. c.

(32) See Cajetan, in P. III q 1 a 3 n, 6, ed. Leonina, Romae 1903 p. 15.

foresaw that Adam was going to fall" (33). This argument being rather obscure, as it lies in the words of its subtle author, in order to be more clearly understood, may be proposed in the following form: "An ordinate willer first wills the end and that which is nearer to it; thus God first wills glory then grace; but Christ is nearer to the end than any other creature. Therefore Christ is willed by God before Adam, and, consequently, also before the knowledge of his sin."

This is the greatest of all the difficulties raised against the opinion of St. Thomas on the motive of the Incarnation, and in order to solve it, the Thomists of all times were faced with an incomparable and unequalled task. It is a question of the place which the Incarnation has in the order of the things willed by God. According to this objection the Incarnation was willed by God before the creation of all creatures, men and angels not excluded, and consequently, before the foresight of original sin. The Subtle Doctor himself teaches this in his *Reportata Parisiensis*: "First God, he says, loves Himself; secondly He loves Himself by means of others and this is a pure love; thirdly He wills to be loved by another who can love Him with the highest degree of love, speaking of extrinsic love; and fourthly He foresees the union of that nature which must love Him with the highest degree of love, even if no one would have fallen..... In the fifth instance He saw the mediator coming to suffer and to redeem his people, who would not have come as mediator, as sufferer, as redeemer if some one before had not committed sin" (34).

From this order of things as established by Scotus, a conclusion emerges, that even if man had not sinned the Son of God would have become incarnate, not only so, but, as he himself points out: "If neither the angel nor man fell, still Christ would have been so predestinated, nay, even if no one else than Christ was to be created" (35). That Christ is the first of the predestinated remains abundantly clear from the fact that He is the exemplar, efficient and final cause of our predestination. The cause is always before the effect at least *prioritate naturae*. Be-

(33) See Scotus, Oxon., l. ult. c.

(34) See Scotus, *Reportata Paris.*, in III Sent., d. 7 q. 4 n. 2, ed. Vives, Parisiis 1894, p. 301.

(35) Idem., *ibid.*, n. 5.

sides if Christ was willed by God as an end to all the other predestinated, seemingly He would have been so willed in view of his dignity and excellence, and for this reason the motive for which God predestinated Christ to be his natural Son was not sin or anything dependent on it. Sin, however, would have been the reason why Christ came as a redeemer and would-be sufferer.

Before we answer this objection it is deemed useful to recall to our mind some points regarding the nature of God's knowledge and will. First of all we must not forget that divine knowledge is altogether immune from any imperfection. There is no reasoning in Him since He sees everything in his essence. The same thing occurs as regards his will. God by a single act of his will, wills Himself and other things to be; Himself as an end, the other things as ordained to that end (36). Consequently, in divine knowledge, predestination and providence, there can be no priority or posteriority, neither on the part of the divine act, in the sense, that one thing is known or willed before another, nor on the part of the objects actively terminating the divine intellect or will, since nothing can actively terminate them. But an order of priority and posteriority on the part of the objects passively terminating the divine mind or will, in the sense that one object is the reason for the other, is not impossible: "*Deus vult hoc esse propter hoc*" (37). The dependence between these objects can be reciprocal, according to the Aristotelian law of reciprocity of causes: "*Causae sunt ad invicem causae in diverso genere*" (38).

Among the four kinds of causes only the final one has other species subordinated to it. Indeed the end is twofold, that is, *finis qui* and *finis cui* between which the reciprocal dependence can be equally saved as among the four principal kinds of causes. The *finis qui* is the thing which one wishes to obtain; the *finis cui* is the person for whom the *finis qui* or that thing is obtained. In other words it is the subject matter of the *finis qui*. It may happen, therefore, that two things which are willed, be dependent on each other in the sense we have just explained. Thus the farmer depends on the king as on a *finis qui*, while the king

(36) St Thomas. P. I q. 19 a. 2.

(37) Idem. P. I q. 19 a. 5.

(38) Idem, in V Metaph. c. 2 lect. 2, ed. Cathala 1926, n. 775.

has a relation to the farmer as to a *finis cui*, that is the farmer derives some utility from the king, because the king secures peace for his subjects. And so the king and the farmer are so reciprocally dependent on each other that none of them can exist without the other (39).

According to our way of thinking, the act of the divine will terminated by these different objects is conceived as distinct in decreeing different things which are distinct from each other. Hence theologians distinguish different instants or signs of reason in the act of the divine will, of which one is considered to be before the other, according to the order of the objects themselves. This order or connection between the objects may be natural or supernatural. The first is in the very nature of the objects, the other is willed by God. In the first case the order between the instances of the divine act is formed according to the similarities which are found in creatures in whose exemplarity we distinguish and order, that which in God pre-exists unitedly and simply (40). When, on the contrary, there is no natural connection between the different objects, then the order of priority and posteriority in these signs of reason, is to be drawn from the relation of the different effects, not of those which they naturally have, but of those which are allotted to them by divine will, in such a way, that that is to be conceived as first willed which is ordained by God to be the reason and the end of the other; the second is to be conceived as willed by God after the other, which is ordained by Him as a means to the first. And this is clear, since these objects having no natural connection between themselves, it is only from the will of God that this order is to be derived (41).

Now between the Incarnation and the Redemption of mankind there is no natural connection, and if there is any, this should be supernatural and therefore absolutely dependent on divine will. But that "which springs from God's will, and beyond the creature's due, can be made known to us only through being revealed in the Sacred Scripture, in which the divine will is made known to us" (42). God can intend the Incarnation

(39) Idem. in II Sent. d. XV q. 1 a. 1 ad 6m.

(40) St Thomas, P. I q. 13 a. 4.

(41) Salmanticenses, De Volunt. Dei, disp. 8 q. 19 a 15, Parisiis 1878.

(42) St Thomas, P. III q. 1 a. 3.

because of its intrinsic excellence and dignity, as a nearer end or *finis qui*. He can also intend it as a remedy for sin and for the salvation of humanity as a *finis cui*, in such a way that between these two objects there would be mutual dependence, in the sense that the Incarnation would be prior to human nature in the kind of the *finis qui*, while our salvation would have been prior to the Incarnation in the kind of *finis cui*, without any repugnance or contradiction. Indeed the reciprocal dependence between them would not have been natural but supernatural, depending only on God's will. It is possible for us to know the divine will concerning the Incarnation and the Redemption of mankind? Could we know the order of priority and posteriority between these two objects of the divine will? This is the question which we have to answer now.

As we have already emphasised, the solution to this problem can be exclusively obtained through Revelation, which is the only means of knowing the mind of God. It would have been too long to quote here all the references in the Holy Scripture which refer to this problem, however, we cannot refrain from giving, at least, the principal ones, and those only of the New Testament. The very name given to the Son of God, which was announced by the Angel, is Jesus, which means Saviour. This shows clearly the character of his mission on earth which mission was immediately indicated to St. Joseph by the Angel himself: "And thou shalt call his name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sins" (43). When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him, on the shores of the Jordan: "Behold, he said; the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (44). By these words the Son of God is designated as lamb, that is, most innocent, as well as remover of sins. Christ Himself on several occasions expressed the aim of his mission in the world as being that to save sinners. To the Pharisees who were scandalized because He ate with the publicans and sinners, He answered: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick..... for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (45).

The Apostles assign also this end, as the reason of the com-

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(43) Mt. I, 21.

(44) Jn. I, 29.

(45) Mt. IX, 12-13.

ing of Christ into the world. St. Paul calls a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation: "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (46). And in his Epistle to the Galatians he says, that God in the fulness of time sent forth his Son: "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (47). St. John in his Gospel says, that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but: "That the world through Him might be saved" (48).

From these references it is manifest how right was the Angelic Doctor when he affirmed, that: "Everywhere in the Sacred Scripture the sin of the first man is assigned as the reason of the Incarnation" (49), and therefore: "It is more in accordance with this to say, that the work of the Incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy for sin; so that had sin not existed the Incarnation would not have been" (50). In this sense also, all the Fathers have understood and interpreted the Holy Scripture. They not only assign the liberation of mankind from sin as the reason of the Incarnation, but what is more, they exclude every other reason as possible. Thus for example, the head of the Greek Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, affirms that: "There is no other cause of the Incarnation besides this one, indeed He saw us lying prostrate and oppressed by the tyranny of death and He had pity on us" (51); and the head of the Latin Fathers, St. Augustine, whose language is stronger than that of the other Fathers, says: "Our Lord Jesus Christ took flesh for no other reason but that by this arrangement of his merciful grace He could give life, save, redeem, free and illuminate all those who before were dead in their sins" (52). And in another place: "There was no other cause for our Lord to come except to save sinners. Take away disease, take away wounds and there is no need of medicine" (53).

Not only the Fathers, but also the Councils of the Church,

(46) I Tim. I, 5.

(47) Gal. IV, 4.

(48) Jn. III, 16-17.

(49) St Thomas, P. III q. 1 a. 3.

(50) Idem., *ibid.*

(51) St John Chrys., Hom. V n. 11, PG 63, 47.

(52) St Augustine, De Pecc. remiss. 26, 39, PL. 44, 131.

(53) Idem. Sermo 175, PL. 44, 945.

which are the authentic interpreters of the Holy Tradition, express the same teaching on this subject. Already in the Nicæan Council, the Fathers speak of Christ: "Who for our salvation came down from heaven, became flesh and was made man" (54). And in that of Constantinople: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven" (55). This doctrine we repeat in the Credo of the Mass: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnated". It is not only here, that the Liturgy puts the Redemption of man as the only reason of the Incarnation. It suffices to quote the words, which the Church sings in the blessing of the Paschal Candle: "O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer". And a little further: "O surely necessary sin of Adam".

The illustrious Jesuit theologian, Cardinal Toletus, after a detailed examination on the mind of the Fathers with regard to this subject, concludes: "I think that if the old Scholastic Doctors saw the many witnesses of so many Fathers which I am now giving against the opinion of Scotus, they would have given to it no probability at all. Hence in my opinion, *salva pace*, it is deprived of any probability, of any truth and of any genius" (56).

To these we may add also a theological reason based on the efficaciousness of the divine will. God in the first instance willed the Incarnation in a passible flesh. But the Incarnation in a passible flesh pre-supposes the foresight of sin. Therefore the Incarnation depends on the foreknowledge of sin, and in consequence, had sin not been committed the Incarnation would not have been decreed. While the second of these premises is clear in itself, the first can be easily proved. Indeed there are three possibilities in which God could have decreed the Incarnation, that is, in a passible flesh, in an impassible flesh or in common, abstracting from its passibility and impassibility. But God could not have decreed the Incarnation in an impassible flesh, because had He so willed, it would have taken place in that state. Otherwise it would follow, that God had changed his mind, which we cannot affirm. Neither the last hypothesis, in which God would have decreed the Incarnation in common, is possible, since this supposes imperfection in God's knowledge

(54) Denz-Bann, 54.

(55) Idem., 86.

(56) Toletus, in P. III q. 1 a. 3, Romæ 1869.



and will. Indeed providence, of which predestination is a part, is comprehensive in foresight, and so, before it decrees something to happen, it foresees all the possible circumstances and ways in which that thing can be done. Hence we cannot say that God first willed the Incarnation in common, abstracting from the ways it could have been done, and then with another decree willed it to be in a passible flesh. God's decree not only regards the thing absolutely in itself and abstractly considered, but also its issue; and therefore such a decree cannot exist in God. It argues imperfection in Him, that is, Impotence and change, which no one would ever dream to attribute to God (57). Hence the only possibility which remains is, that God in the first instant decreed the Incarnation to take place in a passible flesh for the Redemption of mankind.

In conclusion the salvation of humanity is the subject or the *finis cui* to which Christ's Incarnation is beneficent, and therefore the first thing foreseen is the fall of mankind in whose remedy the Incarnation becomes ordained.

What are we going to answer to the Subtle Doctor's objection? If it is well considered this argument shows, that he wanted to establish the order between the Incarnation and the Redemption from the part of the act of the divine will, in such a way as if priority and posteriority existed in this act, which is not possible. As regards his principle: "An ordinate willer first wills the end and that which is nearer to it", this would have been true had it been a question of only one kind of causes, that is, of the final cause; but here we have another, that of the material one. Hence though we could say that a thing is before another when it is a question of the final cause, we have also to affirm, that with respect to the material cause it is posterior to it, as it is evident from the already quoted Aristotelian law of the reciprocity of causes. From this it appears, as the Angelic Doctor points out, that the word *propter* can have two senses, it can mean both the *finis qui* and the *finis cui*, and so it is equally true to say, that the soul is for the body, that is, the soul is the *finis qui* of the body, and that the body is for the soul, that is, the body is the material cause of the soul, on which it

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(57) Salmanticenses, De Incarn. disp. 2 dub. 1 n. 29, Parisiis 1878, p. 263.

depends as on a *finis cui*, in such a way, that had the body not existed, the soul would never have been created (58).

According to this conception of the *finis*, the connection and reciprocal dependence between the Incarnation and Redemption can be very easily established. In this way Christ appears to be willed by God as a *finis qui* of all the creatures, angels and men not excluded (59). On the other hand, however, Christ would not have been predestinated to be the natural Son of God, if human nature was not to be redeemed, that is, had sin not preceded; consequently mankind would be the material cause to be perfected, or the *finis cui* of Christ's predestination.

Scotus therefore fallaciously proceeds in his argument, which can be very well solved by the doctrine of the reciprocity of causes. He deviates from the order of possibility to that of reality. We do not deny, that in force of another decree, God could have ordered the work of the Incarnation, independently altogether of the hypothesis of the fall and reparation, for as our Angelic Master says: "The power of God is not limited to this" (60). But the question is about the present decree which can be known to us only through Revelation. And Revelation tells us everywhere, that Christ was predestinated to be the natural Son of God dependently on the hypothesis of the liberation of mankind. Besides, the Subtle Doctor passes over from what seems to us more to be willed by God, to that which is *de facto* willed by Him. The soul of Christ is not nearer to God, unless God willed it to be so, and this is here precisely the question to know what the will of God is, which knowledge can be acquired exclusively from the fountains of Revelation.

Therefore, the opinion of St Thomas on the motive of the Incarnation contains nothing against the doctrine of the predestination of Christ as exemplar, efficient and final cause of our own predestination. Though Christ in these three kinds of causes is before mankind, however, there is another kind of causes, that of the material ones, in which the predestination of Christ is posterior to our predestination. Mankind, as it has

(58) St Thomas, in II Sent. d. XV q. 1 a. 1 ad 6m

(59) G. Grech O.P., Il concetto della regalità di Cristo, in Scientia (Melitae) Vol. V (1939) p. 283; item G. Grech O.P., The influence of Christ as head of the angels, *ibid.* vol XI (1945) p. 69.

(60) St Thomas, P. III q. 1 a. 3.

already been stated, is the material cause or the *finis cui* for which the predestination of Christ is ordained. This opinion is also in perfect harmony with the other doctrine of the gratuitousness of predestination. These doctrines far from being contrary to this opinion, corroborate and illustrate it; consequently we have clearly shown that the doctrine of the Doctor Communis of the Church, is altogether immune from any discordant note of contradiction, which his adversaries invain tried to find in his works, with reference to which, Pope John XXII declares: "He alone enlightened the Church more than all the other doctors" (61).

It is only appropriate to conclude this brief paper by recalling the words of Pope Innocent VI. quoted by the immortal Leo XIII in his Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* of the 4th August 1879. These words, which in the opinion of the same Pope Leo, may be regarded as the summary of all the judgments pronounced by the Supreme Pontiffs on Thomas Aquinas, are the following: "His doctrine exceeds all others, with the exception of canon law, in propriety of expression, precision of definition and truth of statement, so that those who have once grasped it are never found to have deviated far from the path of truth; and anyone impugning it, has always been suspect of error".

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(61) See Bull of Canonization: "Redemptionem misit Dominus".