

that all the duty that we owe, by God's bidding, to Fatherhood and Motherhood, for (reasons of) God's Fatherhood and Motherhood, is fulfilled in true loving of God" (*Ch.* 60).

But if God is our "Mother in Kind", he is still more our "Mother by Grace"; and not only womankind alone, but every human being is called upon to reflect that Maternity, and to become not only Mother to men, but even Mother to God—"He is my MOTHER", says our Blessed Lord (*Mark* iii, 35). How is this possible? He himself has supplied the answer—"He that doeth the Will of my Father . . . He is my Mother" (*cf. Matt.* xii, 50). By his obedience to the Will of his Father, the Eternal Word, made flesh and born of a woman, redeemed the human race; and so by his death on Calvary he brought forth the "new creature", who is born "not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (*John* i, 13), a creature which is "another Christ", his own Mystical Body; "for Jesus is all that shall be saved, and all that shall be saved is Jesus" (*Mother Julian, Ch.* 51). Therefore, when by Grace, which involves the union of our will with the Will of God, we are incorporated in Christ and become 'another Christ', then also does He act in and through us, and we in and through Him. Thus we share in his redemptive activity, which is to share in his Motherhood and bring him to birth in souls. Just as his earthly Mother became on Calvary the Mother of the Mystical Christ, the Mother of each grace-redeemed soul, the Mother of the Son of God in each soul. That is the end of all Motherhood, natural and spiritual, of God's and of ours: to give to the Eternal Word "une humanité de surcroît", to use the untranslatable phrase of Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity, in which he can be born again and renew all his mysteries. Or rather, there is only one Motherhood, the Divine Motherhood, in which, as in so much else, God deigns to use us creatures as his instruments, and to act in and through us.

ALMSGIVING

By

FRANCISCO DE VITORIA (c. 1480-1546).

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[Vitoria's commentary on the *Summa* includes an elaborate discussion of the duty of almsgiving (on II-II, 32, 5). It is in many ways of great interest, but is too long and sometimes too intricate to encourage detailed translation here. I give in brief paraphrase the main steps of the reasoning, neglect some by-paths of argument, and translate in full one particularly vigorous passage. Actual quotations are given in inverted commas. I have thought it best throughout to render *extrema necessitas* by 'desperate need'. The term is technical, and is used of a state where without immediate help the sufferer is likely to die;

gravis necessitas ('serious need') is something short of this, and may cover cases which common parlance would call 'extreme'¹]

§1. St. Thomas maintains these four positions. (a) Some almsgiving is of precept. (b) Almsgiving from one's superfluity is sometimes of precept. (c) In desperate need, almsgiving is of precept. (d) In other cases, almsgiving is of counsel.

§2. Further points are much disputed. In particular there are two questions. (a) In a case of desperate need, is a man bound to give from what is necessary for his status? For instance, his status requires him to ride. If the poor are starving and he can relieve them only by selling his horses, is he bound to do so and go about on foot? (b) If a man has superfluity (i.e., more than he needs for livelihood and status), is he bound to give alms from this, not in desperate need only (on which there is no dispute) but in serious need also?

Many authorities say No to both questions. Alexander of Hales and Gabriel Biel say Yes to the first, No to the second.

§3. In spite of opinions to the contrary, I lay down these two positions. (a) In a case of desperate need, a man is bound to give alms from what is necessary for his status; that is, to save the poor from starving, he is bound to give although his status will suffer by it. (b) If a man has more than he needs for status and livelihood, he is bound to give alms from it in serious as well as in desperate need.

I have on my side such Scholastic authorities as Palude, Richard of Middleton, and Cagnazzo (in the *Summa Tabiena*); also Hadrian VI (*De restitutione*, qu. 12). But since the positions are by no means generally accepted, I proceed to prove them by Scripture and reason. Then, against some respected Thomists (among them Almain and St. Antoninus of Florence), I shall show that St. Thomas himself accepted them.

§4. Proofs from Scripture of the second position.

(a) I Jn. 3: 7. *If a man has the substance of this world and sees his brother suffering need and closes his heart against him, how can God's charity dwell in him?* My opponents say that St. John is speaking of desperate need; but in that case the duty of helping would fall upon anyone—on peasants and cobblers and such poor folk. As it is, he speaks explicitly of the rich, who by definition have more than they need for status and livelihood. He says: Here is a rich man; he sees his neighbours in need and will not give; he closes his heart against them. How can God's charity dwell in him?² This is precisely my second position. "If in such a case the text is not to be literally applied, I do not know

¹ Text (a far from critical text) in *Comentarios a la Secunda Secundae de Santo Tomás*, Tomo 2 (Salamanca, 1932), pp. 168-191.

² i.e. He must have lost charity, and therefore must be in mortal sin.

what passage of Scripture allows of literal application.”

(b) Lk. 11: 41. *From what remains over, give alms, and all things are clean to you.* Our Lord was clearly rebuking the Pharisees for not giving alms from their superfluity—from what was beyond the needs of their status and livelihood. I know that our modern theologians dispute this interpretation, but it is that of all the saints whom St. Thomas quotes in his *catena aurea*. And there is no hint of *desperate* need.

(c) Lk. 3: 11. *Let him who has two coats give one to him who has none.* This is not a counsel of perfection; it is the Baptist's answer to those who asked him how to escape damnation.

(d) I. Tim. 6: 17. *Bid the rich of this world not to be high-minded . . . to give readily and to share.* The bidding to give and share is linked with the bidding not to be high-minded; this latter is certainly a precept; the other therefore is also a precept. Nor is it a question of ‘desperate need’; if a rich man will give a piece of bread only to someone starving, one would not call him a ‘ready giver’.

(e) Lk. 16: 19-30. Dives was damned for not relieving Lazarus. Yet Lazarus was not in desperate need; he was a beggar, and might have gone begging elsewhere; nor are we told that he died of hunger. But he was in serious need, and Dives was therefore bound to aid him from his superfluity. Lazarus comes into the story precisely to point this lesson; he would not have been needed if our Lord had only been warning men against gluttony and extravagance.

(f) Above all, there is Matt. 25: 41, where our Lord condemns to eternal fire the men who refused the works of mercy. He himself gives the reason for their damnation—that when he was hungry and thirsty, a stranger and naked, sick and in prison, they denied him food and drink, shelter or clothing or ministrations. Here the mention of homelessness, nakedness and prison is sufficient proof that our Lord is not speaking only of desperate need. A naked or shelterless or imprisoned man is not therefore in danger of death, but he certainly is in serious need. Here too then the rich were bound to assist with alms, and are damned for not assisting so.

(g) Matt. 6: 24. *You cannot serve God and mammon.* Mammon undoubtedly means riches. But what is meant by serving riches? Not the seeking them merely (for that is allowable) but the never giving them to the poor; and in that sense our Lord says that one cannot serve both riches and God.

(h) There are many more Scriptural texts on almsgiving; and the Fathers have clearly expounded them. See Chrysostom, Basil, Theophylact, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Isidore. The general tenor of such passages is that to retain what one does not need is a kind of robbery.

§5. Proofs from reason³ of both positions.

We know as Christians that we are bound to love our neighbour as ourselves. On the application of this precept we may make a pagan philosopher our judge. Suppose a man to possess no superfluity but merely the riches proper to his status; and suppose him to see a poor man in desperate need whom with one ducat he might relieve but will not relieve. What would Aristotle say? Would he say that he loved his neighbour as himself?

So too with the matter of serious need. "A neighbour of mine is in serious need—let us say a man of high rank who has been imprisoned and will forfeit his possessions. I find myself with a superfluity; I possess a thousand ducats, and with fifty of them could rescue him and save him from such disgrace. If I fail to do so, who would say that I love him as myself? This is what St. John meant in saying: *Beloved, let us not love in word alone.*⁴ The men that I have in mind love only in word and not in deed. I cannot but think that such rich men are sons of perdition.

Again, we know from the Gospel and St. Paul that we are all one body in Christ, and that one of us is hand to another.⁵ How is this borne out if the hand, the rich man, does not help the foot, the poor man in desperate need? Surely such rich men cannot belong to the body of the Church . . . "

§11. We return to consider the second position: that in a case of serious need men are bound to give alms from what is not needed for their status. The argument used by those who assert or allow the contrary is that proposed by Alexander of Hales. It is plain that the rich—great numbers of them—fail to give alms from their superfluity. Hence, if my position is granted, most if not all rich men are doomed. But since this conclusion appears untrue, my position itself must be untrue.

I should say in answer: I do not see how the conclusion is to be proved untrue; on the contrary, it should surely be granted, if we are not to distort the plain words of the Gospel. *It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven . . . It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven . . . With men it is impossible.*⁶—Ah, say our adversaries, the text is true of rich men who

³ In the examples considered here, Scriptural texts are again discussed. But they are texts of a wider character, not concerned explicitly with almsgiving. Both parties accept their general validity; their application to the matter in hand is made in the light of reason or mere good sense. There are further arguments, here omitted, which turn on the natural law and the law of nations.

⁴ I Jn. 3: 18.

⁵ Cf. Jn. 17 and I Cor. 12.

⁶ Matt. 19: 23-26.

keep the goods of others.—But the Gospel says no such thing. And besides, if poor men should keep the goods of others, for them too it would be impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven. No; our Lord is speaking of all rich men, the good included; and he says it is hard for them to be saved—exceedingly hard, unless special grace be given them. This is confirmed by the parable of the sower, where we read that riches stifle the word of God (and this holds for riches honestly come by). It is also confirmed by the text of St. Paul: *Those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and into the devil's snare.*⁷ Again, we are told in Matthew that *the kingdom of heaven is taken by violence, and it is the violent who gain possession of it.*⁸ This is said of men in general; much harder then must it be for the rich to enter that kingdom. There is also the fifth of Ecclesiastes: *Riches kept to the hurt of the owner . . . He that loves riches shall have no fruit of them.* Read the whole chapter, which has many hard words against the rich. Certainly then no Christian man can be rich without misgivings. To return to Alexander's argument—one answer is to grant the conclusion; and that I think is the better way. There is nothing new in dooming the rich; Dives was doomed not for keeping the goods of others or feasting sumptuously, but for failing to give in serious need.

There is however another way of answering (and I only hope it is not a wrong one): that is, we may deny the conclusion. I mean that in saying that one possessed of a superfluity is bound to give alms, we do not assert that a man with a hundred gold pieces is bound to give these, and that if he comes by another thousand, he is bound to give those as well. After all, this wealth may not be superfluous; it may be the man's duty to leave his sons the means of maintaining their status, and he is then within his rights in not parting with it. No, we do not lay down the position in so rigorous a sense. Again, we do not say that a man is bound to give all his superfluity and give it at once. If he gives as often and in such measure as a wise man would prescribe, that is enough. If a rich man with superfluity came to me in the confessional and said that he always gave a beggar a penny, I would no more absolve him than I would the devil. But if he gives alms at certain times in the year, and gives the poor not one *blanca* apiece but good round alms, then he fulfils the precept.

There is also the case of ecclesiastics with ample revenues and possessed of a superfluity. They have no heirs to leave to, and if they fail to give generous alms they cannot escape guilt. I know well enough they will not believe this, but the truth is that all such are damned, and it is better that they should be . . . ”

⁷ I Tim. 6: 9.

⁸ Matt. 11: 12.