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THE RECEPTIONIST DOCTRINE OF AQUINAS.

BY THE REV. THOMAS C. HAMMOND, M.A.

A RECENT review in "Theology," under the signature of Canon Quick, raises a very important problem in relation to the actual doctrine of Thomas Aquinas which may prove of interest to your readers. I crave pardon for dealing with the matter as it appeared in the review, being convinced that the wider issue will emerge as the article proceeds.

Canon Quick draws attention to the fact that in my chapter on Aquinas and Wicliff in *The Evangelical History of Holy Communion* I offer no reference for a quotation from Aquinas which he considers that I have misapplied.

To accuse a writer of suppressing a reference is rather serious and I trust that this possible meaning of my reviewer's words does not represent his position. The passage which I quoted, taken in relation to its context, is as follows: "What is reality only (*res tantum*) namely, the grace bestowed, is in the recipient." I must apologise to readers of the Article for my failure to give the reference. It is "Summa Pt. III, Q. 73, reply to Obj. 3." Strangely enough my critic does not supply the reference whose absence disturbed him. He, therefore, leaves his readers in doubt as to whether he had discovered it or was relying on his general knowledge of the doctrine of Aquinas. It is surprising that he did not afford his readers the opportunity of testing immediately the value of his criticism.

Readers of my Article will notice that it is fairly fully documented. This may have suggested some sinister motive in leaving this particular extract unattested. On the other hand, it might convey, what is really the fact, that it was a supplementary quotation, on which, alone, no argument is founded.

The context reveals that I was discussing Aquinas's theory that a defect in the offerer reduces the spiritual value of a sacrifice. I wrote: "It is the relation between the offering and the soul of the offerer that really determines the effect of the Eucharist. But such relation is established when the believing soul passes beyond the symbol and gratefully accepts the reality offered to faith." To support this position I introduce the quotation which is the object of criticism. The Latin, which is important for our purpose, reads thus: Et ex hoc etiam consequitur alia differentia nam in Sacramento Eucharistie, id quod res et sacramentum est in ipsa materia: id autem quod est res tantum est in suscipiente, scilicet, *gratia* quae confertur: in baptismo autem utrumque est in suscipiente scilicet et character qui est res et sacramentum et *gratia* remissionis peccatorum, quae est res tantum et eadem ratio est de aliis sacramentis." The italics are mine in the above quotation.

The particular criticism directed against the quotation is that I have misled my readers by ignoring Saint Thomas's technical distinction between what is *res tantum* and what is *res et sacramentum*. Surely it would be a strange proceeding to introduce a passage in which the distinction between *res et sacramentum* and *res tantum* is so obviously contained in order to mislead readers as to the exact force of this technicality.

Two questions obviously suggest themselves. What is the distinction that Aquinas seeks to make? Wherein lies the misuse of the quotation? The answer to the first must be undertaken if we are to rightly appraise the value of the objection which gives rise to the second.

My critic adverts to the "technical distinction" and leaves it there. This may be clever reviewing when the object is to create a vague uneasiness and hostility in relation to a definite presentation, but it is bad theology. The readers of "Theology" are not so conversant, as a whole, with Aquinas's technicalities as to secure from them a valid judgment on the merits of the case. Canon Quick's word becomes their bond. At the risk of labouring the obvious I propose to outline the theory of Aquinas that gives rise to "the technical distinction."

There are seven sacraments of the new Law variously estimated according to the grace conferred and the dignity of the Sacrament itself. If we regard the Sacraments according to their respective dignities, the Holy Eucharist takes first place. It differs from all the others in that while they are perfected by use, in it alone the Author of all sanctity is present before use. This is, of course, the direct consequence of the doctrine of Transubstantiation. If, however, we regard the Sacraments from the point of view of the grace conferred, then there are two sacraments of the dead, Baptism and Penance; and five Sacraments of the living, of which the Holy Eucharist is one.

There is yet another difference running through Aquinas relating to the "res" or "reality"¹ of the Sacrament. Seeing that six of the Sacraments are perfected in use it would seem to follow that there could be no "res" or reality apart from use. To this position Aquinas would give unqualified assent. Consecrated water, for example, does not convey its virtue unless and until a person is baptised. The "res" or "reality" is in the recipient. What is this reality? In three Sacraments it is "reality only" that is "the grace which is conferred."

In Extreme Unction, Penance and Matrimony, the outward sign is a sign of grace and "the reality" is the grace conferred. There is, however, a subtle distinction between these sacraments and the remaining four. This distinction takes on a twofold character. In

¹ It is open to question whether the translation of "res" by "reality" adopted consistently by the Dominican translators has not obscured the relevancy of Aquinas's argument in some places owing to the English meaning of the word Reality. Furthermore there is a subreption in the transference from "res et sacramentum" to "res tantum" in Aquinas's own use.

Baptism, Confirmation and Orders the "reality only" and the "reality and Sacrament" are both found in the recipient and not in the outward element or appearance apart from the recipient. But the "reality only" is the grace conferred. The "reality and sacrament" is a "character." "Character," according to Aquinas, is a new capacity of the soul which is ever after resident in it, but which is quite distinct from grace. He compares the "character" in Baptism to the endowment of the soul with a new capacity similar to the enlistment of soldiers (III. Q. 63. Art. 3 conclusio). It is a "reality" because it really confers a new power on the soul. It makes the soul, e.g. capable of receiving other sacraments. It enables the soul to take part in religious worship. But "character" is also a sign of this conferred power in relation to the sensible Sacrament which confers it (Q. 63). That is to say the baptised person has not only the power which "character" confers but has also in Baptism the sign or token of this power and is marked out from others as its possessor. As it is impossible to separate in this regard, Sacrament and reality, "character" is "reality and Sacrament" and this confirmed experience is in the receiver. This is true of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Orders. It may not be out of place to recall that the "Catechism of the Council of Trent" elaborates the sketch given above and declares that "character" is, as it were, a certain distinctive mark impressed on the soul, which inhering, as it does perpetually, is indelible, and of which St. Augustine has thus written: "Shall the Christian sacraments be able perchance to accomplish less than the bodily mark impressed, namely, on the soldier? That mark is not stamped on the soldier anew, when returning to the military service from which he had deserted, but the old one is recognised and approved."¹ For this reason, seeing that, apart from grace, this feature is an invariable concomitant of administration, these sacraments cannot be reiterated without sacrilege. In the case of an adult who opposes an obstacle to grace in any of these sacraments there is received; "Sacramentum tantum," i.e. the bare outward sign. "Res et sacramentum," i.e. the sacramental character, which in Baptism, e.g. relates to the worship of the Church that now is. But the "res tantum," i.e. the grace conferred, is not bestowed because a hindrance has been opposed in obstinate unbelief or by some damaging sin.

But the Eucharist is intended to be reiterated and does not imprint "an indelible mark on the soul called character." Are we, therefore, to relegate it to the rank of the other three, Penance, Extreme Unction and Matrimony, which have no such dual character? There is the outward sign in them, according to Aquinas, and the inward grace. "Sacramentum tantum" and "res tantum." The answer is no. The Eucharist does not imprint a character, but it has three parts, "Sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum." In order, therefore, to avoid the inevitable conjunction which is inseparable from the "res et sacramentum" as exhibited in Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, Aquinas makes the "res

¹ *Cat. of Council of Trent*, p. 119. Ed. 1816. Dublin.

et sacramentum " in the Eucharist resident in " the very material." He adds " but that which is reality only is in the recipient that is the grace which is conferred." Of course it is impossible for a recipient to avoid receiving " the reality and the Sacrament " when he partakes of the Eucharist. So far the inevitable conjunction is also displayed here. But he, as an individual, adds nothing to the contained reality nor is the reality occasioned by his act of reception. It is there by virtue of the consecration of the priest and not by virtue of administration as in the case of the other sacraments. The Catechism of the Council of Trent clearly indicates the difference : " All the other Sacraments are perfected by the use of their matter, that is, by their administration ; baptism, for instance, becomes a sacrament when the ablution is being actually performed ; but to the perfection of the Eucharist the consecration of the elements suffices ; for, though preserved in a pyxis, either element ceases not to be a sacrament."¹ It is by this distinction that Aquinas relieves himself of the inconvenience of declaring that the Eucharist being " res et sacramentum " must impose a character.

Now the contention which this " technical distinction " is supposed to invalidate is that, granting even his premises, the appropriate element is the more important for Aquinas. Either I must indeed have been " obscure in method," as my critic suggests, or this conclusion is strongly forced upon the critical reader. Is the baptismal " character," important and inevitable as it may be, more important than the baptismal grace? To ask the question is to answer it even upon Aquinas's elaborate formulation. In this case the " res et sacramentum " is of less vital moment than the " res tantum." Can any reason be adduced why it should be otherwise in the case of receiving the Eucharist? Had Canon Quick quoted from page 122 of my chapter he would have seen that I dealt directly with this very question. Perhaps it was here my method was too obscure to enable him to grasp it. Still I venture to submit the paragraph afresh. I stated : " What is the need of these subtle distinctions? Once the question is asked it positively clamours for an answer. And Aquinas supplies the answer. The ' res gratiae ' alone matters, and the ' gratia sacramenti ' is independent of all those changes in material substance which his elaborate theory posited. The two parts of a sacrament sanctioned by immemorial custom and quoted from Augustine to Aquinas himself are compelled to give place to a new threefold division, the ' signum sacramenti,' the ' res sacramenti,' and the ' gratia sacramenti.' " If it is possible to equate in meaning, " sacramentum tantum " and " signum sacramenti," " res et sacramentum " and " res sacramenti," " res tantum " and " gratia sacramenti," then the " technical distinction " has been noted and commented upon.

Does the reviewer mean to suggest that no such equation is possible?

Have we not the last equation in the words quoted already, " res tantum . . . scilicet gratia quae confertur " ?

¹ Ibid., p. 167.

With regard to "res et sacramentum," the reviewer might consider Q. 80, Art. I, reply to Obj. I and II, where we read: "Some receive the sacrament only, while others receive the Sacrament and the reality of the Sacrament (*rem Sacramenti*) . . . that sacramental eating which does not secure the effect is divided in contrast with spiritual eating." And yet again (in Q. 80, Art. III, Conclusio): "Some have erred upon this point, saying that Christ's body is not received sacramentally by sinners. . . . Spiritual eating does not belong to sinners."

That "sacramentum tantum" can be identified with "signum sacramenti" is clear from Q. 80, Art. IV, Conclusio. We read there: "That which is a sacrament is a sign of the reality of the sacrament (*res sacramenti*). Now there is a twofold reality of this sacrament as stated above (Q. 73, Art. VI); one which is signified and contained, namely Christ Himself; while the other is signified but not contained, namely Christ's mystical body, which is the fellowship of the saints."

When we turn to the reference here supplied we find Aquinas writing: "We can consider three things in this Sacrament, namely, that which is Sacrament only, and this is the bread and wine; that which is both reality and sacrament, to wit, Christ's true body; and lastly that which is reality only, namely the effect of this Sacrament."

Once more in Q. 79, Art. III, we read: "The power of this sacrament . . . can be considered in comparison with the recipient of the Sacrament, in so far as there is, or is not, found in him an obstacle to receiving the fruit of this sacrament. Now, whoever is conscious of mortal sin . . . cannot be united with Christ, which is the effect of this Sacrament (*quod sit per hoc sacramentum*) as long as he retains an attachment towards mortal sin."

To sum up: In Aquinas four sacraments cannot be received without what he calls "reality and sacrament." Three out of the four have both the reality and the sacrament in the recipients, that is to say, they mark the recipient, separating him from others and endowing him with certain capacities. Baptism distinguishing him as a Christian (cf. our Article XXVII) and rendering him capable of religious worship and the reception of other sacraments. Confirmation further distinguishing him as a soldier and witness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Orders marking him as a minister of God and conferring priestly powers upon him. The distinguishing element is the sacrament, the capacity is the Spiritual reality, and they are both in the recipients not in *ipsa materia*.

The Eucharist is the fourth Sacrament which has this feature of adding to "sacramentum tantum" the aspect of "res et sacramentum." But in this case the reality and the sacrament is "in ipsa materia." The outward appearance constitutes the sign of an inward reality, the body and blood of Christ. There is indeed a sign further of that which is not in *ipsa materia*, the mystical body of Christ. But in this Sacrament, as in the other three, the "res tantum," the "reality only," is the effect of the sacrament, viz. the union of the recipient with the contained Christ. This effect can

only be accomplished when there is no attachment to mortal sin in the recipient. The presence of mortal sin hinders appropriation of Christ.

I seem to have laboured the point, but it is because the conclusion appeared to me so obvious that it was with some effort I could appreciate a criticism which suggests, in view of this weight of evidence, that the appropriative element is not the important factor for Aquinas. I might add that the quotations given could be largely extended and all would convey the same message that—notwithstanding the alleged miracle of Transubstantiation—the presence of sin in the soul hinders the effect of the Sacrament which is the grace conferred. Sin does not nullify the change of substance, according to Aquinas, but it does nullify the identification with the body of Christ which alone ministers blessing to the soul.

The body, dare we say, remains *ab extra*, a reality in a Sacrament which is ineffective and unprofitable, nay rather is a minister of condemnation. With the best will in the world to understand Canon Quick I can only conclude that his criticism springs from the modern tendency to make Aquinas more obscure than necessary. The unusual terminology in which his message is couched constitutes a difficulty to most students. The attempt to import a mystical indefiniteness into this most matter-of-fact Latin scholastic makes the obscure unintelligible. I am told that the very modern young person exhorts the elderly generation to “come out of their period.” Might I beg Canon Quick to come out of his “technical distinction” and tell us in plain terms what he conceives the distinction to be if it is other than I have described.

Bishop Bernard Heywood in *The Bible Day by Day* (Manchester: Sherratt & Hughes, 2s. 6d.) provides a book for readings for each day of the year with an introduction in which he explains his views on Inspiration, and notes on the selected passages. The passages are short and suitable. The low price of the volume and considerations of bulk probably account for the thin paper used and the type showing through.

Outlines of Teaching Sermons for a Year, prepared by a Subcommittee dealing with Adult Religious Education in the diocese of St. Albans (George Allen & Unwin, 3s. 6d. and 2s.), provides a course intended to deal with the questions regarding religion most frequently discussed to-day. Many valuable suggestions for preachers can be obtained from it.

Doctor Vanderkemp was a remarkable man who devoted the later portion of his life to missionary work among the native races of South Africa under The London Missionary Society. Mr. A. D. Martin has written a most interesting account of his varied career, and the many difficulties he had to face in the prosecution of his work (The Livingstone Press, 2s. 6d.).