

THE WILL AND THE INTELLECT IN THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT  
ACCORDING TO THOMAS AQUINAS

ABSTRACT

In the past, misunderstanding of the interaction between the intellect and the will or of their co-operation with grace was the cause of multiple heresies (e.g. Pelagianism, Quietism, Gnosticism). Excessive emphasis on the role of either one power or misperception of the relationship between nature and grace led to distortions in the spiritual life of Catholics. Hence, this dissertation is an attempt at the exposition of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine outlining the process of development of man's spiritual powers in an encounter with the supernatural gift of grace. The successive chapters of this doctoral paper endeavour to expound how Aquinas understood man's corporeal-spiritual nature, the influence of God's grace on human nature, as well as the role of theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit in a subject's spiritual life.

The first chapter introduces Thomas Aquinas' assumptions concerning the anthropological structure. Aquinas perceives man as a being who is a unity of body and soul – a corporeal-spiritual *compositum*. The body is the seat of human sensory powers. The soul, on the other hand, is the natural substrate for the higher powers – intellect and will. Among spiritual and sensory powers we distinguish those which are responsible for human capacity for both cognition and concupiscence. Having spiritual-corporeal structure makes man a conscious being who is responsible for his actions, which are effected through the collaboration of corporeal and spiritual powers.

The second chapter discusses the thomist concept of divine grace as a perfected of human nature. The spiritual structure highlighting the truth of man's creation in the image of God makes man *capax Dei* – open to accepting the gift of grace. When that happens, the essence of the soul becomes the substrate onto which grace descends. The presence of grace in the soul becomes the cause of, and basis for, the emergence of theological virtues. Not only is man thereby made capable of establishing a relationship with God, his soul also becomes the dwelling of the Divine Persons.

Collaboration with grace begins the remedial process of a human nature corrupted by original sin. Thus begins the long-drawn process of christomorphization, i.e. imitation of Him in whose image and likeness man has been created.

The third chapter deals with Saint Thomas's teaching on theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those perfect man's spiritual powers, bringing them to the summit of their potential development. Faith, hope and charity elevate the natural capacity for cognition and for love to a higher, supernatural level. Through faith, man is given the supernatural light of revelation expanding the scope of cognition and opening to man the horizon of eternal life. Hope, in turn, allows already in the temporal life a foretaste of the reality that is to come. Last but not least, the supernatural virtue of charity creates a real, spiritual bond of friendship unifying man with God. Thanks to it, man can develop and deepen his relationship with God already in the temporal life. The gifts of the Holy Spirit sensitize man to direct inspirations originating from God. Thereby, God as though directly provides His own supernatural light and support, so that man can make the most proper decisions at a specific time. Then, the incentive to undertake the chosen acts flows directly from the very source that is God. Thanks to that supernatural organism, the intellect and the will can develop towards their proper fullness intended by God.

The penultimate chapter discusses the cardinal virtues that are the fruit of man's collaboration with grace. Christian spirituality properly understood leads to the formation of intellectual and moral virtues in man. In those virtues, which are the product of the development of powers of will and intellect, the likeness of Christ is manifest. The formation of cardinal virtues under the operation of grace constitutes an essential element of the pursuit of sanctity. The development of human powers, distinguishing man against the backdrop of all creation, is in a certain way a universal path to union with God. This understanding of the development of the human person contains a certain pluralism of spirituality while preserving its objectiveness, which is embodied in attitudes stemming from virtues possessed.

The last chapter of this paper expounds the practical dimension of man's intellectual-volitional development in the perspective of Saint Thomas's doctrine. It first outlines the practical means of collaboration of the intellect and will with God's

grace. Those include especially prayer, spiritual reading and sacramental life. With them, the development of theological virtues residing in the spiritual powers becomes possible. The later part of the chapter discusses the ascetic aspect of man's development expressed in the subordination of the sensory powers and emotions to the intellect and the will. Through the assistance of selected ascetic means, the sensory sphere is gradually placed under the control of the spiritual powers. The last section shows apostolic life as the goal to be served by the development of man's spiritual powers as presented in this paper. Thus, the dissertation constitutes an in-depth analysis of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine on the role of the intellect and the will in the process of man's spiritual development. It also demonstrates practical applications of Aquinas's teaching in the life of a Christian. A holistic approach to the problem of intellectual-volitional development facilitates a better understanding of the legacy of Saint Thomas's thought and provides a better view of its applicability to present-day reflection on the spiritual development of a Christian.

**Keywords:** spirituality, intellect, will, prayer, spiritual development, asceticism.