



The Catholic University of America

Second Series (105)

The Prayer of Christ  
According to the Teaching  
of  
St. Thomas Aquinas

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF SACRED THEOLOGY  
OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY

BY

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The Catholic University of America Press

Washington, D. C.

1958

NIHIL OBSTAT:

Pascal P. Parente, S.T.D.

*Censor Deputatus*

Washington, D. C., October 8, 1957

IMPRIMATUR:

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*Archbishop of Louisville*

Louisville, Ky., October 11, 1957

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The Catholic University of America Press, Inc.

Murray and Heister, Inc.  
Washington, D. C.

Printed by  
Times and News Publishing Co.  
Gettysburg, Pa., U. S. A.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the dominant notes of the whole theological system of St. Thomas Aquinas is God's universal causality. In the matter of efficacious grace it is God whose influence remains primary from the omnipotent hand down to the sacred precincts of the human will. In divine providence, God not only preserves everything in existence, but looks in a very personal way after even the least functions of our soul and body. In fact, as part of this providence, God deigned to make use of us, and of all creatures, as helpers in realizing His designs. According to St. Thomas, the divine order, by which the infinitely wise God directs all things to His own honor and glory, must be preserved at all costs. The great chain must be kept fast, from God down to the least creature, and from the creature back to the Almighty Creator. Not one link may be left out.

St. Thomas considers prayer as a secondary cause, of which God decreed to make use, in executing His plan of providence. It is one of the links binding the causal chain. As far as God is concerned, it is not necessary in the sense that He is bound to make use of it. Absolutely speaking, God could do everything without any help of secondary agents. Still we can see His great wisdom, and to this wisdom He owes it to use our humble petitions in carrying out His divine plans.

The prayers of our Savior appear in this same light to the Angelic Doctor, except that their influence in comparison to that of other secondary agents, is far more powerful and far more universal. St. Thomas looks upon Christ's prayers as the most necessary links in the divine dispensation, next to the infinite merits of the sacrifice of Calvary. From the prayers He said here on earth, God, from all eternity decreed that numberless graces and blessings be showered upon the first Apostles and Disciples; and by those that He is offering today in heaven the precious fruits of the redemption are being applied to all souls, drawing them on to their eternal reward.

As a basis for the fittingness of these prayers of our Savior,

the Angelic Doctor points to His eternal generation from the Father, a truth which Christ wanted to impress upon us. As a basis for their unfailling efficacy he sees nothing else than the humble subjection of Christ to His heavenly Father. This gave rise to that perfect conformity of the human with the divine will, which St. Thomas considers the all important factor in the hearing and answering of prayers. Thus, while giving us a picture of Christ's High-priesthood and Mediatorship of which offices prayer is a function, St. Thomas brings out in much bolder relief the picture of Christ in relation to His Father. He shows us Christ at prayer as a natural Son of God, and at the same time as an obedient subject of a kind and loving Father.

St. Thomas did not treat this subject of Christ's prayer at great length. But even in the short treatise we cannot but admire the spirit of dependence upon the founts of Divine Revelation. In this, as in other matters of theology, the Angelic Doctor leans heavily on Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Fathers. That, to him, meant more than all else. Although a giant in powers of reason, he humbly recognized that in matters pertaining to God, the human faculty is utterly frail and deficient.



## SUMMARY OF FIRST CHAPTER

### *Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Nature of Prayer*

In his theological treatises St. Thomas Aquinas considers prayer in its strict sense as a petition. He defines it as an asking God for things we need, or making known our wants to God for the purpose of having Him relieve them. According to St. Thomas, prayer is an act of the practical intellect, proceeding from the intellect at a command of the will. It is considered a part of the virtue of religion flowing from charity.

Prayer has a definite place in Divine Providence. It is not something useless, as some are led to believe, but is a secondary cause which God ordained from all eternity to produce certain effects in the lives of men. It does not change God, who is immutable, but is rather an instrument which He uses to carry out His wonderful plans. Prayer is always a sign of our submission and dependence.

In granting our petitions God looks to the dispositions and needs of our souls as well as to those of the souls for whom we pray. Prayer that is humble, trusting and persevering, in which we ask for ourselves things helpful and necessary for salvation, is infallibly efficacious in virtue of Christ's promise: "All things whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matt. 21 :22). A prayer of this kind can only be the expression of a soul which is perfectly resigned to God's will. In such conformity to the divine will St. Thomas sees the root of a prayer's efficacy.

## SUMMARY OF SECOND CHAPTER

### Was It Possible for Christ to Pray?

St. Thomas teaches that Christ prayed not as God but as man, that is, through His human nature. Prayer was made possible to Him precisely by the fact that the nature He assumed contained essentially all that our human nature contains. All the requirements needed to make a real prayer were found in Christ. He had an intellect and a will which operated in a perfectly human way. He, as man, was truly inferior to his Father, hence capable of addressing petitions to Him. He was capable of legitimately directing these petitions towards the needs of our souls or the needs of His own body, the latter of which *He* had willingly assumed.

The fact that in His one and same person were present both omnipotence and omniscience did not prevent Him from praying, principally because the humanity always remained distinct from the divinity. Nor did the power of working certain miracles, and the great knowledge which resided in Christ's humanity form a hindrance to His praying. The power in question was not strict and full omnipotence. The plenitude of knowledge, far from being a hindrance, was an aid to His prayer, for by it He could see more clearly the Father's will and knew exactly the objects for which He wanted to pray.

Certainly there was not a moment of Christ's life as man in which His mind was not raised to God who was immediately present to Him in the beatific vision. But even this, declares the Angelic Doctor, did not prevent His holy soul from possessing those movements or impulses required to make known His desires to God, for the movements in His case were not from potency to act, but movements of a faculty already in the highest act, and hence movements implying not the least imperfection.

## SUMMARY OF THIRD CHAPTER

### Was Prayer Necessary in the Life of Christ?

St. Thomas speaks of Christ's prayer as necessary for our salvation and our instruction. According to his principles we could hardly speak of any absolute necessity of prayer in Christ our Lord except where creation was involved. This requires full and strict omnipotence, a power which was entirely beyond the reach of Christ's humanity as it is beyond the power of all creatures. The necessity which St. Thomas would predicate of Christ, then, would be no more than a hypothetical one, dependent upon the decree of God which from all eternity had determined that the Savior of mankind humble Himself before the Divine Majesty of the Father and ask Him in prayer *for* certain things both *for* Himself and for fallen mankind. The weakness and inferiority of the human nature voluntarily assumed by Christ was the fundamental reason for His need of prayer—fundamental in the sense that it was a condition without which prayer would have been impossible for Him.

According to the mind of St. Thomas, we can also see in Christ's prayer a certain added necessity by reason of His special consecration as priest, mediator, and head of the kingdom of God.

Regarding miracles, St. Thomas teaches that in the human nature of Christ, as instrument of the Word, there resided a special divine power of working miracles for purposes of the incarnation and redemption. Consequently, even though Sacred Scripture tells us that Christ prayed before some of His miracles, St. Thomas would hardly suppose for this more than a hypothetical necessity based on God's preordination, excepting once again the cases involving creation.

However, St. Thomas speaks more of the fittingness of Christ's prayer than of its necessity. This fittingness he bases principally on our need of instruction in the meaning and reality of the incarnation, and our need of seeing in Christ a perfect example of humble, persevering and confident prayer.

## SUMMARY OF FOURTH CHAPTER

### The Nature and Characteristics of Christ's Prayer

In general outline., Christ's prayers, according to St. Thomas, were the same as ours. They flowed from the action of a perfect human intellect and a perfect human will. But deeper still in the soul of our Savior there were holy desires rooted in His burning zeal for our salvation and His Father's glory. These holy desires were made known to the Father by means of the great charity that permeated His whole being; and their utterance was prayer. It was Christ the Divine Person who prayed; but His prayer came only through the human nature, for only by that nature was He inferior to the Father.

St. Thomas sees perfection in Christ's prayers because of His great humility, by which He willingly made Himself a subject and inferior of the Father, because of the perfect conformity of His will with God's, and because of the perfect dispositions of all kinds that existed in His holy soul which was at all times in the immediate presence of the Godhead.

Christ's prayers differed from ours in this, that they were supplications of One who had been officially constituted as our Mediator, Priest and Redeemer. This gave Him a special right to intercede for us. As to the objects of His prayers, St. Thomas says that Christ truly prayed for Himself at times. In these prayers He asked for those things not yet in His possession and pertaining to the glory of His body and the inferior parts of His soul. In the last analysis, however, all His prayers in some way or other redounded to our instruction and salvation. For this reason the Angelic Doctor insists that not the least selfishness can be predicated of Christ in this matter of praying for Himself.

According to the principles laid down by St. Thomas, the prayers of Christ ascended to the Blessed Trinity as a whole, for the act of prayer is always from creature to Creator. But our Savior addressed His prayers to the Father to show that He was

the natural Son of the Father and that He lived constantly in intimate relation with and perfectly) subject to Him.

By reason of the fact that the death of Christ on Calvary was the supreme redemptive act, to which all other acts of Christ were ordained and in which all others were consummated and received their value, the prayers of Christ took their force from and saw their completion in the death on the cross.

## CHAPTER V

### The Efficacy of Christ's Prayer

#### 1. PRINCIPAL EFFECTS OF PRAYER

St. Thomas speaks of a threefold effect of prayer. The first is the spiritual consolation that God grants to certain of His worthy suppliants. This effect plainly bears no essential connection with prayer, and for that reason is an unimportant consideration in this dissertation. The other two effects are merit and impetration, both of them essential to the efficacy of prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Every prayer is ordained to a twofold end; the first, eternal life, the second, the object which is asked of Almighty God. "Erom this double end," says St. Thomas, "prayer takes its twofold efficacy."<sup>2</sup> If we analyze these two operations we see that one refers more properly to God, though it has a certain dependence upon man's dispositions; the other pertains more directly to man inasfar as it depends upon his charity.

The Angelic Doctor teaches that the degree of merit depends upon the theological virtue of charity in the soul of the one meriting.<sup>3</sup> The greater the charity, the more merit one has. Consequently whenever we perform good works, and our soul is at the same time filled with the virtue of charity, we merit a share of eternal life, to be given us at God's good pleasure. Our act of prayer being a good work, is therefore a meritorious act, giving us a right to a reward from God, as do all good works. And the more charity there is in the soul the greater the reward God will give. Indeed, we have a right to expect the reward, not because we deserve it, but because God has promised it.<sup>4</sup>

The other effect, impetration, depends more properly upon God Himself. This, as St. Thomas says, belongs to the order of

<sup>1</sup> Sum. Theol. IIa, IIae, Q. 83, Art. 13, Corp, and Art. 15.

<sup>2</sup> De Sent. Book 4, Dist. XV, Q. 4, Art. 7, Questiunc. 3, Sol.

<sup>3</sup> De Sent. Book 4, Dist. XV, Q. 4, Art. 7, Questiunc. 2, Sol.; Sum. Theol. IIa, IIae, Q. 83, Art. 15, Corp.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mark 9:40—I Jn. 2:25—Rom. 2:6-7.

### *The Efficacy of Christ's Prayer*

mercy, whereas merit belongs to the order of justice.<sup>5</sup> Impetration is the proper effect of prayer, because it, more than merit, is in accord with the reason for prayer, since prayer is a petition or a manifestation of one's request.<sup>6</sup> Now the obtaining of a request is the main reason for prayer since that is the very purpose of supplication. Furthermore, the position of a suppliant is that of a beggar, whose appeal is not to justice, but to mercy. On this account, we say that impetration is an effect more proper to prayer, more closely allied to it than merit.

#### 2. DISPOSITION'S REQUIRED FOR IMPETRATION

God, "Whose tender mercy is over all His works" (Ps. 144. Vs. 9), is always ready' to come to the aid of his creatures. But often it happens that the creature himself places an obstacle to the reception of his request, either by asking in an improper manner, or by praying for something harmful to his soul. In such a case God will not and cannot grant the request. St. Thomas says that there are four conditions whose presence renders the obtaining of a request absolutely infallible. These conditions are the following: first, the prayer must be said with devotion; secondly, with perseverance; thirdly, it must be for one's self; fourthly, it must be for the good of one's soul.<sup>7</sup> If these conditions are

<sup>5</sup> De Sent. Book 4, Dist. XV, Q. 4, Art. 7, Quæstionc. 2, Sol.

<sup>6</sup> Sum. Theol. IIa IIæ, Q. 83, Art. 13, Corp.

<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas mentions these in his commentaries on parts of Sacred Scripture. (1) In De Sent. Book 4, Dist. 15, Q. 4, Art. 7, he gives the four conditions mentioned above: devotion, for one's self, with perseverance, and for salvation. (2) In his commentary on Psalm 26, vs. 8, he says a prayer must be from the heart, that is, "Anxious," directed towards God, and assiduous. (3) In his commentary on Psalm 4, vs. 2, he says a prayer must have a crying (clamor), justice, and must be said in such a way that the whole is attributed to God. (4) In explaining the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, verse 18, he says, a prayer must be perfect, humble (not presumptuous), persevering, devout, vigilant, instant, and charitable. (5) In a commentary on Psalm 38, verse 14, he says, for a commendable prayer there must be the raising of the mind to God, perseverance and tears. (6) In a commentary on Psalm 3, verse 5, he says, that attention, righteousness, and devotion go to make a prayer commendable. (7) Commenting on the Epistle to the Colossians, chapter 4, verse 2, he says, a commendable prayer must be assiduous, grateful (with thanks) and vigilant. In the same

present, the prayer will be conformed to God's designs and the person worthy of receiving his request. God, however, is the one and only judge of these conditions, for Ide alone can search the hearts of men, and Ide alone knows what is favorable and what is harmful to souls. If, therefore, God judges that the prayer of a suppliant is in perfect accord with Idis will, Ide will grant the petition. In such a case- the prayer is said to be efficacious.

### 3. RELATION OF MERIT AND IMPETRATION

The power of meriting and the power of obtaining the favor, although closely related to one another, are in some respects independent one of another. Accordingly it is possible for a prayer to be efficacious from one point of view and inefficacious from another. For example, a sinner cannot merit eternal life nor an increase of it, because the virtue of charity is lacking in his soul: and yet he may obtain his request. On the other hand, a person in whose soul the virtue of charity resides may offer a most perfect prayer, asking God for something altogether legitimate. Yet God may know that the granting of the request would work detriment to the soul, and so would not and could not grant it. Such a prayer would be efficacious as far as the power of meriting is concerned, but inefficacious as to the power of impetration. It must, however, be maintained that the just man, since he is endowed with charity which gives him a right to a reward, is more likely to obtain his request, because merit itself provides a foundation for obtaining favors from God.<sup>3</sup>\*

commentary on chapter 1, verse 9, he says, a commendable prayer is timely (said at the proper time, as soon as necessary), continual and multiple. (8) Commenting on the first epistle to Timothy, Chapter 2, verse 8, he says, a prayer must be assiduous, pure and tranquil. He also enumerates circumstances that make a prayer worthy of being heard.—Commenting on Psalm 19, verse 2, he states, the goodness of God, prayers of the Saints, and one's own merit. Commenting on Psalm 17, verse 42, he states, the right intention. Commenting on Psalm 37, verse 16, he states, obedience, patience, and praying for enemies. Quoted in "Mystica Theologia Divi Thomae" by Vallgornera, Editio quarta, Tom 1, Marietti—1924, Disp. V. Q. 2, Art. 3-6, Page 184 ss.

<sup>3</sup> De Sent. Book 4, Dist. 15, Q. 4, Art. 7, Questiunc. 3, Sol.



#### 4. EFFICACY OF CHRIST'S PRAYERS

Having considered the efficacy of prayer in general, the next consideration will be that of St. Thomas's treatment of the efficacy of Christ's prayer. According to the above distinction the efficacy of Christ's prayer will be treated first from the point of view of merit, and then from the point of view of impetration.

By the power of meriting in a general sense we mean a certain right to a reward promised by God to those who do good works with the proper intention. Christ made the promise: "Whoever gives a cup of water to drink in My name, because you are Christ's, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9:40). Every work of a person, whose soul is adorned with sanctifying grace and the virtue of charity, merits a reward in God's sight.<sup>9</sup> It is not that the work by its very nature claims a recompense from God; but the work is deserving of a reward primarily and principally because God has promised it, and only secondarily because of the dignity attached to the work through the charity of the person performing it.

Christ our Lord, as St. Thomas teaches, was capable of meriting in strictest justice both for Himself and for men, whose immortal souls were entrusted to His care. For Himself He could merit only those things not yet in His possession, such as the glorification of His body, His ascension into heaven, and things pertaining to His external excellence.<sup>10</sup> For mankind He could merit reconciliation to God and those graces necessary for salvation.<sup>11</sup> But the point to be insisted upon here is merely that Christ's works had the power of meriting.<sup>12</sup> Every act He performed, just like every human act of a person in the state of grace, called for some reward from God, for, as faith teaches, Christ's soul was filled with grace<sup>13</sup> from the first moment of His life on earth, and on that very account, charity was always present to give His works

<sup>9</sup> Sum. Theol. Ia Hae. Q. 114, Art. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 19, Art. 3, Corp.

<sup>11</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 19, Art. 4; De Sent. Book 3, Dist. 18, Art. 6, *Questiuncula 1, Sol.*

<sup>12</sup> "The Council of Trent defined that, "Christ is the meritorious cause of our salvation," D. B. 681.

<sup>13</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 7, Art. 9.

the dignity required for meriting in God's sight. Furthermore, the presence of the Godhead in Christ lent an added dignity to His works, so that, unlike those of the ordinary Christian, they were of infinite value.

Christ's human nature was united to the divine in the person of the Word. Although nature had operations proper to itself, still there was no operation at all, not even such seemingly indifferent acts as walking and sleeping that was not colored by divinity, so to speak, through the Hypostatic Union; for, although the nature is the remote principle of actions, it is the person who performs them.<sup>11</sup> In Christ the human nature was merely an instrument of the divine. From this it follows that all the acts of Christ, even those proper to His human nature, as the act of prayer, were acts of the Godman, proceeding immediately from the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. They were therefore divine and of an infinite value in God's sight. Such is the teaching of St. Thomas reflecting the doctrine of the church and the teaching of tradition.<sup>11</sup> In his work on the mystery of the redemption Father Hugon explains this very clearly and concisely:

The human operations of the Redeemer, finite in the order of being, in their physical reality, receive in themselves and intrinsically, an infinite dignity in the moral order on the sole score that they are the property of the Divine Person. One understands then that these acts are inexhaustible. Let us revert to our principle "actions belong to the person"; all the actions, merits, and satisfaction, are the works of a Divine Person, who subsists and acts in a human nature. Consequently their value is that of a God operating through the medium of humanity.—The value of the acts of a Divine Person, acting through

“La nature est ce d’où procède l’acte, le mérite, la satisfaction; la personne est ce qui agit, mérite et satisfait.” *Le Mystère de la Rédemption*, Ed. Hugon, O.P., pp. 91-92.

“Sum. Theol. III, Q. 19, Art. 1 ad 2, “Sic igitur actio instrumenti, in quantum est instrumentum non est alia ab actione principalis agentis:—sic igitur operatio quae est humanae naturae in Christo, in quantum est instrumentum Divinitatis non est alia ab operatione Divinitatis, ad 3. Et similiter in Christo oportet quod sint duae operationes specie differentes secundum ejus duas naturas, quaelibet tamen operationum est una numero in Christo simul facta sicut una ambulatio et una sanatio.”

humanity, is limited in the physical order, because of the created faculties which produce the operations; it is infinite in the moral order because of the uncreated (Divine) Person who makes His own the works of both natures.<sup>10</sup>

##### 5. OBJECT OF THE MERIT OF CHRIST'S PRAYER

The direct object of all merit is life eternal. Under the indirect object fall the means of obtaining that life eternal; namely, the spiritual means such as grace and the virtues, and the material means or things that in some way or other help us arrive at our eternal goal.<sup>17</sup> In general, this was also the object of the merit of Christ's prayer. Essentially it must have been the same, for all merit must have reference to God either directly or indirectly, because charity, the foundation of meritorious works, is directly concerned with God, Who alone is our eternal reward.<sup>18</sup>

There are, however, several differences to be noted in the object of our Savior's merit. Christ already possessed eternal life in the beatific vision of His Father, and so could not merit it, for Himself.<sup>19</sup> He did, however, merit eternal life and all the helps necessary to attain it for fallen mankind.

It might be objected that He did merit for Himself His resurrection, the glory of His ascension, veneration by the faithful and the spread of His kingdom here on earth, because it was for these things that He prayed.<sup>20</sup> It is true that Christ prayed for them and thereby merited them for Himself, for that is the common teaching of Theologians. Still even these things were all, in a way, for the eternal happiness of others, as St. Thomas points out:

The very glory which Christ asked for in prayer, pertained to the eternal salvation of others according to St. Paul's words (Rom. 4;25), "He rose again for our justification"; and therefore even that prayer which He said for Himself was in a certain sense for others.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Le Mystère de la Rédemption, Ed. Hugon, O.P., pp. 91-92.

<sup>17</sup>Sum. Theol. Ia IIae, Q. 114.

<sup>18</sup>Sum. Theol. Ia Hae, Q. 114, A. 4.

<sup>19</sup>Sum. Theol. III, Q. 34, Art. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 3 ad 3.

While He truly merited these things for Himself, yet they were means to lead men to salvation.

Another difference that might be marked in the object of Christ's merit is that He always merited directly and with strictest right the very thing for which He prayed, as He Himself said in praying before the tomb of Lazarus: "Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me. Yet I knew that Thou always hearest Me" (Jn. 11; 41-42). The reason for this is that Christ knew and willed only what pertained to salvation, and therefore the things He asked in prayer were always for salvation.

In human merit however, the right to a reward is never as strict as Christ's, and furthermore, that right becomes less strict the farther the object of request is removed from our salvation. The power of our merit therefore is much less strict and more indirect than Christ's, owing to the imperfect dispositions that characterize human prayer. Father Friethoff makes this observation in his book, *De Alma Socia Christi Mediatoris*, in speaking of Christ's prayer as compared to that of the just:

The just merited to be heard; Christ, however, did not merit to be heard—"For I knew that Thou always hearest Me" (Jn. 11;42); but Christ merited the object itself for which He prayed.<sup>22</sup>

About the dispositions of Christ's soul there can be no doubt. The fullness of grace therein prevented His soul from being wanting in any respect whatsoever. Divine charity, the foundation of this power of meriting, filled it to overflowing, and, from this charity His prayer proceeded. Besides, He knew exactly what was beneficial both to Himself and to the souls of men. If the efficacy of meriting depends upon the degree of charity in the soul, as St. Thomas points out,<sup>23</sup> then there was nothing at all that could conceivably have stood between the infinite charity whence Christ's act of prayer sprung and the object to which it was immediately

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. P. 214.

<sup>23</sup> Sum. Theol. IIa IIae, Q. 83, Art. 15. "Oratio autem sicut et quilibet alius actus virtutis habet efficaciam merendi in quantum procedit ex radice charitatis." Sum. Theol. Ha Hae, Q. 83, Art. 11. "Quanto sunt Deo conjunctiores, tanto eorum orationes sunt magis efficaces."

referred. This certain, direct, and unswerving character of Christ's power of meriting in prayer, held just as well when He prayed for others as when He prayed for Himself. The reason is this: in asking favors for others, His infinite knowledge was the infallible guide. By divine foreknowledge He could see into the souls of others for whom He prayed; and only for those whom He knew had no impediment to God's grace, did He direct His prayers with His absolute and efficacious will. Therefore, like a piercing shaft, our Lord's prayers went directly to their end.

#### 6. POWER OF IMPETRATION

The second of the two principal effects of prayer as defined by St. Thomas, is the power of impetration, or the power of obtaining the favor that is asked of God.<sup>21</sup> This effect is more proper to prayer than that of meriting, as is evident from its very nature; for prayer is essentially the asking of a favor, to which is inseparably united the idea of obtaining the thing for which we ask. It is the end and reason for our asking, and is what we ordinarily think of when speaking of prayer. Although the power of meriting eternal life is just as truly part of the prayer's efficacy as impetration, still the object we desire, while it must ultimately be ordained to eternal life, is generally a means to it and hence is closer to us in our present state than our ultimate end is.

It is this power of impetration that St. Thomas has in mind when he treats the question of the efficacy of Christ's prayers. At the very outset of his article in the *Summa Theologica* he explains what he means by the term *exaudire*: "One's prayer is said to be heard (*exauditur*) when one's will is fulfilled."<sup>25</sup> As described by St. Thomas, the efficacy of prayer as regards its impetratory power depends not so much upon man as upon God, for it is He who grants or refuses our request.<sup>20</sup> We manifest our

<sup>20</sup> ^SumGTheol. Ha Hae, Q. 83, Art. 13 and 15.

<sup>25</sup> Sum. Theol. III Q. 21, Art. 4. "Tunc ergo alicujus orantis exauditur oratio quando ejus voluntas adimpletur."

<sup>20</sup> De Sent. IV, Dist. 15, Q. 4, Art. 7, Questiunc. 4, Sol. "Impetratio importat ordinem misericordiae vel liberalitatis ex parte donantis; et ideo meritum ex seipso habet unde perveniatur ad praemium; sed oratio impetrare volentis non habet ex seipsa unde impetret, sed ex proposito vel liberalitate dantis."

*will to Him*, and it lies with Him to grant or withhold the desired favor.

By reason of the fact that God, in His eternal decree has seen fit to condition His granting of our requests upon dispositions of our soul, there is a notable difference between the power of impetration of Christ's prayers and that of ours. This *difference* must be taken into account for a clearer understanding of the great efficacy of Christ's prayers.

The prayers of Christ, besides proceeding from a soul whose powers of knowledge and love pierced every particle of being to which the prayer in every respect extended, rested solidly on a strict right of the God-man before His heavenly Father. In other words, our Lord had a right in rigorous justice to be heard by the Father, and more directly still, had a strict right to everything for which He asked. Father Friethoff, O.P., points this out in the book of his that was cited above. Our merit, as he shows, is truly based on justice, but ultimately rests on God's promise; whereas Christ's merit is based on justice in its strictest sense, for in the Hypostatic Union, there was a perfect equality between Father and Son. Christ, therefore, had a strict right not only to what He merited, but even to whatever He asked for in prayer.<sup>27</sup> In His prayers, merit and impetration could not be separated from one another, for both were concerned with one and the same object, namely, the eternal salvation of souls.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, there is no question of Christ's merit resting on God's promise as ours does ultimately; but Christ merited from His own personal dignity as Son of God. We, however, merit because we are adopted sons through grace, whereas Christ merited because He is the natural Son of God from all eternity. As a result of this, when Christ prayed, He merited the very object for which He prayed. The

<sup>27</sup> De Alma Socia Christi Mediatoris, pp. 69-71.

<sup>28</sup> J. Margreth, "Das Gebetsleben Jesu Christi des Sohnes Gottes," page 279. "Zum Rechtstitel der Sohnschaft kommt also der Rechtstitel des Lohnes hinzu. Dieses Verhältnis von Arbeit und Lohn, welches beim Verdienste wesentlich ist, kommt bei der blossen Impetration gar nicht im Betracht. Hier wird der Ausdruck des Willens rein in sich eben als Willensausdruck betrachtet, nicht aber als Leistung und Arbeit. Doch sind, wie schon gesagt, im irdischen Gebet Christi Impetration und Verdienst nicht von einander zu trennen. Beide reichen gleich weit und gehen auf dasselbe."

point, then, is that the efficacy of His prayers rested on the same title of right as His merit. And thus the power of merit and the power of impetration in Him rested on one and the same foundation

In our prayers, the merit rests on a right acquired only through God's promise, and the impetration depends upon God's mercy. We, too, merit the object of our prayers in a certain sense, in as far as it agrees with out ultimate end,<sup>29</sup> but never with the strict right as Christ did. His prayers did not depend upon God's mercy for obtaining their object. He knew His Father's will, and He knew infallibly that He would grant His request. He knew also that the Father desired Him to pray for it in order to instruct men and give them a good example.

The act of impetration terminates in God's act of granting the petition. Its source is in the desire of the one who prays, as St. Thomas suggests in defining prayer as the "manifestation of one's will before God in order that He might fulfill it."<sup>30\*</sup> In Christ, every expression of His sacred will was both meritorious and impetratory; the latter, because of its very nature as the foundation of a request, the former because of the Hypostatic Union and the fullness of grace. In us, on the contrary, the expression of our will in itself has no more than an impetratory value. Its meritorious value comes in only through something else, namely, sanctifying grace, which is the foundation of merit.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Sum. Theol. IIa Hae, Q. 83, Art. 15.

<sup>30</sup>Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 1.

<sup>33</sup>Father Margreth points this out in his book on Christ's prayer already cited, page 280; "hierin zeigt sich ein grosser Unterschied zwischen dem Gebete Christi und dem Gebete blosser Menschen. Bei diesen beziehen sich sogar regelmässig, weil ihre Impetration sich nicht auf einen Rechtstitel stützt, Verdienst und Impetration im Gebete auf verschiedene Gegenstände.— So fallen selbst denn, wenn das Gebet auf das geht, was eigentümlicher Gegenstand menschlichen Verdienstes ist, Gebet und Verdienst nicht zusammen. Noch klarer ist dies, wenn ich für Andere bete; in diesem Faile erstreckt sich die impetratorische Wirkung ganz auf den andern, die meritorische ganz auf mich. Bei Christus, dagegen, fällt beide zusammen. Der letzte Grund davon liegt eben darin, dass bei Christus, dem Sohn Gottes, jeder Ausdruck seines Willens an sich verdienstlich, also wesentlich meritorisch ist, bei uns dagegen, der Willensausdruck an und für sich, selbst wenn er ernst gemeint ist, bloss impetratorisch ist und erst durch etwas

## 7. EFFICACY OF CHRIST'S PRAYERS STATED IN SACRED SCRIPTURE

Having spoken of the manner in which Christ's prayers have their efficacy, let us now turn to the inspired writings to see whether the Holy Spirit speaks in any way about the efficacy of these prayers. The most direct reference of Sacred Scripture is found in the words of Christ Himself. When He was *brought* to the tomb of Lazarus, and was about to *restore life to the* body of His friend. He raised His eyes *to heaven* and prayed to His Father:

Father I give Thee thanks that Thou hast *heard Me. Yet I knew* that Thou always hearest Me; but because of the people who stand round, I spoke, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. When He had said this, He cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth." And at once he who had been dead came forth (*Jn. 11 ; 41-44*).

Our Lord in this incident taught us both by word and example that His prayers were infallibly efficacious before His Father in heaven. He Himself said openly that His Father always hears Him.

In the garden of Gethsemani He again pointed to the unfailing efficacy of His prayers. It was after the threefold prayer to His Father. The Roman soldiers had already come and taken Him captive. St. Peter, seeing what had happened, suddenly drew his sword and, striking the servant of the High Priest, cut off his ear. Our Lord turning to Peter said:

Put back thy sword into its place; for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or dost thou suppose that I cannot entreat My Father, and He will even now furnish Me with more than twelve legions of Angels? How then are the Scriptures to be fulfilled that thus it must happen (*Matt. 26; 52-54*)?

anderes (durch die heiligmachende Gnade, durch welche er als Bitte eines Kindes Gottes erscheint, und die begleitende Tugendakte) meritorisch wird. Das Gebet eines Sünders, dem diese Bedingung fehlt, ist darun impetratorisch, nicht aber meritorisch im eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes.—Der Willensausdruck der Göttlichen Person Christi ist aber stets streng meritorisch."

By this rather sharp rebuke to St. Peter, Jesus wanted to impress upon him first of all His absolute obedience to the Father's command of suffering the death of the cross. But then He also wanted to teach St. Peter that if He had not known that His death was decreed by the Father, and if He had prayed for help from Him, His prayer would have been immediately and infallibly efficacious, and there would have come legions of Angels to His assistance.<sup>32</sup> In other words, Christ teaches us by His own words here, that His prayers are heard and answered; that they have the power of obtaining whatever He asked in them. What is more, from Christ's manner of speaking, in a reproachful tone, He supposed that St. Peter should have known this, and realized that such a thing lay in the power of the Son of God if He chose to make use of it.

There is another direct reference to the efficacy of Christ's prayers. It is found in St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews where he speaks of the priesthood of Jesus.

For Jesus, in the days of His earthly life, with a loud cry and tears, offered up prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His reverent submission (*Hebr. 5; 7*).

This is the text which St. Thomas chooses from Sacred Scripture to prove that when Christ prayed, His prayer was always heard and answered.

As to indirect references to this matter, we have the following: Our Lord was speaking one day to His disciples about the efficacy of prayer in general; and He said:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, who, if his son asks him for a loaf will hand him a stone; or if he asks for a fish, will hand him a serpent? Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him (*Matt. 7; 7-11*)!

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Maldonatus in *Matt. chap. 26, pp. 425, #53*.



We might say that in this passage the Evangelist wanted to convey two ideas ; first, the efficacy of worthy prayers, and secondly, the readiness of God to answer those prayers.

Regarding the first part, Christ included all men in His statement, as He did in similar statements about the efficacy of worthy prayers, especially in His last words with the Apostles.<sup>33</sup> Now if it is true for all men, how infallibly true this must have been in the case of Christ's own prayers ! St. Thomas himself makes use of the parallel text from St. John, in the second of his *Sed Contra* arguments in his commentary on the *Third Book of Sentences*. He says :

Christ's prayer was not less efficacious than the prayers of the Saints. But to the Saints Christ Himself orders, "Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full" (Jn. 16,24). Therefore, He Himself also received what He asked for.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, when our prayers are not answered by God, it is ordinarily because of some fault or imperfection on our part, or because the object of our prayer is not conducive to our salvation. St. James reminds his disciples: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it upon your passions" (James 4 ;3). These are the only obstacles that could withhold God's graces, and, obviously none of them could interfere with the efficacy of Christ's prayer.

In the second part of the above text, Our Lord compares earthly fathers to the heavenly Father, man to God, wickedness to goodness, as Maldonatus says,<sup>35</sup> so as to argue from the lesser to the greater. An earthly father, even though he is a sinner, willingly hears his children's prayers, and bestows gifts upon them, sometimes even without their asking. If an earthly father does such a thing, how much more can we not expect from our heavenly Father, who knows His children's prayers and needs infinitely better than the earthly father, and who is infinitely more inclined to

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Luke 11; 5-8, Matt. 21; 22, Matt. 18; 19, Jn. 14; 13-14, Jn. 15; 7, Jn. 16; 23-24.

<sup>34</sup> De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art 3, Questiunc. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Comment. in Matt, page 111.

show mercy? And how much more still can we not expect from Him if we humble ourselves and ask Him; for He Himself told us to ask, and He Himself promised to grant our requests. Then, making the further step to our Savior's prayers, if the Father is so eager and ready to grant the prayers of His adopted sons, how great must be the efficacy of the prayers of His natural Son, Jesus Christ! If our Lord could assure His disciples of a hearing before the heavenly throne, how certain He Himself must have been that every prayer of His would be heard and answered! In the above passage, therefore, we can see at least an indirect allusion to Christ's prayers.

When Christ was transfigured on Mount Tabor, amid the manifestations of His glory, the Father's voice was heard saying: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him" (Matt. 17 ;5). According to Maldonatus, we are to understand this word "hear" in the sense of "obey."<sup>16</sup> The Father, therefore, tells us to be obedient to Christ, to fulfill all His wishes and commands in our regard, for He is our Head. If the Father demands obedience to the voice of Him in whom He is well pleased, will He not Himself harken to that voice when it cries to Him in prayer? St. Paul uses God's own words to David of old as referring to Christ: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (II Kings, 7;14, Quoted in St. Paul to Hebr. 1 ;5). This is a testimony, though indirect, of the Father Himself, telling us that the prayers of His Son are acceptable in His sight and are always granted.

We refer once again to the incident of Christ's raising Lazarus from the dead. Even before He had pronounced that direct testimony to the efficacy of His prayers as cited above, Martha, the sister of Lazarus spoke out clearly her confidence in the strength and infallible efficacy of her Master's prayers.

When, therefore, Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him. But Mary remained at home. Martha, therefore, said to Jesus: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it to Thee" (Jn. 11 ; 20-22).

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Comment, p. 231.

In the Old Testament, there are numerous passages in which the Holy Ghost testifies to the efficacy of prayers of the just in God's sight. In the Book of Exodus we read:

And Moses besought the Lord His God saying: "Why, O Lord, is Thy indignation enkindled against Thy people whom Thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Let Thy anger cease, and be appeased upon the wickedness of Thy people"—And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against the people (Exodus 32; 9, 12 and 14).

The Psalmist says :

The eyes of the Lord are upon the just; and His ears unto their prayers—The just cried, and the Lord heard them; and delivered them out of all their troubles (Ps. 33, vs. 16-18). He will do the will of them that fear Him; and He will hear their prayers and save them (Ps. 144, vs. 19).

In the Book of Proverbs we read :

The Lord is far from the wicked; and He will hear the prayers of the just (Prov. 15:29).

In Isaias God speaks :

My elect shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth in trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their posterity with them. And it shall come to pass that before they call I will hear; as they are yet speaking, I will hear (Isaias 65:24).

These texts give sufficient proof that God looks favorably upon the cries of the just. If He is so ready to grant the requests of those who love Him, how could He turn a deaf ear to the earnest petitions of His Only-Begotten Son?

#### 8. THE PROBLEM AS THEOLOGIANS SAW IT; WERE CHRIST'S PRAYERS ALWAYS HEARD?

This question of the efficacy of Christ's prayers has given rise to discussion ever since it was first proposed by the early

Scholastics. The Fathers, of course, never treated the matter as a special question. They spoke of it simply in passing, especially in their explanations of the Sacred Scriptures where the Evangelists speak of our Lord at prayer, or where St. Paul treats of His priestly functions. The texts of St. Paul, with the exception of one (Hebr. 5:7), refer to Christ's prayer in heaven, of which we shall speak later. The three principal places which form the basis of the Fathers' comments are the following: the prayer at the tomb of Lazarus, the prayer in the garden of Gethsemani, and the prayers said while on the cross. Because of the peculiar nature of these prayers, they have not only attracted the attention of the Fathers, but likewise provoked most of the discussion on this matter among Theologians. These prayers will be considered separately in their turn.

St. Thomas asks the question whether the prayer of Christ was always heard. He answers in the affirmative; not, however, without a distinction, basing his response upon the words of divine revelation as spoken by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews (Chap. 5, vs. 7).

For Jesus, in the days of His earthly life, with a loud cry and tears, offered up prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His reverent submission.

St. Thomas uses this text of Sacred Scripture as his entire *Sed Contra* argument in the *Summa Theologica* (I, Q. 21, Art. 4) and as the first of the arguments in his commentary on the *Third Book of Sentences* (Dist. 17, Art. 3, Questiunc. 4).

In the *Catena Aurea* where St. Thomas gives his exposition of St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, he comments on this text in the following manner:

It must be said that Christ, in everything which He really wished to be accomplished, was actually heard.<sup>31</sup>

In the commentary on the *Sentences* he also adduces two other scriptural citations to prove his assertion. The one is that of<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ad. Hebr. 5:7. "Dicendum est, quod Christus in omnibus quae voluit fieri, fuit exauditus." Cf. *Opusculum* 11, Cap. 233 (Edit. Romana).

St. John (chapter 16, verse 24) wherein Christ gave His disciples the command, "Ask and you shall receive," whereby St. Thomas shows, as was mentioned above, that the prayers of Christ will be hardly less efficacious than those of His Apostles; wherefore if they obtain what they ask, *a fortiori* does Christ Himself. The second is the words of Christ at the tomb of Lazarus, also cited above: "I knew that Thou always hearest Me" (Jn. 11 ;42). These three places in Sacred Scripture, therefore, form the foundation for the Angelic Doctor's teaching on the question.

#### 9. CONFORMITY OF HUMAN WILL WITH DIVINE- BASIS OF ARGUMENT

In the body of the pertinent article in the *Summa*, St. Thomas explains his position on the matter. The theological reason upon which he bases the entire response is the absolute conformity of Christ's human will in all things with the will of His Father, according to His own words, "Not My will but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42), and, "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn. 5 ;30), and also, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him" (Jn. 8;29). Thus does our Lord Himself give us the starting point for our conclusions. He made known to us very clearly that His will conformed at all times and in all matters to the Holy Will of His Father. This means, as the Angelic Doctor explains, that according to His absolute will guided by pure reason, Christ never willed anything except that which He knew His Father willed.<sup>88</sup> Because of this perfect conformity of will, every prayer of Christ, proceeding from such a perfect human faculty, was infallibly heard and granted; for the hearing and answering of a prayer, as is stated at the outset of the article, means the fulfilling of the desire expressed by the will.<sup>89</sup> The conclusion, therefore, is that every desire of Christ, manifested in prayer, which proceeded from His absolute will guided by reason, was in absolute conformity with the desires of the divine will, and for this reason perfectly fulfilled.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 4, Corp. "Secundum autem voluntatem rationis, Christus nihil aliud voluit nisi quod scivit Deum velle; et ideo omnis absoluta voluntas Christi etiam humana fuit impleta, quia fuit Dei conformis."

<sup>89</sup> Sum. Theol. loc. cit. "Et per consequens omnis ejus oratio fuit exaudita."

We can draw another argument from the teaching of the Angelic Doctor in his commentary on the fourth book of *Sentences* (Dist. 45, Quest. 3, Art. 1 Solution). In this article he teaches that the prayers of the Saints in heaven on our behalf are always heard, and are efficacious to obtain whatever they ask; for the Saints know exactly what God wills in our regard, and they will nothing but what they know to be His will. Now if this is true of the Saints, *a fortiori* must the same have been true of our Savior here on earth. He, in His mortal life, just like the Saints in their immortal existence, saw the face of God, and knew, therefore, even more perfectly than the Saints (for He was their Head) what was God's holy will.<sup>40</sup>

In order to understand fully the force of St. Thomas's argument, it is necessary to consider more pointedly his teaching on the conformity of wills in Christ. It should, however, be noted here that St. Thomas considers this matter basic in the theology of prayer. It is the unity of the will of the person praying with the holy will of God that makes a prayer pleasing in God's sight. The unity of wills is likewise the strongest appeal to God's mercy in granting requests, as our Lord Himself teaches. In the "Our Father" He prays, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10); and during His agony in the garden, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:42).

Throughout the entire treatise on prayer, St. Thomas insists on conformity with the divine will as a necessary disposition of soul in the one praying. He does not use the term "resignation," but in the final analysis it is exactly that. The will of God in our regard can be none other than salvation, and sanctification which leads thereto, as St. Paul says: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3); and, "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:7). God cannot grant anything that will not lead to the soul's sanctification. Hence St. Thomas says that our prayers must be directed to something good for our soul (*ad salutem*), for it is only then that they are conformable to God's will.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. also Sum. Theol. Supplement, Quest. 72, Article 3.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Sum. Theol. IIa Hae, Q. 83, Art. 5, ad. 2—Art. 11, ad. 2 and Art. 15, ad. 2. NOTE: The following are the words of St. Thomas given in response to an objection made against the asking of God for determinate

We cannot lose sight of the other dispositions of soul which were mentioned previously, such as humility, confidence, and perseverance, but the most important of all is submission to God's designs, for it points to a oneness of our will with His. Since the designs of God are generally hidden from us, we do not always know exactly what is, and what is not, good for our souls. Here is where our perfect resignation comes into play. We must be ready to accept what He sends us. Christ knew exactly what was and what was not for the salvation of those for whom He prayed. That is why His prayers were always efficacious.

This same thought is expressed in the present article under discussion :

The prayers of others are fulfilled according to this, namely, that their wills are conformable to the will of God, as it is written in Sacred Scripture (Rom. 8;27), "And He who searches the hearts, knows what the spirit desires, i.e. (what He makes the Saints desire), that He pleads for the saints according to God, i.e., according to their conformity to the divine will.<sup>42</sup>

Christ's infallible knowledge of His Father's will extended not only to Himself, but to every other creature. Herein we see the

favours. From the tenor of the objection, the statement of the difficulty at hand, and the very nature of the answer, we can gather St. Thomas' sentiment. He states the objection thus: "Whoever asks something determinate of another, bends, so to speak, the will of that person to do what he himself wants." This is the major proposition. And it is true except in the cases where one asks something which he knows the superior wants to give him, as is the case between us and God, for God wants us to ask for things leading to our salvation. Proceeding then with the minor; he says, "But, we should not tend to this, namely, that God wills what we will, but rather that we should will what He wills, as is said in a marginal note of St. Augustine's commentary on Psalm 32 (Exsultate justi in Domino)." This proposition is also true. But then the conclusion is drawn, "Therefore we ought not ask from God anything determinate in prayer." Now this is false— for it does not follow from the premises. It is true that we should not try to bend God's will to fit ours, nor can we—but—as St. Thomas points out in his response, when we ask in the right way, namely, for things pertaining to our salvation, we are asking for what God wants. Implicitly at least, there is resignation to His will, and therefore we are really bending our will to fit in with God's.

<sup>42</sup> Sum. Theol. II, Q. 21, Art 4.

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foundation of that perfect conformity, for He willed only what He knew His Father willed.

**10. TRADITIONAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH**

It has always been the solemn teaching of the Church ever since the early centuries, that Christ had two wills, one human and one divine, distinct from one another, yet not at all contrary one to another. The human will gave no resistance, nor was it reluctant to obey the divine; but it was rather subject to the divine, omnipotent will. This was solemnly proposed in the Third Council of Constantinople, against the false teaching of the Monothelite Heretics, who held that there was only one will in Christ, and that, a divine one.<sup>13</sup>

St. Thomas gives a summary of this traditional doctrine of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, in the eighteenth question of the third part of the *Summa Theologica*. In the first article he shows that there were two perfect wills in Christ, by reason of the fact that besides His Divine Nature, there was also the perfect human nature He assumed. In the second and third articles he shows how it *follows, then*, that besides movements of the human nature as such, Christ had certain movements of the lower appetites, some of which seemed to come from the will, and some of which actually came from the will, but all of which were obedient to the supreme command of the rational faculty. In

TD.B. 291. "Et duas naturales voluntates in eo, et duas naturales operationes indivise, inconvertibiliter, inseparabiliter, inconfuse, secundum Sanctorum Patrum doctrinam adaeque praedicamus; et duas naturales voluntates non contrarias absit, juxta quod impii asseruerunt haeretici, sed sequentem ejus humanam voluntatem et non resistentem vel reluctantem, sed potius et subjectam divinae ejus atque omnipotenti voluntati."

NOTE: Sergius, the Patriarch of Constantinople was the leader of this sect. Among his immediate followers were Cyrus, Bishop of Phasidia and Alexandria successively, Pyrrhus of Constantinople, and Macharius of Antioch. They taught that the Verbum according to the divine nature was the immediate principle of all operations in Christ, to the exclusion of all operation on part of the human nature. As a result, according to them there was only one power and one operation, hence, only one volition and one will, which was divine. All acts, therefore, in Christ, were elicited by the divinity. The humanity was no more than something passive and inert.



order to preserve the perfection due to the human nature, it follows that Christ must also have had a free will with perfect human liberty, as Isaias said of Him: "He shall eat butter and honey, that He may know to refuse evil and to choose the good (Isaias 7;15) (*Scd Contra*—Article 4). Then, in the two final articles, St. Thomas shows very beautifully how Christ's will will always in perfect conformity with the will of His bather, and that not even the least contrariety could be found between the two; and this despite the fact that from several of Christ's prayers there might seem to have been some slight variance. St. Thomas bases his response to the question whether every prayer of Christ was heard, upon the doctrine expounded in these articles. This doctrine in turn, depends upon his teaching about the nature of the human will.

According to St. Thomas, every perfect human nature contains a will of the sense appetite and a will of reason. The will of the sense appetite, in the strict sense of the term, is not the rational faculty, nor even part of it; but it is the sense appetite. We call it a will only in the sense that it participates in the liberty and righteousness of the rational faculty by being obedient to its command. It is really nothing more than a movement of the lower sense appetite towards something which natural instinct sees as good, or away from something apprehended as harmful.<sup>43</sup>

The will of reason, or the rational will, is the will in the proper sense of the term, the faculty which, aided by the intellect, seeks the good. There is only one such faculty in every human nature; but there are different acts, and hence various aspects under which we can view that faculty in operation. On this account we can speak of it as the will of reason and the will of nature.<sup>44</sup> St. John Damascene uses the term *boulesis* for the first, and *thelesis* for the second.<sup>46</sup> The will of nature has as its object, the good, or, at least, the apparent good, and, considering it in itself, without relation to anything else, chooses it and finds

<sup>42</sup>Cf. De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 1, Questiuinc. 2, Sol. Cf. Sum. Theol III, Q. 18, Art. 2, corp.

<sup>43</sup>De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Questiuinc 3, Sol., Art. 1.

<sup>44</sup>In II lib. (c. 22; G. 94, 943), Cited in De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 1, Questiuinc, 3 #1.

satisfaction in its possession, unless reason ordains it to something higher. The will of reason, though it has the same object, considers it not in itself, but in relation to some further good which ultimately amounts to the supreme good, God Himself. It does not rest in its first object as the will of nature does, but goes from one to another, always from good to better, incapable of satisfying itself till it reaches its ultimate end, the perfect goodness of God Himself.<sup>47</sup> St. Thomas says that the rational will as reason corresponds with the consequent will of God, because it accepts its object only after consideration of all the circumstances, as well as all the relations it bears to other things; while the rational will as nature corresponds with the antecedent will of God, because it takes its object independently of such considerations.<sup>48</sup>

As regards the object willed, St. Thomas says that we speak of a thing as being willed absolutely (simply), when it is deliberately-chosen by the will as reason; or as being willed *secundum quid* when it is chosen because of a certain circumstance. This latter implies an act that would be placed if that circumstance were not present. It is usually called a velleity (which means a very weak will act), and can proceed either from the rational will as nature, or from the sense appetite. The velleity is the imperfect act of will, while that proceeding from deliberation is the perfect act.

#### 11. IN WHAT SENSE WERE CHRIST'S PRAYERS ALWAYS HEARD?

With the above terminology in mind, let us see with what type of will St. Thomas maintains that Christ prayed when His prayers were efficacious.

In his article on this question he first proposes as a possibility, the will of the sense appetite together with the rational will as nature. He excludes these two at once from further consideration, because by acts such as proceed from them, we do not will a thing absolutely or in the perfect way, but we rather will it *secundum quid*, i.e., only in the event that reason does not urge us on to a

<sup>47</sup>Cf. De Sent. loc. cit. Sol. 3, ad 1, also Sum. Theol. III, Q. 18, Art. 3 and 5.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Sum. Theol. I, Q. 19, Art. 6, ad 1; also De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 3, Sol. 4 ad 2. NOTE: This distinction is not to be understood as existing in God's will, but only in the objects willed, as St. Thomas himself points out.

more perfect object. In other words, we would choose it and rest in it, but our rational will as reason prevents us from stopping at such a worthless object.<sup>49</sup> If Christ, therefore, prayed with such a will, those prayers were not always efficacious, because they were not in strict conformity with God's will.<sup>50</sup> Such acts are, according to St. Thomas<sup>51</sup> rather velleities, mere fancies, or slight wishes. Such things as were the objects of prayers coming from these velleities, did not conform to God's will at all times. Hence Christ could not have always received them from His Father, and did not really pray for them in the true sense of the word. His rational will as nature could not have satisfied itself with such objects, for it never moved to an object as an end in itself unless God had willed that object.<sup>52</sup>

Having eliminated these two considerations of the imperfect type of will act, St. Thomas proceeds at once to the perfect type, which as explained above, is an act coming from the rational faculty as reason, perfectly ordained to its end. He speaks of it here as the absolute will of Christ. Viewing this alone, he draws his conclusion for the whole article. "Because Christ by this will, willed nothing but what He knew His Father willed, therefore, every absolute will of Christ, even human will, was fulfilled, because it was in conformity to God's will; and consequently every prayer of Christ was heard."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 2, Questiunc. 1, Sol.

<sup>50</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 4, Corp. "Voluntas autem simpliciter hominis est rationis voluntas; hoc enim absolute volumus quod secundum deliberatam rationem volumus. Illud autem quod volumus secundum motum sensualitatis, vel etiam secundum motum voluntatis simplicis quae consideratur ut natura, non simpliciter volumus, sed secundum quid; scilicet, si aliud non obsistat, quod deliberationem rationis invenitur."

<sup>51</sup> Sum. Theol. loc. cit. "Unde talis voluntas magis est dicenda velleitas quam absoluta voluntas, quia scilicet, homo hoc vellet si aliud non obsisteret."

<sup>52</sup> De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 2, Questiunc. 1, Sol. "Patet igitur quod voluntas ut natura imperfecte vult aliquid, et sub conditione, nisi feratur in ipsum sicut in finem.—His visis, potest patere qualiter voluntas rationis, divinae voluntati in Christo conformatur in volito; quia voluntas ut natura numquam in Christo movebatur in aliquid sicut in finem, nisi quod Deus vult."

<sup>53</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 4; "Secundum autem voluntatem rationis Christi, nihil aliud voluit nisi quod scivit Deum velle; et ideo omnis absoluta voluntas Christi etiam humana, fuit impleta, quia fuit Deo conformis; et per consequens omnis ejus oratio fuit exaudita."

In his commentary on the third *Book of Sentences*, St. Thomas states the same conclusion, but there he explains more clearly what he means by Christ's willing absolutely; namely, Christ's praying with the intention of obtaining what He prayed for. The term "intention" denotes the ordination by reason that was mentioned above. Thus in this place he more clearly distinguished the rational will as reason from the mere velleity, in which Christ would not really pray with the intention of obtaining what He asked.<sup>54</sup>

We, therefore, come to the answer of our question regarding the efficacy of Christ's prayers, and must say with St. Thomas that every prayer of Christ, proceeding from that perfect type of will was efficacious. From the nature of St. Thomas's response, it would seem that we cannot make the categorical statement "every prayer of Christ was heard and answered," without making the proper qualification, namely, every prayer "proceeding from His rational will as reason," which is the absolute will.

It is necessary to mention here that the Angelic Doctor *does* call the expressions of those imperfect will acts "prayers." They are not, however, prayers in the strict sense of the term, but only in a broad and imperfect sense. He shows that he considers only expressions of the rational will as reason to be true prayers, by the nature of the response in the article under discussion in the *Summa* (Art. 4). After the fine distinction between the various will acts, he ends by saying: "Therefore, every prayer of Christ was heard," referring to the absolute will.

But the words quoted might seem to contradict what was just said about a categorical answer to the question. It can, however, be shown that St. Thomas at least mentions these expressions of imperfect wills as prayers. In his conclusion to the fourth question in the third book of *Sentences* (Dist. 17, article 3) he says: "And because of this, His prayers of this kind (i.e., of the sense appetite and those of the will as nature where there was no real intention of being heard) were not always heard."<sup>55</sup> In the third

<sup>54</sup>De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 3, Sol. 4; "Omnis oratio quam Christus obtulit hac intentione ut ipsam impetraret, fuit exaudita." Cf. also Comment, in Hebr. 5: 7

<sup>55</sup>De Sent. III, Q. 4, Dist. 17, Art. 3; "Et propter hoc hujusmodi orationes non fuerunt exauditae."

part of the *Summa*, the second article of the 21st question he says: "In this far Christ prayed according to His lower appetite, namely, in as far as His prayer expressed the affection of that appetite."<sup>68</sup> In the same question of the *Summa* are found several other references to the same expression of the sense appetite as prayer.<sup>69</sup> In the light of these texts it is difficult to see how anyone could say that St. Thomas did not attribute at least some connection with prayer to these other expressions.

## 12. POINT OF DISPUTE AMONG THEOLOGIANS

Among the many theologians who considered this question, varied answers are found to the question whether Christ's prayer was always heard. In general, however, they fall into two categories: one maintaining that Christ was always heard; the other, that He was not. Among those who hold without distinction the opinion that Christ's prayer was always heard are Cajetan, Vasquez, Becanus, Arauxo, and Thomassinus. Among those who hold the other view are: Alexander of Hales, Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Durandus, Suarez, Sylvius, Alvarez, Cabrera, Lorca, Castillo, Salmanticenses, Janssens, Schwalm, Altisiodorensis, Garrigou La Grange. The difference of opinion in this matter seems to hinge upon the conclusion of St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologica*. Because of its seemingly categorical nature—"consequently every prayer of Christ was heard"—those of the first view contend that St. Thomas admitted no other expression of the will as prayer, and maintain that every unfulfilled manifestation of Christ's will was not prayer. Those of the other view contend that it is not the nature of prayer to be always heard. They admit, consequently, that those other expressions of more imperfect will acts are, at least in some sense, prayers, and were considered so by St. Thomas himself. Such prayers, therefore, arising from the will of the sense appetite and the rational will as nature were not always heard.

There is no great importance to the dispute. In fact, in the

<sup>68</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 2; "Et secundum hoc Christus oravit secundum sensualitatem, in quantum scilicet oratio ejus exprimebat sensualitatis affectum, tamquam sensualitatis advocata."

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Art. 4, corp, and Art. 4, ad 1 and ad 4.

final analysis, it all amounts to this: whenever Christ prayed in the strict sense of the term, His prayer was heard, because the will whence that prayer proceeded was always in perfect conformity with the will of God. All would admit this. But the next step brings the variation of opinion. Is there such a thing as prayer in the broad sense? Is it proper to call the expressions of those lower types of will-act prayers in any sense at all? An answer in the negative forces the conclusion that Christ's prayers were always heard. An answer in the affirmative demands a distinction: sometimes His prayers were heard, sometimes not. From the citations given above<sup>8</sup> it seems clear enough that the Angelic Doctor would himself favor the second way of stating the matter. His conclusion in the fourth article of the *Summa* is not wholly categorical, but clearly refers back to the distinctions made beforehand. We could hardly imagine him making preparatory distinctions and disregarding them in his conclusion. Then too, his explicit reference to other manifestations of will as prayers seems to be sufficient proof that St. Thomas would rather be classified with the second category of Theologians who answer the question with a distinction.

**13. PARTICULAR PRAYERS---CHRIST'S PRAYER IN THE GARDEN :  
EXPLANATION ACCORDING TO THE MIND OF ST. THOMAS.**

Consideration must now be given to a few difficulties that seem to argue against our thesis for the efficacy of Christ's prayers. St. Thomas treats them one by one in the objections at the beginning of the article, in which he embodies at one and the same time a consideration of the particular prayers of our Savior. The first one that he considers is the familiar prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemani, where Jesus, prostrate on the ground, was awaiting the terrible moment of His capture. In deep agony He prayed: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Our Lord, therefore, asked that the cup of suffering be taken from Him, that He be released from the terrible ordeal of the crucifixion. From\*

<sup>8</sup>De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Q. 4, Art. 3; Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 2, Art. 3, Art. 4 ad 1 and 4.

this it would seem, as St. Thomas says, that His prayers were not always heard; for the suffering as a matter of fact was not removed. Jesus had to suffer despite His prayer.

In light of the above explanations of the various wills in Christ, the answer to the difficulty is at once apparent. The words whereby Christ asked His Father to deliver Him from the ordeal of suffering unto death, did not form a prayer that came from the rational will as reason, but a prayer only in the broad sense of the term, which was nothing more than a manifestation of the will of Christ's lower appetite and His rational will as nature. When praying in this manner, Christ did not really have the intention of being heard and of obtaining that request. He simply wanted to teach us that He was truly man, with a nature exactly like ours that would naturally recoil from such terrible suffering.<sup>59</sup> But in interpreting these words one must bear in mind this important thing, namely, that they are not to be considered independently of the last part of the prayer in which Christ said: "Yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt." The first part was not meant absolutely, but was conditioned on the last part, which gave perfection to His entire prayer, and ordained it to God's holy purposes. Christ's first intention was to fulfill His Father's wishes, according to the words of the Messianic Psalm 39; vs. 9: "In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will; O My God I have desired it, and Thy law in the midst of My heart."<sup>60</sup>

With the horrors of death immediately present to Him in all the vividness of reality, Christ's lower appetite, just as that of any human being, felt a sense of repulsion, and moved naturally away from such a thing. This movement in itself was not a prayer in any sense of the word, as St. Thomas remarks, "for the sense appetite cannot raise itself to God, nor is it an act of ordination

<sup>59</sup>Cf. Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 4 ad 1; "Ratio quae petitionem proposuit, nolebat ut hoc impleretur; sed ad instructionem nostram volebat demonstrare nobis suam voluntatem naturalem et motum sensualitatis, quem sicut homo habebat."

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Sum. Theol. III, Q. 47, Art. 2, ad 2; "Nam ipsa passio et mors secundum se considerata, naturali voluntate repugnabat; volebat tamen Christus Dei voluntatem circa hoc implere, secundum illud Ps. 39, vs. 9, 'UT facerem voluntatem tuam, Deus meus volui.' Unde dicebat; 'Si non potest transire a me calix iste nisi bibam illum, fiat voluntas tua'" (Matt. 26; 42).

by reason,"<sup>61</sup> both of which are necessary to constitute a prayer. Eventhough the Psalmist exclaimed prophetically in the name of Christ: "My heart and My flesh have rejoiced in the living God" (Ps. 83, vs. 3), this does not mean that the sense appetite raises itself to God, but simply shows the influence of the heart (mind) on the flesh, seeing that the sense appetite follows the movement of the rational appetite.<sup>62</sup> Again, the fact that the sense appetite was united to Christ in His person, does not mean that it could raise itself to God in prayer; for as St. Thomas says that union in person pertains to every part of the human nature, whereas the raising of the mind belongs only to the intellect and not to the sense appetite.<sup>63</sup> Besides the horrors of death, there were those of sin, which, even more than the others, caused fear and repulsion to the nature of Christ. His will of nature spontaneously recoiled.

But Sacred Scripture says that Christ prayed: "And going forward a little, He fell on His face and prayed" (Matt. 26:39). Therefore, we are forced to say that in some way or other there must have been an ordaining of that act by reason, so as to bring it into the realm of prayer. And this is exactly what happened in our Savior. The last part of His prayer makes it evident that the movement of His sense appetite was proposed and made manifest and ordained by His reason for the purpose of instructing us in the reality of His human nature.<sup>64</sup> St. Thomas in this place says:

1Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 2, Corp. "Orare secundum sensualitatem potest intelligi dupliciter. Uno modo sic, quod ipsa oratio sit actus sensualitatis; et hoc modo Christus secundum sensualitatem non oravit: quia ejus sensualitas ejusdem naturae et speciei fuit in Christo et in nobis. In nobis autem non potest sensualitas orare duplici ratione. Primo quidem quia motus sensualitatis non potest sensibilia transcendere; et ideo non potest in Deum ascendere; quod requiritur ad orationem. Secundo quia oratio importat quamdam ordinationem; prout, scilicet, aliquis desiderat aliquid quasi a Deo implendum; et hoc est solius rationis."

2Sum. Theol. loc. cit. ad 1; "Caro exultat in Deum vivum non per actum carnis ascendentem in Deum, sed per redundantiam a corde in carnem, in quantum appetitus sensitivus sequitur motus appetitus rationalis."

3Sum. Theol. loc. cit. ad 3; "unio in persona est secundum esse personale quod pertinet ad quamlibet partem humanae naturae; sed ascensio orationis est per actum qui non convenit nisi rationi (ut dictum est in corp. art.). Unde non est similis ratio."

4Sum. Theol. loc. cit. ad 1; cf. also III, Q. 19, Art. 2, Corp; In this place St. Thomas says: "In the man Jesus Christ there was no movement of the sensitive appetite that was not ordained by reason."



"Christ willed to demonstrate to us His natural will." This shows clearly that he considered the words under discussion a prayer, at least in the broad and imperfect sense.

This same doctrine is found in the second article of this twenty-first question, where the question is proposed whether Christ really prayed according to His sense appetite. St. Thomas answers in the affirmative, not however, in the sense that the prayer itself was an act of the sense appetite, which is impossible for reasons stated above, but in the sense that the prayer was a manifestation to God of the movement of His sense appetite.<sup>65</sup>

By what faculty was the movement in Christ made manifest? St. Thomas says simply: "Reason manifested it."<sup>66</sup> Certainly, therefore, it was an act of the rational will. But was that the rational will as nature or as reason? Here again we must have recourse to the distinction which St. Thomas makes in the body of the fourth article, and which we explained above. It was partly of nature and partly of reason; but owing to the infinite sanctity of Christ, reason dominated; nor was it possible for His will as nature ever completely to satisfy itself, unless its object were exactly the same as that of the will as reason. St. Thomas would say, then, that Christ willed that the chalice pass from Him not absolutely but *secundum quid*. In other words, His will as nature would have willed it absolutely, if reason had not prevented such an act, and brought it into conformity with God's will. It was therefore by His rational will as nature that He willed not to die. That same rational will even manifested the natural horror of death; for it was a prayer, it must be remembered, at least in a broad sense, and hence an act of reason. But the rational will as reason also shared in the very manifestation, and ordained it to God's greater glory.<sup>67</sup> Thus we can attribute that act partly to

<sup>66</sup> Sum. Theol. loc. cit. corp.; "Alio modo potest dici aliquis orare secundum sensualitatem; quia scilicet ejus oratio orando Deo proponit quod est in appetitu sensualitatis ipsius; et secundum hoc, Christus oravit secundum sensualitatem, in quantum scilicet, oratio ejus exprimebat sensualitatis affectum, tamquam sensualitatis advocata."

<sup>67</sup> Sum. Theol. loc. cit. ad 1.

<sup>m</sup> St. Thomas notes this in his commentary on St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews (Chap. 5, vs. 7). "Ipse autem secundum appetitum sensualitatis et secundum voluntatem in quantum est quidam appetitus naturalis, refugiebat

nature and partly to reason.<sup>68\*</sup>

The influence of His reason over the lower faculties was brought out by Christ, when He uttered the last part of His prayer: "Yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Here was His most perfect will (the rational faculty as reason) in perfect conformity with His Father's will. This will would not and could not have allowed the natural impulse of the sense appetite to rest in its choice, but ordained it to the perfect end, the accomplishing of God's holy will, which for Christ meant the enduring of suffering unto death for the sins of men. It was this sentiment that dominated the entire prayer. The first part could not have been said independently of this, for only in this light could the seeming contrariety to God's will be explained. This sentiment made the first utterance an ordination of reason, and hence a prayer.

It must always be borne in mind that in one sense Christ did actually will something that was not in conformity with His Father's will. He willed not to die, whereas His Father willed that He die. But this, He did not will absolutely and perfectly, but only *secundum quid* on the condition that His Father willed not otherwise. This was only a manifestation of Christ's will as nature, hence it was an act of will in an imperfect way, and in no sense an act contrary to the divine will.<sup>70</sup> It should also be remembered that the very operations of these lower wills in Christ was God's holy will, and also Christ's, in its most perfect form.<sup>70</sup>

mortem. Et quantum ad hoc orabat, ut ostenderet se verum hominem. Sed voluntate consequente rationem deliberatam, volebat mori. Unde dicit: 'verumtamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.'

De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 2, Sol. 1; "Voluntas ut natura, mota in aliquid sicut in finem—quod quidem non eodem modo se habet in bonitate et malitia secundum se consideratum et in ordine ad finem—non conformabatur divinae voluntati in volito; quia sic Christus volebat non pati. Deus autem mori eum volebat; mors autem secundum se mala erat, sed relata ad finem, bona. Hoc autem, ut dictum est, non est perfecte velle aliquid, sed sub conditione; unde et a magistris velleitas appellatur."

<sup>68</sup>De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 2, Sol. 1; also Sum. Theol. IIT, Q. 18, Art. 6.

<sup>70</sup>Sum. Theol. I, III, Q. 18, Art. 6, Corp. and Resp. ad 1; "Placebit enim Christo secundum voluntatem divinam, et etiam secundum voluntatem rationis, ut voluntas naturalis in ipso, et voluntas sensualitatis secundum ordinem suae naturae moverentur. Unde patet quod in Christo nulla fuit repugnantia vel contrarietas voluntatum.—Hoc ipsum quod aliqua voluntas humana in

It was God's will, therefore, that Christ utter such a prayer in the garden before suffering. Deeper still St. Thomas searches, suggesting the very reasons in the mind of God for such a prayer. This point was hinted at above in mentioning that it was for our instruction. But St. Thomas explains fully what the prayer teaches us: namely, that Christ had assumed a true human nature with all its natural affections; that according to the natural affections one can lawfully will something that God does not will; that man must subject his own will to the divine.<sup>71</sup>

#### 14. INTERPRETATION OF THE FATHERS

This prayer of Christ in the garden has formed the subject of much comment from the earliest times. It was a point of attack for many of the heretics. Consequently the Fathers refer to it often, giving various explanations of its apparent difficulties.

St. Hilary says that when Christ prayed that the chalice pass from Him, He did not ask that it be passed over without His drinking it, but that He drink it and let it be passed on to others who were to suffer after Him in His name. Thus He really prayed that these others, His followers, might after Him, bravely drink the chalice of suffering without the diffidence of hope, without the sense of grief, and without the fear of death.<sup>72</sup>

St. Jerome thought that by "chalice" or "cup" our Lord meant the sin of the Jews in causing His death. In the light of this explanation His prayer would have been somewhat like this: "I pray, O Father, that I may not suffer at the hands of the Jews, my kinsmen. For in killing Me they commit a most awful crime and will be punished most severely in hell."<sup>73</sup>

*Christo aliud volebat quam ejus voluntas divina, procedebat ex ipsa voluntate divina, cujus beneplacito natura humana motibus propriis movebatur in Christo, ut Damascenus dicit." Orth. Fid. lib. III, cap. 15 a med. et cap. 19 (P.G. 94, pp. 1059-1060 and P.G. 94, p. 1079).*

<sup>71</sup> Sum. Theol. III, Q. 21, Art. 2, Corp; "Et hoc ut nos de tribus instrueret; primo quidem ut ostenderet se veram naturam suscepisse cum omnibus naturalibus affectibus; secundo ut ostenderet quod homini licet secundum naturalem affectum aliquid velle quod Deus non vult; tertio ut ostenderet quod proprium affectum debet homo divinae voluntati subjacere."

<sup>72</sup> P.L. 9, pp. 1068-1069.

<sup>73</sup> P.L. 26, p. 198—Interpretation of Cornelius a Lapide in Matt. 26, p. 207.

St. Dionysius of Alexandria takes note of the transferring of the chalice and says that in asking for this, Christ did not ask for the entire removal of it; for it could not be spoken of as transferred, if it had not at least been touched. And so *He* prayed simply that the bitter chalice which had already lightly touched Him be taken away shortly.<sup>74\*</sup>

Most of the Fathers who commented on this prayer of our Lord agree in general in maintaining that the first part of it, in which He asks for deliverance of the chalice of suffering, was nothing more than an expression of some kind of natural will. Here is what St. John Damascene says :

In as far as He is God, He has the same will as the Father; while inasmuch as He is man, He manifests the natural will of mankind. For it is this that naturally seeks escape from death.<sup>75</sup>

And St. John Chrysostom says :

He does not say: "Father if Thou wilt" as though not knowing whether it pleased the Father or not—since therefore, that which was about to take place was almost incredible, first He sent the prophets to announce it, then He Himself coming clothed in the flesh, that He might not be thought to be a phantom,—permitted His flesh to sustain the natural defects, to hunger, to thirst, to sleep, to labor, to be affected and to be troubled; for this reason also, He recoiled in the face of death, showing us His true humanity.<sup>76</sup>

It is this common view of the Fathers that St. Thomas adopted as His own.<sup>77</sup>

With the mention of these early Fathers, it might be well to consider one of the reflections of St. Augustine on the words "if

\*P.G. 10, p. 1590.

<sup>73</sup> De Fide Orth. Bk. 3, cap. 24—P.G. 94, p. 1091.

<sup>74</sup> P.G. 51, p. 31 ss; also P.G. 58, p. 747.

<sup>77</sup> Besides those quoted above, St. Thomas also mentions others who taught the traditional interpretation. Among these are St. Ambrose, Origen, St. Augustine, who are mentioned in the Summa Theologica. In other commentaries he mentions St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Athanasius, St. Bede and St. Leo the Great. (Commentary of the Gospels.)

it is *possible*" (Mark 14;35; Matt. 16;39). Do not these words, at first hearing seem to imply that our Lord was doubtful about the divine omnipotence? St. Augustine says absolutely "no." "Christ did not say," he remarks, " 'if the Father is able to do it' (*si facere posset*), but 'if it could be done' (*si fieri posset*),'—and certainly everything that the Father wills can be done. Christ say> "if it could be done" to be meant in such a sense as though He had said "if He, the Father, should will it." Then *St. Augustine* warns us not to look upon this as a limitation of the Father's power; for the same Christ, in the same breath prayed: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee" (Mark 14;36). Christ, therefore, knew that it was possible for His Father to remove the cup of suffering if such had been His *holy will*.<sup>78</sup>

There is, however, a further difficulty. If we take these words, as *St. Augustine* says, in the softened tone "if it so pleased Him," or "if He should will it," does it not then seem that Christ was at least ignorant of the will of His Father? *St. John Chrysostom* answers: "He does not say *Si vis* (if Thou wilt) as though He were ignorant of whether it was pleasing to the Father or not . . . for He alone knew the Father perfectly as *St. John* says (10;15) 'Even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father,' but He says it to show the reality of His human nature."<sup>79</sup>

It may be asked further whether this prayer in the garden possibly manifested weakness in Christ our Lord in as far as He wanted to escape the suffering. True, it showed His human nature with its natural defects, which He willingly assumed; but the *fiat makes it* clear that reason was in perfect conformity with God's will. The heretic Arius had accused Christ of such weakness. St.

<sup>78</sup> Augustine Comment, in Mark 14—Quoted in *Catena Aurea* P.L. 34. p. 1165. Medina cites this same difficulty in commenting on the fourth article of *St. Thomas*, concluding in like manner that there was no room for hesitation or doubt on part of our Savior as to the power of His Father.

<sup>79</sup> Chrys. Comment, in Luke 21—*Catena Aurea*, Cap. 22, #11. Medina says that Christ uttered the words in question (*si vis*) to give us a form of proposing our will to God in prayer; also to show us that we should ask for temporal goods not absolutely, but conditionally. (Same commentary on *St. Thomas Sum. Theol.* Art. 4) *St. Dionysius of Alex.* says: "The 'si vis' was a sign of subjection and docility of our Savior, not a sign of ignorance or doubt." P.G. 10, p. 1590.

Hilary, however, inveighed most vehemently against any such idea, maintaining that there was absolutely no sign of weakness in Christ He speaks of Arius in the following terms:

But perhaps He (Christ) may be thought to have feared to the extent that He prayed that the cup might be removed from Him. "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee; remove this cup from Me" (Mark 14:36). To take the narrowest ground of argument, might you not have refuted for yourself this dull impiety by your own reading of the words, "Put up thy sword into its sheath; the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it" (Jn. 18,11)? How could fear induce Him to pray *for the* removal of that which in his zeal for the divine plan He was hastening to fulfill? To say He shrank from the suffering He desired is not consistent. You grant that He suffered willingly. Would it not be more reverent to confess that you had misunderstood this passage, than to rush with blasphemous and headlong folly to the assertion that He prayed to escape suffering, though you allow that He suffered willingly ?

In this passage St. Hilary referred to the entire prayer of our Savior as perfectly ordained by reason to the higher ends.

#### 15. EXEGETES OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Among the noteworthy exegetes of Sacred Scripture, just as among the Fathers, the common interpretation of this prayer of Christ in the garden seems to be substantially the same as that recorded by St. Thomas. They attribute the cry of nature for release from suffering to a lower will, and the cry of resignation to the higher and perfect will.

Maldonatus asks whether Christ in the first part of the prayer didn't really will something contrary to the divine will, and thereby commit sin? It would seem so, for St. Augustine defines sin as a "word, a deed, or a desire against the will of God." But then the author explains, that even we do not sin every time we will

<sup>60</sup> De Trinitate Bk. X, Cap. 30, P.L. 10, p. 368-369.

<sup>61</sup> St. Aug. 1- 22, contra Faustum, c. 27.

something contrary to God's will, but only when we will, say, or do something that is against God's will perfectly known to us and perceived by us. We do not sin when we pray that our parents live long, and remain in good health, even though God might will that they die soon ; for God's will is not known to us. Christ, however, knew God's will perfectly. Still we cannot accuse Him of sin: for sometimes even we will something' against God's known will without sin. For example, if one's father is dead, one does not sin by wishing that he were alive, although such a wish is manifestly against God's will. Now, somewhat in the same way, Christ's prayer for the removal of the chalice, even though He knew it was of precept, was not sinful, for, says Maldonatus, "this will by which He shrank from death, was not the full and perfect will, but as theologians say, the conditional."<sup>82</sup>

Cornelius a Lapidé explains Christ's words in a still dearer way, using practically the same terminology as St. Thomas. Commenting on the words found in St. Matthew (26;39) he says:

Absolutely this was possible (that the cup be removed), but it was impossible according to God's decree that man was to be redeemed by Christ's death. Christ knew this, and therefore did not wish for it absolutely, and asks for nothing contrary to His own and the Father's will. But He merely exercises His natural shrinking from death, His ineffectual and conditioned will, and yet freely submitted himself to the contrary will of God, that He should die.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Maldonatus Comment, in Matt. cap. 26, vs. 39, p. 418.

<sup>83</sup> Comment, in Matt. pp. 208-209. Shortly after the above words, the renowned commentator makes the following note: Though the human will was in itself one, yet in its power and action it was twofold, the one natural, with which it shrank from death; the other rational and free, with which He subjected Himself to the will of God.—And accordingly, the natural will of Christ was conditional and of no avail, because it wished to escape death only under the condition that it pleased God. But His rational will was absolute and effectual, because He embraced death for the same reason that God willed it, that is, for man's redemption. But the natural will of Christ seemed materially contrary to the divine will. But by the rule of subordination it was conformable to it, as suffering itself to be guided by the rational will, and thus by the divine will; and on the other hand the will of God, as well as the rational will of Christ, wishes on deliberate and just

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16. THEOLOGAINS

On this matter of the prayer of Christ in the garden, theologians are practically of the same opinion as St. Thomas. They treat the matter from the standpoint of the two wills in our Savior, and practically all of them are agreed on the necessity of a distinction between the rational will as reason and the rational will as nature. Since such is the common opinion, we need speak only of those few who might cast new light on the question in one way or other.

St. Bonaventure maintains that we cannot call the first part of Christ's prayer purely of reason, nor can we attribute it entirely to the sense appetite. It is partly of one and partly of the other. The movement of the lower appetite, he claims, was the material of the prayer, while the ordination by reason was the form which gave it the character of a prayer in the real sense. In the last analysis, Christ prayed more for us than for Himself. St. Bonaventure, therefore, stresses the part played by reason.<sup>81</sup>

Vasquez admits only one kind of prayer in Christ, that coming from His absolute and efficacious will. The others, which we spoke of as prayers in a broad sense, he does not admit as prayers at all. According to him they are nothing more than the simple proposing of inefficacious desires. To be prayer, he says, they must be useful to some extent in obtaining their request. In applying this teaching to the prayer in the garden, he does not differ substantially from other theologians. For he says that Christ did not ask for the removal of the chalice absolutely, but only in as far as the will of the Father would not have stood in the way. He makes it clear that the last part of the prayer, the *fiat*, was the important element, which served to unify and complete it as a prayer.<sup>s1</sup>

grounds that His natural will should express this natural fear of death. In both aspects, therefore, was the will of Christ in all respects conformable to the divine. Christ here teaches us, as a moral duty, that our sole remedy in affliction is submission to the divine will, and that in every temptation we must betake ourselves to the aid of God, who alone can free us from them, or strengthen us under them, if we submit ourselves humbly, reverently and lovingly to His will.

<sup>84</sup> Comment, in III Sent. Dist. 17, Art. 2, Q. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Vasquez, Comment. Disp. 82, cap. 3.



Suarez draws the same conclusion as the rest of the theologians, but stresses very emphatically the point that all the lower movements of the sense appetite in Christ, were perfectly dominated by the perfect will of reason, and thus ordained to higher ends such as our instruction, our salvation, and ultimately God's honor and glory.<sup>80</sup>

It seems to be quite clear from the foregoing citations, that if there is any difference at all in interpretation of this prayer among theologians, it is for the most part only a difference of words or terminology, not a radical difference in solution. Several of the theologians themselves admit this.<sup>81</sup> However, no matter what kind the solution be, it would be foolish to say that part of the prayer that proceeded from Christ's sacred lips was useless, as the Hussite and Trinitarian Heretics would have us conclude.<sup>82</sup> Of course such must be our conclusion if we take the first part of Christ's prayer, and contemplate it independently both of the second part and of all ordination by reason. But it was not intended by Christ to be that way. His prayer was not finished until He had added, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." In the light of this, then, we see how reason directed the first part of the prayer to higher ends of our spiritual good. We are not warranted in saying that Christ uttered any of these words in vain.

#### 17. Christ's prayer on the cross

In the second objection of this fourth article in the *Summa*, St. Thomas speaks of the prayer that Jesus breathed for His executioners as He hung on the cross of Calvary. Like the prayer in the garden, this one has also been much discussed by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. It does not seem necessary, however, to examine it as closely as the last, for the difficulty at least in

<sup>80</sup>Comment. Disp. 38, Sect. 2, Treating Quest. 18, Art. 6 of *Summa*.

<sup>81</sup>Cf. Suarez: *Salmanticenses*, loc. cit.

<sup>82</sup>The Hussites maintained that prayer is of no avail at all, because everything happens out of necessity. The Trinitarians held that we should not pray for a thing which God never willed, or a thing which He willed should never or nowhere come to pass. The conclusions of these heretics as to Christ's prayer is evident. To them it was absolutely in vain. (Quoted in Cajetan's commentary—III, Q. 21, Art. 4, Note.)

part will be found to lie precisely in the matter of Christ's two-fold will. Hence with practically the same principles as were given above, we can offer a solution to the objection raised. This much, however, we should bear in mind, that in all these matters pertaining to the Incarnation and the influence of Christ's divinity on His humanity and His humanity on His divinity, we come eventually to a mystery, which by the holy wisdom of God will remain veiled to us until we shall see Him face to face.

The prayer under discussion is expressed in the following-words of our Savior: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" ( Luke 23 ;34). The difficulty about the prayer is this: Christ prayed that those men that put Him on the cross be forgiven. We know that, as a matter of fact, they were not all forgiven, for the terrible punishment predicted by Christ (Luke 21 ; 6-24) came upon many of them at least, while they were still hardened in their sin. It seems, therefore, that the heavenly Father did not hear and answer this prayer of His Son, and consequently that we are not warranted in concluding that Christ obtained everything He asked for in prayer. Such is the difficulty as St. Thomas saw it.

St. Thomas gives his solution to the difficulty in the following way. He says simply that Christ did not pray in the strict sense *for* all His executioners, but only for those who were from all eternity predestined by the will of God for eternal life. We must, therefore, understand Christ's words in no other sense than that in which He Himself wished them to be understood.<sup>89</sup>

In the commentary on the third *Book of Sentences*, he says that Christ prayed for all His executioners and willed all to be saved by His rational will as nature, because it is this will that goes out to its object in itself not considering its relation to anything else. This, he says is just like the antecedent will in God; but in so willing, one is not said to will simply and absolutely. With

<sup>89</sup> Sum. Theol. loc. cit. Art. 4, ad 2. "Dicendum est quod Dominus non oravit pro omnibus crucifixoribus, neque etiam pro omnibus que erant credituri in eum; sed pro his solum qui erant predestinati ut per ipsum vitam consequerentur aeternam." St. Thomas commenting on the epistle to the Hebrews, 5 ;7, says in passing: "Itexn nolebat quod ignosceretur omnibus, sed illis tantum qui crediderunt. Et multi postea conversi sunt."

the rational will as reason, however, Christ did not pray for, nor did He will the salvation of all, because this will goes out to its object considering all circumstances and all relations to other things. This is like God's consequent will, and by this will Christ was said to will simply and absolutely. Every prayer that proceeded from it was heard, and was absolutely efficacious.<sup>90</sup> With this will He prayed only for the predestined.

These words of St. Thomas at first seem to run counter to God's infinite goodness and sanctity. But there is nothing at all against faith. In fact, it is precisely the Church's doctrine. We must understand the position of the Church on predestination, and the terms which St. Thomas used to explain it.

Christ's human will was in perfect conformity with His divine will, even in regard to the very objects willed, whenever He willed simply and absolutely. Furthermore He knew exactly what the will of His Father was. Therefore He directed His prayers only to those ends which His Father had ordained. The difficulty, accordingly, concerns the divine will. Why did God not will that all those who took part in Christ's crucifixion be pardoned and spared for eternity? It is the same as the question: Why does not God will absolutely that all men be saved? This is the mystery of predestination. The only answer that we can give is, that God by His consequent will predestined some to enjoy eternal happiness, and others not, for reasons of His own. Further we cannot go.

St. Thomas, however, attempts to clarify the matter a little by making a distinction between God's will act according to the objects which He wills. He says that God wills some things according to an absolute consideration of their good or evil, whereas other things He wills considering them with all their peculiar

<sup>90</sup> De Sent. III, Dist. 17, Art. 3, Sol. 4 ad 2. "Voluntas rationis ut natura est de eo quod habet in se bonitatem non considerato ejus ordine ad aliud. Unde talis voluntas in (Christo) fuit de salute omnium hominum, sicut voluntas antecedens in Deo; sed secundum hanc non simpliciter et absolute dicitur aliquid velle.—Sed voluntas ut ratio est de eo quod habet bonitatem etiam in ordine ad aliud. Et secundum hanc voluntatem non volebat Christus omnes salvari, sicut nec Deus voluntate consequente; et secundum hanc dicitur aliquis simpliciter et absolute velle. Et ideo oratio Christi quae fuit secundum hanc voluntatem fuit exaudita; non autem quae fuit secundum primam."

circumstances.<sup>91</sup> The first he calls the antecedent will, the second the consequent will. This latter corresponds to the absolute and simple willing of a thing, the former, to the willing of it *secundum quid* or conditionally. St. Thomas says that by His antecedent will, God wills all men to be saved, in much the same way as a righteous judge wills to set free all those brought to him for trial (because they are men like himself and he naturally sympathizes with them); but still by His consequent will He wills that those only be saved whom He by His eternal decrees has predestined to be saved, just as the judge wills to liberate only those who are found innocent.<sup>92</sup>

The salvific will of Christ is expressed by St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy (2:4): "Who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This is an expression of His antecedent will; for by His consequent will He does not will that all be saved, but only those whom the Father had predestined for salvation. And indeed, Christ Himself said: "I pray for them; not for the world do I pray, but for those whom Thou hast given Me, because they are Thine" (Jn. 17:9).

The Church has always taught that, though Christ wills all men to be saved, all are not actually predestined to eternal life. In the condemnation of the errors of Gottschalk and the Predestinationists, Pope Leo IV solemnly declared that the "Omnipotent God wills that all men without exception be saved, although all are not saved. That some, however, are saved is a gift of the One saving, but that some are lost, is the merit of those who are lost. Furthermore, the Church expresses her mind on the salvific will of Christ by teaching that He died not only for those who are predestined to eternal life (D.B. 1096 & 1382), nor alone for the<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Sum. Theol.* I, Q. 19.

<sup>92</sup> *Sum. Theol.* I, Q. 19, Art. 6: "Deus antecedenter vult omnem hominem salvari; sed consequenter vult quosdam damnari, secundum exigentiam suae justitiae." NOTE: St. Thomas took this solution from St. John Damascene—*De Fide Otho.* Lib. 11, cap. 29—P.G. 94, p. 970.

<sup>93</sup> D.B. 318: "Deus omnipotens omnes homines sine exceptione vult salvos fieri (1 Tim. 2-4), licet non omnes salventur. Quod autem quidem salvantur, Salvantis est donum; quod autem quidam pereunt, pereuntium est meritum."—This same was also taught in the 6th Session of the Council of Trent, cap. 2—D.B. 794.

faithful (1294), but for all men, even though all might not receive the benefits of the redemption (D.B. 319, 322 ss., 717b, 795, 1362, 1380).

The same principles hold in the case of Christ's prayer for those who nailed Him to the cross. Knowing the Father's will, and knowing those whom He had predestined, Christ willed with a consequent and efficacious will, that only those who were predestined be pardoned and finally saved. The manifestation of this will before the Father in heaven was His prayer, and it was absolutely efficacious. The words heard from the cross for all the executioners, however, were an expression of His antecedent will only, and in that far were conditional. And yet, like the prayer in the garden, these words were ordained by the absolute will to the higher purposes of our salvation and ultimately God's honor and glory. In this way the expression came to the throne of God as a perfect prayer, for to the Father it was only the absolute will that appeared; while in the hearing of those who stood beneath the cross, it was a simple cry of His conditional and antecedent will.

#### 18. CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO WERE TO BELIEVE IN HIM

The same solution holds also for the third objection proposed by the Angelic Doctor. In this one he cites the prayer uttered by Jesus at the Last Supper:

Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in Me; that all may\* be one, even as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me (Jn. 17;20-21).

These words proceeded not from His consequent will, but from His antecedent will; for we know that all are not "one in Christ," not even today. Still before the throne of God the Father, it was a prayer in most perfect form, not of the antecedent, but of the consequent will whereby Christ really prayed only for those whom He knew were predestined to eternal life.

One might object and say that herein lies a deception. Such is not the case. Christ prayed in this way not without reason; for

as was already pointed out, He wanted to teach us by His example the way of salvation. Besides, He really did will that all be saved, and He obtained for each and every person sufficient grace for salvation. But He left them all freedom of will to use or reject it. Taking all this into consideration, His will in the last analysis could not but pray that what God had determined from all eternity be accomplished in them.

In commenting on this prayer of Christ, St. John Chrysostom said that Christ uttered the prayer conditionally, i.e., supposing the words "if they repent." By this he teaches that Christ prayed in conformity to the will of the Father. Those who repented were those predestined to eternal life, and for them alone did Christ pray with His absolute will. This supposes that Christ by His antecedent will, i.e., without that supposed condition of repentance, sincerely willed and prayed that all the executioners be forgiven.<sup>91</sup>

The same Father teaches the distinction of wills much more clearly in his homily on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. In commenting on the words: "He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ, as His sons according to the purpose of His will" (1;5), he says that here St. Paul speaks of the real will and desire of God, the second will (*voluntas secunda*), or as we said, the consequent will. By this will God predestined some for heaven. There is also the other will which St. Chrysostom calls the "first will," by which God wills that even those who have sinned perish not. This is what we called the antecedent will.<sup>95</sup> In another homily on the Gospel he says :

How, therefore, are not all saved, if He wills all to be saved? Because the wills of all men do not follow His will—but He does not inflict force on anyone.<sup>96</sup>

In speaking of the prayer of Our Lord for those who were to believe in Him, St. Augustine says that Christ prayed for all whom He redeemed, whether those already in the flesh, or those to come in the future. St. Augustine clearly refers to the antecedent

<sup>91</sup> *Ci. Catena Aurea, St. Thom., in Luc. cap. 23, vs. 34.*

<sup>95</sup> *Cf. Enchr. Patris. 1202.*

<sup>96</sup> *Cf. Enchr. Patris. 1211.*

will by which God willed all to be saved.<sup>97</sup> In this place he does not mention the consequent will; and, yet, considering his teaching in other places, it is undoubtedly his opinion that from this will proceeded Christ's absolute and efficacious prayer. In a sermon on St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15 ;22), he says:

In Christ all will be made to live. Since so many will be punished with eternal death, it is said "in Christ etc." for the reason that whoever receives eternal life, will receive it only through Christ. Thus the words "God wills all men to be saved" (I Tim. 2:4) since He wills that so many be not actually saved, have been said with the meaning that those saved, are not saved unless He wills it.<sup>98</sup>

The fact, therefore, that some of Christ's executioners were not saved, and not all men came to believe in Him, according to St. Augustine, was because the Father had not willed them to be. Christ, then, who knew His Father's will, prayed with His absolute will, that this will be accomplished.

Theologians do not give as much consideration to the second and third objections as they did to the first one about Christ's prayer in the garden. The reason is that all three solutions hinge on the same distinction of wills. Again, they do not differ substantially in giving their responses.

Cajetan points out that the word "all" in Christ's prayer did not mean "all" in the universal sense, but in the sense that He prayed with an efficacious prayer for "all those to whom the Father had willed to give that special grace."<sup>98</sup>

St. Bonaventure remarks that, while the prayer of Christ came from His absolute will and was only for the predestined, nevertheless, the actual words He uttered were spoken not precisely to be

<sup>m</sup> Ergo illa oratione pro omnibus quos redemit, sive tunc in carne viventes, sive postea futuros, Redemptor noster oravit (Jn. 17:20 Catena Aurea). P.L. 35, p. 1919. "Sicut autem ex eo quod Patrem pro suis omnibus rogavit, hoc fieri voluit ut omnes unum sint ita ex hoc etiam suo beneficio quod ait, 'claritatem quam dedisti mihi, dedi eis,' id fieri voluit" (tract. 110). P.L. 35, p. 1922.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Cf. Enchr. Patrist. 1457.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Comment. St. Thom. III, Q. 21, Art. 4 ad 2 and 3.

heard and granted by God, but rather for our instruction. This latter St. Bonaventure refers to as the "will of devotion" (*voluntas pietatis*).<sup>100</sup>101

Sylvius confirms the traditional view by various scriptural texts; e.g., by the prayer found in St. John 17;20: "Not for the world do I pray, etc.," by the words of St. Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 2;19) "The Lord knows who are His," and by the words of St. Peter found in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2;22 ss) ; "You (men of Israel) have crucified Jesus of Nazareth." Shortly after which words, the men were converted and baptized (Acts 2 ;37-41) m

Father Schwalm, O.P., in his book *Le Christ d'après St. Thomas d'Aquin*, classifies these prayers of Christ for His disciples into those that were entirely efficacious, and those that were efficacious only in part. The former obtained their effect absolutely, but the latter were conditioned in some way or other, and, while not obtaining full effect, they always obtained sufficient graces for the salvation of those persons. Thus the prayer on the cross was efficacious only for those who were actually saved, namely, the predestined. This solution does not differ from that of St. Thomas.<sup>102</sup>

Father Margreth insists that Christ's prayer on the cross cannot be understood to have been prayed independently of the consideration of man's freedom of will, and his freedom to accept or reject God's grace.<sup>103</sup>

#### 19. PRAYER OF THE MESSIANIC PSALM

There is one more prayer considered by St. Thomas ; namely, the words of Psalm 21, verse 3 : "O My God, I shall cry by day, and Thou wilt not hear." This Psalm, according to scriptural exegetes, speaks directly about the coming Messiah, whose sufferings the Psalmist sees in prophetic vision. Hence, the words of the Psalm are put into the mouth of Christ Himself, as if He Himself had said them. The verse quoted, therefore, becomes a prayer-

Sent. Comment. III, Dist. 17, Art. 2, Q. 2, ad 3, 4, and 5.

<sup>101</sup> Comment, in Summa III, Q. 21, Art. 4 ad 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>102</sup> Op. Cit. page 466 ss.

<sup>103</sup> J. Margreth, op. cit. p. 293.



ful cry of our Savior. Now, if Christ prays: "I shall cry, and Thou wilt not hear," it would seem that His prayer was not always heard.

The prayer mentioned here is a prayer that Christ uttered while dying in desolation on the cross. According to the traditional explanation, Christ in His last moments recited Psalm 21, as Cornelius a Lapide says: "to show that He was the very person there spoken of, and that the Jews might thus learn the reason why He refused to descend from the cross, namely, because the Father had decreed that He should die for the salvation of men, as David had there foretold."<sup>101</sup> St. Matthew records the incident thus: "But about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, '*Eli, Eli, lama sabachani,*' that is, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me" (27 ;46) ?

There are several difficulties encountered here. The first is practically the same as that found in the prayers considered above. If Christ Himself prayed "I shall cry, and Thou wilt not hear," it seems that His prayers were not always heard. The second difficulty is the question of Christ's abandonment. From the nature of the cry, it would seem that the divinity had gone out of Christ and had left His humanity to die in utter desolation. Obviously, Christ cannot be accused of impatience and despair for He was God. Such an accusation would be refuted by the very next words coming from His sacred lips: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23;46).

We need not delay in solving the first difficulty, for it is of the same nature as those already met. St. Thomas answers by distinguishing, as he did for the other prayers, between an act coming from reason, and one coming from the lower appetites. He says that this reference of our Savior to the very inefficacy of His prayers, was not an expression of His rational will as reason, but simply an expression of the sense appetite, or will of nature, which naturally asserted itself in the presence of suffering and death. We might say that these words of Christ go to substantiate the very thesis of St. Thomas, rather than stand as a difficulty against it. For is it not as Christ had said: "When I cry to Thee Father, with these expressions of My lower appetites which it has

pleased Thee to implant in My human nature, I know that Thou wilt not hear My prayer. Vet I always pray fot the good of them whom I have come to save." The cry itself arose from the sense appetite. It was a natural way to express the terrible pain He was enduring at that moment and He wanted us to know of His great suffering for us. Even here, as in all His prayers and acts, there was that higher ordination of reason, for the instruction of those standing at the foot of the cross, as well as for our own instruction.

St. Thomas does not consider the second difficulty in the treatise on Christ's prayer. He does, however, treat it in speaking of the death of Christ in his commentary on Psalm 21. Was Christ really abandoned by His heavenly Father? Was the divinity withdrawn from the humanity of Christ so as to leave that human nature to die absolutely devoid of divine assistance?

In the death of Christ His divinity remained hypostatically united to the humanity just as it had been during the whole of His life. Not even after death was there a separation, either of body or of soul, from the divinity. Therefore, *a fortiori*, there was no such thing on the cross immediately before death, no matter how much the cry of abandonment might seem to point to such a separation. St. Thomas bases this teaching on the following argument. That which God grants through grace He never revokes except because of sin; for sanctifying grace is not lost till mortal sin enters a soul to expel it. But the grace of union whereby the human nature was hypostatically united to the Word of God, was the greatest and most perfect grace of God—far more permanent than sanctifying grace, for it was substantial grace.<sup>105</sup> Certainly it could never have been lost without sin. Now in Christ, sin never existed and therefore, it was impossible that His divinity be separated from either His soul or His body.<sup>106</sup> And even though Christ's soul and body were separated from one another in death, they each remained hypostatically united to the second person of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>107</sup>

Practical!) speaking it is a matter of faith for us to believe

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<sup>105</sup>Cf. Sum. Theol. III, Q. 2, Art. 10.

<sup>106</sup>Cf. Sum. Theol. III, Q. 50, Art. 2 and 3; also De Sent. III, Dist. 21, Ques. 1, Art. 1, Questunc. 1 and 2 passim.

<sup>107</sup>SMC*i*. Opusculum 11, cap. 229 (edit. Romana); also comment, in Ps. 21.

that Christ was never abandoned by the divinity. In the Apostles' Creed we say: "He was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell." Now we know that in the grave there was only His body, not His soul. We know too, that into Limbo went only His soul, not His body. Still in the Creed we repeat "He" each time, signifying that Christ, the second person of the Blessed Trinity was united to the soul and to the body, even though they were separated from one another.

Such is, and always has been the traditional teaching of Holy Mother the Church, even though one or other of the Fathers held slightly different views. St. Ambrose, for example, seems to have thought that the divinity left Christ in actual death, but only then, and at no other time. He says:

These, things which the soul on the cross cried out to the divinity thus "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the man about to die exclaimed in the separation of the divinity.<sup>108</sup>

Again in his homily on the Gospel according to St. Luke, he says: "The man cries, being about to die by a separation of the divinity."<sup>109</sup>

The Master of the *Sentences*, Peter Lombard, mentions that this seemingly erroneous view of St. Ambrose can be interpreted as meaning that God in some way exposed Christ to more intense suffering by withdrawing His protection from Him, rather than that the union itself to the divinity was severed.<sup>110</sup> St. Thomas adopts the same position in his commentary on this work.<sup>111</sup> Others say that perhaps St. Ambrose meant that there was a separation only from the body, and not from the soul.

St. Epiphanius gives the following interpretation to Christ's words: "Seeing that the divinity was on the threshold of deserting the body, Christ uttered these words from the person of the God-man."<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> De Trinitate, cap. 13—P.L. 17, p. 525.

<sup>109</sup> Hom. in Lk. X, n. 127—P.L. 15, p. 1836.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Book III, Dist. 21.

<sup>111</sup> De Sent. III, Q. 50, Art. 2, ad 1.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Haeres. 69—P.G. 42, p. 306.

St. Hilary held the same position, for he says: "The cry to God is the voice of the body crying out in protest against the withdrawal from itself of the Word of God."<sup>113</sup>

Cornelius a Lapide finds room for putting a benign interpretation on all these views.

Nor do Saints Hilary and Ambrose mean anything else in saying "The man cried aloud when dying at being separated from the Godhead." For they mean not a severing of essence and of the Hypostatic Union, but of support and consolation. For faith teaches us that though the soul of Christ was separated from His body, yet the God-head remained as before, hypostatically united both to His soul and His body.<sup>114</sup>

With the exception of those just cited, the Fathers are practically unanimous in asserting that Christ's divinity was not separated from His humanity on the cross. For example, St. John Damascene says: "Although He died as man, and His sacred soul was divided from His body, nevertheless the divinity remained, and was not in the least separated from either body or soul."<sup>115</sup> Again he says in one of his homilies: "That which the Word once assumed, He never put off."<sup>116</sup> In one of his sermons, St. Augustine says:

Therefore, you do not deny that Christ was buried, and still only the flesh was buried. For if the soul was there, Christ had not been dead. If, however, death was real, then, in order that His resurrection be also real, He must have been without His soul in the sepulchre; and nevertheless Christ was buried. Therefore, Christ was also flesh, without a soul; because only the flesh was buried.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Comment, in Matt. cap. 33—P.L. 9, pp. 1074-1075.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Comment, in Matt. 27;46, p. 301; Cajetan puts the same interpretation on the words of St. Ambrose, cf. Comment. III, Q. 50, A. 2, Note 2.

<sup>115</sup> De Fide Orth. Lib. III, c. 27—P.G. 94, p. 1098; cf. also same Vol. pp. 1091, 1094.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. De Fide Orth. Lib. IV, cap. 1—P.G. 94, pp. 1102-1103; also horn, in Sabbato Sancto—P.G. 96, p. 631.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Symbol., Sermon. 213, cap. 3—P.L. 38, p. 1062.

Theologians agree unanimously that Christ's divinity was not separated from His humanity during the time of His death, and that His cry from the cross, therefore, was not one of desperation nor of impatience. They do not all make a special comment on the words of abandonment, but hold in general that if there was any abandonment at all, it was in some sense that God the Father delivered His Son up to the executioners, at the same time withdrawing His protection from the sacred humanity, allowing it to endure the very depth of suffering for the sins of mankind.

Cajetan mentions the prayer "Aly God, Aiy God, why hast Thou forsaken Ale" (Matt. 27 ;46) ? saying that Christ said these words in order to fulfill the words of Sacred Scripture as spoken by the Psalmist ( Ps. 21)—words which David had sung prophetically of Christ.<sup>118</sup>

According to St. Bonaventure, the words are to be understood "not in the sense that the bond of the Hypostatic Union was broken, but that God was exposing His Son to the torture of the passion."<sup>119</sup>

The Carmelite Fathers of Salamanca contend that these words of Christ "show no deordination or desperation, but simply declare the extremely acute suffering that Christ was undergoing in the inferior part of His soul without having any solace redounding to it from the superior part."<sup>120</sup>

Suarez says we must remember that Christ enjoyed the beatific vision during that prayer, and that, therefore, desperation was impossible. He gives three reasons for the cry ; Christ wished to make use of the prophetic words of the twenty-first Psalm, to show that they were spoken of Him ; He cried out thus, to show that His prayer in the garden, in which He had naturally shrunk from death, had not been heard ; He wanted to show that He was actually deprived of all consolation in the inferior part of His soul, so as to suffer all the more for us.<sup>121</sup>

## 20. OTHER PRAYERS OF CHRIST

St. Thomas, neither in the *Somma Theologica* nor in his commentary on the books of *Sentences*, makes any further study of

<sup>118</sup>Cf. Comment, in Sum. III, Q. 50, Art. 2 Appendix.

<sup>119</sup>Cf. Comment, in III Sent. Dist. 21, Q. 21, Art. 1 Conclusio.

<sup>120</sup>De. Incar. Disp. 26, Dub. 1. Paragr. 1 #3.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. Comment. Disp. 33, Sect. 1, Paragr. 4—Q. 15, Art. 2.

the particular prayers of our Savior. There are, however, a few other prayers which Christ uttered, which seem at first sight to present difficulty, but which can be explained according to the principles given by the Angelic Doctor regarding the other prayers.

There is no difficulty at all in the prayer which Christ said for St. Peter during the Last Supper :

Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee that thy faith may not fail ; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brethren.<sup>122</sup>

This prayer, our Savior said firmly and absolutely. There was nothing conditional about it. He referred to St. Peter's faith both after the denial, and later on in governing the Church ; and His prayer was infallibly efficacious.

Christ prayed also for Judas, not explicitly but implicitly in the prayer for all the Apostles, when He said : 'I pray for them ; not for the world do I pray, but for those whom Thou hast given Me, because they are Thine' (Jn. 17 ;9). Christ could not have prayed for Judas with His absolute and unconditioned will. If he so prayed, the prayer would have been efficacious, and Judas saved. Christ prayed for the other Apostles with a prayer that obtained perseverance unto salvation. His prayer for Judas, however, did not impede the betrayer from perpetrating his crimes of betrayal and the commission of suicide. Why not? The answer rests in God's holy will. Christ must have conditioned His particular prayer for Judas upon Judas' repentance. Knowing the will of His heavenly Father, that He had not predestined Judas to eternal life, Christ could not have prayed for him with His absolute will.<sup>123</sup>

Christ's sacerdotal prayer at the Last Supper, which St. John records in the whole Chapter 17, is one of the most beautiful of all the utterances of our Divine Savior. In this prayer, our Lord prayed for His own glory, not in a selfish way, but in such a way that it would redound to the glorification of His Father. "Father, the hour has come ! Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify†33

<sup>122</sup> Luke, 22,32.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Schwalm, O.P., op. cit. pp. 467-468.

Thee, even as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, in order that to all Thou hast given Him, He may give everlasting life.'<sup>134</sup> St. Augustine remarks that Christ was glorified in His passion through the very depth of His humiliations, but even more so in His resurrection and glorious ascension.<sup>135</sup> By these words our Lord asked that through Him, the Father be known throughout the world?<sup>136</sup> Sacred Scripture itself tells us how this prayer was heard and answered by the Father. It was heard during the passion; for our Savior was never greater, stronger, and more triumphant, even despite His apparent weakness, than in that supreme hour. That glory will shine out through the ages to come. The prayer was answered by the conversion of the good thief on the cross, and by that of the centurion. Finally, it was answered by the glorious resurrection, and later by the conversion of the world to the gospel.<sup>137</sup> Our Lord continued then, with the prayer for His Apostles:

I pray for those whom Thou hast given Me. . . . Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one even as We are. . . . I Those whom Thou hast given Me I have guarded; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, in order that they may have My joy made full in themselves. . . . I do not pray that Thou take them out of the world, but that Thou keep them from evil. . . . Sanctify them in the truth. . . . And for them I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Then the Savior brings His prayer to a conclusion by praying for the spread of His Church.

Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in Me that all may be one, even as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee;

<sup>134</sup>John 17; 1 and 2.

<sup>135</sup>*Ci. Catena Aurea, St. Thom. In Joan. cap. 17 Aug. tract. 1(M—P.L. 35, p. 1903.*

<sup>136</sup>*Cf. Cat. Aur. loc. cit. Aug. tract. 105—P.L. 35, p. 1906.*

<sup>137</sup>Garrigou Lagrange "Le Sauveur et son amour pour nous" pp. 275-276.

that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me—and may know—that Thou hast loved them, even as Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me, may be with Me; in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me—in order that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them (John, Chap. 17 passim).

In the above prayer, which hardly needs any explanation, Jesus prayed for His Apostles, for the unity of His Church here on earth, and for His own glory in heaven. Every part of the prayer, like those already considered, was infallibly efficacious, in the very way in which Christ uttered it, and to the exact extent to which He wanted it to be heard. As far as we are concerned, however, seeing that our knowledge of Christ's actions and of the divine plan is so imperfect in comparison to the infallible knowledge of our Savior, whenever historical facts seem actually to contradict the holy words of His prayers, then let us remember that Jesus could not in that instance have prayed with His absolute and perfectly unconditioned will.

After all these explanations, however, the mystery of predestination remains. We say that Christ prayed in a certain way, because He knew exactly what the will of His Father was, and hence, could not have prayed otherwise. After all is said, that is only taking the mystery from Christ, in part at least, and putting it with the Father. We do this legitimately, for we know more about Christ than we do about His Father. Still it remains a mystery, that we shall never be able to understand this side of heaven. However, as Father Schwalm remarks :

Without attempting to penetrate the insoundable mystery, we can satisfy ourselves now by saying that for everybody, the prayers of Christ asked and obtained that which was sufficient for salvation; and those to whom the very last effect of His prayer was not given, are not deprived of it except through their own fault.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Schwalm, O.P., op. cit. p. 469.



## SUMMARY OF SIXTH CHAPTER

### Christ's Prayer in Heaven

St. Thomas did not write a special treatise on this phase of Christ's prayer, but he makes mention of it a number of times in the *Summa Theologica* and in his commentaries on the *Books of Sentences* of Peter Lombard and the Epistles of St. Paul.

There are those among theologians who hold that Christ who is in heaven today with His glorified humanity prays for us only in the sense of interpretative prayer. This means that He simply stands in the presence of His Father displaying the marks of the sacred wounds of His passion and death, as a perpetual reminder of His sufferings together with all their glorious merits, and as a silent testimony of His ardent desire for our salvation.

If we analyze the texts found in St. Thomas, however, we will find that he looks for something over and above this interpretative prayer. He speaks of real and formal prayer on the part of Christ in heaven. He says that Christ prays in both ways, not only interpretatively but also formally and in the strict sense of making known to the Father His desire for our salvation. St. Thomas mentions this clearly in several places. What is more he makes a comparison between Christ and the High Priest of the Old Testament who used to enter the Holy of Holies to pray for the people. From these citations together with his very clear teaching on the manner in which the saints in heaven pray for us, we can gather, and it seems more correct to conclude, that St. Thomas believed and taught that Christ in heaven prays not only by interpretative prayer but also by real and formal prayer.

It does not seem likely that the Angelic Doctor would look on real prayer as useless on the part of Christ in heaven. When the text of Sacred Scripture, wherein Christ speaks of the fullness of power that was given Him, is advanced as a proof of the opposite opinion, St. Thomas insists that the same fullness of power to accomplish the purposes of the incarnation resided in Christ's soul from the beginning. To those who say that infinite merits were

gained and consummated on Calvary and hence real prayer which is meritorious is no longer of use in heaven, St. Thomas would respond that while the infinite merits have been won, there still remains the task of applying them to individual souls for salvation. What is more, it is not an impossibility to have a real and formal prayer which has impetratory value alone, without the corresponding merit. Of the saints in heaven he teaches that they can implore God for our needs on the strength of the merits of their life here on earth. Why cannot Christ do the same?

St. Thomas speaks often of the secondary causes of which God makes use in applying the fruits of the redemption. We could hardly imagine that he would be unmindful of the most potent of all those secondary causes, Christ's prayers.

As for tradition among the Fathers, by far the majority clearly favor the side of real prayer, and most of those few who make mention of only the interpretative prayer, do so in such a way, it would seem, as to make no explicit denial of formal prayer, but rather seem to include it in the interpretative prayer.

The Church does not wish her children to use the expression, "Christ pray for us." From this, however, we are not to conclude that Jesus does not pray for us in heaven. St. Thomas says, the main reason why the Church discountenances that expression is: some of the faithful, who are not so adept at understanding the distinction to be made between His human and divine natures, might become confused over it and be led to heretical ideas in the matter of person and natures in Christ our Lord.

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