

# Whether the ultimate disposition to grace proceeds effectively from habitual grace?

John of St. Thomas

*Notes from Cursus Theologiae, disp. 28, a. 2. This is from John of St. Thomas' discussion of justification in his treatise on grace. Here he is commenting on Summa Theologiae IaIIae, q. 113, a. 8*

## Statement of the Problem

In the last article, John of St. Thomas inquired into the remote and proximate dispositions for justification. First, he clarifies the notion of a disposition. John points out that dispositions ought to have some causality, and hence some connection with respect of the form toward which they dispose. Specifically, dispositions are in the genus of material cause. But not just any material cause is a disposition, for a subject related indifferently to the reception of the form is not a disposition. Rather, a disposition is a material cause as determining and proportioning the very subject with respect to the form.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, dispositions come in two flavors: *remote* and *proximate*. A remote disposition is what pertains to the beginning of the introduction of some form. A proximate disposition is that by which the introduction to the form is finally accomplished [*consummatur*]. For this reason, a proximate disposition is also called an ultimate disposition.<sup>2</sup>

John concludes that faith is the first remote disposition for justification. It is a necessary beginning for justification, but more is required for justification to come about.<sup>3</sup> The fundamental reason why Protestants err in this area is that they see justification as extrinsic, where sin is only covered and not imputed. The Catholic faith, on the other hand, teaches that justification is the true, intrinsic renewal of the inner man.<sup>4</sup>

With respect of the will, what acts are required? Many are helpful, but not all are *per se* necessary.<sup>5</sup> The ones that are *per se* necessary are hope of pardon, *dilectio*, and penance.<sup>6</sup> Some have held that all of these acts must be explicitly and distinctly elicited. But others have said more truly that an efficacious act of *dilectio* virtually contains the other two.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 2

<sup>2</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 2

<sup>3</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 3

<sup>4</sup>d. 28, a.1, n.4

<sup>5</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 9

<sup>6</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 10

<sup>7</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 11

The true and proper ultimate dispositions for justification, then, are *dilectio* and perfect contrition.<sup>8</sup> But, although contrition and *dilectio* are perfect insofar as they are dispositions, nevertheless, they still need a superadded favor and mercy of God. It is habitual grace that formally and intrinsically justifies. Contrition and *dilectio* dispositively and effectively turn a person to God, but they do not turn God toward the person. This is an effect of the will of God mercifully remitting sin (which must produce a real change in the person, but that is another topic). The dispositions of contrition and *dilectio* turn us to God not as dispositions which actively introduce grace, but which passively dispose us to receive from God, as a body must first be turned to a source of light in order to then be enlightened by it.<sup>9</sup>

But all of this immediately gives rise to a question. In any change, the ultimate disposition for the reception of a form is inseparably and *per se* conjoined to the form that is to be introduced. Does the ultimate disposition proceed from the form in the genus of efficient cause? Specifically in our situation: do contrition and *dilectio* proceed effectively from habitual grace?

There is a lot of debate around these points, but, in general, there are two basic teachings: (1) The ultimate disposition proceeds effectively from habitual grace; and (2) the ultimate disposition proceeds effectively from actual grace, and not habitual grace.

## The First Position: *Dilectio* and Contrition Proceed from Habitual Grace

### Philosophical Foundation

Although the disposition is the cause of the form in the genus of quasi-material cause, nevertheless, in the other genera of causes, the disposition can be the effect of the form. This is because causes are causes to each other and are related as prior and posterior according to diverse dependencies and the urgency of nature. Therefore, although the disposition precedes the form in the genus of material cause, nevertheless, it follows the form in the genus of efficient cause, and is cause by and depends on it.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, St. Thomas says in the passage that we are considering<sup>11</sup> that the infusion of habitual grace precedes the motion of the free will. This means that the infused grace has the *ratio* of a cause with respect to the motion of the free will.<sup>12</sup>

### First Theological Foundation

Contrition, as it is an ultimate disposition, merits glory, but does not merit grace.<sup>13</sup> Therefore it ought to proceed from habitual grace.

**Proof.** The motion of contrition cannot merit glory unless it proceeds from grace. This is because if it does not proceed from a graced subject and the love of could, it would in no way merit before God, because merit is not only with respect to acts, but to persons. Nor would it suffice for contrition to have grace for its term in order for contrition to merit glory, because in this case grace would no longer be the principle of merit.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>d. 28, a. 1, n. 12

<sup>9</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 12

<sup>10</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 3

<sup>11</sup>IaIIae, q. 113, a. 8

<sup>12</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 4

<sup>13</sup>Ia, q. 112, a. 2, ad 1

<sup>14</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 5

**Confirmation.** If it were the case that contrition and *dilectio* did not proceed from habitual grace, then they could be unformed, as acts of faith and hope.<sup>15</sup>

## Second Theological Foundation

1. Christ the Lord has been justified with respect to accidental sanctification through a proper disposition as an adult.
2. That act by which he disposed himself proceeds efficiently from habitual grace.
3. Therefore, it can also proceed [this way] in us.<sup>16</sup>

**Proof of (1)** This is the common teaching of the theologians and St. Thomas.<sup>17</sup>

**Proof of (2)** If that disposition did not proceed from habitual grace, then the disposition would merit the habitual grace, and consequently glory, which is grace consummated. But the common teaching of theologians (as well as St. Thomas) denies this.<sup>18</sup>

This can be shown by an argument. Suppose that the disposition did precede habitual grace. Even then, it would be a human act that proceeded from a divine person united to the humanity. Therefore, the dispositive action was sanctified and proceeded from a subject sanctified with a personal sanctity, therefore it is in just this way that it merited the grace to which it disposed. Note, however, that this argument does not apply to the angels, who were justified through a proper act, because altho that act did not proceed from habitual grace but a personal elevation through actual grace, nevertheless, because the person himself was not sanctified prior to habitual grace, the act of such a person was not precisely as such meritorious.<sup>19</sup>

[NB: I don't exactly understand what John of St. Thomas is getting at here. These two paragraphs seem to be saying different things.]<sup>20</sup>

**Proof of (3)** If that disposition proceeds from grace in one subject, then it is not unfitting that it so proceeds in others.<sup>21</sup>

## The Second Position: *Dilectio* and Contrition Proceed from Actual Grace

### Philosophical Foundation

Disposition to a form precedes the form and is its cause in the order of disposition. Therefore, it cannot be the effect of the form introduced in the genus of efficient cause.

**Argument.** In order for the disposition to be the effect of the form in the genus of efficient cause, it ought to suppose that the form exists in act and not outside of, but inside of, the subject. Thus the disposition proceeds from a form already introduced and received into the subject.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 6

<sup>16</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 7

<sup>17</sup>cf. IIIa, q. 7 and 34.

<sup>18</sup>ibid.

<sup>19</sup>ibid.

<sup>20</sup>ibid.

<sup>21</sup>ibid.

<sup>22</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 2

## Theological Foundation

Contrition and love of God, no matter how perfect, need a new grace and favor of God in order for sanctifying habitual grace to be infused. Therefore they cannot be the effects of habitual grace itself in the genus of efficient cause.<sup>23</sup>

**Proof of Antecedent.** Immediate from the last article.

**Proof of Consequent.** If contrition, insofar as it is an ultimate disposition, is an effect of habitual grace, then it does not require another favor and will of God beyond that which infuses the habitual grace. Again, if the grace itself is infused by God sufficiently for the remission of sin and the turning of God to the person, then contrition is an effect of the grace derived from such a will, and thus does not need another gratuitous will from God for remitting sin and turning God to the person.<sup>24</sup> (Note that this is a proof of the contrapositive).

**First Confirmation.** Those dispositions by which we are disposed for justification are not proper passions flowing from grace. Rather, they are elicited acts by which we are turned to God so that we may be mercifully illuminated by Him. Thus, those dispositions do not introduce necessity, as do the natural dispositions for a form, as St. Thomas says.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, such a disposition is not a proper passion proceeding from grace through a necessary flowing. Hence, if the disposition does proceed effectively from [habitual] grace, then it does so freely. Therefore, the infusion and reception of [habitual] grace can be understood without reference to the [dispositive] act which is elicited, if this act is elicited freely by the very grace, even in the instant of reception. Therefore, such a disposition does not pertain to the reception of [habitual] grace itself, if it *freely* proceeds from the [habitual] grace already received.<sup>26</sup>

**Second Confirmation.** Justification takes place in the sacrament of penance through attrition. But this attrition does not proceed effectively from grace, for then it would be contrition. Therefore, similarly, when justification takes place through contrition, it stands to reason that the very motion of contrition is not elicited by habitual grace, but from actual grace, and through another distinct action of infusing grace.<sup>27</sup>

## An Explication of the Mind of St. Thomas

Although St. Thomas says that the infusion of grace is first among those things which are required for justification, and consequently is also first with respect to the dispositions toward it, nevertheless by the notion of the infusion of grace, St. Thomas does not only understand the production of habitual grace, but also the motion of God by which he disposes us through the means of actual grace. We can gather this from the very words he uses in the article that we are considering:

In any natural motion, the motion of the mover itself is first. The disposition of the matter, or the movement of the mobile thing is second. Last comes the end, or the term over the movement to which the motion of the mover is turned. Now the very motion of God the mover is the infusion of grace, as was said above.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 8

<sup>24</sup>ibid.

<sup>25</sup>*De veritate*, q. 28, a. 2, ad 8

<sup>26</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 9

<sup>27</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 10

<sup>28</sup>IaIIae, q. 113, a. 8, c.

Therefore, since St. Thomas himself explains what he understands by “the infusion of grace,” namely the motion of God the mover toward justification, this term should not be restricted to what he says concerning the infusion of grace precisely for the production of habitual grace. Rather, it should be understood for the motion of God which moves to justification—a motion that takes place through actual grace. And although God also moves to remote dispositions, inasmuch as the beginning of justification is taken from these remote dispositions, nevertheless, in the present case, the motion of God is taken just as it touches only on the ultimate dispositions, because St. Thomas only treats here concerning those things which are simultaneous in the same instant with justification. This is implied in this article, and is explicitly stated in other places.<sup>29</sup>

**First Conclusion.** In the teaching of St. Thomas, habitual grace, in the instant in which it is infused, concurs formally, but not effectively, for the remission of fault and for the eliciting of contrition.

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<sup>29</sup>d. 28, a. 2, n. 11; cf. in IV *Sent.*, dist. 17, q. 1, a. 4, qun. 2; *de Veritate*, q. 28, a. 7