

Proemia of the *Summa theologiae*

First Part (*Prima*)

The teacher of Catholic truth ought not only to instruct the proficient; it also pertains to him to educate beginners, accordingly as the Apostle said, “as to little ones in Christ I gave you milk to drink, not food”. Wherefore in this work, it is our proposed intention to treat of those things which pertain to the Christian religion, in such a way as befits the education of beginners.

For we have seen that novices in this doctrine are rather impeded by the writings of many: partly through the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments; partly because those things which are useful for them to know are not treated according to the order of the discipline, but rather as the exposition of other books requires, or as the occasion of a dispute presents itself; and partly because the frequent repetition of the same thing generates boredom and confusion in the minds of the audience.

Therefore, striving to avoid such faults, with confidence in divine assistance, we will try to treat of those things which pertain to the faith briefly and lucidly, and as the matter demands.

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First Part of Second Part (*Prima secundae*)

As the Damascene says, man is said to be made in the image of God insofar as by “in his image” is signified “intellectual, having free will and power over himself”. Wherefore, after speaking of the exemplar, namely God, and of those things which proceed from the divine power according to his will, it remains for us to consider his image, namely man, insofar as he himself is the principle of his actions, having free will and power over his works.

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Second Part of Second Part (*Secunda secundae*)

After the common consideration of virtues and vices and of other things pertaining to the subject of morals, it is necessary to consider each of these in particular: for with moral instruction, the more universal is the less useful, because actions pertain to particulars.

Concerning morals, something can be considered in particular in two ways. The first is according to the matter of the moral itself, as when one considers this virtue or that vice. The second is according to the particular states of mankind, as when one considers subjects and rulers, the active and the contemplative, or whatever other differences among men. First, therefore, we will consider particularly those things which pertain to all states of mankind, and second, particularly those things which pertain to determinate states.

Concerning the first, there is this consideration: if we were to make a determination on all the virtues, gifts, vices, and commandments, we would have

to say the same thing several times: for he who wishes to treat of the commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”, must needs inquire concerning adultery, which is a particular sin, the knowledge of which in turn depends on knowledge of the opposite virtue. Therefore, it will be a more compact and expedient way of consideration, if it proceeds at once in the same section concerning a virtue, the gift corresponding to it, the vice opposed to it, and the affirmative or negative commandments.

And this manner of consideration is appropriate to the vices themselves according to their proper species, for it was shown above that vices and sins are diversified in species according to their matter or object, not according to any difference among the sinners, be it in heart, word, or deed, or according to any infirmity, ignorance, malice, or other differences of this kind. Moreover, it is with regard to the same matter that a virtue acts rightly and the opposed vices recede from rectitude. Therefore, with the whole subject of morals in this way reduced to the virtues, all the virtues may further be reduced to seven: of which three are theological, and these will be treated first; and the other four are cardinal, which will be treated afterwards.

Now, certainly one of the intellectual virtues is prudence, which is contained and numbered among the cardinal virtues. Art, however, does not pertain to morals, which concern actions; for art is right reason regarding productions. The other three intellectual virtues, namely wisdom, understanding, and science, agree in name with certain gifts of the Holy Spirit, whence they will also be considered at the same time with the consideration of the gifts corresponding to the virtues. All the other moral virtues can in some way be reduced to the cardinal virtues, as is clear from the aforesaid; whence, in the consideration of a given cardinal virtue, there will also be considered all the virtues and opposed vices pertaining to it in some way. In this way nothing of morals will be overlooked.

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Third Part (*Tertia*)

Our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, to “save his people from their sins” as the Angel testified, shows to us the way of truth in himself, through whom we are able to come to the blessedness of immortal life by rising again. Wherefore it is necessary for the consummation of the whole work of theology, after the consideration of the ultimate end of human life and of the virtues and vices, that our consideration should proceed to the Savior of all himself, and to his preeminent gifts to the human race.

Concerning these, the first consideration is of the Savior himself. The second is of the sacraments, by which we strive for salvation. The third is of the end of immortal life, to which we come through him by rising again. Concerning the first of these, there is a twofold consideration. The first is of the mystery of the Incarnation itself, in which God was made man for our salvation. The second is of those things which our Savior, God Incarnate, did and suffered.

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