

## FATHER REGINALD GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, O.P.

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DOMINIC NEALY, O.P.



WITHIN the past few years translations of several works of Father Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., have appeared on our book-stands. The translators, Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B., and Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P., are to be congratulated on their timely and excellent work. Hitherto the barrier of language has hidden the works of this distinguished French Dominican from the majority of English speaking people. But now with the increase of interest in Thomism these translations are needed to effect among the Catholic people of this country the same enlightening influence the originals had on the faithful in Europe.

Father Garrigou-Lagrange is not a spiritual writer of the moment. Rather he is an outstanding thinker, a man of sound theological knowledge, a priest who is a master of the spiritual life. In the words of the Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Fenton, Professor of Dogmatic Theology in St. Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, N. Y.:

Father Garrigou-Lagrange is one of the most interesting and powerful figures in the current Thomistic resurgence, for many years a member of the faculty of the Angelico, the Dominican institute of higher ecclesiastical studies in Rome. It is safe to say that no living man, not even Maritain or Sertillanges, has done more to advance the cause of Catholic thought than he. Since the death of Gardeil, his former teacher, and Hugon, his associate, he has been the regularly acknowledged leader of the Thomistic movement. One of the most prolific writers of this generation, he is at the same time one of the most powerful and profound. . . . Father Garrigou-Lagrange does not owe his preëminence in the realm of Catholic thought to the number of his productions, but to the peculiar vigor and intensity of his understanding.<sup>1</sup>

In February, 1937, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, the *Angelicum*, official publication of the Collegium Angelicum, was dedicated to Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. He was born on February 21, 1877, entered the Order of Preachers in 1899 and on April 30 of the following year made his profession.

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<sup>1</sup>Fenton, J. C. "Modern Thomists" in *The Commonweal*, Vol. XX, no. 11 (July 13, 1934), p. 279.

In 1909 he was assigned to the faculty of the Angelico. The story is told that after his first lecture he left the classroom, and thinking himself a failure, burst into tears. However, under the sympathetic guidance of Father Sadoc Szabó, the Regent of Studies, he carried on. The degree of Master of Sacred Theology was conferred upon him in November, 1919. Today, as Vice Rector of the Collegium Angelicum and member of the Roman Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, he stands "the acknowledged leader of the Thomistic movement."<sup>2</sup>

In the issue of the *Angelicum* already referred to there is drawn up the complete list of his works, two hundred and seventy-three in all. There is in the major works of Father Garrigou-Lagrange a remarkable unity so that each book stands as an individual, yet the whole offers us what might be called a modern *summa*. This *summa* may be divided into three groups: the first consists of the foundations and background of Theology; the second deals with the existence and nature of God and embraces also special treatises on divine causality: the governing or Efficient Cause (Divine Providence), the Final Cause (the predestination of the saints), and the Exemplary Cause (Christ); the third is composed of his writings on Ascetical and Mystical Theology, that is, "the application of Theology in the direction of souls towards an ever closer union with God."<sup>3</sup>

In these days when Communism is admittedly Atheism and Materialism logically and thoroughly applied in a political philosophy, such a *summa* is of great practical value to modern men. It provides a natural approach to the study of the True Faith; it offers the antidote for Atheism inasmuch as it treats of God from the viewpoint of His existence and nature; and, from the aspect of His causality in the world, it furnishes a remedy for Materialism. Finally in the realm of Ascetical and Mystical Theology it supplies a man with a safe guide to his own personal sanctification.

The first group of this *summa* includes two outstanding works. The first is *Le Sens commun* in which Father Garrigou sets out to defend the thesis that being and the principles implied in it constitute the formal, primary and adequate subject of common sense, that is, natural reason. The other is *De Revelatione*, an apologetical treatise, which provides a sound founda-

<sup>2</sup> cf. Fenton, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (Saint Louis, 1937), p. 23. Translated by Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P.

tion for Theology. Pope Benedict XV in a congratulatory letter to Father Garrigou said: "And so you have completed a work which scholars hold in no small repute; a work which, We hope, will be of service in enabling the younger clergy especially to safeguard and defend, as today they must, supernatural truth."<sup>4</sup> Using this work as a basis, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. T. J. Walshe has made a study of modernism entitled *The Principles of Catholic Apologetics*.

There are four treatises in the second group. Three of these may be termed a trilogy, inasmuch as they combine to form a popular commentary on Questions I-XXIV of the First Part of the *Summa Theologica* (in which St. Thomas treats of the One God). These three are: *God: His Existence and His Nature*, *Providence* and *La Prédestination des saints et la Grâce*.

Philosophers look to Descartes as the father of modern rationalism but to Kant as the genius who revealed its first principles and true spirit. It is against the antinomies of Kant and the other modernists that Father Garrigou-Lagrange has written *God: His Existence and His Nature*. In this book, translated by Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B., he sets out to demonstrate the necessity of first principles (which he treated in *Le Sens commun*) and their ontological and transcendental validity. For as A. E. Taylor says in his *Elements of Metaphysics*, "The Humian and Kantian criticism of all arguments for knowledge of the ultimate nature of reality and their attack upon metaphysical knowledge in general, necessarily imply a discarding of the traditional proofs of God's Existence."<sup>5</sup>

Dom Bede has also translated *La Providence et la confiance en Dieu*, the title of the English edition being simply *Providence*, the second book of the trilogy. Father Garrigou has already touched upon Divine Providence in *God: His Existence and His Nature*, but from a purely speculative point of view: in *Providence* he writes of the relationship of Divine Providence to our spiritual life. Surely the author is best qualified to state the aim of his own work. Father Garrigou-Lagrange tells us that the "chief aim will be to insist upon the *absolute* and supremely life-giving character of the truth revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ and infallibly proposed to us by the Church." Then he goes on to say something which is becoming more apparent every day: "Souls are perishing in the ever-shifting sands of the relative; it is the absolute they need. Nowhere will they find it

<sup>4</sup> *Analecta, S.O.P.*, January-February, 1919.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, A. E., *Elements of Metaphysics* (London, 1903), p. 400.

but in the Gospel entrusted by Jesus Christ to His Church, which has preserved, taught and expounded it. It has been exemplified in the lives of the best of her children."<sup>6</sup>

The concluding work of the trilogy is Father Garrigou-Lagrange's latest book, *La Prédestination des saints et la grâce*. No doubt it will be one of his most popular, for if there is a question which inflames theologians and philosophers to a white heat it is the question of predestination. To this problem Father Garrigou-Lagrange brings a life-long study of St. Thomas and his principal commentators. Let there be no misgivings as to his interpretation of the mind of Saint Thomas. On the very first pages we find this sentence: "We have retained, in the title, the expression dear to Saint Augustine, 'the predestination of the saints,' in order to bear in mind that predestination to grace alone does not bring us 'de facto' to eternal life, whereas this (the predestination of the saints) includes the gift of final perseverance." And further on: "In the second part we shall retrace the history of the diverse solutions of this great problem, stressing the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas, which we shall compare with the theories proposed after his time, especially with those of the theologians who came after the Council of Trent."

The fourth book of the second group, *Le Saveur et son amour pour nous*, is a popular commentary on that section of the Third Part of the *Summa* in which St. Thomas treats of the Incarnation, a subject upon which Father Garrigou has often lectured. He tells us in the preface: "We thought it would be useful to take from St. Thomas' tract on the Incarnation that which touches directly upon the personality of Our Saviour, His intimate life, His love for us, and present it in a popular form to our good Catholic people." This work, then, is meant for the real Catholic who has a living faith, who believes in God with his whole heart, who has implicit trust in Divine Providence, and who prays fervently for the gift of final perseverance. It is in some respects a life of Christ—the God-man who was born of the Virgin Mary that He might show us how to live. In many ways it might serve as a modern Imitation of Christ.

We turn now to the group in which we find classical treatises on Ascetical and Mystical Theology. Father Garrigou-

<sup>6</sup> *Providence* (Saint Louis, 1937), pp. v-vi. Translated by Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B.

<sup>1</sup> *La Prédestination des saints et la grâce* (Paris, 1936), p. 9.

Lagrange admits at the outset that the teachings he presents are not his own but those of St. Thomas and the traditional doctrine with which the Dominicans have been identified. This traditional thesis is the Unity of Spiritual Doctrine. According to St. Thomas, St. John of the Cross, and others, "mystical theology included not only the mystical union, infused contemplation, its degrees and the extraordinary graces that sometimes accompany it (visions and private revelations), but also Christian perfection in general, and the first phases of the spiritual life, the normal progress of which thus seemed directed toward the mystical union as its culminating point. All these together formed a whole that was truly one: . . ."<sup>8</sup>

The first book of this third group is one from which we have already quoted on several occasions, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*. The other is *L'Amour de Dieu et la Croix de Jesus*. This latter is a study in Mystical Theology on the problem of love and the passive purification of the senses and the spirit. It, too, is according to the principles of St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross. These two works fulfill his thesis to the letter. "When ascetical and mystical theology are separated from each other," says Father Garrigou in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, "the ascetical lacks vitality, depth, and elevation; the mystical loses its importance, its gravity, and its depth, and seems to be solely a luxury in the spirituality of some privileged souls."<sup>9</sup>

Men filled with the spirit of study are not influenced by the conditions of the particular age in which they live. They are, in a sense, timeless because they seek Truth, which never changes. They themselves are influences. Father Garrigou-Lagrange is a man filled with the spirit of study, a lover of Truth. He writes of God in the quiet of a Dominican convent, unperturbed by the clash and clamor of the world about him. It is for us to read and learn, to partake of the fruit of his contemplation—for that fruit has the quality of lasting nourishment and surely we need such nourishment today.

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<sup>8</sup> *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> pp. 42-43.