

A PARTICIPLE FROM ST. THOMAS

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"Adoro Te Devote, Latens Deitas."



THE hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of words which have come from the pen of the Angelic Doctor, those which have a somewhat fascinating appeal for me are his participles. For a minor latinist, at least, there is nothing like a good participle! As a major latinist, of course St. Thomas understood this and consequently made excellent—at times, exquisite—use of participles to speak to us of the things of God.

Now there are many participles in the works of St. Thomas, but of all I've seen and noted there is just one which keeps attracting my attention. I like this particular participle best of all because I think it exemplifies a special aspect of the genius of St. Thomas; it has *drive*. The participle to which I refer is found in the first line of the ADORO TE, the fourth word—which is *latens*. From an analysis of this word as here used, I think it will be evident how very much more the Angelic Doctor intended to convey than we ordinarily get out of his use of this word *latens*. To my mind, this one word used in this context is a compendium of St. Thomas's Eucharistic theology!

All of us are very familiar with that first line of the ADORO TE; many say it reverently each day, especially at that moment when the Eucharistic Christ is present within their breasts. But do we realize what this sentence means? Or at least what St. Thomas intended to convey? It is, of course, impossible to comprehend all the richness and treasure contained therein; but much remains to be unearthed by and for each one of us. For instance, can we even literally translate just this first line of the ADORO TE? It has been my experience that few do translate this line even correctly, much less adequately; hence, through a hurried over-simplification, they overlook the hidden gem St. Thomas deliberately concealed in that participle *latens*—to say nothing of the other words in this line.

THEOLOGY AND LATINITY

Many of us who have not a profound knowledge of latinity have been mislead by vernacular translations of the ADORO TE into

English. Almost all translate that participle *latens* incorrectly, I believe; it is most frequently translated as an adjective, minus its participial connotation. The usual translation into English renders *latens* as *hidden*; in the versions, therefore, the Godhead is qualified as a "hidden Godhead." In fact, in only one poetic translation into English have I seen this participle adequately and correctly rendered; and that is found in the excellent poetic version of the ADORO TE, written by Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. I confess that it takes the happy combination of a Thomistic theologian and a latinist to see the force of this word as used by St. Thomas in his hymn; it is gratifying, however, that Father Hopkins of the Society of Jesus shares these discerning qualities along with his poetic gifts. The first stanza of Father Hopkin's translation of the ADORO TE will be given at the conclusion of this paper.

But if *hidden* is not the proper translation of *latens* in this context, what then is its meaning? We shall presently see. In favor of *hidden* as the translation, of course I recognize you can advance some authority—your small latin dictionary, for example—which renders *latens-latentis* as *hidden*. While granting your authority, I must deny your conclusion if you apply it to the text we are considering. To strengthen my position, let us analyze the word *latens*, first giving its syntax as used in our sentence. The syntax offers no difficulty. "*Latens* is the present participle of *lateo-latere*, used as a participial adjective to qualify *deitas*."

But now for an analysis of this syntax. First of all, *latens* is a present participle; essentially it is a participle, not an adjective. (The translation of *latens* as *hidden*, you will note, is an adjectival translation, not a participial one.) What is a participle? It is a word which partakes of the nature both of a verb and of an adjective. And a verb implies action. A present participle, therefore, denotes some sort of action-going-on-in-the-present. But what is this action-going-on-in-the-present which the word *latens* implies? Well, we get the answer to that from the action-word (verb) itself of which *latens* is the participle. What does *latere* mean? You tell me at once that it means "to hide, to be hidden, to lie concealed etc." But in what sense, active or passive, does it mean "to hide, to be hidden, to lie concealed, etc."? Is it in the passive sense; for example, in the sense in which one's hat is concealed when it lies hidden in the closet? That is one possibility. Or is it in the active sense; for example, the manner in which the crew of an artillery battery actively conceal themselves from enemy observation?

O GODHEAD HIDING

Let us apply this distinction to the use of *latens* in the text we are considering. I grant that one can advance arguments either way from a grammatical standpoint; but, add the theological viewpoint of St. Thomas himself, and the weight of merit favors-an active sense as the meaning of *latens* in this text. Remember that in speaking these sublime words of the ADORO TE, St. Thomas is directly addressing Christ in the Eucharist, under the particular species present to the adorer. But how is Christ present in the Eucharist; how is He concealed therein? More properly, is it not rather He Himself Who conceals Himself within the Eucharistic species, as opposed to His being concealed? For Christ in the Holy Eucharist is not there hidden as some dead, passive thing might be hidden, concealed in a closet. Christ within the Holy Bread is alive, dynamic, actively and constantly concealing Himself under the sacred elements! It is this idea which St. Thomas so magnificently fitted into that single word *latens*. So infinite is God's love, so great is His desire to unite Himself to us in this Holy Sacrament, that Christ is continuously "restraining His Divinity" as it were, lest It burst the lowly bonds of the holy bread and we be unable to contain Him! To conceal Himself in the Holy Eucharist—Body, Soul, and Divinity—requires an act, a present act of divine omnipotence. What is this act of divine omnipotence in the Eucharist? It is that tremendous, present, constant movement of actively concealing under the holy species the very Godhead Itself! It was not without deliberation, therefore, that St. Thomas chose the forceful present participle of *latere* to express himself almost perfectly when he wrote: "Devoutly I adore Thee, O Godhead *hiding!*" In the beautifully expressive version of Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., this line is exquisitely rendered—

"Godhead *here in hiding*, whom I do adore
 Masked by bare shadows, shape and nothing more,
 See, Lord, at Thy service low lies a heart
 Lost, all lost in wonder at the God Thou art. . ."