

THE "TABULA AUREA" AND ITS COMPILER

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I



WHAT does Saint Thomas say about it?" is a common question to be heard whenever questions of Catholic Philosophy and Theology are discussed. And another question logically follows: *Where* is the true doctrine of St. Thomas on this point to be found? Surely the words of the Angelic Doctor himself are most likely and authoritative source of such information. But since he has treated many and diverse subjects, and since his works comprise some thirty or more volumes, recourse to the words of Thomas himself is not always an easy task. Happily, there is at the disposal of the student an invaluable compilation,—the *Index*.

At first glance this great work reminds one strongly of a stock-market report. Abbreviations that mean nothing at all to the uninitiated, word combinations and the like, stagger and even befuddle one. However with the aid of the key accompanying it, the maze of unintelligible words and numbers becomes what it really is, an orderly and concise dictionary to the opinions and principles of Saint Thomas.

The *Index* is the work of Peter of Bergamo, a Dominican theologian of the fifteenth century. In the form in which it is appended to the editions of the *Opera Omnia* of St. Thomas, it is entitled *Tabula Aurea Magistri Petri de Bergamo*, and includes two distinct works, the *Index Universalis*, and the *Concordantia Locorum Doctoris Angelici Quae sibi Invicem Adversari Videntur*.

The first of these, Peter's principal work, the *Index Universalis in Omnia Opera Divi Thomae de Aquino*, was first published at Bologna in 1475. It was an alphabetical summary of all the principal conclusions and principles and theories contained in the works of Saint Thomas. The only Thomistic treatise not indexed was the opusculum, *De Eruditione Principis*. This exclusion was due no doubt to the shadows of doubt which were then being cast upon the authenticity of that treatise.

In the *Index*, each conclusion, theory and principle is arranged alphabetically by its principal word. When there are a number of words absolutely necessary to the proposition, the latter is arranged under each of them to facilitate research. Since some word may be indispensable to a hundred or more propositions, each proposition is

numerically ordered under that essential word. After each proposition, references are given to various places in the works of St. Thomas where it is discussed. These references are minute in detail, and even designate that part of St. Thomas's article which concerns the cited proposition. Beyond this, there is added an intricate system of cross references to particular words of the proposition abstracted from their proper context. The maze of marginal notes in the earlier editions has been done away with simply by omitting them.

In 1478 was published Bergamo's second work, *Concordantia Locorum Doctoris Angelici Quae Sibi Invicem Adversari Videntur*, an attempt to harmonize certain apparently contradictory passages in the texts of St. Thomas by recourse to the latter's own principles. When this work was embodied in the *Tabula Aurea*, after each statement which seemed to be contradicted in another part, there was added "oppositum videtur dicere," with a number of references and a solution of the problem. In later editions this last was eliminated, with an eye, no doubt, to brevity.

Another of Peter's compilations was his *Compendium Sacrae Scripturae*, a list of each text of Sacred Scripture used Saint Thomas. The order followed is that of the Bible itself. Each text is followed by one or more references to the articles in which they are employed as arguments from authority.

Previous to 1570, there existed no complete edition of the works of St. Thomas. After the Council of Trent, Pope Pius V ordered that a universal and corrected edition of those invaluable tracts be made. The commission was given to two Dominicans, Venenz Guistiani and Thomas Manriquez. To the text of St. Thomas was added the *Commentary* of Cardinal Cajetan, O.P., and the *Tabula Aurea* of Peter of Bergamo. This, the famous *Piana Edition*, was published at Rome in 1570, and has been the source of the later editions, all of which significantly retain the *Tabula Aurea*.

That the work of Peter contains numerous errors cannot be denied. But it must be remembered that its author attacked a task of gigantic proportions and carried it through to such completion that it has not been supplanted in the ensuing four and a half centuries. The very scope of the work accounts for any number of errors, while Peter's desire to cover the slightest minutia was certainly another contributing cause. Much complexity and many of the inaccuracies have been eliminated over a period of editions. The compilation stands as a monument to its author, whose only purpose was "to give help and an incentive to all who wish to perfect themselves in the wholesome, Catholic and veridical doctrine of Aquinas."

II

To pass from a study of the *Index* to a consideration of the life of its author is like passing from the bustle and confusion of a city to the serenity and calmness of farm and field. For Peter's life was a life of that peace which is found in God.

He was born in the town of Bergamo in Lombardy, in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. His training at home and at school developed the seeds of sanctity in his youthful soul. Thus it was no ordinary candidate who presented himself at the Dominican Convent of Bergamo and sought admission into the Order.

From the very outset of his religious life, Peter was entirely engrossed in the business of striving toward religious perfection. Besides a heart that was entirely directed to God, he possessed magnificent intellectual qualities. His steady development soon raised him above his brothers and he became known to all as a model religious. Father Tournon says of him that in a period that was not very progressive, Peter of Bergamo was already considered a model of regular observance and of wisdom; the help and support of reform, the most rigid observer of its laws. Yet, for all his zeal and punctiliousness in religious discipline, he was kind to all, fairly exuding charity and that peace which is not of this world.

He was sent to the University of Bologna to complete his studies. There he received all his degrees with the highest honors. But these shafts of worldly glory failed to dent Peter's profound humility. During this period he set himself about the task that was to prove the major occupation of his life, the study of Thomistic Theology. He studied and meditated upon the thought of the Angelic Doctor and made it so much a part of himself that his students later remarked that he seemed to have the entire synthesis committed to memory.

The striking combination of the intellectual and spiritual in Peter of Bergamo fitted him for the many responsible positions which fell to his lot. Naturally most of his positions were in the professorial field, and while professor of Theology at Bologna, he felt keenly the need for an index to the works of St. Thomas. As we have seen, he took this task upon himself. Moreover, he held the offices of Master of Students and Bachelor of Theology at the Dominican Studium of Bologna, his tenure of office ending in 1476. In these positions he exerted not a little influence upon the spiritual and intellectual lives of his subjects, who give ample proof of the excellence of their training. Blessed Vincent Bandelli and Barthol-

omew Comatius, both of whom were Master Generals of the Order, were protégés of Peter. Paschal de Burgos, later raised to the episcopacy in Spain, Ambrose of Germany, Paul de Soncina, and Dominic of Flanders, are a few more of the many illustrious Dominicans who flourished under his competent instruction and splendid example.

The labor entailed in the compilation of his works and the responsibilities of his many offices seem to have shattered his physical powers, for in 1476 he retired to the Dominican Convent of Piacenza in his native Lombardy. He died there in 1482.

It is to be regretted that the few extant documents dealing with Peter's life give us but few significant facts concerning the life of this truly remarkable Dominican. Of the veneration in which he was held by the people of Piacenza and the surrounding country, however, his biographers have left us a fuller account. Shortly after his death several miraculous cures took place, and these were attributed to Peter's intercession. His tomb in the Chapel of St. Thomas at Piacenza became an accepted place for public vows and here his devotees were wont to honor his memory.

Instead of dying with the years, Peter's hold upon the hearts of the people increased, so much so that a century after his death a solemn translation of his body was made, March 14, 1585. The relics were removed to a more impressive tomb under the main altar of the Church of Piacenza. That miracles continued to be worked at this shrine is attested to by Leander Albert, O.P.

Thus did the name of this model of Dominican life continue in spirit among the people of his native Lombardy. But outside the narrow limits of that region the most that his name suggests to the mind is a remote connection with the works of St. Thomas. Although Samuel Johnson wrote the first dictionary of the English language, his memory might have passed into oblivion had not faithful Boswell immortalized his master. Peter of Bergamo composed the first and greatest dictionary to Thomistic thought, but he was doomed almost to oblivion because his Boswell, if he had one, was mute.

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