

truth (iv, 23), this does not mean that those worshippers have come to do so by their own efforts. That the Father *seeks*, means that he brings it about, as he *seeks* Christ's glory (viii, 50). Is this truth not close to the notion of the kingdom of God of the other gospels, the kingdom of sanctifying and liberating love?



## SHAMING THE DEVIL: OR TELLING THE TRUTH

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

OF truthfulness it is much less than courage of heart and holiness'—this adaptation of Belloc might be prompted by some hack moralists of the day before yesterday, who instead of riding the downs with God's first gift to man, *subtle, eloquent, sure, sweet, more beautiful than the sun, whose company is without tediousness but with gladness*,<sup>1</sup> land us in a bog of mental restrictions and verbal circumlocutions. True, they carry some sort of apparatus for extricating us, but their effect is one of casuistry rather than candour, and they irked Newman who was formed by another tradition: it was ironical that he, who in all conscience had a delicate sense of honour, should have been exposed to Kingsley's bluff. Not that Anglo-Saxons anyhow have cause for complaint against the slippery Latins, for they themselves, though they may not go in for *suggestio falsi*—the half-lie—are adept at *suppressio veri*—the half-truth—and of all nations the frankness on which they pride themselves seems most baffling to others. In any case truthfulness is not just a matter of bluntness, for though it will have nothing to do with white lies, it does call for tact and a cultivated spirit of fair play.

Let us look at how it is described in the *Summa Theologiae*. For somebody so charged with obedience to the truth of God and things, it may come as a surprise that St Thomas tucks veracity in between two of the satellites to the cardinal virtue of justice, namely between punitive justice and friendliness which govern its severe and agreeable functions respectively,<sup>2</sup> a suitable position between the bleak and the bland—but surely rather a minor one? Is St Thomas perhaps like us, most off hand sometimes about what

<sup>1</sup> cf. Wisdom vi-xi.

<sup>2</sup> 2a-2ae. cix-ciii.

is most pervasive and intimate? Many of us know how hard it is to answer in terms of a special subject such inquiries as, 'Tell me, what do you consider most important in life?'—or, 'what you think about things in general?'—or even, 'all about yourself'.

Perhaps, but that is not the reason for the modesty of the treatise. St Thomas makes it clear from the beginning that he is not directly dealing here with the final truth immediately possessed in vision which is our eternal happiness, nor with the cleaving to it in darkness which is the act of faith, nor yet with the conformity of our judgment with the world as it really is. All this is discussed elsewhere. He is not even dealing with that integrity of mind which will not let us put up a smoke-screen between ourselves and God. If we have done wrong let us be heartily sorry, or at least not defend ourselves; if we are going to do wrong let us not blink the fact, or persuade ourselves that the law is not there or is other than it is. There is a split-second ignorance before most sins, but when it settles on us like a habit so that our very conscience becomes erroneous, then we are in danger of being at fault whatever we do—*quod est inconveniens*, the *Summa* drily notes; in other words, an awkward state of affairs, worse than a thumping whopper, for it is a sickness of which the germs breed like those of the common cold.

To utter truth on this scale is the object or end of all virtue. But room remains for a more specialized and less ranging habit, of manifesting to our fellows what we have in our minds, of using aright the signs whereby we communicate with one another, of going past scientific or doctrinal truth, which is impersonal, to moral truth, which is interpersonal. As concerned with what is due to others, truthfulness is directly the affair of justice and equity, though it differs from ordinary justice in that it does not render a *legal obligation* which can be measured by set rules and strictly enforced (2a-2ae. cix, 3). This point can be misunderstood; it does not imply that the authorities cannot proceed against false declarations in contracts or damaging lies, nor that we are entitled to twist words as we choose, like Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass*,<sup>3</sup> nor that telling the truth is of lesser obligation

<sup>3</sup> 'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less . . . Impenetrability! That's what I say!'

than paying your debts, nor, still less, that it is merely a counsel. It simply means that the *strict moral obligation* of truthfulness, like that of loving your neighbour or behaving with fortitude or temperance, cannot be framed by legislation. Its decency is too personal for typification, too supple for fixation. Human laws, be it remembered, touch our outward patterns of behaviour, not our inner spring and the virtuous way of doing things (1a-2ae. xcvi, 2, 3).

We have to know where we stand with one another, for otherwise life in common would become intolerable. Untruthfulness, then, always contains the element of unfairness, actual or potential, to somebody else. All sins can be antisocial, though many are committed in solitariness. But you cannot exercise the special virtue of truthfulness without a listener—not necessarily attentive; you cannot lie making a speech meant to be a soliloquy. The intention to deceive, however, is not the stuff of a lie, but rather the high polish; it does not constitute its essence, but rather its achievement (2a-2ae. cx, 1). St Thomas here uses the term *perfection*, not in any commendatory sense; thus we refer to a perfect murder meaning one that leaves no suspicion behind it, or a perfect gentlemen meaning one who never unintentionally offends against good manners. Not all scholastic moralists have agreed with him, but we need not linger over the controversy except to recollect that Ananias and Sapphira were punished not for any harm they did, and to note that truthfulness has a loveliness apart from the benefits that follow. Let us pick out some of its qualities.

By temperament, or at least by training, many of us find more reassurance of virtue by doing what is irksome than by doing what is congenial. This does not agree in theory with St Thomas's teaching about the delightfulness of virtue, the healthiness of pleasure, and the fact that actions are not good just because they are painful. Certainly there is a special merit in tackling opposition, and it is the mark of the cardinal virtue of fortitude. In general, however, going against the grain does not increase the voluntariness of what we do and therefore does not enhance its excellence (cf. 2a-2ae. lxxxii, 4): St Thomas means, of course, our inner grain rather than the texture of our surface emotions when he speaks of delighting in the good, for not yet 'does our flesh rejoice in the living God' (Ps. lxxxiii, 3). Nevertheless

the object of virtue is such because it is good, not because it is difficult, and if we enjoy it, well then, so much the better.

So with truthfulness. Many of us like easy-going ways, and have to nerve ourselves to speak harshly. All the same we should not fancy that our truthfulness should be reserved for unpleasant encounters. Speaking our mind does not necessarily mean showing the rough edge of our tongue. Bluntness can be only too blunt, candour only too devastating. Truthfulness should go with a smile as well as a frown, and we might well inquire how often it works for the encouragement of others, not merely for their correction. Perhaps this is one of those few occasions where the moralist in us can learn from a maxim of the canonists: 'enlarge the favourable, confine the burdensome'. For truthfulness is positive and constructive, for the building up of the Church, which is the body of Christ. So 'speaking the truth in love we may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ' (Ephes. iv, 15).

Truthfulness is no more the mere absence of deceit than sanctifying grace itself is the mere absence of mortal sin. Evil should not be allowed to get away with the trick of looking shaggy and high-spirited, one result of grooming good to look too even and sedate. Safety is not too safe a word in the light of the condemnation of *Tutorismus Absolutus* (Safety First at All Costs) by Alexander VIII towards the end of the seventeenth-century debates about conscience—but that is another question and deserves a separate article. The more real the more good, the less real the more evil—that is, in effect, the refrain which runs throughout St Thomas's moral theology. An unadventurous negativeness is a main menace to the life of the spirit, for though our sins of commission may rise up against us, look closely and we shall see that it is our sins of omission that should give us a sinking feeling. By and large we should recognize that we probably fail God's friendship more by what we don't do than by what we do do.

Next, as truthfulness is not a sour-faced or angular virtue, neither does it put its foot in it every time it opens its mouth. Blurting out is not its role, for it calls for consideration and discretion, delicacy and reserve, indeed all the component parts of the cardinal virtue of prudence which governs it (2a-2ae. xlix). A sense of social context is essential, otherwise we may become

exhibitionists or conversational bullies. The cult of 'absolute honesty' can be a self-centred luxury, and its effects can be very unfair. That man is vicious, St Thomas remarks, who publicizes either his good qualities or his faults out of season and out of place (2a-2ae. cix, 1 ad 2). I am not a truthful person because I blab to any chance inquirer, or because I betray confidence, or because I confess to a merely emotional not liking of someone, when my hearer—and repeater—will misunderstand me to mean that I harbour a deliberate disliking, or because I throw pearls before swine. It takes two to be truthful, for truthfulness is a part of justice, and may start as a monologue yet must reckon on what sort of dialogue is likely to follow.

Finally, like all the moral virtues, it holds to a mean between excess and deficiency, and, as with justice, this mean stands between too much or too little with respect to the outward word or deed. If anything, it is more offended by overstatement than by understatement. Aristotle notices that he who claims more than he has out of boastfulness is a futile sort of fellow, though an uglier character if he does so for gain, whereas he who disclaims qualities in order to avoid parade is less unattractive, unless he indulges in the mock-modesty of the humbug. St Thomas confirms him; people who exaggerate themselves are bores, while those who depreciate themselves at least exhibit social good sense, though they may be just as inaccurate (2a-2ae. cix, 4). He draws a distinction between a man who denies his gifts and another who without prejudice to truth does not affirm them. This last he finds admirable, citing St Paul, 'For though I should have a mind to glory, I would not be foolish, for I would say the truth. Yet now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth in me or heareth of me' (II Cor. xii, 6).

At once the dove and the serpent, truthfulness has a simplicity set against double-think, double-talk, double-dealing, and an elasticity that responds to the variety of its occasions, being closer to the equity of justice than to its legal grammar; its genius is analogical rather than univocal. Sometimes speaking in silences, sometimes showing the shimmer of contrasting half-truths recognized as such, sometimes downright, sometimes turning to parables, it knits the society of person with person, that whole body, of which St Paul speaks, 'compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the opera-

tion in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity' (Ephes. iv, 16). According to the measure of every part; for as there is a gradation in charity, so the tones of truthfulness differ for the near, the dear, the distant, the weak, the strong, the young, the old, though always there should be 'rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation' (I Peter ii, 1).

The eternal principle of this conversation is truly in heaven, in the Father who by declining himself begets the Word: *Verbum spirans Amorem*, the Word breathing forth Love. Thence proceeds the Spirit, the *Donum*, the Gift we receive and share with others, for the kingdom of heaven is already among us. Love cannot live with pretences, however kindly meant; charity rejoiceth in the truth (I Cor. xiii, 6). Neither ostentatious nor secretive, neither thrusting nor evasive, says St Thomas, each should deal with his neighbour with open mind and open heart according to circumstance. So St John would have us avoid lies less because they debase the currency of human transactions than because they belong to the Devil, 'who is the father of lies' (John viii, 4). So St Paul looks beyond reasons of civic decency; 'speak ye the truth because you are members of one another' (Ephes. iv, 25). So St Thomas observes that every truth, whatever and by whoever uttered, is from the Holy Ghost, and St Catherine bids us remember that whenever we think and speak we should reflect some likeness of the Word.



## RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND INTOLERANCE<sup>1</sup>

CARDINAL LERCARO

**T**HE Concept of *Tolerance*. There is about tolerance something paradoxical, for it consists, in fact, in permitting something which we know with certainty to be either an evil or an error: *permissio negativa mali*, as the theologian carefully defines it. Negative, because the permission does not imply either encouragement or approval.

<sup>1</sup> A French version of this conference by the Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna appeared in *La Documentation Catholique*, March 1959, and this translation of it by G. F. Pullen is here printed by kind permission of the editor.