



## 70. The Mission of St Augustine, St Thomas and Schoenstatt

*There is hardly any other text in which our founder's mission-consciousness, and his vision of Schoenstatt's importance and the mission of our Blessed Mother for our present times, is so clearly expressed as when he compared it with the "uniquely specific" mission of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. The comparison subdivides the two thousand years of the Church's history into three periods of epochal change. All three present a special challenge to our relationship with God, a special crisis, and the possibility of a special leap in the growth of precisely this relationship to God.*

*According to our founder's conviction, the Blessed Mother, as she has "revealed" herself in Schoenstatt, has been given a special task to confront the challenges of our times today.*

*The comparison with Augustine and Thomas is very closely connected with our founder's vision of Schoenstatt as the "heart of the Church" (Cf. Text 71). This text is taken from the fourth talk during the 1967 Christmas Conference, and can be found in *Propheta locutus est*, XII, 98-108.*

Allow me to make a brief digression and repeat once more: ***The problem of our times is the problem of God!*** In the background we can distinguish with increasing clarity between two camps: on the one hand the avowed theists, and on the other, the avowed atheists. So if we want to trace all the religious problems in our present times to their ultimate root, we will have to say: In every respect it is a matter of saving God! Atheism and theism are constantly locked in fearsome combat. Many decrees and changes in the Council's way of thinking and acting can only be understood from this clear perspective.

Let us look back for a moment into the history of the Church. In it we find two men who exercised a profound influence on the Church: St Augustine and St Thomas. The one based himself on Plato, the other on Aristotle. Both in their own way have had a uniquely specific mission.

As a Neoplatonist, St Augustine based his thinking on the mystery of Christ. He used Plato to penetrate this mystery more deeply. What the Council wanted to give us, and has given us, in this regard through the Constitution on the Liturgy<sup>264</sup> has essentially remained within the ambit of St Augustine's mission.

By the way, if you compare Augustine with Dante, for example, you will find that Augustine dared to take a step of genius by depicting the whole of salvation history from the point-of-view of "*De civitate Dei*", the city and kingdom of God. You will understand that in the process he placed special emphasis on God's activity. This was in his nature, but it was also part of his mission.

Experts tell us that Dante is the last medieval and the first modern person. He expressed the content of "*De civitate Dei*"<sup>265</sup> in his own way in the well-known work "*The Divine Comedy*",<sup>266</sup> something we have often discussed together. They concern something that is absolutely divine, but connected with what is human; something divine, but connected with secondary causes, which Augustine considered relatively rarely.

As time went on, the Muslims brought Aristotle's philosophy to Europe via Africa, and this raised the question of the autonomy of secondary causes.

**St Thomas'** most brilliant achievement was that he immediately recognised the danger this posed to Christianity in Western Europe through the spread of Aristotle's way of thinking about secondary causes. It separated secondary causes from the First Cause, just as at the beginning the First Cause was insufficiently safeguarded by its in appropriate connection with secondary causes. His brilliant achievement was his attempt to connect secondary causes, that is, all that is created, to the First Cause in the spirit of Christianity. Can we understand what that means? The idea of God had to be saved! Hence the great law: *Deus operatur per causas (secundas) liberas!*<sup>267</sup>

Allow me to state without giving many proofs at present: **The mission of the Church today consists in the double mission:** to continue the mission of St Augustine and St Thomas. What matters above all and in all is to **connect creation with God**. In the meantime this creation interposes itself vastly between God and us personally. Unless this creation is again made transparent and attractive in a more profound way, unless the divine bond proceeding from the world repeatedly connects us with God, we will all be worse than the heathens tomorrow or the next day; we will lose the image of God, the concept of God, our self-surrender to God. That is why, on the one hand, we have to continue this twofold and brilliant achievement, and, on the other, apply it to our times and world. Of course, this would be the point where we ask: How are things in the Catholic camp with regard to seeing through these inner related truths? That is a question that would have to be answered historically. In the process you will notice how you will be given a clear

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<sup>264</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963.

<sup>265</sup> *The City of God*, Penguin Classics, 2003. Augustine's main work.

<sup>266</sup> Dante Alighieri, (1265-1321), *Divine Comedy*, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 2009.

<sup>267</sup> God works through free secondary causes.

answer to all that God has given our Family in anticipation. So, once again: Enter into the school of our Family history!

However, this does not carry out the mission. We not only have to save and continue this double task, but also and in a unique way we have to carry out **a new form of the mission of these two great men!** If St Augustine has saved the First Cause for people who think in religious and philosophical terms, and if St Thomas has increasingly explained the philosophy and theology of secondary causes to us, I think I may say that the new mission of the present-day Church is to be found in the psychology of First and secondary causes, and their reciprocal relationship. The reason for this is, as you know, that all the normal vital bonds in human nature have been torn apart, or are in the process of disintegration.

**The psychological dimension of the fundamental relationship between the First and secondary causes.** Expressed in different terms, we could talk of the psychology<sup>268</sup> of the laws by which the world is governed, ordered and perfected. I don't know if I may dare to say one or the other thing about this, at least in broad outline.

***The psychological dimension of the law by which the world is governed.*** St Thomas' law – *Deus operatur per causas liberas* – has to be interpreted in psychological terms as: God works on secondary causes and through secondary causes according to the law of organic transference and organic transmission. I have presented it briefly, I can't explain it at the moment.

***Secondly, the law by which the world is ordered.*** Interpreted in psychological terms this means that the lower order – by this I mean in very general terms the natural order, all that is created – is for the supernatural order, firstly, a meaningful expression, and secondly, a protection, and thirdly, a means.

You probably can't imagine which related realities are opening up before us. Actually it may take some time before the broad public within the Church becomes aware of, recognises and considers these related realities – considers it in its teaching, considers it in life, considers it in the education of the individual person and society as a whole.

***Thirdly, the law by which the world is perfected.*** God perfects the world, his creation, step by step. One step gives way to the next. At the highest point of this law by which the world is perfected we find the Blessed Mother. What applies to her in her relationship to God, and God's relationship to her, has to be seen, examined and interpreted according to the law of exceptional cases, but it applies in a certain way to every secondary cause.

So you will understand what follows from this: In the image of the Blessed Mother we see our own personal ideal illustrated and embodied *per eminentiam*.<sup>269</sup> To a certain extent God allows us to share in all that he has given to the Blessed Mother *per eminentiam* according to the law by which the world is perfected.

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<sup>268</sup> That is, the psychological dimension of the interaction between God and secondary causes, including the processes of growth and development.

<sup>269</sup> Eminently.

Now I have spoken in a way that many of you will be saying: I can't understand it! This inability to understand will one day be followed by: I can soon understand, and, I can soon understand deeply. However, we must first have the courage to remain with what we already know, with our Family history. It is here we have to educate ourselves and immunise ourselves. It will then be quite safe for us later to dare to enter modern discoveries with their searches and insecurities.