

## **“Return to politics with help of Thomas, to cultivate Christian virtue of patriotism”**

**Ricardo von Büren**

Our presentation offers the possibility to answer our three questions facing the contemporary political crisis:

*What to do?* return to politics.

*How to do?* led by Thomas.

*Why try it?* to cultivate patriotism as Christian virtue.

### **I.- What to do? Return to politics.**

The title of presentation reveals that, nowadays, we situate out of politics, that's why we speak of "being back", of return, of coming back. Because the experience makes evident that politics, whether in principles and institutions or in specific operations, is immersed in a deep crisis. The first "current political issue" is the urgent need to be recovered. Without this prior clarification, we will not get out of crisis that afflict us, with the risk of secluding ourselves in a principled ghetto, far from reality, that will take us to isolation and ideologization. Even more, overgrowing in a wild activism, without foundations or aims that will only take our enterprises to sterility. Neither one nor the other.

We should rescue the double sapiential and prudential dimension of politics. For years, decades and centuries, we have been suffering from fragmentation of disciplines, what we call "the epistemic dispersion of knowledge". That is the reality today, and politics is one of the victims. Francis states in *Fratelli Tutti*, n° 210: "What is happening today and is dragging us into a perverse and empty logic, is the assimilation of ethics and politics to physics. There is no good and evil per se, but only calculation of advantages and disadvantages".

Currently, it is postulated that the essence of politics is a struggle for power, and exclusive empirical approach is arbitrarily imposed, which reduce it to theoretical discipline, supposedly aseptic, and neutral with respect to ethics and values. Moreover, it would be merely descriptive of *agonal* phenomena, present in the struggle to access, exercise and keep the power, which are expected to know and manage them when, formally, politics is a science that focused on "the prudent request for a common good".

## II.- *How to do? With help of Tomás.*

The effort to return to politics, or bring politics back to us, can be attempted in many ways. To question: how to do it? Pope Francis answers: "**Following the footsteps of my predecessors, I suggest you: Go to Thomas!** With the Holy Father, we believe we must "go to Thomas", since his work has valuable insights and principles for reconstruction of politics. And this "going to Thomas" can be done by consulting authors, who over the centuries have cultivated his thought, what we call "Thomism". Also, by studying the "Social Doctrine of the Church", which has its main philosophical-theological support in Aquinas. Thus, when approaching the Catholic social magisterium, we will find Thomas, and conversely, going deeper into his writings, we will be able to enter, with greater conceptual rigor, the discursive framework of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

ICUSTA global network is one of the institutions promoting the study of relation between Thomism and the Social Doctrine of the Church. Such was the case in October last year, with Seminar coordinated by Universidad Santo Tomás in Chile, held for reflection on the influence of Aquinas' thought in the documents of Pope Bergoglio: **Evangelii Gaudium, Laudato si and Fratelli Tutti**. In this occasion, I personally participated with paper entitled: "*The doctrine of Thomas Aquinas on property, as inspiration source for the social magisterium of Francis.*"

But the best way to know about Thomas' thought, is the direct study of texts written by himself, where we find his living thought which can enlighten us today. Francis says: "Thomism advances following a double vital movement of 'systole and diastole'. Systole, because first we must focus on the study of the work of St. Thomas in its historical and cultural context, to identify its structuring principles and understand originality. Then comes the diastole: to return to dialogue with the current world, to assimilate critically what is true and correct in the culture of the time."

Entering into Thomistic approach about the epistemology of knowledge, we see Thomas, from a formal perspective of philosophical conceptualization, he separates the plane of theory from plane of praxis, each with its particular disciplines and their respective "proper principles". Principles of political science -located in the practical sphere-, are not the same as those of mathematics or physics -which are theoretical sciences-, but above those specific principles of each particular science, there are "common principles" -of metaphysical nature- which allow structuring this complex of disciplines in the unity of knowledge.

Politics is a science in which political phenomenon is known in its causes, then to act prudentially on reality, and which constitutes the architectural practical science in matters related to praxis.

As Thomas teaches in the Prologue to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, political science is a part of moral science, in which has the autonomy proper to a specific treaty, but not to an autonomous discipline. But as man is a naturally social being who cannot attain his personal fulfillment, except through the ordering to the common good of society, as we said, politics constitutes the 'architectural' discipline of every moral science. Thus, other disciplines are subordinated, such as law, education, economics, the military, to which politics clarifies nothing less than its ultimate purpose: the temporal common good.

Therefore, faced with sad spectacle of contemporary corruption, it is not a matter of moralizing politics, as if it were a matter of breaking into it extrinsically, but reveal sapientially and prudentially operating the moral dimension of politics, which is an eminently ethical knowledge and action.

In practical philosophy of Thomas there is a fundamental principle that says: *operatio sequitur esse* (operation follows the being). Politics is subordinated to anthropology, since theoretical conception and practical execution of politics will depend on the conception of man that is held.

And anthropology depends on a philosophy of nature and, ultimately, on a metaphysics of being, open to the Being. Since its epistemic openness to transcendence, can receive the Revealed Data and be, in our case, a christian political philosophy. Benedict XVI says: "St. Thomas proposes to us a vision of human

reason expanded and confident... because human reason, especially if accepts the inspirations of the Christian faith, promotes a civilization recognizing the dignity of the person, the intangibility of rights and the obligatory nature of their duties".

### **III.- ¿What for?**

#### **Cultivate Christian virtue of patriotism**

Once politics has been reconstructed, there are different "current topics" to consider. But I believe that continuing with what has been said so far, there is a topic which becomes a sort of supposition of political life at this time of globalization: the love of one's country.

Patriotism is an instinctive feeling. An innate affection of devotion and care for things and people close to us. Feeling that, if it is not enlightened by the intelligence and rectified by the will, can become disordered towards two opposite vices: stateless internationalism, which denies the roots seduced by foreign fashions or customs, and selfish chauvinism which can derive in xenophobia or indiscriminate hatred to foreigner. The homeland, without renouncing to our own, must open itself to other cultures, which also exhibit universal values which can enrich it.

In his doctrinal formulation on patriotism, St. Thomas Aquinas is sustained by the Greco-Latin tradition and the Old Testament revelation, which he completes with the light of the Christian Faith. From that tradition, we mention an eminent figure: Marcus Tullius Cicero, who in the book of ethics dedicated to his son, he tells him: "our first duties refer to the immortal gods; the second, to the Fatherland; the third, to our parents, and then, in gradation, to other men" (*De Officiis*, I, 157) And in Book VI of the *De Republica*, the famous "Dream of Scipio", he expresses: "To all who have preserved the Fatherland, assisted and increased it, there is a certain appointed place in heaven, where the blessed enjoy eternity" (VI, 13).

Aquinas is based on pagan wisdom and also on revelation to Israel, in which filial and patriotic piety, already in the positive divine law, receives a new configuration. We read in Deuteronomy: "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and be happy in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Deuteronomy 5:22).

Christianity assumes the positive values of the piety of the ancients, but including important precisions which come from the Incarnation, since in the fullness of time, "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:14). And Christ transfigures the virtue of patriotism. There are three moments in his life when Jesus weeps: at the death of his friend Lazarus. Then, in the Garden of Olives, on the eve of his Passion, and he also sheds his tears contemplating the imminent ruin of the Holy City, Jerusalem. We read in Luke's Gospel: "When he came near and saw the city, he wept over it" (Lk 19:41). Jesus weeps because Jerusalem "has failed to recognize the time when it was visited by God" (Lk 19:44).

Taking up these sources, Thomas writes a treatise on justice in the *Summa Theologiae*, in which he studies as virtue that rules relations with those to whom we have a strict debt. But there are situations with a debt that cannot be paid. It is the one we have with our parents, our fatherland and with God, obligations to which St. Thomas dedicates the Virtue of Religion Treatise (where he refers to duties before God) and the Treaty on Social Virtues (in which he develops the virtue of Piety, which moves man to render to parents and to the fatherland the cult of the due respect, because they also, like God, have the reason of principle to our being and government).

Etymologically, Homeland comes from *patrum*, "the land of the fathers", but it is not the only physical entity, but the land humanized through the heroic deeds of men who inhabit it, and preeminently, of spiritual values, especially religious and cultural, as well as their own traditions.

To love the Homeland means to know its history, to walk in the lands and deal with people, to safeguard and increase religious heritage and cultural patrimony. In the case of Argentina, we owe to Spain, Our Motherland, the Baptism of America. To have known Christ and his Church, Mary, and to have received the legacy of our language, our music and dances, and so many customs and public and private institutions. Therefore, filially, we, Argentines, "love the eternal and unshakable metaphysics of Spain".

When our parents, collaborating with God, bring us to life, we are born in a Homeland, which is like the cradle where we will grow up. A piece of time, of land and people: when, where and with whom: God providentially placed us here and now, entrusting us with the work of cultivating the Homeland.

No man received a ready-made Homeland. Even the first man had to cultivate the Garden of Eden. Like every living being. Homeland is always being built. We have the duty to grow and to make grow there the Truth, the Good and the Beauty, which are the philosophical names of God, and to announce by word and testimony, Our Lord Jesus Christ, "Way, Truth and Life, the human face of God and the divine face of man".

An eminent Christian, patriot and Thomist, St. John Paul II, on the occasion of his visit to my province of Tucumán, in northern Argentina, gave a speech entitled: "The love of Christians for their own country". With his words, which summarize what we have wanted to share with you, I conclude:

"Piety in civil life is known, in our times, *as love for one's own country or patriotism*. For Christians is a manifestation, with actions of Christian love; it is also the fulfillment of the fourth commandment, since piety, as we have been saying, includes - as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us (Summa theologiae, II-II, q. 101, a. 3, ad. 1), honoring parents, ancestors, the Fatherland (...) Consider, then, that love for God the Father, projected in love for the Fatherland, should lead you to feel united and in solidarity with all men. Believe in Christ! Love your Fatherland! Fulfill your professional duties, your family and your civic duties with competence and moved by your condition of adopted children of God! This is the program".