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**ACTS OF CHARITY AND *SEVĀ* IN THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT:
Assessing St. Thomas Aquinas and Swami Vivekananda's Perspectives**

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Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study of the concepts of *caritas* (charity) explained by one of the greatest Catholic theologians St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), with *sevā* (service) of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). It aims to compare the understanding of actions of loving service towards one's neighbour. St. Thomas Aquinas is selected because his doctrines on charity integrates the Holy Scripture, Aristotle's philosophical theories, and the insights of prominent figures like Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Gregory the Great. He is considered as one of the greatest theologians in the Catholic Church. Swami Vivekananda is chosen because he is a representative influential theologian of the Hindu religion in India. He became the symbol of the religious awakening of India at The Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 when he presented *Vedanta* as the Universal Religion. As an *Advaita Vedantist*, by founding the Ramakrishna Mission in India, he emphasizes *sevā* as a means of spiritual growth and social upliftment. He is one of the important thinkers of modern Hinduism.

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches *caritas* as a theological virtue. The acts of charity are expressions of one's self love which is directed towards one's neighbour, and it is very much rooted in the love of God. Charity involves both the love of God who is the ultimate end of all goodness and the desire for the good of others. On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda's concept of *sevā* is grounded in Hindu philosophy. *Sevā* is identified with *Karma yoga* and *Practical Vedanta* as selfless service to humanity, which is considered a form of worship. *Sevā* is important to the Ramakrishna Mission's ideology and operations, which Swami Vivekananda established in 1897. For him, service to human (*jīva sevā*) can give liberation (*Mukti*). Even though there are differences, both Aquinas and Vivekananda stresses on the importance of selflessness, compassion, and service one render for others are pivotal aspects of spiritual life and a life of morality. They also emphasize the transformative power of the acts of charity in nourishing personal growth, promoting social harmony and ultimately leading to realize spiritual ideals. But this apparent agreement in certain aspects may disguise the deeper disagreements that sprout from their respective theological foundations. One of the works of mercy, "instructing the ignorant" or giving education is specially mentioned in this paper. Because both authors give importance to education.

Both Aquinas and Vivekananda are influenced by the life of Jesus of Nazareth and encouraged to follow His teachings. This study is not only for comparison but to show how Christ is an exemplar of charity and selfless love for Christians and the people of other religions. He is not only an example but the Son of God and our redeemer, and as Aquinas writes, Christ "reconciles us to God through faith and charity: for God indeed was in Christ, *reconciling the world to himself*" (2 Cor 5:19). Christ

as an exemplar of charity is a powerful source of inspiration and His life and teachings are a guide for all those who want to grow in virtue and righteousness. The Church in India is urged to embody a communal life rooted in the commandment of Christ and marked by compassionate service, especially towards the marginalized such as indigenous peoples, *dalits*, tribals, women, and children who often suffer from severe exploitation. The central role of virtues, particularly charity, in shaping human actions and strengthening our connection with the divine is emphasized by Aquinas. Vivekananda's concept of *sevā* is not an end in itself but rather a means to attain realization. It is just an act of worship to purify oneself to realize God. As a theological virtue infused by God, charity is the epitome of friendship and the measure of true goodness. It perfects and guides other virtues, directing them toward the love of God and neighbour.

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General Conclusion

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