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St. Thomas Aquinas's *Ens Commune* as *Genus Omnium Supremum*

Ens commune św. Tomasza z Akwinu jako *genus omnium supremum*

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to demonstrate whether Aquinas's concept of "common being" (*ens commune*), as it emerged widely among scholastic metaphysicians, provides a theoretical basis for being reconciled with the concept of "the highest genus of all" (*genus omnium supremum*). The main focus of this study is to understand the underlying resemblance of these concepts, based on Aquinas's selected works, both the *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis* and *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*. The Author proposes either an analytical reconstruction or a metaphysical lens for examining this topic, presenting additional approaches to the study of *ens commune*. The correlation between *ens commune* and *genus omnium supremum* seems quite plausible, though in certain respects. It is generally accepted that Aquinas's *ens commune* refers exclusively to the abstracted concept of common being, encompassing all real beings in terms of existence (*secundum esse*), while *genus omnium supremum* would be a broader and still higher concept, encompassing all varieties of beings, even those of the intentional order (*secundum rationem*). It seems likely that Aquinas's *Commentaries* may convincingly reveal that the concept of *ens commune* has a broader scope than merely referring to diverse real beings and their properties. Arguing in favor of this thesis, the Author strives to demonstrate that the concept of *ens commune* corresponds to all beings considered from a cognitive perspective, not only the existential one, but also a perspective covering all denominations of being in whatever form of their existence, namely combining both real being (*ens reale*) and being of reason (*ens rationis*) into one, unique, intelligible concept.

KEY WORDS: St. Thomas Aquinas, *ens commune*, *genus omnium supremum*, medieval philosophy, Scholasticism

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wykazanie, czy pojęcie „bytu wspólnego” (*ens commune*) św. Tomasza z Akwinu, szeroko rozpowszechnione wśród scholastycznych metafizyków, stanowi teoretyczną podstawę umożliwiającą pogodzenie go z pojęciem „najwyższego rodzaju wszystkiego” (*genus omnium supremum*). Głównym

celem niniejszego opracowania jest zrozumienie podstawowego podobieństwa tych pojęć w oparciu o wybrane dzieła Akwinaty, zarówno *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis*, jak i *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus*. Autor proponuje albo analityczną rekonstrukcję, albo metafizyczną perspektywę do zbadania tego tematu i przedstawia dodatkowe podejścia do badania *ens commune*. Korelacja między *ens commune* i *genus omnium supremum* wydaje się całkiem prawdopodobna, choć pod pewnymi względami. Powszechnie przyjmuje się, że *ens commune* św. Tomasza odnosi się wyłącznie do abstrakcyjnej koncepcji bytu wspólnego, obejmującego wszystkie byty realne pod względem istnienia (*secundum esse*), podczas gdy *genus omnium supremum* byłoby szerszym i jeszcze wyższym pojęciem, obejmującym wszystkie odmiany bytów, nawet te należące do porządku intencjonalnego (*secundum rationem*). Wydaje się prawdopodobne, że komentarze św. Tomasza z Akwinu ujawniają, że pojęcie *ens commune* ma szerszy zakres niż tylko odniesienie do różnorodnych bytów realnych i ich właściwości. Argumentując na rzecz tej tezy, autor stara się wykazać, że pojęcie *ens commune* odpowiada wszystkim bytom rozpatrywanym z perspektywy poznawczej, nie tylko egzystencjalnej, ale także z perspektywy obejmującej wszystkie denominacje bytu w dowolnej formie ich istnienia, a mianowicie łączącej zarówno byt realny (*ens reale*), jak i byt myślny (*ens rationis*) w jedno, unikalne pojęcie inteligibilne.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *ens commune*, *genus omnium supremum*, filozofia średniowieczna, scholastyka

Introduction

Although the growth of the studies on *ens commune* is not overly noticeable, still recent research has been especially attentive to the philosophical survey, less frequently theological, of the methodology underlying the defense and exposition of some doctrines centered on this theory in the Middle Ages and Baroque scholasticism. While I do not take a decisive stance on this debate, which is apparently still ongoing in the philosophical *milieu*, this paper addresses the problem by focusing on the foremost issue: Aquinas's theory of *ens commune*, according to which this concept is derived exclusively from real beings in relation to the existence understood universally (*secundum esse*) and from beings in relation to reason (*secundum rationem*). In both cases, these are still underexplored topics. Hence, I find the "evanescent" existence of *ens commune* surprising enough to merit its closer inspection. Throughout the article, both references to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the Dionysian theory of participation in Aquinas's commentaries should be considered leading, and sometimes only heuristic. To this end, the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation and participation, as well as the scholastic concept of beings of reason (*entia rationis*), must be taken into account and must play a pivotal role in the topic under discussion. While the scope of real being and being of reason is different, it seems that

there must be something that spans the domains of *ens rationis* and *ens reale* and combines them into one. Although they do not share a common essence, they do share a common cognitive order of being in general (its *esse* becomes *cognosci*) in the intellect as the *ens cognitum*, containing as parts of the whole both the entities *sine* and *cum fundamento in re*. This “whole,” considered as the *ens commune* in terms of *genus omnium supremum*, is precisely the subject of this article.

Since the subject matter discussed in this article does not stem from the fact that some medieval and Renaissance philosophers wrote about it, who rarely, if ever, used the name “*genus omnium supremum*” to denote *ens commune*, but rather impose other related terms interchangeably, hence an important caveat is necessary at the outset. While demonstrating the *ens commune*, this seemingly comprehensive article offers a brief overview of this intriguing concept in Aquinas, which has its roots in more distant traditions, such as Latin Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. It may come as a surprise that conspicuous connotations of the problem would be found in both Kant and modern thinkers alike. Afterwards, the whole topic goes through a new perspective, outlining the relationship between classical metaphysics and modern ontology, and – in a somewhat specific tone of reconciliation – theology as well. For sooner or later the question of God as a being higher than the *ens commune* would eventually emerge, which is to some extent consistent with Thomistic thought, regardless of other minor philosophical discrepancies.

Primarily, the topic finds its foundation in a centuries-old tradition of demonstrating the main subject of first philosophy, harking back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which aimed to lead us to the realm of immaterial forms such as essences, separate substances, species and genus, and perhaps even to draw us towards a supernatural being, instead of placing us solely in terms of corporeal substances. Those who realize the broad nature of metaphysics might also hypothesize that at the core of *ens commune* as *genus omnium supremum* there exists a certain correspondence between the sciences. Suggestively, this could at least be called a *supra-transcendental* doctrine for all of the sciences. Most supporters of opinions similar to mine are rarely evoked or are omitted altogether in contemporary textbooks, similar to the omission of Aquinas's doctrine of *ens commune*. Even if the *ens commune* itself cannot be counted among the separate substances, as everything indicates, it is nevertheless true – as I also demonstrate, drawing on Aquinas – that the *ens commune* cannot in any way be said of God. On the other hand, angelic beings should be permissibly included in the broad denomination of being in general. Moreover, even if Aquinas did not explicitly use the term “*genus omnium supremum*” to mean “*ens commune*,” I nevertheless

intend to use it in this way to grasp the deeper meaning of *ens commune* in the metaphysics of the Angelic Doctor. The reconstruction of Aquinas's views that I offer below leads rather to the conclusion that the *ens commune* cannot truly be any of the existing entities nor their analogous concept in terms of *secundum esse reale*, hence this is where its initial ephemerality comes from. Nor is it a fictitious being. Instead, all paths lead to the plausible conclusion that it is a truly existing principle uniting the real and unreal in the order of matter in one common, *super*-analogous and genus-like concept of *ens commune*, both in terms of existence (*secundum esse*) and in terms of intentionality of reason (*secundum rationem* or *secundum esse cognitum*), but not merely according to the structure of predication or signification (*secundum dici* or *in significando*).

This article is structured in five sections. Following the introductory part (From Roger Bacon to Immanuel Kant), the second section (The Troublesome Subject of Aristotle's Metaphysics) raises divergent claims about the subject of metaphysics as given by Aristotle, which has been a matter of disputes for ages. The third section (Aquinas's Doctrine of the Ens Commune: A General Outline) attempts to discuss the issue in a slightly comprehensive yet general overview. The fourth section (Ens Commune in Aquinas's Commentaries on Metaphysics and on the Divine Names) is an analytical attempt to reconstruct Aquinas's views, which were based on Aristotelian metaphysics on the one hand and on the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation/participation in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite on the other. It seems that both of Aquinas's *Commentaries*, or more precisely, his interpretations within, demonstrate that *ens commune* should be considered in terms of the *genus omnium supremum*. The fifth section (*Final Remarks*) contains concluding points supplemented by references to figures who could comparatively follow the same line of reasoning. Hopefully, this unpretentious paper devoted to the theory of the *ens commune* will contribute to increase the theory's basic assessment among committed scholars and improve its overall value in philosophy, not counting merely metaphysicians. As may be seen from the article, the method of intertwining analytical and historical reconstruction employed here is a sparse combination, but quite applicable.

From Roger Bacon to Immanuel Kant

It is a burdensome undertaking to pinpoint with undeniable certainty the origin of the intuition of *ens commune* as *genus omnium supremum* in the history of philosophy. Although this question, which most likely boiled down to the unification of real being (*ens reale*) with being of reason (*ens rationis*)

into the highest, common concept – either as *genus omnium supremum* or under another name – seems to have Aristotelian provenance; presumably its origins can be traced back to the Middle Ages among the masters of the *artes liberales* at the University of Paris, committed to the study of the so-called “common doctrine.” This doctrine comes down to the issues surrounding the theory of “appellation,” “supposition,” “equivocation,” and other theories of early medieval terministic and modal logic. In his treatise *Sumule Dialectices* (Oxford, Bodley Library, Digby 204), Roger Bacon († 1292), in the section *De appellacione*, recalls controversial tendencies surrounding a strange concept that had just emerged from Parisian circles and was becoming increasingly popular in Oxford, and which deeply disturbed Bacon’s mind. According to this logician tendency, in contrast to a metaphysical approach, the early masters of the arts in Paris tended to combine real being and being of reason (considered as a non-being) into one common concept of “appellation,” which was associated with the Parisian theory of “natural” and “accidental” suppositions, although they did not explicitly name it “*genus omnium supremum*” at that time, using instead different terms.¹ Bacon notes the following:

However, the statement about appellations is twofold, because some say that a term appellates of itself the presence, past, and future, and is common to beings and non-beings. Others say that a term is only the name of present things and nothing is common to being and non-being, or past, present, and future, according to what Aristotle says in the first book of the *Metaphysics*. But because the first statement is common, therefore we first distinguish it.²

As Alain De Libera demonstrates in an insightful study, in his final work, *Compendium studii theologiae* from 1292, Bacon addresses two widely debated

¹ See Alain De Libera, “The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 175–87 (ch. 8), esp. 181–82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/chol9780521226059.010>.

² “Duplex tamen est sententia de appellacionibus, quia quidam dicunt quod terminus appellat de se appellata presenciam, preteritam, et futuram, et est communis entibus et non-entibus. Alii dicunt quod terminus est solum nomen presencium et nichil est commune enti et non-enti, sive preterito, presenti, et futuro, secundum quod dicit Aristoteles in primo Methaphysice. Quia vero sententia prima est communis, ideo primo discernamus eam.” (Robert Steele, ed., *Summa Grammatica Magistri Rogeri Bacon necnon Sumule Dialectices Magistri Rogeri Bacon*, Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi 15 [Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano Londoni; Apud Humphredum Milford, 1940], 277, nos. 28–35). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in the text are entirely mine.

questions: whether “word” can denote anything unambiguously common to being and non-being, or beings of reason, and whether this can lead to the displacement of its meaning. Bacon also mentions that as early as the 1250, some Oxford scholars, including Richard Rufus of Cornwall († 1260), considered it permissible to employ an unambiguous concept that signifies the correspondence between real being and non-being (i.e. being of reason). De Libera suggests that this still nebulous “common doctrine” described by Bacon in *Sumule Dialectices* was influenced by these new tendencies, which had originally developed among the Parisian terminists and logicians. To understand precisely what doctrine Bacon firmly opposed in 1250, it would be helpful to examine the way he presented this doctrine more than forty years later, also referring to it in other works, such as *De signis* from 1267.³ Moreover, De Libera mentions that such a concept of unity between being and non-being is absent in Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus*, later known as the *Summulae Logicales*, where the so-called “appellation” is brought in only as a kind of limited supposition, rather than the popular phrase *supponere pro* being used at that time.⁴ It is relevant that no Parisian logician from the period before 1250 adopted any positive terms to denote something common to being and non-being. Hence – as De Libera confidently concludes – this strange “common doctrine” was likely inspired by theories that were just becoming popular, and which may have first appeared in texts from around 1250.⁵ Most likely the first treatise which tends to combine real being and non-being, including *entia rationis*, into one common concept, and thus reminiscent of a supertranscendental concept, is the *Lectura Tractatum* by William Arnaud († 1242) – a Dominican inquisitor and martyr from Montpellier and a master of arts in Toulouse – which was one of the earliest commentaries on Peter of Spain. This same trend was continued by Siger of Brabant († 1280) and Peter of Auvergne († 1304) in their works where the issues of supposition and appellation are invoked.⁶

Somewhat counter to what one might expect, I also begin this section by referencing Immanuel Kant († 1804), who seems to be worthy of attention against the background of the debate on the Aquinas’s common being (*ens commune*). Although Kant himself neither appealed for the *ens commune* nor consistently refrained from using it, at least one passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* raises a subtle controversy, namely, one that may indicate Kant’s

³ De Libera, “The Oxford and Paris Traditions in Logic,” 181–82.

⁴ De Libera, 182.

⁵ De Libera, 182 et sqq.

⁶ De Libera, 183.

desire to overcome the shortcomings of his transcendental philosophy by crowning it with a genuinely ultimate concept. Interestingly enough, Kant either reached such a parallel conclusion, or borrowed it from the intuition of medieval thinkers who preceded him, or simply did so based on his own insightful knowledge of transcendental logic, which seems to be consistent with the proposals of thinkers of the past. Presumably, this quite astonishing passage from the *Critique*, however, bestows a certain validity to his entire doctrine and provides an outline to the topic under question, which is otherwise still vague. In the *Critique*, Kant took only one step down this path, but it seems to me to be enough to show that the position he holds is akin to the preceding scholastic views, i.e. *genus omnium supremum*; *ens commune*; or simply *ens supertranscendentale*. Concluding the first volume of the *Critique*, Kant extraordinarily proclaims the following:

... Before we leave the Transcendental Analytic behind, we must add something that, although not in itself especially indispensable, nevertheless may seem requisite for the completeness of the system. The highest concept with which one is accustomed to begin a transcendental philosophy is usually the division between the possible and the impossible. But since every division presupposes a concept that is to be divided, a still higher one must be given, and this is the concept of an object in general (taken problematically, leaving undecided whether it is something or nothing).⁷

One might admit that Kant's historically recognized breakthrough in philosophy could be the subject of a separate study, but if we look at the background of Kant's transcendental doctrine, and especially at some of its outcomes, we will discover outright a straightforward idea – expressed implicitly, albeit hypothetically – that could suggest the adoption of some kind of the *genus omnium supremum* or similar projection within his own system. What Kant

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A290, p. 382; and sqq. to A292, p. 383. For the German source, see Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft von Immanuel Kant*, 2nd ed. (Riga: bei Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1787), A290–A292. Kant adds significantly that "... since the categories are the only concepts that relate to objects in general, the distinction of whether an object is something or nothing must proceed in accordance with the order and guidance of the categories." Additionally, a broader definition of the object in general was inserted into Kant's copy of the first edition, that is, "the highest concept is that of the object in general" (E CLI, p. 46; 23:38). See also John P. Doyle, "Between Transcendental and Transcendental: The Missing Link?," *Review of Metaphysics* 50, no. 4 (1987): 783–814.

so aptly pointed out in the quoted paragraph, though cautiously and without any particular elaboration, seems to be consistent with arguments from the 16th and 17th centuries, especially those expanded in the Jesuit school. As staggering as this is, one can draw a conclusion comparable to that of the late Scholastics, based on the final thesis of the first volume of the *Critique*, in which Kant openly addresses the question of defining the object in general or common being (*ens commune*) in terms of a *supra*-transcendentality that seems to serve as a bridge between two distinct realms, or simply as the highest notion that stands beyond the division into what is (*entia possibilia*) and what is not (*entia impossibilia*). Kant maintained that this division is due to the necessity of positing a third kind of object from which this division would stem, namely, indicating a *supra*-transcendental concept, as the highest ontological category, a superior genus of being from which everything equally originates and which enables diverse divisions to be possible. Kant defines such a notion as the *most general concept or object in general* (*Gegenstand überhaupt*), without determining what it is, and consequently, whether it is something or nothing. This concept refers to a cognitive object as such or to an object in general, reminiscent of Aquinas's *ens commune*, and not to any unequivocally defined singular thing. As a result, Kant introduced a *supra*-ontological, category encompassing both the world of the senses – “*phenomena*” – and the world of reason – “*numena*,” which surprisingly brings him closer to the earlier solutions of Baroque scholasticism. Kant seems to confirm his position from the 1781 *Critique* in another work from 1797, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, where he frames the position in a slightly different delineation:

... Just as the teachers of ontology begin with something and nothing at the very beginning, without realizing that these are already members of a division, and that the divided concept is missing, which can be no other than the concept of an object in general.⁸

As any astute scholar can reasonably deduce, Kant undertook to define what could be boldly described as *ens commune* or a *supra*-transcendental being relating to the uppermost order of existence, marked by two intersecting lines – reality and intentionality of beings of reason, or even nothingness itself,

⁸ “So wie die Lehrer der Ontologie vom Etwas und Nichts zu oberst anfangen, ohne inne zu werden, dass dieses schon Glieder einer Eintheilung sind, dazu der eingetheilte Begriff fehlt, der kein anderer als der Begriff von einem Gegenstande überhaupt sein kann.” (Immanuel Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre* I [Königsberg: bey Friedrich Nicolovius, 1798], XIV [“Einleitung”]).

which supremely exceeds them both, as it were, beyond all differential entities, divisions, and even self-contradictory ones. A compelling question worth investigating is whether Kant borrowed this line of reasoning from scholastic thinkers, or whether, like others before him, he considered it indispensable for application into his own transcendental philosophy. This system then went beyond medieval metaphysics and logic and instead led to a new ontology, perhaps even to the benefit of a future phenomenology of religion, examining the relevance of phenomenological consideration of God (or the sacred otherwise defined as something beyond the transcendental of being). Hence, in Kant's philosophy one could find many convergences, although only in some respects, with thinkers who afterwards tackled the issue of "transcendentality," "intentionality," "analogy" or the *a priori* limits of knowledge, such as Alexius Meinong († 1920), Edmund Husserl († 1938), Johannes Daubert († 1947), Bertrand Russell († 1970), as well as Adolf Reinach († 1916), the latter of whom pioneered the use of phenomenology to describe supernatural acts (*überirdische Akte*) within sacred and mystical religious experiences, in addition to others who followed in Kant's footsteps.

Either way, I assume that no contemporary scholar would deny that the dominant philosophical system that significantly transformed the main ideas of scholasticism into new ones was supposedly Kant's idealism, from which his transcendental doctrine emerged, though framed in a fairly modern sense. As one might notice, Kant's "ontological shift" led to the formation of completely opposite meanings for numerous philosophical terms derived from the old metaphysical tradition and coined in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. These include, first and foremost, intelligibility and transcendentality, both of which are among the ultimate ideas of Kant's doctrine and are intended to define the ontological structure of the so-called *noumena*. The concept of *noumena* refers to the rational, noumenal aspect of the human existence, which is relatively distinct from the empirical, phenomenal realm of the "self," which in turn is subject to deterministic laws of nature. The *noumena* can be apprehended through the activities of pure reason (*reinen Vernunft*) or through the intelligible subject (*intelligible Subjekt*) and then intentionally discerned by the so-called practical reason (*praktischen Vernunft*). Kant's approach, by replacing the scholastic understanding of both intelligibility and transcendentality with new meaning, refers exclusively to the world of beings of reason (*intelligibile Welt*), which is the equivalent of *entia rationis* in scholastic doctrine, and, accordingly, to a mental realm that exists beyond the empirical and phenomenal world and is thus uncorrelated with the corporeal and sensible things. This is a purely rational structure of mind-dependent objects (*intelligiblen Gegenstand*)

and does not refer to real being (*ens reale*) in the metaphysical sense, as embedded in tradition.

This profound change of meanings, which Michelle Grier has termed a “metaphysical delusion,” “metaphysical error,” or “metaphysical illusion,”⁹ involves a Kantian debasement of the subject of metaphysics, considered from a historical and etymological perspective, on an unprecedented scale. According to Hans Leisegang, who follows Benno Erdmann’s earlier research (“Die Entwicklungsperioden von Kants theoretischer Philosophie”) and whose twentieth-century studies on Kant’s philosophy is consistent with that of Ignacio Angelelli and, more recently, Marco Sgarbi, the pivotal turn in Kant’s transcendental doctrine is primarily the redefinition of the scholastic doctrine of transcendentals (*nomina transcendentalia*) – taking into account the new meanings given to the concept of being (*ens*), essence (*essentia*), reflection (*reflexio*), and so forth. Most likely under the influence of Christian Wolff’s *Ontology* and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s *Metaphysics*, Kant was inspired to write his pre-critical lectures on metaphysics, this tipping point also being confirmed by John P. Doyle.¹⁰ The influence of Wolff and Baumgarten – and perhaps several others from the Albertus-Universität Königsberg who taught there between 1703 and 1770¹¹ – inevitably resulted in Kant’s early philosophy being affected in that

⁹ Cf. Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. 17–47 (Part One: “Kant’s Discovery of Metaphysical Illusion,” ch. 1: “Metaphysical Error in the Precritical Works”); 101–40 (Part Two: “Fallacies and Illusions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” ch. 4: “Transcendental Illusion”); 263–93 (Part Four: “Illusion and Systematicity,” ch. 8: “The Regulative Employment of Reason”).

¹⁰ Cf. Doyle, “Between Transcendental and Transcendental,” 784–88, where the author thoroughly reports on the interesting debate between Hans Leisegang, Norbert Hinske and Cornelio Fabro on the interrelations between Kant’s doctrine, Baumgarten’s *Ontology* and *Metaphysics*, and Wolff’s *Cosmologia generalis, methodo scientifica pertractata*, as well as exemplifies discernible impact of scholasticism on Kant’s thought.

¹¹ Marco Sgarbi has made significant contributions to this field of cutting-edge and pioneering research. See Marco Sgarbi, “The Historical Genesis of the Kantian Concept of »Transcendental«,” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 53 (2011): 97–117; Marco Sgarbi, “Abraham Calov and Immanuel Kant: Aristotelian and Scholastic Traces in the Kantian Philosophy,” in “Estratto,” *Historia Philosophica: An International Journal* 8 (2010): 55–62; Marco Sgarbi, “Metaphysics in Königsberg prior to Kant (1703–1770),” *Trans/Form/Ação* 33, no. 1 (2010): 31–64, <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0101-31732010000100004>; Marco Sgarbi, *La Kritik der reinen Vernunft nel contesto della tradizione logica aristotelica*, Studien und Materialien Zur Geschichte der Philosophie 80 (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2010); Marco Sgarbi, *Logica e metafisica nel Kant precritico: L’ambiente intellettuale di Königsberg e la formazione della filosofia kantiana*, Studien zur Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010); Marco Sgarbi, “Il risveglio dal sonno dogmatico e la rivoluzione del

way, which appeared eleven years before his major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These noticeable scholastic traces exist in Kant's philosophy, including those from the period of Baroque Jesuit and Protestant scholasticism, and undoubtedly his pre-critical lectures were formed as a propaedeutic outline of classical metaphysical doctrine and became an instructive path to further, in-depth studies. The end result of Kant's earlier inclination was to be the mature critical philosophy of later transcendental logic, which was based on the deduction of concepts from pure reason itself.¹² Hence, primarily elaborating on this essentialist, noetic, or simply intentional thread between Kant's revolution and the thinkers of the scholastic background who preceded him or merely surrounded him in the scholarly *milieu*, one can see some particularly perceptible implications.

Admittedly, it strikes me that this disaccord between Kant's doctrine of transcendentalism and the scholastic doctrine of the *nomina transcendentalia* concerns both a considerable change in the definition of "transcendentalism" as something previously referred to as reality and – an equally crucial issue – what in Kant's philosophy could be described as a transition from a realistic to a purely noetic knowledge, namely the transition from existential (realistic) metaphysics of the Middle Ages to modern ontology in Kant's favor.

1772," *Archivio di storia della cultura* 25 (2012): 237–49; Marco Sgarbi, "The University of Königsberg in Transition (1689–1722): Aristotelianism and Eclecticism in Johann Jakob Rohde's *Meditatio philosophica*," *Studi Kantiani* 26 (2013): 125–35; Marco Sgarbi, "At the Origin of the Connection between Logic and Ontology. The Impact of Suárez's Metaphysics in Königsberg," *Anales Valentinus* 36, no. 71 (2010): 145–59. On the influence of scholasticism and Aristotelianism on Kant's philosophy, see also Marco Sgarbi, *Kant and Aristotle: Epistemology, Logic, and Method* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2016); Hans Seigfried, "Kant's Thesis about Being Anticipated by Suárez?," in *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, ed. Lewis White Beck, Synthese Historical Library: Texts and Studies in the History of Logic and Philosophy 4 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972), 510–20; Wolfgang Ertl, "'Kant und die Scholastik heute'. Vorüberlegungen zu einer Neueinschätzung," *The Geibun-Kenkyu: Journal of Arts and Letters* 105, no. 2 (2013): 20–40; Costantino Esposito, "The Hidden Influence of Suárez on Kant's Transcendental Conception of 'Being', 'Essence', and 'Existence'," in *Suárez's Metaphysics in Its Historical and Systematic Context*, ed. Lukáš Novák, Series Contemporary Scholasticism 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 117–34.

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B102–29, A96–98, A644, B672, B384.

The Troublesome Subject of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

The first issue to be examined in order to classify the term of *ens commune* within a philosophical context is the question of what is the primary subject of Aristotelian metaphysics. From all the Aristotelian commentaries given over the centuries, one can distinguish the following denotations: substance itself or being *qua* being (*Met.*, Book IV), substance understood as essence, or essence alone, or something common, such as species or genus, first causes (*Met.*, Book I), the Unmoved Mover (*Met.*, Book XII), or *compositum*, or finally, so-called separate substances (*xechōristos*) or something immaterial and even divine (*Met.*, Book VI). Based on these denotations, one might well conclude that the subject of metaphysics is not a single thing, but that it is complex and diverse. There may be a grain of truth in this, although presumably there is something that unites all these denotations. This “something” is precisely the subject of this article.

It can be undeniably assumed that the issue has in fact been a significant subject of dispute and controversy in the history of philosophy for almost all thinkers of past centuries. Perhaps a certain, albeit rather apparent, simplification lies in examining the primary subject of metaphysics against the backdrop of other sciences, as Aristotle did in *Met.*, book VI, c. 1 (1026a23–32). Given that metaphysics transcends the realm of physical or experimental phenomena, the problem arises of finding a subject unique to itself. Assuming that the subject of physics is the *ens mobile*, of mathematics the *ens quantitative* or *ens numeri*, and of logic the *ens rationis*, what could be identified as utterly distinctive and unequivocal to metaphysics? What is the true domain of metaphysics, and what do we learn through it that physics and mathematics, and even logic, could never achieve? Aristotle himself endeavored to give metaphysics its proper meaning, calling it “first philosophy” or “theology” (*theologia*), which brings to mind certain associations. While the former points to the realm of the first principles of both being and knowledge, the latter is usually attributed to the most intelligent wisdom, which deals with immaterial beings bordering on divinity itself (e.g., God and Angels). However, the question remains as to which term most accurately reflects the scope of metaphysics?

Throughout almost the entire history of philosophy, it has been commonly believed that the primary subject of metaphysics in Aristotle was “being as such” or “the study of being as being,” which corresponds to the Greek term “on” or “to on” (*ens qua ens*; *to on hē(i) on*; *Met.* 1003a21–22). Although Aristotle, in the first books of the *Metaphysics*, described this subject as the study of being as being, this vague phrase posed much controversy in its precise definition and

led to contradictory theories, to be reckoned with from the times of Aristotle, through the Neoplatonists, such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena, to that of the Arab Neoplatonic-Aristotelian syncretism, to Aquinas, Duns Scotus, the Second Scholasticism, and so forth. Literally taken, “being as being” is a central concept in metaphysics, which means the study of beings insofar as they are beings, and describing the study of being itself through the prism of everything that is real in its existence. In a broader sense, metaphysics aims to demonstrate as its subject the study of “first causes” of being and “that which is not subject to change” (immobile being). The term “*to on hē(i) on*” used by Aristotle was also rendered by the Latin term “*iucunda volumptas*,” meaning the study of things that do not change or that are the first causes, or that which constitutes a true philosophy and ensures a pleasant and worthwhile life. In yet another sense, the meaning of the term “*metaphysica*” was used by Aristotle to refer to the natural philosophy or science of divinity (*theologia*), which was thought to define the primary subject of this science as divine or merely to constitute a part of it. Another term that Aristotle used to describe the subject of metaphysics is “substance” (*ousia*), because being separate, independent, and particular seems to belong exclusively to substances, while matter is neither of these, since its actual existence always depends on form (*eidos* or *morphē*). He then applies the word “substance” to four distinct objects, namely the essence, universal, genus and subject (*substratum*), and he accordingly argues that “substance is that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated” (*Met.*, 1029a1).

The previous is consistent with what follows later on. Aristotle’s argument, therefore, advocated the primacy of form over matter, that is, form understood as substance, and consequently as the essence of a thing: “. . . by form I understand the essence of each thing and its primary substance” (*Met.*, 1032b1). Form thus possesses all the hallmarks that distinguish it, making it primary, and that matter lacks, i.e., separation, and hence can be called a “separate substance” (*xechōristos*). It also exhibits a distinctness that indicates its individuality or particularity, and it has its own existence and essence. Meaning that, in Aristotelian philosophy, *substantia separata* refers to something that can exist independently of other things, as opposed to qualities or accidents. This is a key feature of substance, which Aristotle defines as a concrete, individual “this-something” (*tode ti*) or, in the shorter phrase, “*to ti esti*” (*ti esti*), which literally stands for the “what it is.”¹³

¹³ “Being separable and being a ‘this-something’ seem to belong most of all to substance, and for this reason the form and the product of both would appear to be substance rather than matter” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross and J. A. Smith, *The Works of Aristotle* 8

A substance always exists “by itself” and is not parasitic on anything else for its existence, which decisively distinguishes it from accidents or other categories of being attributed to the substance as inherent properties. This contrasts with secondary substances (*deutera ousiai*), such as species and genus, or accidents, which are dependent on the substance and are not “separable” because they cannot exist on their own. More than that, a form can exist in itself and can be separated from substance in two ways: it can be a pattern or imagined model in the mind of an artisan, or it can indicate a cognitively abstracted form (*aphairesis*; Latin *species intelligibilis*), separate from a physical thing.

Aristotle then defined form (*Met.*, 1029b13–14) as the substantial essence of a thing (*to ti ēn einai*), which exists in itself and is not subject to change, but at the same time, form is by itself (Lat. *per se*) the principle of inner change, which is responsible for the movement into matter and gives matter a specific shape and essential features.¹⁴ In turn, in fragment 1035b (*eidōs de legō to ti ēn einai*), Aristotle refers to the expression *to ti en einai*, which may suggest that by the phrase *to ti ēn einai* he understood the form and essence of a thing to be similar to each other. The phrase *ti ēn* also appears in the *First Analytics* (67b12) and the treatise *On the Soul* (429b10), where *ti ēn* is a pronoun asking “what” or “what is it?” and as a question “what is it?” it indicates the essence of being, that is, the essence of what is. Or put another way, it indicates the form or essence of a thing, which may be something abstracted by the intellect or even exist as a separate substance beyond matter. In the *Physics*, he states that the “place for forms” (*topon eidōn*), as Aristotle understood the intellect, has no influence on the physical or essential nature of things known. On the contrary, the intellect can perceive material forms and transform them into intelligible (spiritual) forms, which to some extent pre-exist in things as immanent forms of their matter. In this sense, the intellect is something like an “empty container” without any active influence on the forms and the structure of sensible objects themselves (209a19–22; 209b21; 210b27; 212a1–2, a14–16). On the one hand, the process of knowing the real world must be connected with the act of abstracting essences or forms, which for Aristotle constituted the proper definition of substance in metaphysics (1036a28–29). On the other hand, this

[Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908], 1029a27–30). For more, see Robert W. Sharples, “On Being a Tode Ti in Aristotle and Alexander,” *Méthexis* 12, no. 1 (March 1999): 77–87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24680974-90000324>; Robert W. Sharples, “Species, Form and Inheritance: Aristotle and After,” in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things: Philosophical and Historical Studies Presented to David M. Balme on his Seventieth Birthday* (Pittsburgh, PA: Mathesis, 1986), 117–28.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1029b13–14.

process must involve the dematerialization of material forms adapted to the spiritual nature of the intellect (so-called isomorphic representationalism). Moreover, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle holds that material things are not the same as their essences (1037b4–5). This suggests that the true essence of a thing is precisely what its definition indicates, and this always indicates the immaterial form in a thing, not its accidental matter (1036a28–29). The soul or internal form of a given concrete being constitutes its own essence (1043b2–3; 1036a1–2). Therefore, since forms or essences are immaterial by nature, regardless of their connection with matter, only form itself can be an adequate object of intellectual (metaphysical) science, excluding material properties derived from the perception of the external (*sensus externus*) and internal senses (*sensus internus*).¹⁵

For Aristotle, every thing or substance necessarily possesses its essence, because without it it would inevitably lose its natural identity. For essence is most closely reflected in form, there are also accidental properties that categorically relate to the material structure of a given being (e.g., color, shape, location, condition of time, place, etc.). The property of a substance (*symbebēkos*) means “accident” or “that which befalls,” and the phrase *kata symbebēkos* means “in an accidental way” or “coincidentally” and is used to describe accidental causation within a substance. Or, for example, the phrase *aitia symbebēkotos* refers to an accidental cause. This Greek term – which appears sometimes as a noun meaning ‘accident’ and sometimes as an adjective form meaning ‘accidental’ – is used to describe a quality that is not essential to a substance and can either exist or not exist without changing the substance’s fundamental nature. The nature or essence is something completely different from matter, or even its composition with form (*compositum substantiae*), meaning it is something that underlies the existence of a substance, constituting it as a concrete being.

¹⁵ Cf. Boris Hennig, “Form and Function in Aristotle,” *History of Philosophy & Logical Analysis* 23, no. 2 (2020): 317–37, esp. 320–21, <https://doi.org/10.30965/26664275-02302003>. In the Latin Aristotelian tradition, five external senses were distinguished (*quinque sensus externus*): sight (*visus*), hearing (*auditus*), taste (*gustus*), smell (*olfactus*), touch (*tactus*); and five internal senses (*quinque sensus internus*): sensory judgment (*vis aestimativa*), common sense (*sensus communis*), imagination (*phantasia*), memory (*memoria*), and cogitative or judging faculty (*vis cogitativa*). For more, see Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Pars Prima Summae Theologiae: A quaestione L ad quaestionem CXIX*, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 5 (Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1889), q. 78, a. 3 (*Utrum convenienter distinguantur quinque sensus exteriores*), pp. 253–55, a. 4 (*Utrum interiores sensus convenienter distinguantur*), pp. 255–57. On the intellect’s activities in the soul, including the Aquinas’s active and potential intellects, see Ibidem, q. 79 (*De potentiis intellectivis*), pp. 258–81. See also John J. Haldane, “Aquinas on Sense-Perception,” *The Philosophical Review* 92, no. 2 (1983): 233–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2184927>.

Now, although matter is finite and transient, and therefore subject to change and decay, the essence of things seems to be more permanent and can apparently exist separately from matter after the death of matter or the body. According to this hylomorphic theory, Aristotle believes that the primary subject of metaphysics is in fact the immutable cause of all material changes in the universe, since there must be only one such cause that determines the essential structure of all individual beings and their immutable forms subjectified in them. Aristotle mentions this in Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, where, referring to the theory of the Unmoved Mover (*ho ou kinoumenon kinei*) – which translates to “that which moves without being moved” – as the ultimate object of the soul’s desire and intellectual knowledge, he points to the eternal motion of the cosmos (*kosmos*) or the heaven (*ouranos*), or the whole (*to holon*). Hence, according to Aristotle, man’s natural desire is to acquire knowledge that enables him to know the essence of necessary and imperishable phenomena of the natural realm (*pantes anthrōpoi tou eidenai oregontai fysei*), which would indeed indicate the divine dimension of metaphysics.¹⁶

However, one of the most poignant and deeply troubling aspects of the Aristotelian tradition turns out to be the concept of “separate substances.” This concept has likely been greatly expanded upon by generations of later thinkers who referred to God or Angels in this way, but it undoubtedly has its origins in a theory attributed to Aristotle. If we were to interpret the medieval meaning of “eternity” (*aeternitas*) as a specific term assigned to separate substances, as something existing eternally outside matter (*sempiternity*),¹⁷ it might seem that for Aristotle a separate substance is something that does not participate in earthly matter in any respect. Despite this, in Aristotle’s theory, there is some ambiguity as to whether separate substances are meant to be completely free

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a22.

¹⁷ “Sempiternity” is an infinite existence in time (endless or timeless existence), having a beginningless and infinite duration in time. It is often contrasted with the eternity of God, which is timelessness or a form of existence outside of time. The word comes from a contraction of two Latin words meaning ‘always’ (*semper*) and ‘eternal’ (*aeternus*), and the third derivative is intended to indicate something limited by time but infinite. A being endowed with sempiternity exists in all moments of time, which flow sequentially, without end. In some theological theories, God is sometimes described as sempiternal, meaning that He experiences all time without beginning or end, but within its flow, as opposed to being entirely outside of it. For instance, Boethius distinguished the two by saying that humans create time and sempiternity as they pass through the time of which they are a part, while the divine “now” arising from God’s essence is unmoving and stationary, thereby creating eternity within. For more, see Martha Kneale, “Eternity and Sempiternity,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69, no. 1 (1969): 223–38, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/69.1.223>.

from all matter, or merely free from the earthly matter accessible to the senses. For this Greek philosopher, this constitutes a key point in relation to the subject of metaphysics, for he considered the celestial matter of the superlunar world to be of a different kind from the terrestrial matter of the sublunar world, with only the latter subject to generation, corruption and decay. Similarly, Aristotle defined the motions of the stars (heavenly or celestial sphere) as being in “perpetual motion,” considering that in the superlunar sphere no irreversible changes can be observed, only the stellar repetition is distinguishable.

Although Aristotle considered the order of reality, he includes separate substances such as abstracted and cognitive forms of things (*species*) or their essences, which, after all, retain reference to real entities that also bear a separate existence, prescinding the intellect (*extra intellectum*). Even so, his view excludes impossible or self-contradictory entities (non-beings) such as chimera, pegasi or gryphons (Aquinas's interpretation of Dionysian “*to mē on, hanousios*”), presupposing some kind of existence that could be the subject of metaphysics. Accordingly, they are completely excluded from the subject of metaphysics. Aquinas's writing evidently seems to follow the same line and justify a similar position within his philosophical framework. In Aquinas's realistic metaphysics, the question of *ens rationis* refers to a vague area of unreal being, which is not entitled to judgments about the truth of existence, and which lies beyond the direct object of metaphysics and has almost always been excluded from this domain.¹⁸ Since a being of reason or impossible being does not concern reality, it cannot constitute a proper subject of metaphysics. Thomas Aquinas († 1274) probably did not use the phrase *ens rationis* as widely and with the same terms as other Scholastics who followed him (likewise the term *ens reale*, which does not appear explicitly in Thomistic thought). Instead, he usually used the word *res rationis* in many places, emphasizing in particular that a formal approach to truth need not always rely on an adequate relation or correspondence of the intellect to things outside the intellect.¹⁹

¹⁸ See more Matthew K. Miner, “Beyond Non-Being: Thomistic Metaphysics on Second Intentions, *Ens morale*, and *Ens artificiale*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (2017): 353–79, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq2017523116>. On the mental object in logic and metaphysics, see Federico Tedesco, “Può l'ente logico essere definito un artefatto mentale (e la disciplina che se ne occupa una tecnica scientifica)? La natura analogica e i limiti epistemici del modello demiurgico di matrice tomista,” in *La dinamica della ricerca: Mozioni et rimozioni nella scienza*, ed. Luca S. Maugeri (Bologna: Pardes Edizioni, 2014), 53–78.

¹⁹ Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. Quaestiones 1–7*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 22/1.2 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1970), q. 1, a. 1, c.; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. Quaestiones 21–29*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 22/3.1 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1973), q. 28, a. 6;

Did Aristotle in fact successfully restrict the evanescence of separate substances to concrete entities or their immaterial essences, or should we agree with medieval and Renaissance theologians that they must be conceived in terms of a divine or *supra*-natural being as the ultimate object of metaphysics? All these issues have their roots in both the Neoplatonic and Dionysian traditions, and also hark back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where the primary subject and final goal of metaphysics (*finis primae philosophiae*) can be considered the common concept of "being *qua* being" or "*ens commune*," as something completely immutable to be known within the limits of human reasoning. Most likely to the surprise of many modern Thomists who have followed this path, it seems, however, that the subsequent philosophical tradition stemming from scholastic thought, especially the 17th-century Jesuit and post-Cartesian traditions, contributed significantly to the change in this paradigm.

Aquinas's Doctrine of the *Ens Commune*: A General Outline

As indicated, the three prevailing definitions of the most intelligible objects ("... quae maxime intellectualis est. Haec autem est, quae circa maxime intelligibilia versatur"),²⁰ namely those most elevated from matter, correspond to Aristotle's three delineations that mark metaphysics as the first philosophy (*tēn prōtēn philosophian*) or theology (*theologia*), and this is what ultimately safeguards the unity of science.²¹ Consistently, this distinguishes the primary

q. 29, a. 4, ad 12; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Pars Prima Summae Theologiae: A quaestione I ad quaestionem XLIX*, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 4 (Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888), q. 13, a. 7; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, ed. M.-R. Cathala (Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti, 1926), lib. V, lec. IX, n. 897 (hereinafter: *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*). See also Thomas Osborne, "The Concept as a Formal Sign," *Semiotica* 2010, no. 179 (2010): 1–21, esp. 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2010.015>; Miner, "Beyond Non-Being," 353–79.

²⁰ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1. For English translation, see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), Prooemium, pp. 1–2.

²¹ In this context, this explorative study is worth recommending: Jan A. Aertsen, "Why is Metaphysics Called 'First Philosophy' in the Middle Ages?," in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 53–69; Gregory T. Doolan, "Aquinas on Separate Substances and the Subject Matter of Metaphysics," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 22 (2011): 347–82; Stephen D.

subject of metaphysics from other sciences, which in no way undertake to investigate the most general concept of being as being, as Aquinas aptly states:

For none of them determines about being simply, that is, about being in general, nor even about any particular being as a being. Just as arithmetic does not determine about number as a being, but as a number. For it is proper for metaphysics to consider about any being as a being.²²

Metaphysics, therefore, as the first philosophy, is either the demonstration of the first causes, or it is the consideration of being *qua* being and the properties essentially held by it, or finally, it could rightly be called theology since it deals with what is most immaterial and divine, such as causes and separate substances, insofar as such things are the furthest from matter.²³ The term “first philosophy” was likely coined by Aristotle to describe a knowledge that scientifically abstracts from the matter that is primarily dealt with by lower sciences such as physics and other natural sciences.²⁴ Aristotle’s intention seems to have been to model the highest form of knowledge on immutable and separate substances, encompassing all rational inquiry which is the way to study nature and the entire universe. However, for Aristotle himself, God and the Angels, although they are immaterial and may fall within the scope of metaphysical inquiry, they are still not the main subject of demonstration in this science.²⁵

Dumont, “Scotus’s Doctrine of Univocity and the Medieval Tradition of Metaphysics,” in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 193–212, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110801453.1931>.

²² “Nulla enim earum determinat de ente simpliciter, idest de ente in communi, nec etiam de aliquo particulari ente inquantum est ens. Sicut arithmetica non determinat de numero inquantum est ens, sed inquantum est numerus. De quolibet enim ente inquantum est ens, proprium est metaphysici considerare” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. VI, lec. 1, n. 1147, p. 351).

²³ “. . . all causes must be eternal, but especially these; for they are the causes that operate on so much of the divine as appears to us. There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology, since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort. And the highest science must deal with the highest genus” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. IV, 1026a17–22); “. . . if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this to consider being *qua* being – both what it is and the attributes which belong to it *qua* being” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a26–33).

²⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. IV, 1026a10 sqq.

²⁵ See Peter Furlong, “Reason in Context: The Latin Avicenna and Aquinas on the Relationship between God and the Subject of Metaphysics,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic*

Hence, following Aristotle himself, and the preceding approaches to this subject, presumably Arabic ones, in the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Aquinas concludes that what truly constitutes the foremost subject of metaphysics are those most intelligible objects (*maxime intelligibilia*), which should be considered in the most universal manner, such as of genus, species, and above all, those separate substances, though not entirely discernible substances, that transcend all species, differentiations, multiplicity, and composition of act and potency, integrating being as a whole.²⁶ Knowledge of these most universal objects would then be binding for understanding the entire range of being, and the science that deals with them should obligatorily bear the hallmarks of *scientia transcendens* or *scientia communis*. Since this science concerns the uppermost category of immaterial being separated from transient matter, but grasped in the intellect as *genus omnium supremum*, and in doing so the primary subject of metaphysics would become the being as common as possible to all its denominations, to all its predications and so forth, namely *ens commune* itself.

As Predrag Milidrag remarked,²⁷ although the concept of “being” is common to all created things and although it is modeled on the generic concept, being would not be a genus, because accordingly it must transcend all genera

Philosophical Association 83 (2009): 129–40, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpapro200983111>; Nathan Poage, “The Subject and Principles of Metaphysics in Avicenna and Aquinas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 86 (2012): 231–43, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpapro20128618>; Joseph Owens, “Existential Act, Divine Being, and the Subject of Metaphysics,” *The New Scholasticism* 37 (1963): 359–63; Joseph Owens, “Aquinas as Aristotelian Commentator,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.S.R.* Ed. John R. Catan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980), 1–19; Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God. The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae*, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

²⁶ “Quamvis autem subjectum hujus scientiæ sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quæ sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem. Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quæ nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiæ, sed etiam illa qua possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent.” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2). See also James C. Doig, *Aquinas on Metaphysics: A Historico-Doctrinal Study of the Commentary on the Metaphysics* (The Hague: M. Nijhof, 1972).

²⁷ Cf. Predrag Milidrag, “Thomas Aquinas on the Subject of the Metaphysics,” *Theoria, Beograd* 59, no. 1 (2016): 42–58, <https://doi.org/10.2298/theor1601037m>. For more, see also Leo J. Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993); Marco Forlivesi, “Approaching the Debate on the Subject of Metaphysics from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age: The Ancient and Medieval Antecedents,” *Medioevo* 34 (2009): 9–60; Philip-Neri Reese, “Separate Substances

and species, though not in the sense of an individual being above them, but in the sense of being common to all of them (*communis*) – common to all denominations of beings, things, creatures, etc. The corollary of this is that the category of “being” in Aquinas does not refer to any subjective or singular determination of being, since there is nothing particular that can be common to all things except something outrightly analogous to unity (*analogia entis*). Hence, such unity of being must always be analogical, proportionally attributed to all its components, referring to everything that falls within the scope of the concept of being in general.

However, it would not be impermissible to disagree with the above, I believe, especially since Aquinas himself suggests a completely contrasting way of interpreting such an “ephemeral” concept as *ens commune*, which actually is, and which truly appears, as a kind of guise or “fiction” applied in order to grasp being in the most universal and extensional way. I would venture to assume that at least two of his commentaries provide conclusive premises that do not depart sharply from the likely assumption that *ens commune* is indeed a cognitive concept of the intellect (*ens cognitum*) with the characteristics of a genus, and perhaps the highest genus encompassing everything (*genus omnium supremum*) that falls within the sphere of reflection on being, both that which stands for being *secundum esse* and that which stands for being *secundum rationem* (“... tota de his quæ sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem”²⁸). Taking into account the fairly common belief that *ens commune* is not a genus, such a view would be quite limiting for this science, for in the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Aquinas maintains nearly the opposite opinion and even extends the concept of *ens commune* to super-genus, which may really pose certain inaccuracies in prevalent assessments of his approach. Following Aristotle, he holds that what is indeed separated from matter is the subject of metaphysics, which to some extent must resemble the genus of everything that relates to reality of material and immaterial nature of things, although it is itself immaterial:

... consequently, it must be the office of one and the same science to consider separate substances and being in general (*ens commune*) which is the genus of which the separate substances mentioned above are the common and universal causes. ... For the subject of a science is the genus whose causes and properties we seek, and not the causes themselves of the particular genus studied,

and the Principles of Being as Being: Aquinas's (†1274) Aporia and Flandrensis's (†1479) Answer,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 31 (2020): 383–416.

²⁸ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2.

because the knowledge of the causes of some genus is the goal to which the investigation of the science attains.²⁹

Accordingly, the separate substances, though conceived as immaterial natures or causes, become the object of metaphysics, constituting the common and universal subject of being in general or being as being.³⁰ One could even assume that this indicates a clear conditioning of materiality by immateriality, which subtly connects the seen realm with the unseen realm on the border of *ens commune*. Moreover, everything within the scope of this science, which is itself immaterial and unseen, always refers to the emergence of an *ens commune*, as something essentially invisible, and exclusively perceptible by means of intellectual insight into its very nature. In other words, metaphysical speculative knowledge of something as ephemeral as “common being” should always predicate objects whose nature can be confirmed as being separated from matter at the greatest distance, that is, with respect to both the *ratio entis* itself and the *esse essentiae* itself, which together constitute something universal for the intellect’s apprehension, but not singular or individual at all. They are only cognitively perceptible (*in cognoscendo*) at the level of the second or even – as it were – the third intention of the intellect, namely the *supra*-transcendental approach which puts forth an apparent concept that combines both the materiality and immateriality of whole being in one intellectual realm.

When Aquinas invokes the *ens commune*, he does so together with separate substances, though at the same time he seems to understand the separate substances otherwise. Rather, the *ens commune* and separate substances are considered in terms of the formality of a single universal cause. Thus, at one time he denotes the *ens commune* as a genus pertaining to everything, at another time he explicitly states that the *ens commune* is the proper and primary subject of metaphysics. Nevertheless, when he further distinguishes between the *ens commune* and separate substances, he argues that separate substances are never contained in matter, while the *ens commune* is something that exists completely without matter. Moreover, if it is exactly as John F. Wippel confirms

²⁹ In *Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1.

³⁰ See John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant on Being and the Science of Being as Being,” *The Modern Schoolman* 82, no. 2 (2005): 143–68, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman200582216>. Wippel’s complementary studies are worth recommending: John F. Wippel, “Metaphysics and ‘Separatio’ According to Thomas Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 31, no. 3 (1978): 431–70; John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and Participation,” in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 117–58.

in his works, that *ens commune* has the same extent as *esse commune*, as the below lines in *De Divinis Nominibus* may indeed suggest (cap. V, lec. 2, n. 655, 660), then evidently the Angels, who owe their existence to God the Creator, must be incorporated among *esse commune*, meaning this in terms of possessing existence (*esse*), regardless of whether one considers it spiritual or intellectual.

That said, it seems to me that the question of “abstraction” or “separation,” which does not pertain necessarily to the same operation, may be decisive in establishing the definition of *ens commune*. For in *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, Aquinas describes two ways in which the principles constituting a genus are distinguished, namely, as a supergenus common to all beings. He holds that just as each particular genus has certain common principles that extend to all the principles of that particular genus, so all beings, insofar as they participate in being, have certain principles that are common principles to all beings.³¹ Following Avicenna, he argues that these principles can indeed be called common in two ways: (1) “by predication” (*uno modo per praedicationem*), where a form or genus is common to all the forms of what is predicated because it is predicated of each thing; (2) “by causality” (*alio modo per causalitatem*), when something is one principle for all, as, for example, the sun is numerically one principle for all things that can come into being. From this follows – as Aquinas asserts – that it is possible to distinguish common principles of all beings not only according to the first method of separation which Aristotle gives in *Metaphysics* (Book XI), so that identical principles are assigned to all beings by way of derived analogy *per praedicationem*, but also that it is possible to define the common principle of beings (*ens commune*) according to the second method of demonstration *per causalitatem*. Indeed, this second method leads consequently to the emergence of the coherent definition of the main subject of metaphysics, which is invariably the common being and the divine being at once, understood as the most distant from matter on the plane of separate substances:

But there are common principles of all beings not only according to the first way, which the Philosopher calls in Book XI of the *Metaphysics* that all beings have the same principles according to analogy, but also according to the second way, that certain things existing numerically the same are principles of all

³¹ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, “Super Boetium De Trinitate,” in *Super Boetium De Trinitate: Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 50 (Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992) (or earlier edition: Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Expositio super Librum Boethii De Trinitate*, ed. Bruno Decker, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 4 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965]), pars III, q. 5, a. 4., co. 2 sqq. (hereinafter: *Super Boetium De Trinitate*).

things, namely insofar as the principles of accidents are reduced to principles of substances, and the principles of corruptible substances are reduced to incorruptible substances, and therefore in a certain degree and order all beings are reduced to certain principles. And since that which is the principle of being for all things must be the greatest being, as said in *Metaphysics* II, therefore such principles must be the most complete and for this reason they must be the most actual, so that they have nothing or the least potency, because act is prior and more powerful than potency, as said in *Metaphysics* IX. And for this reason they must be without matter, which is in potency, and without motion, which is the act of that which exists in. And such are divine things; for if divinity exists anywhere, it is in an immaterial and immovable nature, as is said in *Metaphysics* VI.³²

On this basis, one might reasonably argue that *ens commune* falls into one of these two methods. Personally, I favor the second method (*modo per causalitatem*), which allows for the metaphysical extraction of the *ens commune* by means of the separation of causes, that is, by applying abstraction to the analogy of immaterial causes inherent in all things. This seems to stem from the premise that only abstraction, by which physics and mathematics can be distinguished from metaphysics, should lead to the proof of the existence of superior separate substances, such as the Intelligences that move the heavenly spheres and the “Unmoved Mover” of Aristotelian theology from the “Lambda” book of *Metaphysics*, namely “that which moves without being moved” (*ho ou kinoumenon kinei*).³³ The very proof of separate and immaterial substances transcends our intellect to higher spheres of abstraction, raising human being from the corporeal and sensory level to the level of the intelligent soul elevated

³² “Omnium autem entium sunt principia communia non solum secundum primum modum, quod appellat philosophus in XI metaphysicae omnia entia habere eadem principia secundum analogiam, sed etiam secundum modum secundum, ut sint quaedam res eadem numero existentes omnium rerum principia, prout scilicet principia accidentium reducuntur in principia substantiae et principia substantiarum corruptibilium reducuntur in substantias incorruptibiles, et sic quodam gradu et ordine in quaedam principia omnia entia reducuntur. Et quia id, quod est principium essendi omnibus, oportet esse maxime ens, ut dicitur in II metaphysicae, ideo huiusmodi principia oportet esse completissima, et propter hoc oportet ea esse maxime actu, ut nihil vel minimum habeant de potentia, quia actus est prior et potior potentia, ut dicitur in IX metaphysicae. Et propter hoc oportet ea esse absque materia, quae est in potentia, et absque motu, qui est actus existentis in potentia. Et huiusmodi sunt res divinae; quia si divinum alicubi existit, in tali natura, immateriali scilicet et immobili, maxime existit, ut dicitur in VI metaphysicae.” (*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 4, co. 2).

³³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1074a38–b14.

from materiality, which means the same as thinking in terms of immaterial causes, unseen transcendentals and divine principles of being. This application of the proper method of abstraction in metaphysics is deliberately used to demonstrate perceptible and main attributes of separate substances, such as “immateriality,” “being in act,” “indivisibility,” “inalterability,” “absolute unity,” and “univocity” which must indeed be prioritized in the demonstration of the *ens commune* and in proportion to the human mind. The last seems to be necessary insofar as Angels also have a connatural object of their own cognition and knowledge of causes, though without pursuing any way of abstraction. It follows, in turn, that the proof of the existence of any separate substances can only begin with proving the existence of *ens commune*, because separate substances, not *ens commune* itself, somehow constitute an analogous structure for abstract inquiry to obtain the causality of entire being depicted in Aristotle’s doctrine. Therefore, the second mode of abstraction (*modo per causalitatem*) seems to be the most perfect way of distinguishing commonality in all kinds of beings with respect to their causes, not only their names or denotations (*secundum dici*), which ultimately meet at the level of *ens commune*, but also not merely with respect to the ways of predicating about them, which, on the contrary, could be a vain course. One could even venture to say that the closer a human being arrives at the *ens commune* in separation, the closer he arrives at the Divine Intellect, which may also mean that the closer we are to the Divine Intellect, the more obvious the subject of metaphysics becomes. So, as to the two modes of abstraction, that is *per praedicationem* and *per causalitatem*, these intellectual operations must not be misunderstood, but taken to be some sort of unified process, within which they can act interdependently to some extent, but ultimately the latter process should be the leading one in metaphysics. However, I strongly lean toward the position that while there are various types of abstraction (physical, mathematical, metaphysical, and even logical), there is the one universal abstraction inherent to sciences that are closer to matter, and then, above them, there is the one total *separatio* proper to metaphysics, ascending above all sciences. While other sciences remain in the domain of universal abstraction, the *separatio* permits the separation of all abstract objects and essential principles, and then raises our knowledge to a higher level of intellectual understanding. The passage from Aquinas’s *In De anima* may point to these specific relationships and the distinction between them, which seems relevant in making the final argument for *ens commune* in Aquinas’s metaphysics. The same applies to the metaphysics of Aristotle and similar metaphysical approaches, which are established in the same vein. *Ens commune* seems to be a univocal concept in relation to all kinds of beings, but

with the provision that this univocity also applies to real beings and beings of reason, uniting them on a higher level in a super-genus, but not beyond this limit. Therefore, although the other sciences differ in terms of the respective subject-matter peculiar to them and their distinct essential principles, yet *ens commune* – which is separation from everything and all sciences, including motion and change, place and position, and even intelligible concepts, etc. – seems to be a universal notion for them all.

And it should be noted that the entire reason for the division of philosophy is based on definition and the method of defining. The reason for this is that definition is the principle of demonstrating things, and things are defined by essentials. Hence, different definitions of things demonstrate different essential principles, from which one science differs from another.³⁴

Departing from the main topic for a moment, but striving to make it more precise, I devote the following few paragraphs to the issue of abstraction and in what context it should be understood in Aquinas. There are basically three types of abstraction in the sciences, and this tripartite division is considered indisputable by scholars.

The sources of three basic degrees of abstraction should primarily be sought in Aristotle's division of sciences that stems from the *Metaphysics* and diverse abstracting lens in his *On the Soul*³⁵. Aristotle's position on the intellect's

³⁴ "Et notandum quod tota ratio divisionis philosophiae sumitur secundum definitionem et modum definiendi. Cuius ratio est, quia definitio est principium demonstrationis rerum, res autem definiuntur per essentialia. Unde diversae definitiones rerum diversa principia essentialia demonstrant, ex quibus una scientia differt ab alia" (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Sentencia Libri De Anima*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 45/1 [Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: J. Vrin, 1984], lib. I, lec. 2, n. 24s; under n. 14 in *Textum Taurini*, 1959).

³⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. VI, 1025b18–1026a24; b. IX, 1064a15–b4. Cf. Aristotle, *The Physics*, with an English Translation, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam, 1929), vol. I, b. II, ch. 2, pp. 116–26, 193b22–194b15; Aristotle, *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), b. I, sec. I, pp. 8–19, 402a1–403b20. On what constitutes the unity of a science, see *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics: A Revised Text*, with a comment. by W. D. Ross, with an introduction by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 247–48, b. I, ch. 28, 87a38–87b1 (Greek text). For the division of abstractions, see Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, "Abstraktionsgrade," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), 65; Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantière and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 35–40; Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Imelda C. Byrne (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 12–33; Jacques Maritain,

operation in the process of abstraction (thinking or reasoning), proposed in section 429a13–18 of the treatise *On the Soul* and discussed in greater detail in chapters 4 to 8 of Book III, indicates that thinking consists of the passive reception of forms, where the intellect is a passive faculty or receptive ability, capable of receiving forms impressed on the intellect like a seal on wax. According to Aristotle's definition in section 429a27–29, the intellect is more of a “place for forms” (*topon eidōn*) than a creator of them, and, moreover, said intellect does not possess a formed nature of its own (*physin mēdemian*).³⁶ In a sense, it would be appropriate to say that the intellect, as the cognitive faculty of the rational soul, does not move by itself, but only under the influence of the reception (abstraction) of forms, i.e., passive forms, and then, due to the actively productive function of dianoetic cognition (*dianoia*), it knows all forms. The term *dianoieisthai* (thinking, having in mind), which Aristotle in the *On the Soul* applies to discursive thinking by means of concepts in opposition to *noein* (imagination) and *aisthēsis* (sensory-aesthetic perception), is the exclusive activity of the cognizing intellect (408b3, b9, b14, b25; 427b13; 429a23).³⁷ In the *Metaphysics*, he also compares the process of discursive thinking to a more logical activity or method of combining and separating, by means of which the intellect strives for the cognitive unity of the object (*hen ti*) or the singularity of the object of knowledge (1027b23–25).³⁸

Accordingly, the distinction between the three levels of abstraction comes down to physics, mathematics and metaphysics, the latter of which was the climax of this division, and this whole theory was valid until the 16th century. The primary subject of physics has been considered to be “mobile being” (*ens*

The Degrees of Knowledge, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain*, ed. Ralph McInerney, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) (This is a translation from the first French edition of *Distinguer pour unir, ou Les degrés du savoir* from 1932).

³⁶ For more, see Kurt Pritzl, “The Place of Intellect in Aristotle,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 80 (2006): 57–75, esp. 57–60, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpapro20068015>; Deborah K. W. Modrak, “The Nous-Body Problem in Aristotle,” *Review of Metaphysics* 44, no. 4 (1991): 755–74; Victor Caston, “Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal,” *Phronesis* 44, no. 3 (1999): 199–227, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685289960500033>; Lloyd P. Gerson, “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima*,” *Phronesis* 49, no. 4 (2004): 348–73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568528043067005>; Caleb Murray Cohoe, “Nous in Aristotle's *De Anima*,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 9 (2014): 594–604, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12156>.

³⁷ See Adriana Renero, “Nous and Aisthēsis: Two Cognitive Faculties in Aristotle,” *Méthexis* 26, no. 1 (2013): 103–20, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24680974-90000616>.

³⁸ Pritzl, “The Place of Intellect in Aristotle,” 61–62.

mobile), a being subject to motion or change. Physics abstractly rises above only individual entities and properties of corporeal substances, but nevertheless still remains connected to corporeal and sensible matter.³⁹ In turn, mathematics was treated as a real science in the Middle Ages, but although it is considered as a way of abstracting from things similar to physics, it is understood as a separate type of knowledge and posits a different type of abstraction. The subject of mathematics is then “quantitative being” (*ens quantitative* or *ens principium numeri*). The abstraction procedure of this type assumes quantitative methods, so by means of abstraction it apprehends the relations between objects and their properties as being expressed in a numerical way⁴⁰. Nevertheless, mathematics, which goes beyond the sensible matter, including that of individuals and their properties, does not find the application of its approach at the level of intentional beings. Mathematics is incapable of abstracting objective being from formal being, while the former is the second order of existence for things. Subsequently, the subject of metaphysics was assumed to be “being as being” (*ens qua ens*), that is, something that is the object of knowledge furthest from matter, without ceasing to be a real or transcendental being by nature. Francisco Suárez († 1617) extended this by emphasizing its reality with the term “*ens in quantum ens reale*.”⁴¹ It should therefore be rightly distinguished that in the

³⁹ “Quia liber physicorum, cuius expositioni intendimus, est primus liber scientiae naturalis, in eius principio oportet assignare quid sit materia et subiectum scientiae naturalis. Sciendum est igitur quod, cum omnis scientia sit in intellectu, per hoc autem aliquid fit intelligibile in actu, quod aliquantulum abstrahitur a materia; secundum quod aliqua diversimode se habent ad materiam, ad diversas scientias pertinent. Rursus, cum omnis scientia per demonstrationem habeatur, demonstrationis autem medium sit definitio; necesse est secundum diversum definitionis modum scientias diversificari” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 2 [Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1884], lib. I, lec. 1, a. 1, n. 1); “Sciendum est igitur quod quaedam sunt quorum esse dependet a materia, nec sine materia definiri possunt: quaedam vero sunt quae licet esse non possint nisi in materia sensibili, in eorum tamen definitione materia sensibilis non cadit. Et haec differunt ad invicem sicut curvum et simum. Nam simum est in materia sensibili, et necesse est quod in eius definitione cadat materia sensibilis, est enim simum nasus curvus; et talia sunt omnia naturalia, ut homo, lapis: curvum vero, licet esse non possit nisi in materia sensibili, tamen in eius definitione materia sensibilis non cadit” (Ibidem, n. 2).

⁴⁰ “. . . et talia sunt omnia mathematica, ut numeri, magnitudines et figurae. Quedam vero sunt quae non dependent a materia nec secundum esse nec secundum rationem; vel quia nunquam sunt in materia, . . .” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, lec. 1, a. 1, n. 2).

⁴¹ See Ralf Darge, “Ens in quantum ens: Die Erklärung des Subjekts der Metaphysik bei F. Suárez,” *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 66, no. 2 (1999): 335–61.

traditional scholastic understanding the intellect uses three basic types of abstraction in cognition: physical, mathematical and metaphysical.

The interpretation of these three levels over the centuries has been discussed mainly by St. Thomas Aquinas, who addresses this issue in four treatises, reducing all three levels of abstraction to two cognitive orders, i.e. the *secundum diversum definitionis modum scientias diversificari*⁴². He argues that knowledge arises through the abstraction of intellect from matter, which can occur on three levels of abstraction with respect to two orders of existence: that which presupposes reality and that which is based solely on reasoning above than anything else.⁴³ Of the three mentioned, this specific division into the first and second abstraction seems to be the most justified in terms of the scope to which the knowing intellect refers, because the intellect knows either through an act relating directly to existence (*secundum esse*) or to the structure of signification (*secundum dici*), which always constitutes a second order of things. The first type of abstraction is therefore an abstraction of the intellect's formal intention, while the second is an objective representation of the intellect. Each of these has cognitive value and represents a specific stage in scientific cognition. In the 16th century, Suárez would also speak of the way in which the soul cognizes reality by performing metaphysical pairing, and then cognizes the abstracted object in the intellect (*animo tamen separantur et cogitatione*). Hence, for St. Thomas, knowledge arises more as a result of the adaptation of the knowing faculty, i.e., the intellect, to the thing known, than to the sensible substance (*quod scientia*

⁴² Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, lec. 1, a. 1, n. 2, 3. See also Joseph Owens, "Metaphysical Separation in Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972): 287–306, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.ms.2.306115>.

⁴³ "Patet ergo quod triplex est abstractio, qua intellectus abstrahit. Prima quidem secundum operationem secundam intellectus, qua componit et dividit. Et sic intellectum abstrahere nihil est aliud hoc non esse in hoc. Abstrahere vero secundum aliam operationem intellectus nihil est aliud quam intelligere quid est hoc sine intellectu alicuius, quod est ei in esse rei coniunctum, quandoque quidem coniunctione formae ad materiam vel accidentis ad subiectum" (*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 3, c. 2); "Et sic omnis scientia humanus intellectus speculativus a materia abstrahit, cum a materia abstrahit, cum intellectus non sit nisi universalium. Alio modo consideratur materia absque dimensionibus designatis. Et sic Scibilia ergo sunt trium. Quaedam quidem Quaedam ergo speculabilium sunt separata quae non dependent a materia et motu secundum esse. Et de his est scientia divina sive theologia vel metaphysica, quae est philosophia prima. Quaedam vero dependent" (Ibidem, c. 3). For more, see Armand Maurer, "Introduction," in *The Division and Method of Sciences: Questiones V and VI of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, 4th Revised, trans. and annot., with an introduction, by Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), VIII–XLI, esp. XXIII–XXVII.

est assimilatio scientis ad rem scitam).⁴⁴ St. Thomas discusses abstraction in the context of the division of sciences in the following works: *Summa theologiae*,⁴⁵ *In super librum Boetium De Trinitate*,⁴⁶ *In VIII libros Physicorum Aristotelis*,⁴⁷ *In XII libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*,⁴⁸ and *De cognitione essentiae animae*.⁴⁹ Aquinas's interpretation of the three degrees of abstraction will later be referred to by Cardinal Cajetan († 1534) in one of his most important works, *In De ente et essentia D. Thomae Aquinatis commentaria*. Cajetan, by additionally supplementing this doctrine with the division into "total" and "formal" abstraction, will mainly deepen the meaning of metaphysical abstraction itself⁵⁰.

Returning to the univocity of *ens commune*, which should be of a broader scope than just that of the concept of real being, one may encounter some ambiguity in its further interpretation, depending on works of Aquinas we take into account in our research. Aquinas does indeed refer to being as a genus (e.g. "... ens commune, quod est genus"⁵¹), but in other places he treats *ens* in an ambiguous sense. For example, he argues explicitly that *ens* is not a genus in both the *Summa theologiae*⁵² and *Summa contra Gentiles*.⁵³ The most likely reason for this confusion is that in each of these places he treats both the *ens*

⁴⁴ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 3, c. 1.

⁴⁵ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae I^a*, q. 85, a. 1, ad. 1–5.

⁴⁶ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 3, c. 1.

⁴⁷ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, lec. 1 et passim.

⁴⁸ "Postquam philosophus ostendit de quibus sit consideratio huius scientiae, hic comparat istam scientiam ad alias. Et circa hoc tria facit. Primo ostendit quid sit proprium particularium scientiarum. Secundo ostendit differentiam particularium scientiarum adinvicem, ibi, quoniam autem est quaedam. Tertio comparat istam ad alias, ibi, quoniam autem est quaedam entis scientia. Circa primum duo facit, secundum duo, quae dicit pertinere ad particulares scientias. Dicit ergo primo, quod omnis scientia particularis quaerit aliqua principia et causas, circa proprium scibile quod sub ipsa continetur. Dicit autem – aliqua principia et causas, – quia non omnis scientia considerat omne genus causae" (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. XI, lec. 7, a. 2247).

⁴⁹ Leonard A. Kennedy, "The Soul's Knowledge of Itself: An Unpublished Work Attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Vivarium* 15, no. 1 (1977): 31–45, arg. 22.

⁵⁰ Caietani Thomas de Vio, *In De ente et essentia D. Thomae Aquinatis Commentaria*, ed. Marie-Hyacinthe Laurent (Taurini: Marietti, 1934), Prooemium, n. 5. For more in Caietani, see Pier Paolo Ruffinengo, "Astrazione, separazione, fondazione, della metafisica," *Annali Chieresi* 2 (1986): 25–63.

⁵¹ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1.

⁵² Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae I^a*, q. 3, a. 5 co.

⁵³ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. Edita 15 (Rome: Apud Sedem Commissionis Leoninae; Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1930), lib. I, cap. 25, n. 6.

and *ens commune* slightly differently, but above all, a clearer premise may be that the concept of “genus” must indeed assume numerous variations and the differentiations of the remaining genera of other beings. The *ens commune* itself is a univocal notion, unifying the distinguished features and principles of all beings into single general concept. This may be the reason for these apparent discrepancies. To my mind, when Aquinas speaks of common being (*ens commune*) calling it a genus in the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, although this sounds suspicious and ambiguously, it is actually to be understood in a sense that assumes a basic definition of genus as something that actually groups all the features, principles, concepts, genera and species of beings in a manner of analogy that is rather proportionally adapted to the knowing intellect (*ad intellectum*) than merely in relation to things or entities accessible to senses. Thus, while *universal abstraction* would have to precede the demonstration of the existence of immaterial beings or separate substances, the next step would be moving beyond universal abstraction and applying the idea of *total separation*, in order to rise above all beings and their concepts to the most general of them all, to beings even more universal than separate substances themselves, from which one would also have to separate oneself.

The very fact that the *ens commune* is being abstracted within metaphysics may indicate that we are dealing with a different and superior type of abstraction than that of physics or mathematics, namely, a super-abstraction, a certain kind of total separation from the entire universe of existents and other essences. If this were the case, then such a ephemeral concept of metaphysics would contain everything and nothing at once, because only the concept of *ens commune* would remain, omitting all possible distinctions, differences of species and genera, all motion, change, matter, physical realm, even the realm of the invisible, spiritual world, insofar as the latter also possesses its essential order, causes, and principles, from which a similar super-abstraction or total separation must be attained in order to achieve the *ens commune* itself. In any case, regarding the necessity of abstraction, at least one assumption remains valid. The very proof of the existence of immaterial beings, such as separate substances, including those pertaining to Intelligences or Angels, as well as to God, must be made almost at the very beginning of metaphysics in order to proceed forward, although this proof is not sufficient to reveal the foremost subject of metaphysics in the form of *ens commune*. It seems more likely that at the very starting point of metaphysics, that is, once we have abstracted from material, sensual properties, and corporeal beings, and then from immaterial and spiritual ones, there remain many questions to be resolved before we reach the very *ens commune* itself (e.g. those of the highly spiritual or mystical kind).

Perhaps one could say that proving separate and immaterial substances is a requisite process, at least at the first stage of this path, to direct human attention toward the inner life of the soul, but it is certainly not an ending and not an exhaustive investigative procedure capable of addressing all the doubts and questions that still remain. Apparently, metaphysics is a kind of spiritual path or explicitly the intellectual path of the soul leading towards its proper object, culminating in communion in the realm of separate substances, immaterial Intelligences, Angels and the like, and finally, to a certain extent, in the realm of God himself. Aquinas put it quite bluntly in the *De veritate*, bringing the authority of Holy Scripture into force:

. . . it must be said that Augustine speaks of the truth which is exemplified by the divine mind itself in our mind, as the likeness of a face is reflected in a mirror; and such truths, which flow from the first truth in our souls, are many, as has been said. Or it must be said that the first truth in a certain sense concerns the genus of the soul, taking genus broadly, according to which all intelligible or incorporeal things are considered to belong to one genus, as is said in Acts, XVII, 28: "For we are indeed the offspring of God."⁵⁴

Proceeding then to the immateriality of *ens commune*, which is abstracted from material beings, it should be underlined that it cannot be reduced to merely those things that are strictly transient and equivalent to materiality. For every material thing can be considered as if it possessed its own materiality by means of its own immaterial causes. Hence, the *ens commune*, though itself immaterial and non-individual, in this sense would contain within it all things that can refer to and be predicated of both materiality and immateriality of all beings; inasmuch as the *ens commune* transcends the entire realm and then encompasses within itself the material and immaterial beings, transcending them all in the end. As Aquinas states in his *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*, the *ens commune* is that which can exist separately from matter and motion, because

⁵⁴ "Ad octavum dicendum, quod Augustinus loquitur de veritate quae est exemplata ab ipsa mente divina in mente nostra, sicut similitudo faciei resultat in speculo; et huiusmodi veritates resultantes in animabus nostris a prima veritate, sunt multae, ut dictum est. Vel dicendum, quod veritas prima quodam modo est de genere animae large accipiendo genus, secundum quod omnia intelligibilia vel incorporalia unius generis esse dicuntur, per modum quo dicitur Act., XVII, 28: *ipsius enim Dei et nos genus sumus*." (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate. Quaestiones 1–7*, q. 1, a. 4 ad s.c. 8.).

by nature it does not exist in matter and motion, but on the other hand, it can also exist without them, even though we sometimes find it with them.⁵⁵

Presumably all roads lead to the recognition that Aquinas's *ens commune* should be seen as a common being, based either on the principles of *analogia entis*, i.e., the analogy of proportionality in *esse* broadly extended, or the analogy of causes and essential principles, of which sets of causes and principles are being simultaneously determined for the intellect, rather than being seen plainly as a *general being* that could exist separately in an individual and real way outside the intellect. It seems that Aquinas is concerned more with what is truly common to all created things (material and immaterial), and what is inherently embedded in all entities and relates to their specific *actus essendi*, than with what is correlated with things that could only exist corporeally *extra intellectum*, possessing the same species and generic features within. In this case, it seems instead that there must be a higher factor determining things under a common predicate of a super-genus of all particular beings and their concepts, and this factor seems to indicate an entitative foundation in being broadly considered, transformed by the intellect into a multi-level concept of *ens commune*, inscribed in various forms, modes, modifications of simple existence itself (*esse*).

There is no doubt that the concept of *ens commune* is arrived at by abstraction from what constitutes the medium of demonstration of being (*medium demonstrationis*), that is, from what is essential in all created beings possessing any mode of *esse* (animate and non-animate). The *ens commune* itself must be something truly disparate from these created and naturally differentiated forms, and something that essentially transcends the variability of all these things. This is also evidenced by Aquinas in the *Commentary on Sentences*: “. . . similarly, where there is a common thing, there is also the individual and proper aspect of the thing as an object. First philosophy is a special science, although it considers being according to what is common to all, because it considers that particular aspect of being according to which it does not depend on matter and motion.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, pars III, q. 5, a. 4. See also David Burrell, “Classification, Mathematics, and Metaphysics: A Commentary on St. Thomas Aquinas’s Exposition of Beothius’s *On the Trinity*,” *The Modern Schoolman* 44, no. 1 (1966): 13–34, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19664412>.

⁵⁶ “Et similiter ubi res est communis, est ratio objecti particularis et propria: sicut philosophia prima est specialis scientia, quamvis consideret ens secundum quod est omnibus commune: quia specialem rationem entis considerat secundum quod non dependet a materia et a motu . . .” (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, ed. Pierre Mandonnet, vol. 1 [Parisiis: P. Lethielleux, 1929], lib. III [a distinctione

Ens Commune in Aquinas's Commentaries on *Metaphysics* and on the *Divine Names*

Now, passing to the exposition of Aquinas's opinion from the *Commentary on Metaphysics* and the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, one subsidiary observation should be presented at this point. Notably, many interpreters of Aquinas's thought imply that it is indeed difficult to discern when, in his commentaries on Aristotle or other numerous *opuscula*, Aquinas is actually interpreting Aristotle or others and when he is adopting such an interpretation as his own position, as well as when he is actually going beyond the main thought of the text he is interpreting or the writer he is referring in order to express his own standing. It seems obvious that in both the Prooemium to the *Commentary on the Metaphysics* and in the *Commentary on the Divine Names* of Dionysius, Aquinas writes under his own name. This is indicated either by the logical structure of the Thomistic thought or by the outright title of a given section or chapter; for example, in the *Commentary* on Dionysius, his own position is explicitly marked by the title "Expositio Sancti Thomae" instead of "Textus Dionysii" which, in turn, always precedes Aquinas's lectures (e.g. *In Div. Nom.*, pp. 244–46, n. 651–62, and in like manner at each Dionysius' teaching). However, as Wippel rightly notes, as it is veritably impossible to reconcile certain statements taken from Aquinas's commentaries proper with those he makes under his own name, then in any attempt to identify views consistent with Aquinas's thought and proximate to the truth, priority should be given to the latter.⁵⁷

Aquinas gives varied reasons for setting metaphysics as the first philosophy, but fundamentally he states that metaphysics must have something common to all created beings, something in which, compared to other sciences, only metaphysics finds authoritative application.⁵⁸ However, accepting Aquinas's

XXVII ad distinctionem XXXII], d. 27, q. 2, a. 4 qc 2 co). A worth recommending studies on *ens commune* are: Edmund William Morton, *Doctrine of Ens Commune in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953); Gaven Kerr, "The Meaning of 'Ens Commune' in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society*, 2008, 32–60.

⁵⁷ Cf. John F. Wippel, "Essence and Existence," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 390, n. 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521226059.022> (for more, see ch. 19, sec. "Thomas Aquinas on Metaphysics and God," 385–410).

⁵⁸ Wippel discusses the differences between Commentary on the Boethius's *De Trinitate* and Aquinas's Prooemium to *Metaphysics*, where the main point is placed on *ens commune*. For more, see John F. Wippel, "The Title 'First Philosophy' According to Thomas Aquinas

fundamental assumptions about metaphysics, one should consider whether *ens commune* extends only to certain or to all possible denominations of being, in the sense that it could be substituted for a *supra*-transcendental concept, which also embraces beings of intellect, that is, beings that are a derivative emanation of intellect or soul (i.e. *sine fundamento in re*) and are as equally created within the human intellect as the rest of real beings outside of it.

Although metaphysics considers first causes to be superior, according to Aquinas, nothing prevents varied secondary causes to be the subject of this science, which is not contradictory, since all causes can be reduced to one thing, namely, to the common being (*ens commune*).⁵⁹ Hence, for Aquinas, nothing prevents this science, even if not every science considers causes, from considering all or some of them, provided, however, that they can be reduced in their ontological essence to something singular, namely, to what is common and analogous to being.⁶⁰ He claims that as with the mathematician, so it is with the philosopher who considers common being or being in general but ignores all particular beings, because he concentrates on considering them all as belonging to an *ens commune*. And although, as Aquinas maintains, there are many causes, there is nevertheless one science of them all, insofar as they all reduce to a single, common concept of being.⁶¹ However, in the Prooemium S. Thomae to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, one of the most enigmatic definitions of the object of metaphysics comes down to the opinion that the primary object would be the so-called "most intelligible objects" (*maxime intellectualis*), which are simultaneously substances separated from matter, and whose separation contributes to the highest degree of their perfection. Indeed, one of the objects indicated by Aquinas is first causes, but they alone do not exhaust the definition of the "most intelligible object." Yet less than a paragraph latter, we find that Aquinas argues for understanding the most intelligible things in a threefold framework, even though he effectively reduces them all to a single object. *Primo*, he says, such intelligibility can be attributed to everything that

and His Different Justifications for the Same," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27, no. 3 (1974): 585–600.

⁵⁹ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. III, n. 385, p. 129.

⁶⁰ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. III, n. 385, p. 129.

⁶¹ "Et sicut est de mathematico, ita est de philosopho qui considerat ens, et pratermittit considerare omnia particularia entia, et considerat ea tantum qua pertinent ad ens commune; qua licet sint multa, tamen de omnibus est una scientia, inquantum scilicet reducuntur omnia in unum, ut dictum est." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, lib. XI, n. 2203, p. 626); "... Primo ostendit quod omnium est reductio aliquo modo ad unum. Secundo ostendit quod de omnibus reductis ad unum est consideratio hujus scientiæ . . ." (*Ibidem*, lib. XI, n. 2194, p. 624).

exists in the order of knowing (*ex ordine intelligendi*). For Aquinas, those objects from which the intellect derives consistency and certainty inevitably seem more intelligible. Therefore, as he maintains, since certainty in metaphysics is acquired by the intellect inferring from causes, knowledge of these causes must be the most proper to intellectual or noetic knowledge and the most regulative of all the sciences.⁶² *Secundo*, as he says, the most intelligible objects are universals, which the intellect abstracts as those that exist to some range *in natura rei* and are subjected to generalization as inner forms of real things. Hence, this is the subject of metaphysics, as Aquinas deduces based on the comparison of intellect to senses (*ex comparatione intellectus ad sensum*). Since sense refers to what is particular, intellect differs from it in that it encompasses what is most general, such as universals. Therefore, metaphysics deals with the most universal principles, which are by nature immaterial and separate beings, and also with that from which being results as an indivisible whole and as differentiated in everything, in potency and act (“Qua quidem sunt ens, et ea qua consequuntur ens, ut unum et multa, potentia et actus”).⁶³ *Tertio*, the definition of what is the most intelligible object of metaphysics is that which belongs to the knowing intellect itself (*ex ipsa cognitione intellectus*). The most intelligible thing must therefore be that which is most separated from matter by this very intellect. For this reason, the intellect itself and the intelligible within it must be proportional to each other and belong to a single genus, because the intellect and the intelligible are one and the same in actuality (“... intellectus et intelligibile in actu sint unum”). Aquinas emphasizes that what is most separated from matter is that which is not only capable of abstracting from designated matter, as physics does, but entirely from sensible matter, and does so not only according to reason (“... non solum secundum rationem”), as mathematics does, but also, in a suchlike manner, according to abstraction from the whole of being (*secundum esse*), having as its object of knowledge God and intelligences or Angels (*Deus et intelligentiae*).⁶⁴

Accordingly, what follows in the sequent line of Aquinas’s *Commentary on Metaphysics*, presumably its most relevant part, burdens the reader with a considerable difficulty of a different kind, namely, what actually constitutes the primary and ultimate object of metaphysics, since everything is reduced to intelligible and separate substances, although in accordance with Aquinas’s three-stage division, all denominations of the “most intelligible object” (*maxime*

⁶² *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 1.

⁶³ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁴ *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, pp. 1–2.

intellectualis) are reduced to something singular, albeit something common (*communis*). For on the one hand, he calls separate substances causes, and on the other, more surprisingly, he identifies them directly with the common being itself, evidently subordinating and inscribing the former into the univocal concept of the *ens commune*, that really opaque, imperceptible and elusive notion, as posited here:

But this threefold consideration should not be attributed to different, but to one science. For the aforesaid separate substances are universal and the first causes of being. But it is the part of the same science to consider the proper causes of a genus and the genus itself: just as a naturalist considers the principles of a natural body. Hence it must belong to the same science to consider separate substances (*substantias separatas*) and the common being (*ens commune*), which is the genus (*quod est genus*), of which the aforesaid common and universal substances are the causes. From which it is evident that although this science considers the three aforesaid, it does not consider any of them as a subject, but only the common being itself (*solum ens commune*).⁶⁵

From this concise rendering of Aquinas's standing for the nature of the object of metaphysics in the *Commentary*, it follows that, regardless of the denominations of being, its forms and modes, everything that falls within the scope of objects separated from matter constitutes the central subject of this science. From the preceding paragraphs it also follows that this subject includes everything inherent in common being (*ens commune*), but specifically and as a priority that which falls under reason and the knowledge of the intellect itself, thus including the products or intentional emanates of the intellect as well, such as concepts, propositions, ideas, negations and privations (beings of reason), regardless of whether these objects are predicates of existence outside the intellect (*secundum esse*) like a lion or stag, or – as Aquinas himself indicates – predicates of reason itself (*secundum rationem*) like a goat-stag, *alius-Deus*, chimera, other

⁶⁵ “Hæc autem triplex consideratio, non diversis, sed uni scientiæ attribui debet. Nam prædictæ substantiæ separatæ sunt universales et prima causæ essendi. Ejusdem autem scientiæ est considerare causas proprias alicujus generis et genus ipsum: sicut naturalis considerat principia corporis naturalis. Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et ens commune, quod est genus, cujus sunt prædictæ substantiæ communes et universales causæ. Ex quo apparet, quod quamvis ista scientia prædicta tria consideret, non tamen considerat quodlibet eorum ut subjectum, sed ipsum solum ens commune.” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2). Cf. *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, n. 593; n. 1147; n. 1170.

entia impossibilia or *entia rationis* alike. Although the latter do not really exist *extra intellectum*, they undeniably exist within the intellect (*esse in intellectu*), as might be alluded in the case of Aristotle, Plato and others.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ "... tou gar agathou estin epistēmē hoti agathon. alla kai to B tou G-hē gar dikaiosynē hopēr agathon. houtō men oun ginetai analysis. ei de pros tōi B tetheīē to hoti agathon, ouk estai-to men gar A kata tou B alēthes estai, to de B kata tou G ouk alēthes estai-to gar agathon hoti agathon katēgorein tēs dikaiosynēs pseudos kai ou syneton. homoios de kai ei to hygieinon deichtheīē hoti estin epistēton hēi agathon, ē tragelaphos hēi mē on, ē ho anthrōpos phtharton hēi aisthēton-en hapasi gar tois epikatēgoroumenois pros tōi akrōi tēn epanadiplōsin theteon." (*Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics, Analytika Protera* A, 49a24); "... ti pōs deixei to ti estin; anankē gar ton eidota to ti estin anthrōpos ē allo hotioun, eidenai kai hoti estin to gar mē on oudeis oiden ho ti estin, alla ti men sēmainei ho logos ē to onoma, hotan eipō tragelaphos, ti d' esti tragelaphos adynaton eidenai; alla mēn ei deixei ti esti kai hoti esti, pōs tōi autōi logōi deixei; ho te gar horismos hen ti dēloi kai hē apodeixis: to de ti estin anthrōpos kai to einai anthrōpon allo." (Ibidem, *Analytika Hystera*, 92b3–8); "... ta men oun onomata auta kai ta rhēmata eoike tō(i) aneu syntheseōs kai diaireseōs noēmati, hoion to anthrōpos ē leukon, hotan mē prostethē ti-oute gar pseudos oute alēthes pō. sēmeion d' estin toude: kai gar ho tragelaphos sēmainei men ti, oupō de alēthes ē pseudos, ean mē to einai ē mē einai prostethē(i) ē haplōs ē kata chronon." (Aristoteles, *De interpretatione vel Periermenias: Translatio Boethii: Specimina translationum recentiorum*, ed. Laurentius Minio-Paluello, *Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeke*, ed. Gerardus Verbeke, Aristoteles Latinus, 2,1–2 [Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1965], 16a15–16). Cf. also Plato, *The Republic*, Reprint, ed. Giovanni R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): "... One of those creatures the ancient stories tell us used to exist. The Chimaera, or Scylla, or Cerberus, or any of the other creatures which are said to be formed by a number of species growing into one." (Book 9, 588c); "The best of the philosophers find themselves, vis-a-vis their cities, in a situation so awkward that here is nothing in the world like it. To construct an analogy in their defense, you have to draw on a number of sources, like painters painting composite creatures – half-goat, half-deer – and things like that." (Book 6, 488A). Plato, *PLATŌNOS TIMAIOS. The Timaeus of Plato*, ed. and annot., with an introduction, by R. D. Archer-Hind, Greek and the first English edition (London: Macmillan, 1888), 45B–46C, pp. 154–60; Plato, *Theaetetus, Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Plato with an English Translation 2 (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1921), 266C, p. 450. See also Paul Seligman, *Being and Non-Being. An Introduction to Plato's Sophist* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), esp. §4 (Absolute Not-Being: 237B–239C); §6 (False Logos and the Challenge to Parmenides: 240C–242B); §19 (The Not-Beautiful, the Not-Just and the Not-Tall: 257B–258C); §21 (The Problem of Falsity and the Possibility of Discourse: 259D–261C); §22 (The Nature of Logos: 261C–262E); §23 (True and False: 262E–263D); §24 (The Being of false Logos). More on the topic of Plato's false dialectic and false concepts as the non-beings (the so-called 'falsehood paradox'), see the analysis by Paolo Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the Sophist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. ch. 2 (Puzzles about not-being) and ch. 5 (Negation and not-being).

Aquinas's reasoning about causes, namely, that the subject matter of the science whose causes we are seeking, does not refer to causes of any kind, any specifically identified causes, but to all causes in general or to the most common cause overall.⁶⁷ Knowledge of causes of any kind is, in fact, the goal to which other sciences aspire, such as physics or natural sciences. Although the subject of metaphysics remains a common being, Aquinas nevertheless states that it concerns only those things that are separated from matter both in terms of being and of intellect, that is, which refer to or directly assume the reality of separate substances. Thus, metaphysics focuses not only on those things that can never exist in matter, such as God and intellectual substances, but also on those that can always exist without matter and do exist in this way, such as common being (*ens commune*). All of these are designated as separated in terms of being and reason (*secundum esse et rationem*),⁶⁸ and then Aquinas interpose the crucial point that "this would not be the case if they depended on matter for their being," which forthwith leads to the conclusion that common being cannot be denominated solely from real and material things or physical entities.⁶⁹ Hence, common being must be something beyond the reality of matter, *ens physicum*, *ens mathematicae*, and even *ens formale*, or at least presuppose what exists within the intellect or soul, excluding direct predications of particular entities. In other words, being in general instantly brings to mind the supernatural or *supra-transcendental* concept in general, which is hardly surprising, since it is the "ontological glue" that holds together all predications and denominations of being beyond the entities themselves (*supra ens*), regardless of the beings' form and mode of existence, both those beings from the level of the visible realm and those from the level of the invisible realm.

Moreover, Aquinas defines these three objects of metaphysics as an emerging divine science, which essentially form a unified whole under the common concept

⁶⁷ "Hoc enim est subjectum in scientia, cujus causas et passiones quærimus, non autem ipsæ causæ alicujus generis quæsitæ. Nam cognitio causarum alicujus generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiæ pertingit." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2).

⁶⁸ "Quamvis autem subjectum hujus scientiæ sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quæ sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2).

⁶⁹ "Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quæ nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiæ, sed etiam illa quæ possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent." (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomæ, p. 2).

of *ens commune*, as substances.⁷⁰ All of them constitute the foremost object of metaphysics and are predicates of three substances because of their connection with what accords to the mind, that is, exists in the order of knowing (*ex ordine intelligendi*); with what pertains to the senses, that is, the material objects and the universal concepts derived from them (*ex comparatione intellectus ad sensum*); and with what is denominated as a knowable object in the knowing intellect alone (*ex ipsa cognitione intellectus*). He therefore labels this unifying concept of *ens commune*, which encompasses all these three substances into one notion, a *genus* predicated of them all (“... *ens commune, quod est genus*”).⁷¹ This capacity to connect all beings to *ens commune*, which, moreover, must be articulated not through the senses but through the abstracting power of the intellect, leads to the probable assumption that *ens commune* is what later Scholastics, especially the Jesuits of the 16th and 17th centuries, marked as *ens obiectivum*, or even the higher concept of *ens supertranscendentale*, of which the latter also embraces within its *supra*-transcendental bond both real beings and beings of reason. By the Renaissance doctrine of *entia rationis*, these *quasi* beings (*quasi umbrae entium*) may possess *per modum entis* the same characteristics as real beings, such as singularity, multiplicity, color, shape, intelligibility and other qualities in the likeness of real being, although extrinsically denominated in the intellect. Accordingly, *ens commune* may strike someone as a *supra*-transcendental notion of being that complements the entire doctrine of metaphysics with a superior class of intelligible or *quasi*-intelligible objects, which of themselves are the products of the faculty of pure reasoning (their *esse* becomes *posse cognosci*).

Another worthwhile exposition of the subject of metaphysics that significantly contributes to rendering the *ens commune* in terms of both the *genus omnium supremum* or *ens supertranscendentale* is undoubtedly Aquinas's *Commentary on the Divine Names* of Blessed Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite († ci. 6th century AD). Aquinas's approach to the concept of being, using Dionysius's premises and distinctions, can make a contribution to the plausibility of this thesis. Related to this, the relevance of Aquinas's *Commentary* is also demonstrated by the fact that Dionysius had a profound impact on his thought in terms of shaping the framework of Aquinas's own theory of participation and

⁷⁰ “Secundum igitur tria prædicta, ex quibus perfectio hujus scientiæ attenditur, sortitur tria nomina. Dicitur enim scientia divina sive theologia, inquantum prædictas substantias considerat.” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2).

⁷¹ “Unde oportet quod ad eandem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et *ens commune, quod est genus, cuius sunt prædictæ substantiæ communes et universales causæ.*” (*In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, Prooemium S. Thomae, p. 2).

apophatic theology, and this applies to his general symbolic theology as well.⁷² It was written for those already initiated into a particular Neoplatonic school of Christian theology, although it also represents an attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy with the Christian faith.⁷³ I suppose that there are at least a few encouraging lines from Aquinas's *Commentary on Divine Names*, where the Angelic Doctor adequately explains his own standpoint on *ens commune* through a perspicacious reading of Dionysius's treatise and the guiding idea that it follows. In the subsequent lines I have undertaken an interpretive viewing of the *Expositio Sancti Thomae*, which follows the source *Textus Dionysii*, and more precisely, is referenced in the Aquinas's *Commentary* to: (A) Caput V ("De Existente, in quo et de Exemplaribus"); Lectio II ("Quod Deus est causa omnium particularium entium secundum quod sunt in propriis naturis"), Dionysius's nn. 275–81, appearing in Aquinas's exposition under the reference nn. 651–62, as well as (B) Caput VIII ("De Virtute, lustitia, Salvatione, Liberatione, in quo et de Inaequalitate"); Lectio II ("De processu divinae virtutis ad entia in speciali"), Dionysius's nn. 335–38; appearing in Aquinas's exposition under the reference nn. 752–62.⁷⁴

⁷² For more, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of The Divine Names, The Book of Blessed Dionysius*, ed. and trans. Michael Augros (Merrimack, NH: Thomas More College Press, 2021), esp. i–xxv ("Preface").

⁷³ For more on historical context and influences on Aquinas's thought, see Michael J. Rubin and Elizabeth C. Shaw, "An Exposition of The Divine Names, The Book of Blessed Dionysius by Thomas Aquinas (review)," *The Review of Metaphysics* 77, no. 2 (2023): 345–47, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rvm.2023.a915465>; Conor Stark, "Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Dionysius Circle: 'Participationes tripliciter considerari possunt': The Absolute Notion of Esse in Aquinas's Commentary on the Divine Names," *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 42, no. 1 (2024): 98–109, <https://doi.org/10.2478/ejsta-2024-0007>; Joshua P. Hochschild, "Aquinas's Two Concepts of Analogy and a Complex Semantics for Naming the Simple God," *The Thomist* 83, no. 2 (2019): 155–84; Brian T. Carl, "The Transcendentals and the Divine Names in Thomas Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (2018): 225–47, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq2018313148>; Michael Harrington, "The Divine Name of Wisdom in the Dionysian Commentary Tradition," *Dionysius* 35 (2017): 105–33.

⁷⁴ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, ed. Ceslari Pera, Petri Caramello, and Caroli Mazzantini (Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti, 1950); Caput V, Lectio II, Textus nn. 275–28, Expositio nn. 651–62, pp. 242–46; Caput VIII, Lectio II, Textus nn. 335–38, Expositio nn. 752–62, pp. 284–86 (hereinafter: *De Divinis Nominibus*). In this section on Aquinas's *Commentary* on Pseudo-Dionysius, I would follow C. Stark's technical lead and also avoid disputes about the authenticity of the treatises contained in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. As for the pseudo-epithet attached to Dionysius, I would too recommend the following: Christian Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise*

Primarily, in the *Commentary* on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names*, Aquinas explores how to meaningfully speak of God using propositions and descriptions deriving from human language, a receptacle where predications, ideas, concepts, imaginations, representations of things are or may be stored as far as possible in line with reality. Aquinas employed a three-part method – *via negationis* (negation), *via causalitatis* (causality), and *via eminentiae* (eminence) – to demonstrate how names that constitute human evaluation of qualities, such as “good,” “omnipotent,” “majestic,” or “powerful,” can legitimately be applied to God. Following Dionysius, he argues that this can be achieved by an apophatic rather than a cataphatic route, not from the God's perspective (*ex parte primae causae influentis*), that is, by first denying what God is not, then recognizing God as the cause of all creaturely perfections, and finally recognizing that God possesses these perfections in a superior, eminent, transcendent way, far beyond their finite, creaturely meanings, which we wish to attribute to God based on conformity or resemblance to our mind and understanding (*ex parte rerum recipientium*).⁷⁵ Aquinas, adept at the Dionysian teaching, skillfully explains the meaning of the numerous divine names Dionysius adopts for God, including “good in itself,” “justice itself,” “supergood,” “goodness of all good,” “supersubstance,” and so forth. Ultimately, he indicates that God *in se* is a wholly elusive being, transcending human cognition, beyond any comprehensive and intellectual demonstration or solid exemplification of His entitative attributes therewith.⁷⁶

Now, the prevailing opinion among scholars is that in the first verse of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius raises the issue of the so-called “unfolding” (*anaptyxis*) of divine names found in the scriptures, also adopting names (including Wisdom) from the Letters of St. Paul, which Dionysius discusses in the seventh chapter of the treatise.⁷⁷ As becomes clear in subsequent passages, this “unfolding” means taking a divine name and giving it the meaning of “being” (including “being compressed”) and then, accordingly, explaining its content through other names. What is striking is that these names do not add anything to God's essential content, which is the “being” considered by Dionysius in the “supreme superiority” and broad scope of divinity. The previous point clearly

On the Divine Names, *Philosophia Antiqua* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11–22, Part I (An Introduction to the Problem), §2 (The Phantom Author).

⁷⁵ Cf. Schäfer, 28–31, esp. 29, Part I (An Introduction to the Problem), §3 (The Status Quaestionis), c. Aquinas' Layout of DN.

⁷⁶ Cf. Michael Augros, “Preface,” in St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of The Divine Names*, iv–vii.

⁷⁷ Cf. Harrington, “The Divine Name of Wisdom in the Dionysian Commentary Tradition,” 118.

emphasizes a certain complexity in Aquinas's participation doctrine, which he also based on his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*. Nevertheless, this is crucial insofar as it contributes to indicating the divergent meanings given by Aquinas in relation to *esse* and substance, and the location of the *ens commune* itself in the order of this hierarchy.⁷⁸

Aquinas's wide understanding of *ens commune*, which was most likely derived from the text of Dionysius, causes considerable confusion, first of all because Dionysius uses many different names to describe God, among others he identifies Him with "life itself" (*ton theon pote men autodzōēn*), in another place he defines God as the "substance" that is the cause of life itself (*autodzōēs hypostatēs*), in another "wisdom itself" (*tēn autosophian*), and so forth.⁷⁹ Moreover, Aquinas himself, as contemporary scholars rightly point out, took into account that "Blessed Dionysius used an obscure style in all his books," and he added that this "obscurization" of language was not due to Dionysius's ignorance, but rather to a deliberate attempt to conceal sacred and divine dogmas from the mockery of infidels. According to Aquinas, the aforementioned books also encounter a difficulty from which many could derive divergent interpretations.⁸⁰ As Conor Stark notes, despite this already burdensome "*copia verborum*," Thomas ultimately adopted a completely opposite term, though one that partly unites all the others, to describe God in the dimension of *esse commune*. Unfortunately, the Angelic Doctor's unification of all Dionysian meanings under one common concept, *esse commune*, to which Aquinas also refers, *ipsum esse subsistens* or *ipsum per (secundum) se esse*, did not prove to be a pertinent solution to the nomenclature problem.⁸¹ For Aquinas, what he

⁷⁸ On the participation in references to *esse commune* based on Aquinas's reading of Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*, see Jason Mitchell, "Aquinas on *Esse Commune* and the First Mode of Participation," *The Thomist* 82 (2018): 543–72, esp. 548–54 (I. "Aquinas and Thomists on Participation in *Esse Commune*"). Although not in the metaphysical approach to Aquinas's *esse commune* that is currently in vogue among scholars, nor in the Thomistic vocabulary, to use the author's own remark (p. 463), the following text is revealing and worth recommending: Adrian J. Walker, "Personal Singularity and The Communio Personarum: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas' Doctrine of *Esse Commune*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (2024): 457–79.

⁷⁹ Cf. Stark, "Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Dionysius Circle," 98.

⁸⁰ "II. – Est autem considerandum quod beatus Dionysius in omnibus libris suis obscuro utitur stilo. Quod quidem non ex imperitia fecit, sed ex industria ut sacra et divina dogmata ab irrisione infidelium occultaret. Accidit etiam difficultas in praedictis libris, ex multis . . ." (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Proomium, p. i).

⁸¹ Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae* I^a, q. 11, a. 4; Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 21; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. *Quaestiones* 21–29, q. 22, a. 14.

considered to be the most perfect of all things is derived from the fact that the act is always more perfect than potentiality and therefore that which is being is the actuality of all acts (*actualitas omnium actuum*) and is thus the perfection of all perfections (*perfectio omnium perfectionum*).⁸² Moreover, quite different interpretations began to be adopted, for example by Étienne Gilson who considered *esse commune* to be an abstract universal in the mind and who directly states that all universals, including this one (i.e. *esse commune*), are the being of reason and do not exist in any other reality than the reality of the intellect that comprehends it,⁸³ while Klaus Kremer and Oleg Georgiev identify *esse commune* with God or as the *genus* that holds divine *esse*. Still others, also mentioned by Stark, such as Cornelio Fabro, John F. Wippel, and Fran O'Rourke, assume that *esse commune* is a concept pointing to *actus essendi* as the grounding essence of being.⁸⁴

Although my interpretation, based on Aquinas's *Commentary on Divine Names*, is one of the lines that addresses the *ens commune* and, accordingly, *esse commune*, it goes in a completely different direction, which aims to reconstruct Aquinas's exposition on the basis of *supra*-transcendental as a heuristic concept, if we assume that he indeed speaks for himself.

Now, Aquinas, after earlier analysis of Dionysius's process of emergence from God and the influence of divine power on beings, moves on to a more detailed exposition of the process of participation, firstly, distinguishing things in the order of being in which the effects of divine power are manifested, and secondly, distinguishing those things that are found as embodied in things due to divine power. This last indication by Aquinas is particularly relevant, since

⁸² "Ad nonum dicendum, quod hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est semper perfectior potentia. Quaelibet autem forma signata non intelligitur in actu nisi per hoc quod esse ponitur. Nam humanitas vel igneitas potest considerari ut in potentia materiae existens, vel ut in virtute agentis, aut etiam ut in intellectu: sed hoc quod habet esse, efficitur actu existens. Unde patet quod hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum." (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, vol. 2 of *Quaestiones disputatae*, 10th ed., ed. Paulus M. Pession [Taurini: Ex Officina Libraria Marietti, 1965], q. 7, a. 2, ad 9, p. 192).

⁸³ Étienne Gilson, "Éléments d'une métaphysique thomiste de l'être," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 40 (1973): 19 (more 7–36).

⁸⁴ Stark, "Proceedings of the Second Symposium of the Dionysius Circle," 99. Cf. John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, Monographs of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 102–3; Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité Selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961), 372.

it also refers to the powers and cognitive acts inherent in individuals.⁸⁵ He makes this references by explaining how the progress of divine power towards higher creatures, namely the Angels, and then, secondly, towards lower ones, as shown by Dionysius, should be correctly understood.⁸⁶ He explains, firstly commenting on n. 335 in Dionysius's text, that from divine power (*ex divina potentia*) emerge all angelic powers or substances that are in harmony with God. Now, in Angels, power manifests itself as "to their very being" (*ad ipsum esse eorum*), which in this respect correlates with the immutable divine goodness (*ex divina bonitate*) whereby they possess immutable and permanent angelic being in themselves (*esse immutabile*). Secondly, emergence from God must be understood "as to reasoning or understanding" (*ad intellegendum*). In this respect, angelic eternally intellectual and immortal movements (*eos habere motus aeternos intellectuales et immortales*) also arise from divine power, since, namely, intellect or reasoning is always something in act (*semper intellegunt in actu*). Thirdly, Aquinas elucidates that emergence from God must be understood "as to desire" (*ad desiderandum*). In this respect, he says that they have received from the power of infinite goodness the same power by which they desire good without diminishing such desire (*desiderant sine diminutione talis desiderii*). In fact, Angels have all this by exclusive divine power, insofar as divine power allows them to be and to be capable of desire without pain, having those things that are always present and unchanging for them. This very thing, which is the capacity to desire, as Aquinas shows, which they always have, is the actualizing power that comes solely from God.⁸⁷ In the following paragraph, referring to Dionysius n. 336, Aquinas notes that God's inexhaustible creative power reaches (*procedunt*) through a process of emanation to the farthest layers of creation, demonstrating the progression of God's power to lower creatures. Hence, Aquinas asserts that the effects of this inexhaustible divine power also reach humans, animals, plants, and all natural things, which are all derivatives of this divine process.⁸⁸ Then, referring to n. 337, he confirms what is found in the things which are brought forth by divine power. First, in regard to those things which are common to all (*quae sunt communia omnibus*), the primary one is union (*primum est unitio*). In regard to union, Aquinas holds that the divine power gives union to all those things which are united in a certain friendship and communion with each other, and this communion is determined

⁸⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 752, p. 285.

⁸⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 753, p. 285.

⁸⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 754, p. 285.

⁸⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 755, p. 285.

by divine power (*ad quamdam amicitiam sui et communionem*).⁸⁹ The second is discernment (*discretio*), which indicates that divine power strengthens things distinct from one another so that each, according to its own reason and essence, may be preserved uncorrupted and unmixed with other natures and entities. The third, indicated by Aquinas, is order (*ordo*), which in turn emphasizes that divine power preserves the order of each thing, according to which things are ordered relative to one another. Moreover, despite emanations and the process of participation, God sustains (*conservant*) these things in existence and redirects (*dirigit*) each thing in its proper order toward its end (*ad finem*), which is its proper good (*prioprium bonum rei*).⁹⁰ In turn, commenting on sectional order in Dionysius's n. 338, Aquinas presents what concerns each individual substance. Regarding the Angels, he states that the divine power inviolably preserves from any corruption the immortal life of the angelic individual beings (*immortales vitas angelicarum unitatum*), that is, the simple substances in themselves (*substantiarum simplicium ipsorum*) without composition of form and transient matter.⁹¹ Regarding the heavenly bodies (*corpora coelestia*), he says that God invariably preserves (*custodit*) the substances and orders of the heavenly bodies and luminaries (*coelestium corporum et luminarium*), namely the sun and the moon and the stars (*solis et lune et stellarum*).⁹² In his fourth point, Aquinas remarks on the so-called *aevum*, which measures the substance of the heavens, and posits that divine power makes possible the *aevum*, which is the simple measure of being. Similarly, regarding time, which is the measure of the motion of this same heavens, he emphasizes that divine power distinguishes all the revolutions of time through processes and brings them together through restoration; the celestial sphere and time are in circular motion. Thus, he attributes rotation to time, rotation being that which follows the circular revolution of the heavens themselves. In the motion of the heavens, two things must be considered, he says: firstly, that in the motion of the heavens there is always renewal, according to the passage from one place to another; secondly, that the heavens return to the same position according to their inherent circular motion.⁹³

In the following sections (nn. 758–62), Aquinas demonstrates, through the *Divine Names*, the operation of divine power derived from the elements, regarding fire, the inexhaustible streams of water, which he says result from the constant flow of rivers and the turbulence, waves, and the ebb and flow

⁸⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 756, p. 285.

⁹⁰ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 756, p. 285.

⁹¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 757, p. 285.

⁹² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 757, p. 285.

⁹³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 757, p. 286.

of the sea, as well as the outflow of air, a property of moisture that is most peculiar to air. All these earthly emanations, evoked by Aquinas, are meant to demonstrate divine power, which is limitless within the limits of natural space. Divine power also places the earth in nothingness, since it is always placed by divine potency at the center of the world and has nothing to sustain it. Divine power also maintains the generative birth of the earth itself, namely, plants and other things that spring from the earth.⁹⁴ All this justifies the premise that, firstly, it is necessary that there is a certain proportion of the elements to each other, which Dionysius treats as harmony (*Dionysius hic nominat harmoniam*); secondly, it is required that the proper force inherent in each element remains uncorrupted, otherwise there would not be a mixture, but a corruption (*alioquin non esset mixtio, sed corruptio*).⁹⁵ Thirdly, following Dionysius, Aquinas affirms the essential and unique influence of divine power on living beings, such that divine power maintains the unity of soul and body (*divina virtus in unum tenet coniunctionem animae et corporis*).⁹⁶ Referring to all created things, Aquinas adds that the divine power strongly sustains the substantial and natural powers of all beings, including animate and inanimate, and establishes the inseparable dwelling place of each thing (*rei firmat indissolubilem mansionem*), insofar as all things retain the proper degree of being according to the nature assigned to them by God (*inquantum scilicet omnia gradum sibi praefixum a Deo conservant*).⁹⁷ The effect of God's emanating power is also seen in the operation of grace (*ad gratiam*), wherein it is the power of God alone that confers participation in the Godhead, which always comes by grace (*idest participationem Deitatis, quae est per gratiam*) and not by any inherent power of the beings themselves, whether they be Angels or men.⁹⁸ Finally, Aquinas deduces from Dionysius's concluding remark that there is nothing in beings that is separate, existing by itself and not under the control of a divine power that extends itself in omnipotence so as to give things their stability and participation in existence.⁹⁹ Aquinas states:

For just as nothing can be separated from divine life except what is devoid of life, so nothing can be separated from divine power except what is devoid

⁹⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 758, p. 286.

⁹⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 758, p. 286.

⁹⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 759, p. 286.

⁹⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 760, p. 286.

⁹⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 761, p. 286.

⁹⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 762, p. 286.

of power. But what has no power universally does not exist at all, nor does it occupy any place, that is, any order in the universe or any durability.¹⁰⁰

In other words, everything created belongs to the order of emanation of being and cannot exist in any other alternative sphere, inasmuch as everything else is most likely non-existence in relation to that which is a product or derivative of God's creation. Hence, Angels, human souls, including their intellects and potencies, or substances composed of body and soul, and finally the realm of both animate and inanimate nature, come into being through the action of benignant will and God's very power (*a potentia Dei*).

That said, following Dionysius in chapters 3–4, and then similarly in chapter 8, which I have reconstructed above, Aquinas demonstrates that God is the universal and necessary cause of all things. In chapter 5, he proceeds to throw light on the assertion that God is the cause of all individual beings, according to their proper nature of existence (*proprias naturas rerum esse a Deo*), meaning that the entire structure of creation can be divided according to the mode or form of *esse* of a given entity.¹⁰¹ Some of these may have real existence (*reale*) and formal existence (*formale*) *secundum esse*, still others objective (*obiective*) or intentional existence (*intentionale*) *secundum rationem*, but they all still are to be considered in the order of being itself.

As for the first, universal and necessary dependence on God, Aquinas implies two things: firstly, he states, following Dionysius, that all degrees of being come from God (*omnes gradus entium a Deo esse*); secondly, that even being in general or common being in itself also comes from and is subject to dependence on God (*quod etiam ipsum esse commune est a Deo*).¹⁰² Then, regarding the first dependence, he makes the following three distinctions: (1) he introduces a distinction between the degrees of particular kinds of beings, saying that they all have their source in God; (2) he includes in this division the degrees of the highest beings (*gradus supremorum entium*), together with angelic beings; and finally (3) he distinguishes the degrees of the lower beings themselves.¹⁰³ The subsequent explanations of this three-level metaphysical composition, which Aquinas conducts in the *Expositio Sancti Thomae*, provide

¹⁰⁰ "Sicut enim a divina vita non potest esse segregatum quidquam nisi quod caret vita, ita a divina virtute non potest esse segregatum nisi quod caret virtute. Quod autem universaliter nullam habet virtutem, omnino non est neque habet aliquam positionem, idest ordinem in universo seu firmitatem" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 762, p. 286).

¹⁰¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 651–52, p. 244.

¹⁰² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 653, p. 244.

¹⁰³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 654, p. 244.

an extremely important premise for accepting as entirely permissible the claim that *ens commune* (not to be confused with *esse commune*) encompasses all these degrees, not excluding – quite surprisingly – beings of reason (*entia rationis*) within this framework. In a rather surprising approach, this might lead to the plausible supposition that the foremost subject of metaphysics, that is, the one furthest elevated from matter and uniting all denominations of being, would be precisely the *ens commune*, but considered as *genus omnium supremum* or simply *ens supertranscendentale*, which would be the closest association to *ens commune*.

Aquinas therefore proceeds with the following, specifying individual substances within the order of the entire structure: *Primo*, he says that from the universal cause of all things or beings, which is God, come angelic substances (*substantiae Angelorum*), similar to God, which are intelligences insofar as they are immaterial, and intellectual insofar as they have the capacity to reason or use intellect on themselves and others.¹⁰⁴ Angels, therefore, regardless of their hierarchy, constitute the first order of substances that are neither bodies nor united with bodies. *Secundo*, the next level involves substances that are not bodies but are nevertheless united with them; and in this context, they should be perceived as simply the souls of living creatures (*animarum*).¹⁰⁵ *Tertio*, the third level involves purely corporeal substances (*substantiarum corporalium*); and Aquinas applies this understanding of substances to material (physical) bodies in the entire natural world (*omnis mundi naturae*).¹⁰⁶ *Quarto*, at the fourth level of substances or beings, there are accidents (*accidentia*) which are divided into nine genera or generic categories (*in novem generibus*).¹⁰⁷ *Quinto*, the fifth degree of being encompasses those substances that are not fully understood in accordance with the order of nature, for – Aquinas points out – they exist only in thought according to cognition (*non sunt in rerum natura, sed in sola cogitatione*), and they are literally marked as beings of reason (*quae dicuntur entia rationis*), such as genus, species, opinion, and the like, and such as privations or negations, consequents and antecedents, etc.¹⁰⁸ In the following paragraph,

¹⁰⁴ “... quae sunt intelligibiles, inquantum sunt immateriales et sunt intellectuales, inquantum habent virtutem intelligendi se et alia; et iste est primus gradus substantiarum, quae nec corpora sunt, nec corporibus unita” (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244).

¹⁰⁵ “... est substantiarum quae non sunt corpora, sed corporibus unita sunt; et quantum ad hoc dicit: et animarum” (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244).

¹⁰⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

¹⁰⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

¹⁰⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

Aquinas significantly adds that, regarding these last two degrees of being, they also come from God in the same way and must be treated as inherently subjected in other substances (*inesse aliis*), similar to the accidental features that are incorporated and formed into a *substantia composita*. Thus beings of reason, in turn, and most importantly in this case, belong to the order of substances according to reason or knowing intellect (*esse secundum cogitationem, sicut entia rationis*), to which all beings of reason should be contained.¹⁰⁹ In short, these last substances and the last degree of particularization of being must be enfolded within the subject of intellectual cognition of the soul, directed towards being, or at least referring to one of the five kinds of being in the broad scope of its denotations.

Furthermore, in the preceding Lectio I (“Praemissis quibusdam necessariis ad propositam intentionem prosequitur de causalitate primi Entis”), Aquinas consciously invokes seven orders of existence of things that have their origin in God, which essentially confirms his other accompanying analyses on Dionysius’s *Divine Names*.¹¹⁰ *Primo*, in article n. 650, enumerating all the determinants of existence, he significantly concludes that as to the causality of God (*Dei causalitate*), causality refers in the first line to being itself (*ad ipsum esse*), so that from God alone comes both the very being of things and the being (*esse*) of all beings, in whatever manner they may exist (*quod a Deo est ipsum esse rerum et omnia existentia, quocumque modo sint*).¹¹¹ Accordingly, both the principle of being and the end belong to being itself (*principium essendi et finis*), since they are found in all existing things. God himself is the founding principle of all principles originating at the divine creation, since from Him alone every principle and every end must arise (*ab Ipso est omne principium et omnis finis*).¹¹² *Secundo*, Aquinas points to those things in the order of substantial beings that also have a foundation in God and are particularly related to life (*ad vitam*), whereby all life and immortality come from God and may lead to the indestructibility of this very life (*ex Deo est omnis vita et immortalitas, quae est indeficientia vitae*).¹¹³ *Tertio*, he lists things that should be considered in the order of wisdom (*ad sapientiam*), and as with the other types of dependence in being, all wisdom therefore comes from God in the order of the degree of emanation of being and its participation in the Divine (*ex Deo est omnis sapientia*). And since the duty

¹⁰⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 655, p. 244.

¹¹⁰ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Lectio I; Caput V; Textus nn. 257–74; Expositio nn. 606–50, pp. 227–38.

¹¹¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 1, p. 238.

¹¹² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 1.

¹¹³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 2.

of the wise man is to order, it follows that all order and all harmony (*omnis ordo et omnis harmonia*), which is the appropriateness derived from order, also flows from God.¹¹⁴ *Quarto*, the order of dependence from God is defined by reference to virtue (*ad virtutem*), for likewise all virtue comes from God. For virtue consists in guarding oneself against vices and bad habits of character, and avoiding harmful things, and it is in this context that Aquinas concludes that this attitude of virtuous life comes from God (*ex Deo est omnis virtus*), because it is based on the divine virtue of “entirely guarding” (*omnis custodia*). This “entirely guarding” safeguards the virtues and is established in what is appropriate to God (*omnis collocatio*), for which reason it is also marked as the virtue of “entirely distributing” (*omnis distributio*).¹¹⁵ *Quinto*, he enumerates things that pertain strictly to the order of cognition (*ad cognitione*) and everything that finds its foundation in knowing intellect. For this reason, Aquinas concludes that *ad cognitione* applies to every kind of intellect (*omnis intellectus*), both angelic intellect (*ad Angelos*) and human speech and reason (*omnis sermo, idest ratio quantum ad Homines*). Accordingly, all the senses, in the case of animals (*omnis sensus quantum ad animalia*), and every habit by which the cognitive and appetitive intellect can be perfected are also included (*omnis habitus quo perficitur ratio cognoscitiva vel appetitiva*).¹¹⁶ Thus, all cognitive operations are merged into the order of being, in particular of the intellect, which operates not only on the forms of the sensory representations of real things (*species intelligibilis impressa*), but also on the basis of the concepts of pure reason, as is the case with beings of reason, and even fictional or imaginary objects of the intellect. *Sexto*, he indicates those things which strictly refer to corporeal things (*corporalia*) and states (*omnis statio*) that every state of them belongs to being, that is, their state of rest, as well as every movement and variation (*omnis motus*).¹¹⁷ At last, *septimo*, Aquinas emphasizes the dependence of things on God by referring to “unity” (*ad unum*), covering all unions (*omnis unio*), such as the personal unity of man, who is subject to various forms of union, e.g. forms of agreement within the union of bodies (*ad unionem corporum*), forms of friendship within the union of feelings (*unionem affectuum*), forms of agreement within the union of concepts, sentences, judgments, statements, opinions (*omnis concordatio quantum ad unionem conceptionum et sententiarum*) etc.¹¹⁸ In concluding his exposition of the Dionysian doctrine, Aquinas lists what

¹¹⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 3.

¹¹⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 4.

¹¹⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 5.

¹¹⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 6.

¹¹⁸ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 7.

pertains to “multiplicity” (*ad multitudinem*). This leads him to accept the claim that every distinction (*dinstinction*), that is, differentiation (*omnis discretio*), and also every definition (*omnis deffinitio*), that is, an inner determination of the non-contradiction of each thing, which is always determined in itself by being distinct from others (*ab aliis distinctum*), derives its being from God.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the most meaningful and highly memorable statement is the final sentence of Aquinas’s *Expositio Sancti Thomae*, namely, that “. . . not only these come from God, but also everything else that pertains to being and that beings receive,”¹²⁰ meaning that ever since the creation, there is no thing that, in one order of existence or another, does not fundamentally take its origin from God.

I would venture to say that Aquinas’s reconstruction of Dionysius’s doctrine from the *Divine Names*, as of his Prooemium to the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, quite likely leads to the plausible conclusion that substances or beings existing according to reason (*secundum rationem*), i.e. those from the realm of the knowing intellect, such as beings of reason (*entia rationis*), also come from God, although in the sense of being objects for the human intellect or soul, not as directly created by God.¹²¹ If this is to be considered as a conclusive inference, then entities of this kind must fall within the scope of reflection on being in general or common being, and consequently, in a quite obvious way, they become part of the *ens commune* that Aquinas raises in the margin of both his commentaries; to emphasize it once again: “. . . quod a Deo est ipsum esse rerum et omnia existentia, quocumque modo sint.”¹²² Nevertheless, I would be

¹¹⁹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 8.

¹²⁰ “Et non solum ista sunt a Deo, sed quaecumque alia pertinent ad esse quibus entia informantur” (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, § 8).

¹²¹ A similar opinion can be attributed to Suárez, Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza († 1641), John of St. Thomas († 1644), namely that God does not create beings of reason, but is only capable of knowing them insofar as they are the object and product of the human intellect. Cf. Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, Editio nova, ed. Carolus Berton, vol. 25–26, Opera Omnia (Parisiis: Apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam editorem, 1866), disp. LIV, sec. 2, n. 23; Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza, “Disputationes metaphysicae, De ente transnaturalis; sive abstracto a materia,” in *Disputationum in Universam Philosophiam a Summulis ad Metaphysicam*, vol. 2 (Moguntiae: Typis & Sumptibus Ioannis Albini, 1619), 605, disp. XIX (*De ente rationis*), sec. II (*Untrum Deus cognoscat entia rationis?*), § 27; more pp. 599–606. Cf. Ioannis a Sancto Thoma, “Ars Logica seu forma et materia ratiocinandi,” in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus, secundam exactam, veram, genuinam Aristotelis et Doctoris Angelici mentem*, ed. Beato Reiser (Taurini: Ex Officina Domus Editorialis Marietti, 1930), 307–13, esp. 310–11 (“Secunda Pars Artis Logicae. De instrumentis logicalibus ex parte materiae,” q. II: “De Ente Rationis Logico, Quod Est Secunda Intentio,” a. V: “Utrum Deus formet entia rationis”).

¹²² *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 650, §1, p. 238.

cautious in my assessment and would not rule out an option that *esse commune* and *ens commune* can also be defined in two opposite ways: firstly, beings considered from the perspective of the order of existence (*esse commune*), which would contain only real substances or those pursuing reality; secondly, those beings or substances considered from the perspective of reason or knowing intellect (*secundum rationem*), such as beings of reason, which would also refer directly to the concept of *ens commune*, along with the remaining denominations and predicates of being regardless of their ontological status and inherent mode of existence, since nothing can be considered existing unless it has *esse*. It means that only those beings denominated existents that share a status in real existence participate in *esse commune* itself, while those that are inherent exclusively in intellect would rather participate in *ens commune*, as in the cognitive concept (*ens cognitum*), and in this context *ens commune* can be treated as *genus omnium supremum*.

In turn, another inference concerning *esse* itself may be equally valid, given what Aquinas says in the following arguments. In articles nn. 658–60, Aquinas outlines that God alone is the cause of common being (*Deus est causa ipsius esse communis*), which means that, firstly, being in itself is common to all (*ipsum esse est omnibus commune*), and secondly, although God is connected with common being, He is excluded from it and does not constitute a part of it, but is only the first efficient cause.¹²³ As I have shown above, in this process God distributes to higher substances (*superiores substantiae*) certain nobler properties of being, forms of existence (*esse*), whereby those higher substances, like Angels, are rightly called eternal substances (*aeternae*), as if they had existed from eternity (*quasi semper existentes*), though not in the sense of the eternity proper to God, according to the words of the Psalmist: “Lift up, you everlasting gates” (Ps 237).¹²⁴ Aquinas then presents a rather intricate structure of the connection between common being and God. He maintains that being in itself comes from the first Being, which is God (*ipsum esse commune est ex primo Ente, quod est Deus*), and from this, in turn, it follows that common being is linked to God by a specific form of dependency, unlike existence. Furthermore, this difference occurs in three respects: *Primo*, existence depends on common being (*esse commune*), but not God (*existentia dependet ab esse communi, non autem Deus*), for it is common being that depends directly on God (*magis esse commune dependet a Deo*). From this, Aquinas infers, following Dionysius, that common being in itself comes solely from God himself and is fully dependent on his power, and that it is not

¹²³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 658, p. 245.

¹²⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 659.

God who is this very common being or rather the *esse* within it (*et non ipse Deus est esse, idest ipsius esse communis*), but He is its supreme conditioning cause, on which *esse commune* is entirely contingent and subordinated.¹²⁵ *Secundo*, all existing beings fall under the common being itself, excluding God. It is rather the common being itself that is subject to divine power, because God's power, in its infinite omnipotence, extends beyond all created beings, which otherwise emerged from God by virtue of efficient causality. And on this basis, in turn, one can further maintain that the common being is in God himself "as something contained in something contained" (*contentum in continente*), and not the other way around, and therefore that God himself (the efficient and final cause of being) is *esse* in that which is being, hence any form of pantheism or panentheism identifying nature itself with God is utterly rejected.¹²⁶ *Tertio*, from this point, it follows that all other beings participate in that which is being in general, though God does not. Aquinas then concludes that all created being is merely a certain participation of God in His likeness, whereby in a certain analogy the *esse commune* participates as a likeness to God, however, without God being defined as participating in his own divine likeness. Therefore, it must be inferred that God himself is, according to Aquinas and Dionysius, the "unique *aeon*," the cause, foundation, and capacity for the duration of created being, as well as its principle and measure. In his separate existence, God precedes every substance, every being, every *aeon*, preceding them in duration, in order, and in causality. Consequently, the substance of everything depends on Him, since He is the cause of substantial, spiritual, and rational existence in everything. He is the principle of *esse*, because all duration, every movement, every process proceeds directly from God alone. Moreover, presumably, taking into account the Neoplatonic order *monê-pródos-epístrophê*, one might infer, following the Angelic Doctor, that God himself is also the goal (final cause) towards which all things ultimately strive in their earthly permanence and transient being (*duratio et processus omnium est ab Eo et est etiam finis in quem omnia tendunt*).¹²⁷

The following claims of Aquinas, which he derives while commenting on Dionysius, are also worth emphasizing in order to clarify the immense disparity and causal determination between God and beings (*entia creata*), as well as to indicate possible approaches to exemplify the superiority of *ens commune* and its inherent principle of existence: "... in the Holy Scripture God Himself,

¹²⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 660, § 1.

¹²⁶ "... quod esse commune est in ipso Deo sicut contentum in continente et non e converso ipse Deus est in eo quod est esse" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 660, § 2).

¹²⁷ *De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 660, § 3.

who truly preexists all things, is praised in many ways according to every reason for existing things" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 661, p. 245); "... as is fitting according to God, that all being, according to whatever reason for being, exists supersubstantially in Him, who is the cause of all existing things" (n. 661); "... but He is above all things, as existing supereminently before all things" (n. 661); "... from this that He, according to one unity, infuses being into all things, shining above them without His own defilement" (n. 661); "... and nourishes all living things; and guards, that is, preserves universally all things, both living and non-living; and perfects, that is, brings them to life and due perfection" (n. 662, p. 246); "... in God, who is the cause of both the sun itself and all existents, it must be conceded that the exemplary reasons of all beings preexist according to a supersubstantial unity, which, namely, completely exceeds the unities of substances" (n. 662); "... for God, although He is one in His essence, nevertheless, by comprehends His unity and power, knows whatever virtually exists in Him. Thus, therefore, He knows that diverse things can proceed from Him; hence what He knows can proceed from Himself are called reasons of the intellect" (n. 665, p. 249); "... exemplars are not some things outside God, but in the divine intellect itself certain intellectual reasons of existents, which are the productive of substances, and preexist in God singularly, that is, unitedly and not according to any diversity" (n. 666, p. 249).¹²⁸

In conclusion, given what has been said so far about Aquinas's *ens commune*, I find it somewhat interesting that the concept of *ens commune* brings creation

¹²⁸ "... in sacra Scriptura ipse Deus qui vere praeexistit omnibus, multipliciter laudatur secundum omnem rationem existentium" (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Expositio Sancti Thomae, n. 661, p. 245); "... ut decet secundum Deum, quod omne esse, secundum quamcumque rationem essendi, supersubstantialiter existit in Eo, qui omnium existentium est causa" (n. 661); "... sed Ipse est super omnia, sicut ante omnia supereminenter existens" (n. 661); "... ex hoc quod Ipse secundum unitatem unam, omnibus esse infundit, superlucendo eis absque sui maculatione" (n. 661); "... et nutrit omnia viventia; et custodit, idest conservat universaliter omnia, tam viventia quam non viventia; et perficit, idest ad vitam et debitam perfectionem adducit" (n. 662, p. 246); "... in Deo, qui est causa et ipsius solis et omnium existentium, concedendum est quod praeexistant exemplares rationes omnium entium secundum unitatem supersubstantialem, quae scilicet omnino substantiarum unitates excedit" (n. 662); "... Deus enim, etsi sit in essentia sua unus, tamen intelligendo suam unitatem et virtutem, cognoscit quidquid in Eo virtualiter existit. Sic igitur cognoscit ex Ipso posse procedere res diversas; huiusmodi igitur quae cognoscit ex Se posse prodire rationes intellectuales dicuntur" (n. 665, p. 249); "... Hoc est ergo quod dicit, quod exemplaria dicimus esse non res aliquas extra Deum, sed in ipso intellectu divino quasdam existentium rationes intellectas, quae sunt substantiarum activae, et praeexistunt in Deo singulariter, idest unite et non secundum aliquam diversitatem" (n. 666, p. 249).

and God closer together, who is ultimately proven to be the absolute, conserving, and exclusive cause of the existence of everything, and to whom the path of the metaphysical demonstration of *esse* leads. The inclination towards *esse*, whether one speaks of *esse commune* or *ens commune*, clearly points to the existential metaphysics of Aquinas and those who followed in his footsteps.

Final Remarks

It would not be an exaggeration to maintain that the concept of Kant's "object in general" (*Gegenstand überhaupt*) bears some resemblance to the concept of "common being" in Aquinas. More than that, some relative comparisons can also be demonstrated in Avicenna († 1037) and other medieval thinkers. According to the latter, the subject of metaphysics is the most universal concept of the "third nature" (*natura tertia*), which fulfills its function as a synonym of the "common nature" of being (*natura communis*) before its individuation or merely essential determination. Certain convergences can be indicated markedly with Duns Scotus († 1308), for whom the concept of being comes down to an intelligible apprehension of the most universal nature in the intellect.¹²⁹ The concept of *ens commune* may likely be related to Averroes († 1198), for whom diminished being (*ens diminutum*) is a universal *ratio entis* (i.e. *in genere diminuto generum entis*), that is, an intelligible object of apprehension encompassing the nature of distinctive beings.¹³⁰ As in the approach that Scotus maintained, when the *ratio entis* is expressed in the concrete (*haecceitas*), it can determine

¹²⁹ Cf. Eleuterio Elorduy, "Duns Scoti influxus in Francisci Suárez doctrinam," in *Acta Congressus Scotistici Internationalis Oxonii et Edimburgi: De doctrina Joannis Duns Scoti, Scotismus decursu saeculorum* 4 (Rome: Antonianum, 1968), 307–37; Parthenius Minges, "Suárez und Duns Scotus," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 32 (1919): 334–40. On the differences between Suárez and Scotus, especially in the understanding of prime matter, see Andreas Inaven, "Suárez' Widerlegung des scotistischen Körperlichkeitsform," in *P. Franz Suarez S. J. Gedenkblätter zu seinem dreihundertjährigen Todestag* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1917), 123–46; José F. Sagües Iturralde, "Escoto y la eficacia del Concurso divino ante Suárez," in *Scotismus decursu saeculorum*, vol. 4 of *De doctrina Joannis Duns Scoti* (Rome: Societas Internationalis Scotistica, 1968), 339–74.

¹³⁰ Averroes, "Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libros," in *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis*, Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis 8 (Venetiis: Apud Iunctas, 1562), lib. VIII, s. 6, c. 2, fol. 152v, 152r. For more, see Richard C. Taylor, "Remarks on Cogitatio in Averroes' Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima Libros," in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition: Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198). Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Averroicum (Cologne, 1996)*, ed. Jan Aertsen and

being in the concrete through an individual mode of existence, constituting its intrinsic mode as proper only to its singular nature (*intrinsecus modus naturae individualis*).¹³¹ Scotus adopted the Avicennan concept of *natura tertia* as a starting point for his own metaphysics and the study of reality; however, in order to designate the most universal concept of being, he also used the term *ens omnino communissime*, which seems to assume that the concept of being encompasses all denotations of real beings, excluding, however, those that are self-contradictory, such as chimera and other *impossibilia*.¹³²

Nevertheless, like most of the scholastic thinkers, Duns Scotus also emphasized the order of the second intention (*secunda intentio*), in which the intellect grasps being through the medium of an objective concept (*ens obiectivum*), which reflects the cognitive status of being in the intellect within the intellect's uppermost and undifferentiated nature, likewise with *ens commune* itself.¹³³ For both Duns Scotus and Avicenna, the concept of "nature" denotes the most universal concept, namely the very *ratio entis* of all beings within the entire created realm, despite their diversity and distinctive attributes at the level of reality. The prevailing opinion is that for Scotus, the concept of "nature" is the result of his theory on the objective apprehension of the *intelligible* in the mind (*tantum objective*), that is, by means of the second intention of the knowing intellect. This approach, being entirely dependent on cognition, discovers the fundamental reason for the existence of being in terms of propositional

Gerhard Endress, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies* 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 217–55, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004452756_013.

¹³¹ Suárez invokes Duns Scotus's concept of "diminished being" in disp. XXXI, in which he examines the question of the difference between essence and existence: "... reprehendunt Scotum, quod asseruerit, creaturas habere quoddam esse aeternum, quod est esse diminutum earum, scilicet esse obiectivum seu essentiae in esse cognito" (Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. XXXI, s. 2, n. 1). Furthermore, on the subject of "diminished being" in *Disputationes*, see disp. XX, sec. 1, n. 30; disp. XXXI, sec. 2, n. 1–2; disp. XXX, sec. 15, n. 27.

¹³² Cf. Joannes Duns Scoti, "Quodlibeta III," in *Obras del Doctor Sutil Juan Duns Escoto: Cuestiones cuodlibetales*, ed. Félix Alluntis (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 93–94. See also Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation: Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot* (XIIIe–XIVe siècle), *Épiméthée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 459–62.

¹³³ "Aliquando autem universale accipitur pro re subjecta intentioni secundae, id est, pro quidditate rei absoluta, quae quantum est de se, nec est universalis, nec singularis, sed de se est indifferens, et tale est objectum intellectus directum; non autem est in intellectu subjective, sed tantum objective" (Joannes Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones in Libros IV, V, VI, VII, VIII Physicorum Aristotelis, in Libros Aristotelis De Anima*, vol. 3 of *Opera Omnia* (Parisiis: apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam Editorem, 1891), q. XVII, a. 14, 546a, p. 581).

judgments of the intellect (*secundum rationem*) rather than in terms of real being itself. The *ratio entis* is then transferred from the level of being itself to the level of the intellect, which ultimately discerns *ratio entis* within its own structure of apprehension.

A quite similar comparison can be made with Francisco Suárez. In Suárez's doctrine, which draws on the views of Avicenna, Aquinas, and Scotus, essence is indeterminate in terms of individuality. For these reasons, it is indeterminate in the most universal way, in an objective concept of being and within the noetic order.¹³⁴ This means that as a *ratio entis*, understood metaphysically, essence or *esse essentiae* can refer equally to particular and universal beings, real and possible, finite and infinite, created and even uncreated (i.e. God), but it does so only in relation to existence (*secundum esse*), not in relation to reason itself.¹³⁵ For Suárez, what is knowable (*ens cognitum*), and therefore the object of the knowing reason itself, seems to encompass something more than just real beings, but unites in the concept of *cognoscibile* also beings of reason (*entia rationis*).¹³⁶ Suárez's position seems moderate, because while he denies that there is a single common (essential) concept for real being and the being of reason, the latter can never be known without the former. This means that they share a common cognitive order *secundum rationem*, and although the subject of metaphysics is real being or the concept of real being, the analysis of the being of reason is part of this science.¹³⁷ This could indicate a certain drift

¹³⁴ Cf. John P. Doyle, "Suarez on the Reality of the Possibles," *The Modern Schoolman* 45, no. 1 (1967): 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19674512>.

¹³⁵ Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. I ("De natura primae philosophiae seu metaphysicae"), sec. 1, n. 26.

¹³⁶ Cf. John P. Doyle, "The Borders of Knowability: Thoughts From or Occasioned by Seventeenth-Century Jesuits," in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen: Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Pickavé, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 30 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 644–46 (more 643–58), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110204582.7.643>.

¹³⁷ It is a common knowledge that, in the first paragraphs of *Disputationes*, Suárez argues (disp. I, sec. 1, n. 4–6) for the exclusion of being of reason from the subject of metaphysics, but in the last disputation (LIV) he clearly indicates that it is an object included in metaphysical considerations, and even necessary for the whole of his doctrine of real being. Cf. Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. LIV, prol.). On Aristotle in relation to this, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, lib. VI, 1027b34–1028a3. Suárez also claims that beings of reason possess a second intelligibility. See Francisco Suárez, *De anima*, ed. Carolo Berton, *Opera Omnia*, 2–3 (Parisiis: Apud Ludovicum Vivès, Bibliopolam editorem, 1851), vol. 2, lib. IV, a. 1., n. 4. In the Jesuit schools of the 17th century, thinkers sought to distinguish between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* intelligibility. A being of reason has *extrinsic* intelligibility, while a real being has *intrinsic* one. See John P. Doyle, "Extrinsic Cognoscibility: A Seventeenth-Century Supertranscendental Notion," *The Modern Schoolman* 68, no. 1 (1990): 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19906812>.

towards the concept of *ens commune* in Suárez's theory overall, especially in his metaphysics of cognition (*theoria animae*), though this possibility would require further in-depth research into this area alone.

To date, there is still a noticeable lack of comprehensive studies on Catholic and non-Catholic metaphysics and logic textbooks from the period between the 16th and 18th centuries, including pre-Kantian, Jesuit, Protestant, or strictly Lutheran commentaries and textbooks. They presumably may contain derivative theories or references to *ens commune*, which could contribute something new to the topic. Despite the reluctant, though not entirely fruitless, progress in this field, a comparative scrutiny has yet to be undertaken to render this potentially ultimate concept of being in metaphysics, the *ens commune*, worthy of attention for contemporary and discerning thinkers.

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Thomas Aquinas and Contemplative Acts^{*}

Akty kontemplacji w ujęciu Tomasza z Akwinu

ABSTRACT: That contemplation is an important concept in philosophy and theology seems hard to deny. There have been many debates concerning the nature and place of the contemplative life, for example. But not enough attention has been paid to the precise question of what contemplation is in the first place. It is clearly some sort of mental act, but what makes a mental act contemplative? Does it have a special type of object? This article discusses the views of Thomas Aquinas on the nature of contemplation, in part through engagement with the important recent work of Rik Van Nieuwenhove. First, the article locates contemplation in the context of the foundational contrast between reasoning (*ratio*), on the one hand, and the grasp of truth by the intellect (*intellectus*), on the other. Second, the article asks whether Aquinas understands contemplation to be a special kind of act over and above the classic “three acts” of simple apprehension, judgement, and reasoning, or whether he includes it somewhere within that classic trio while distinguishing it in some other way. Third, after considering and rejecting the idea that what specifies contemplation is that its object is higher truth or highest truth, the article proposes a *relational* understanding of what makes a mental act contemplative: an act is contemplative or not depending on how it is related to other mental acts. Fourth, the article asks how contemplation can be simple. It then concludes with brief discussion of practical applications.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas, contemplation, intellect, *intellectus*, reason, *ratio*, acts of the mind

ABSTRAKT: Kontemplacja jest niewątpliwie istotnym pojęciem w filozofii i teologii. Naturze i umiejscowieniu życia kontemplacyjnego poświęcono już wiele debat, jednak kwestia doprecyzowania, czym w ogóle jest kontemplacja, wymaga jeszcze uwagi.

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Kontemplacja jest oczywiście pewnego rodzaju aktem umysłowym, ale co sprawia, że akt umysłowy jest kontemplacyjny? Czy przedmiot tego aktu jest szczególnego rodzaju? W niniejszym artykule omówiono poglądy Tomasza z Akwinu na temat natury kontemplacji, częściowo w oparciu o niedawno opublikowaną merytoryczną pracę Rika Van Nieuwenhowe. W pierwszej części artykułu kontemplacja rozważana jest w kontekście fundamentalnego kontrastu między rozumowaniem (*ratio*) a pojmowaniem prawdy przez intelekt (*intellectus*). Część druga poświęcona jest zagadnieniu, czy Akwinata rozumie kontemplację jako szczególny rodzaj aktu wykraczający poza klasyczne „trzy akty” prostego pojmowania, osądu i rozumowania, czy też umieszcza ją w ramach tego klasycznego trio, uzupełniając o elementy różnicujące. W trzeciej części, po rozważeniu i odrzuceniu poglądu, że przedmiotem kontemplacji jest wyższa lub najwyższa prawda, autor proponuje podejście do uznania aktu umysłowego jako kontemplacyjnego: akt jest kontemplacyjny lub nie w zależności od tego, jak odnosi się do innych aktów umysłowych. W części czwartej postawione zostało pytanie, w jaki sposób kontemplacja może być prosta. Artykuł kończy się krótką dyskusją na temat zastosowań praktycznych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, kontemplacja, intelekt, *intellectus*, rozum, *ratio*, akty umysłu

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas undoubtedly values contemplation. But what is it that he so values? One way to answer that question is to say that for Aquinas, it is higher or better to engage in reasoning to grasp truth for its own sake than to engage in reasoning for the sake of some action.¹ But it is worth asking whether something else might be at stake as well. Perhaps speaking about what is and is not “contemplative” is not only a way of demarcating one very general class of mental operations from another, but also a way of singling out a particular kind of activity. Is there a specific act that we can properly call “contemplation”?

¹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 182, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html> (hereafter: *ST*), which gives priority to the contemplative life while making important qualifications. For a few studies of Aquinas that focus on this question, see Anthony J. Celano, “The Concept of Worldly Beatitude in the Writings of Thomas Aquinas,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987): 215–26, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1987.0025>; David M. Gallagher, “Moral Virtue and Contemplation: A Note on the Unity of the Moral Life,” *Sapientia* 51 (1996): 385–92; Mary Catherine Sommers, “Contemplation and Action in Aristotle and Aquinas,” in *Aristotle in Aquinas’s Theology*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 167–85.

Aquinas deploys the term in question, *contemplatio*, in a variety of ways.² Even so, there appears to be a core meaning according to which, among the activities that are theoretical rather than practical, only some count as “contemplation.” In this paper, I propose an understanding of this core in dialogue with recent work by Rik Van Nieuwenhove.

Intellectus Rather than Ratio

The analysis that Van Nieuwenhove offers focuses, with good reason, on an interesting phrase that Aquinas uses to talk about contemplation, namely, *simplex intuitus* or *simplex intuitus veritatis*—a simple gazing upon the truth. The phrase appears in the Thomistic corpus infrequently, and its provenance is not clear; it might even be Aquinas’s own coinage.³ In any case, this is our first clue to the nature of contemplation: it is a *simplex intuitus veritatis*.

But what is that? Following Van Nieuwenhove, I will begin by stressing that this simple gazing upon is a matter of *intellectus* rather than *ratio*. Sometimes, Aquinas uses these two words to mark a distinction between kinds of mind or mental capacity. Unlike angels, human beings must usually pass from one thought to another in order to arrive at truth. For example, we probably know that dogs are warm-blooded by having reasoned from the propositions *all dogs are mammals* and *all mammals are warm-blooded*. To mark the fact that we must often engage in reasoning or ratiocination, Aquinas says that the type of mind we have, and the type of thinking capacity we have, is *ratio*. Angels, by contrast, have *intellectus*.

The same two words, however, can indicate not only kinds of mind or kinds of mental power, but also kinds of operations that minds can perform. Although it is indeed a special characteristic of the human mind that it reasons from one thought to another, human thought is not always in motion. Sometimes we pause and hold a thought: either in simple apprehension, as when we grasp what it is to be a triangle or a dog, or in judgment, as when we judge that all dogs are mammals, or that all triangles have internal angles that add up to two right angles. Because these are acts that remain still and take hold of truth,

² See the wide-ranging discussion of the term’s “broad semantic spectrum” in Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2–11. See also Sommers, “Contemplation and Action in Aristotle and Aquinas.”

³ Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 35–37.

rather than acts of moving from one thought to another, Aquinas treats them as *intellectual* acts, acts of *intellectus*, even when performed by humans.⁴

With this distinction in hand, let us return to the point that contemplation is a matter of *intellectus* rather than a matter of *ratio*. There are at least two reasons to attribute this association to Aquinas. First, there is an explicit textual connection. For example, in *ST I*, q. 59, art. 1, ad 1, Aquinas says, “Intellect knows by simple intuition, but reason [*ratio*] by running from one thing to another.”⁵

Here we see the expression *simplex intuitus* clearly linked to the term *intellectus*. In this context, Aquinas is distinguishing between angels and humans, so it might be thought that the text implies that only angels can engage in simple intuition, and therefore perhaps that only angels can engage in contemplation. As noted already, however, Aquinas thinks that even humans can perform acts of *intellectus*—the capacity to do so is not distinctively human, but that does not mean that humans cannot perform such acts, nor does it mean that they are unimportant for us.

Beyond this textual link, the association makes excellent sense on Thomistic principles. The verb corresponding to *intellectus* is *intelligere*, ‘to understand,’ and Aquinas says that *intelligere . . . est simpliciter veritatem intelligibilem apprehendere*, “to understand is simply to grasp intelligible truth.”⁶ What acts of intellect do, then, is grasp truth. Contemplation is intuition, but intuition of truth, and truth is grasped through intellectual operations rather than through ratiocination. Reasoning brings us to where we can grasp truth, but to reason is not of itself to grasp it. This grasping is done instead by either of two acts: by judgement primarily (the “second act of the mind”), or else by simple apprehension (the “first act”).⁷

⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 8; see also St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 15, a. 1, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html> (hereafter: *De veritate*).

⁵ “[I]ntellectus cognoscit simplici intuitu, ratio vero discurrendo de uno in aliud.”

⁶ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 8; see also *De veritate* q. 15, a. 1: “Intellectus enim simplicem et absolutam cognitionem designare videtur; ex hoc enim aliquis intelligere dicitur quod intus in ipsa rei essentia veritatem quodammodo legit.”

⁷ For the idea that truth is grasped primarily through judgment, and only secondarily through simple apprehension, see *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 3; see also *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2. For more on the relationship between contemplation, *ratio*, and *intellectus*, see Gerald P. Boersma, “Divine Contemplation as ‘Inchoate Beatitude’ in Aquinas,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 86, no. 3 (2022): 461–69, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2022.0028>.

A Fourth Act of the Mind?

All this suggests that contemplation is a matter of grasping truth, of *intellectus*, especially in judgement, and that is indeed what I will claim, albeit with an important qualification that will become clear below. But first we must consider a possible contrasting view, suggested (with due caution) by Van Nieuwenhove, who says that “strictly speaking, contemplation does not extend to all intellectual dimensions of the operations of the intellect but only to the simple grasp of truth in which these observations come to fulfillment.”⁸ Going beyond the standard idea that there are three acts of the mind—the two intellectual acts of simple apprehension and judgement, and reasoning—the proposal here is that contemplation may perhaps count as a fourth act of the mind.⁹

The first thing he says in support of this suggestion comes from combining two texts from Aquinas.¹⁰ One is from the prologue to Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, where Aquinas insists that the first act of the mind, simple apprehension, is ordered to the second act of the mind, judgment, and that judgment is ordered to the third act of the mind, reasoning. The other is a passage from *De veritate* q. 14, art. 9, where Aquinas uses the word *intuitus* to claim that the gaze of understanding (*intuitus intellectus*) can be fixed on those things that are present to the understanding.

It seems to me, however, that Van Nieuwenhove over-reads these texts. When Aquinas proposes, in the *De Interpretatione* commentary, that the first act is “ordered to” the second, he explains this by saying that the second cannot happen without the first. When Aquinas asserts that the second act is ordered to the third, he explains this by saying that we need to engage in the third act, reasoning, in order to move from things known to things unknown. But he gives us no reason to think that what the third act leads to is a new (fourth) kind of act. It is perfectly consistent with the text to suppose that the third act, the reasoning process, leads to a new instance of a second act, i.e., a new

⁸ Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 35.

⁹ Van Nieuwenhove, 35–40. Bernhard Blankenhorn expresses skepticism about this proposal in his review of Rik Van Nieuwenhove’s book: Bernhard Blankenhorn, review of *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* by Rik van Nieuwenhove, *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 87, no. 1 (2023): 153–57, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2023.0004>. Paul O’Grady, by contrast, seems more sympathetic to Van Nieuwenhove’s approach; see Paul O’Grady, “Aquinas on Wisdom,” *New Blackfriars* 104, no. 1114 (2023): 737.

¹⁰ Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 37.

judgment that would serve as the conclusion of the reasoning process.¹¹ Further, Aquinas's overall goal in making these remarks is to clarify how the various logical works of Aristotle are related to one another, so as to put in proper context what he, Aquinas, is doing in his commentary on this particular work, the *De Interpretatione*. This does not seem like the kind of discussion where Aquinas would introduce a fourth act of the mind.

As for the text from the *De veritate*, Aquinas's concern in that passage is not contemplation at all, but instead the question of faith and reason, or faith and science. Picking up on a saying of Augustine, Aquinas states that belief concerns things that are not present either to the senses or to the mind and explains "present to the mind" by saying that things are present to the mind if they do not exceed its capacity, which is what makes it possible for the mind to fix its gaze upon them.¹² In context, the point of talking about "fixing of the gaze"

¹¹ "Sicut dicit philosophus in III de anima, duplex est operatio intellectus: una quidem, quae dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia, per quam scilicet intellectus apprehendit essentiam uniuscuiusque rei in seipsa; alia est operatio intellectus scilicet componentis et dividensis. Additur autem et tertia operatio, scilicet ratiocinandi, secundum quod ratio procedit a notis ad inquisitionem ignotorum. Harum autem operationum prima ordinatur ad secundam: quia non potest esse compositio et divisio, nisi simplicium apprehensorum. Secunda vero ordinatur ad tertiam: quia videlicet oportet quod ex aliquo vero cognito, cui intellectus assentiat, procedatur ad certitudinem accipiendam de aliquibus ignotis. Cum autem logica dicatur rationalis scientia, necesse est quod eius consideratio versetur circa ea quae pertinent ad tres praedictas operationes rationis. De his igitur quae pertinent ad primam operationem intellectus, idest de his quae simplici intellectu concipiuntur, determinat Aristoteles in libro praedicamentorum. De his vero, quae pertinent ad secundam operationem, scilicet de enunciatione affirmativa et negativa, determinat philosophus in libro perihermeneias. De his vero quae pertinent ad tertiam operationem determinat in libro priorum et in consequentibus, in quibus agitur de syllogismo simpliciter et de diversis syllogismorum et argumentationum speciebus, quibus ratio de uno procedit ad aliud. Et ideo secundum praedictum ordinem trium operationum, liber praedicamentorum ordinatur ad librum perihermeneias, qui ordinatur ad librum priorum et sequentes."

¹² "Illa tamen praesto esse dicuntur intellectui quae capacitatem eius non excedunt, ut intuitus intellectus in eis figatur: talibus enim aliquis assentit non propter testimonium alienum, sed propter testimonium proprii intellectus. Illa vero quae facultatem intellectus excedunt, absentia esse dicuntur a sensibus animi, unde intellectus in eis figi non potest; unde eis non possumus assentire propter proprium testimonium, sed propter testimonium alienum: et haec proprie credita esse dicuntur." See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Isaiam* cap. 1 l. 1, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>: "Et quia omnis nostra cognitio est a sensibus, inter quos visus potior est et subtilitate et universalitate, quia plures rerum differentias nobis ostendit; ideo transfertur nomen visionis ad alias interiores cognitiones. Circa tertium sciendum, quod non quaelibet visio intellectualis est visio prophetalis: est enim quaedam visio ad quam sufficit lumen naturale intellectus, sicut est contemplatio invisibilium per principia rationis: et in hac contemplatione ponebant

is simply to focus our attention on what is within the capacity of the human mind. There is no reason to think that this passage is pointing us beyond the standard three acts.

Van Nieuwenhove's second reason for speculating that contemplation may be a special, fourth act of the mind involves *ST* II–II, q. 180, where Aquinas is discussing the contemplative life. Van Nieuwenhove points us to art. 6, which he takes to be teaching that “the understanding that arises from the operations of the intellect constitutes the culminating act of contemplation,” an act which “fulfills and crowns the other operations.” He also points us to art. 3, where Aquinas affirms that contemplation is the *ultimus . . . completivus actus*, which phrase Van Nieuwenhove translates as “the last and crowning act.”¹³ And he points to art. 4, where Aquinas distinguishes contemplative operations from others which merely precede and support them. With regard to this last, Van Nieuwenhove puts the point as follows, beginning with a quotation from art. 4 itself:

“Accordingly, it is clear from what has been said [articles 2–4] that four things pertain, in a certain order, to the contemplative life; first the moral virtues [discussed in article 2]; second, other acts exclusive of contemplation (*alii actus praeter contemplationem*) [discussed in article 3]; third, contemplation of the divine effects [discussed in article 4]; the fourth contemplative factor is the contemplation of the divine truth itself.” Here Aquinas calls the crowning act of contemplation “a fourth” factor, which seems to strengthen further the claim that he is keen to distinguish the contemplative act from the other acts of the intellect.¹⁴

So contemplation in a narrower sense would concern divine truth, and in a broader sense it would concern divine effects, but in any case it should be contrasted with the acts discussed in earlier articles of q. 180.

I believe that Van Nieuwenhove is pointing us to important passages, but also that it would go too far to see them as indicating a fourth act of the mind. It is true that in art. 6, Aquinas says that discoursing must cease in order for the soul's powers to be fixed in the gaze of contemplation, and obviously this excludes the third act, reasoning, but it gives no reason to think that the

philosophi summam felicitatem hominis. Est iterum quaedam contemplatio ad quam elevatur homo per lumen fidei sufficienter, sicut sanctorum in via.”

¹³ Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 37.

¹⁴ Van Nieuwenhove, 39. Van Nieuwenhove here uses a modification of the Laurence Shapcote translation; the glosses in square brackets are Van Nieuwenhove's own.

first and second are also excluded.¹⁵ What “arises from the operations of the intellect” might, for all this text tells us, simply be further instances of first or second operations.

As for art. 3, Aquinas there asks whether the contemplative life involves many acts or one, and his answer is that it primarily consists in the act that gives it unity, namely, contemplation, but that it also involves other acts leading up to this. Such acts are, we might say, pre-contemplative rather than contemplative. But does art. 3 shed any light on whether the distinction between pre-contemplative and contemplative acts corresponds to a distinction between, on the one hand, the traditional first, second, and third acts and, on the other hand, some fourth kind of act? I do not see how. Van Nieuwenhove points out that Aquinas contrasts the crowning contemplative act with *acceptatio principiorum* and *deductio principiorum*, i.e., with reception of principles that thought begins from, and with deduction of the truth that is sought. Deduction, of course, is a third act, and any such act will have to be pre-contemplative, for the reason given in the preceding paragraph. *Acceptatio principiorum*, it seems, will take the form of first or second acts, yet from this it follows only that *some* first or second acts are pre-contemplative. This leaves open the possibility that the crowning contemplative acts are themselves first or second acts of the mind.¹⁶ This would require us to ground the pre-contemplative / contemplative distinction in something other than type of mental act (first, second, etc.).

As for art. 4, there are, as Van Nieuwenhove points out, discrepancies between the Leonine text and other readings.¹⁷ To my mind, however, the key point is simply that while Aquinas there does mean to distinguish contemplation from activities that are not themselves contemplative, but instead are in support of contemplation, this does not mean—one way or the other—that an act of contemplation is neither an act of simple apprehension nor an act of judgment, but instead some fourth kind of act. Many acts are indeed *praeter contemplationem*, including many first and second acts of the mind, but this does not mean that all first and second acts are *praeter contemplationem*. The text thus leaves space for the possibility that contemplative acts are first or second acts. Aquinas does indeed—on one manuscript reading, at any rate—refer to a “fourth contemplative factor” [*quartum . . . contemplativum*], beyond pre-contemplative intellectual acts, and this does indeed, as Van Nieuwenhove says, encourage the

¹⁵ See *ST* II–II, q. 180, a. 6: “Cessante discursu, figatur eius intuitus in contemplation unius simplicis veritatis.”

¹⁶ Indeed, Van Nieuwenhove himself points to factors that support this proposal: Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 38.

¹⁷ See Van Nieuwenhove, 39, n. 63.

thought that Aquinas “is keen to distinguish the contemplative act from the other acts of the intellect.”¹⁸ But this sheds no light on where contemplation falls vis-à-vis the traditional three acts, and leaves open the possibility that what distinguishes the contemplative from the pre-contemplative is something else.

In closing this section, I wish to add an important point. Although we have not yet seen what makes contemplative acts contemplative, we have seen that they can arise from complex processes of abstraction, judgement, and reasoning. But this does not mean that they must do so. As Van Nieuwenhove shows in detail, Aquinas has plenty of space for thinking that human beings, including non-philosophers and non-theologians, can enjoy contemplative acts that are infused by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

A Relational Account of What Makes an Act Contemplative

Having learned from, but also to some extent demurred from, Van Nieuwenhove’s analyses, I now wish to turn to my own proposal about what the act of contemplation is for Aquinas. I wish to say that, in a sense, *any* grasping of a truth *can* be a case of contemplation. But it sounds strange to claim that we are engaged in contemplation every single time we grasp truth. Some acts stand out as contemplative rather than non-contemplative; but how do they do so?

One thought is this: perhaps contemplation is an intellectual act of gazing on the *highest* truth, or anyway *higher* truths. This proposal is not unattractive. If someone were thinking about the fact that he had just missed the bus, it would sound strange to insist that he was engaged in contemplation; if we did say that, almost surely it would be because he was thinking about his failure to catch the bus in the light of some higher truths: the fragility of happiness, perhaps, or the nature of time.

¹⁸ Van Nieuwenhove, 39.

¹⁹ Van Nieuwenhove, 147–81. For an argument that non-philosophers and non-theologians can enjoy a kind of contemplation even on the natural level, see Daniel Gutschke, “Is the Individual Subordinate to the City? A Response through a Consideration of Contemplation,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (2025): 76–77. And for discussion of how supernatural gifts improve on even intellectually sophisticated natural contemplation, see Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, chs. 5–7; Adriano Oliva, “La Contemplation des philosophes selon Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 96, no. 4 (2012): 585–662.

There are passages where Aquinas speaks in ways that seem to line up with this, at least to some extent. For example, in his commentary on the third book of Lombard's *Sentences*, d. 35, q. 1, art. 2, qa. 3, Aquinas introduces a distinction between *contemplatio*, by which God is contemplated in himself, and *speculatio*, whereby God is seen in creatures.²⁰ Again, in *ST* II–II, q. 9, a. 4, ad 3, he says that the happiness of contemplation comes not from science but from understanding and wisdom, and that these latter concern divine things.²¹

Nevertheless, Aquinas does not seem to have a strict policy of using the word “contemplation” only for acts that are aimed solely at God, or even only for acts that are aimed primarily or ultimately at God. For example, in *ST* I–II, q. 35, art. 5, Aquinas explores the connection between sadness and contemplation, and in that discussion he speaks of how contemplating worthless things can impede the contemplation of better things.²² There, at least, he is willing

²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis* lib. 3, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 3, co., accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html> (hereafter: *Super Sent.*): “Nihilominus tamen et contemplativus considerat alia, in quantum ad Dei contemplationem ordinantur sicut ad finem, puta creaturas, in quibus admiratur divinam maiestatem et sapientiam et beneficia Dei, ex quibus inardescit in ejus amorem; et peccata propria, ex quorum ablutione mundatur cor, ut Deum videre possit. Unde et nomen contemplationis significat illum actum principalem, quo quis Deum in seipso contempletur; sed speculatio magis nominat illum actum quo quis divina in rebus creatis quasi in speculo inspicit. Et similiter etiam felicitas contemplativa, de qua philosophi tractaverunt, in contemplatione Dei consistit: quia, secundum philosophum, consistit in actu altissimae potentiae quae in nobis est, scilicet intellectus, et in habitu nobilissimo, scilicet sapientia, et etiam objecto dignissimo, quod Deus est.” See also *De veritate* q. 18, a. 2, where Aquinas, in the context of discussing Adam’s pre-fall knowledge, uses the word “contemplation” as if it applied only to direct knowledge of God, i.e., knowledge that does not involve creatures, as if knowledge via creatures (which pre-fall Adam also had) was not contemplation in the true sense.

²¹ *ST* II–II, q. 9, a. 4, ad 3: “Sed aliquantulum beatitudo hominis consistit in debito usu creaturarum et ordinata affectione circa ipsas, et hoc dico quantum ad beatitudinem viae. Et ideo scientiae non attribuitur aliqua beatitudo pertinens ad contemplationem; sed intellectui et sapientiae, quae sunt circa divina.”

²² *ST* I–II, q. 35, a. 5, ad 3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod contemplatio, secundum se, nunquam habet rationem mali, cum contemplatio nihil aliud sit quam consideratio veri, quod est bonum intellectus, sed per accidens tantum, in quantum scilicet contemplatio vilioris impedit contemplationem melioris; vel ex parte rei contemplatae, ad quam inordinatae appetitus afficitur.” For another example, in *ST* II–II, q. 180, a. 4, Aquinas allows that contemplating the divine effects, if ordered to contemplation of God, belongs to the contemplative life; setting aside the question of what belongs to the contemplative life, here he does clearly think of the act of contemplation as being applicable to lower things. See also *De veritate*, q. 15, a. 2, co. “Secundum enim quod ad superiores naturas respicit, sive ut earum veritatem et naturam absolute contemplans, sive ut ab eis rationem et quasi

to allow for “contemplation” of lower things, which would mean that having higher things as one’s object is not required for contemplation.²³

If what makes an act contemplative is not its object, does that mean we should embrace the view that I earlier called “strange,” namely, the view that every act of grasping truth counts as contemplative? No, because there is another way of distinguishing contemplative from non-contemplative acts. Here it is helpful to consider something Aquinas says when commenting on Book X of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Scrutiny into the truth is of two sorts: one consists in seeking after the truth, while the other consists in contemplating truth that is already discovered and known. And this latter is more complete, because it is the end-point and goal of seeking. For this reason, there is more delight in considering truth already known than in seeking for it.²⁴

exemplar operandi accipiens; superior ratio nominatur. Secundum vero quod ad inferiora convertitur vel conspicienda per contemplationem, vel per actionem disponenda, inferior ratio nominatur. Utraque autem natura, scilicet et superior et inferior, secundum communem rationem intelligibilis ab anima humana apprehenduntur; superior quidem prout est immaterialis in seipsa, inferior autem prout a materia per actum animae denudatur.” See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, c. 37, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html>, where he talks about contemplation as if it could concern many things, although the best one is God. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Psalmo* 54, n. 5, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html> (hereafter: *Super Psalmo*), where Aquinas compares various acts of contemplation to the many ways birds fly.

²³ As so often, Aquinas is more terminologically flexible than we may be inclined to think. For two other examples of this flexibility, see *Super Sent.*, lib. 3, d. 34, q. 1 a. 2, co., where Aquinas seems to use *contemplatio* merely as a synonym for theoretical reasoning, and *Super Sent.*, lib. 4, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, qc. 2 ad 1, where he distinguishes a stricter and a wider meaning of “contemplation,” in such a way that the wider meaning can include not only the intellectual act of meditating on divine things, but also reading and prayer.

²⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum* lib. 10, l. 10, n. 13, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html>: “Speculatio veritatis est duplex: una quidem quae consistit in inquisitione veritatis; alia vero quae consistit in contemplatione veritatis iam inventae et cognitae. Et hoc perfectius est, cum sit terminus et finis inquisitionis. Unde et maior est delectatio in consideratione veritatis iam cognitae, quam in inquisitione eius.” (At risk of pedantry, I wish to point out that Litzinger’s translation of the start of this passage is misleading, at least for our purposes: “Contemplation of truth is twofold: one consists in the investigation of truth, the other in the reflection on the truth already discovered and known”; see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, 2 vols. [Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964]). Here are two similar texts: “Cum vero intellectus iam ad formam veritatis pertingit, non cogitat, sed perfecte veritatem contemplatur. Unde Anselmus improprie accipit

It is always worth asking whether something Aquinas says in a commentary is his own view, or merely his view of what the text is saying, but I find it very plausible that Aquinas is not merely reporting here, but endorsing. And what I want to put the focus on is this: Aquinas associates contemplation not with truth that is yet to be discovered, but with truth that is already discovered and known (*iam inventae et cognitae*). There is the seeking of truth, and then, after truth has been found, there is the contemplation of it.²⁵ This sets contemplation apart not in terms of the kind of act it is intrinsically (e.g., simple apprehension or judgment), and not in terms of its object (e.g., buses, God), but in terms of its relation to other mental acts.

So now I can present my interpretation of Aquinas on the act of contemplation, which goes beyond anything I have seen him say explicitly and in detail, but which seems to fit the texts: Contemplation is an act of grasping a truth, but an act of grasping that is rested in, rather than serving as part of a ratiocinative process that leads onward towards some further truth.²⁶ We are already familiar, in the context of distinguishing theoretical from practical reason, with the idea that sometimes knowledge is sought for its own sake, and sometimes for the sake of something other than itself. But it now appears that even within the theoretical realm, we find a distinction analogous to the theoretical/practical distinction. To be sure, knowing something not for the sake of action is already a kind of theoretical knowledge, but I still might want to know it not really for *its* own sake, but only for the sake of discovering some *other* truth. Only when I know it for its own sake, with no further truth sought by means of it, is knowing it a case of contemplation in the full sense.

On the proposed interpretation, then, a contemplative act is not a distinct cognitive or psychological type, except relationally. What makes an act contemplative is how it is related to other intellectual acts, and above all perhaps how

cogitationem pro contemplatione" (*STI*, q. 34, a. 1, ad 2); "Et inde est quod in anima nostra est cogitatio, per quam significatur ipse discursus inquisitionis, et verbum, quod est iam formatum secundum perfectam contemplationem veritatis" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioannem* 1, lect. 1, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>).

²⁵ Perhaps this is the text that Christopher Brown has in mind when he says, "Thomas thinks that, whereas an act of scientific inquiry aims at *discovering* a truth not already known, an act of contemplation aims at *enjoying* a truth already known." See Christopher Brown, "Thomas Aquinas," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed July 15, 2025, iep.utm.edu/aquinas. Kevin White mentions a somewhat similar passage, *ST I-II*, q. 32, art. 2, resp., in his discussion of Aquinas on sources of pleasure; see Kevin White, "Pleasure, a Supervenient End," in *Aquinas and the Nichomachean Ethics*, ed. Kevin White and Tobias Hoffmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 232.

²⁶ See also: *Super Sent.*, lib. 3, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 2.

it is *not* related to other intellectual acts. Focusing on judgment and demonstration will help to make this clear. If one takes the proposition *all men are mortal*, one can fit it into a syllogism, such as *all mortals are composite, all men are mortal, therefore all men are composite*. There is nothing wrong with this, of course, but it involves thinking the thought *all men are mortal* only as part of, and in the service of, some larger discursive process oriented towards some other truth. If, by contrast, one were to grasp the truth *all men are mortal*, hold it, and gaze upon it, resting in that judgement, then one would be engaging in contemplation. What makes the thinking of this thought contemplative, then, is not the nature of the thought as a first act, second act, or some possible fourth act, but instead the fact that this act is not used as a stepping stone for some further act, but instead treated as a resting place. Perhaps it would help to use not the noun “contemplation” so much as the adverb “contemplatively,” and to speak of engaging in intellectual operations contemplatively or non-contemplatively. This would bring out the idea that contemplation is not a distinct type of intellectual operation but instead a distinct way of engaging in an intellectual operation.

And now it may help to return to something we looked at earlier, the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*. Aquinas says that *ratio* is a kind of motion, while *intellectus* is the rest to which that motion tends. He uses this point to argue that *intellectus* and *ratio* are not different powers, because it makes no sense for the motion of one power to tend to the rest of some other power.²⁷ For our purposes, the point is that *intellectus* is a kind of rest. As contrasted with *ratio*, it is an act that one stays with and rests in, rather than moving on from.

It is worth asking how the notion of contemplative rest fits together with Aquinas’s invocation of Pseudo-Dionysius’s three-way distinction between circular, straight, and oblique movements of intellect. Contemplation, in the sense we are concerned with here, is the circular one. But is not circular movement a kind of movement? And are not movement and rest opposed?²⁸

To some extent, one could reply simply by saying that this talk of movement is metaphorical, and the trio of circular/straight/oblique is one of those traditional ideas that Aquinas feels obliged to make sense of. If one is committed in advance to using the language of motion to speak of intellectual operations, then *circular* will clearly be the best option for contemplation. Circular motion does not go anywhere; it remains where it is, rather than moving on. For this reason, one might say, Aquinas uses it as a metaphor for rest.

²⁷ *ST* I, q. 79, a. 8; *De veritate* q. 15, a. 1.

²⁸ *ST* II–II, q. 180, a. 6 and *Super Psalmo* 26, n. 6.

But more can be said. As Van Nieuwenhove points out, contemplative insight can lead to further discursive reason that leads back to the original insight, but now in a deeper and fuller way.²⁹ Perhaps this would, strictly speaking, count as a departure from contemplation: one leaves off contemplating for a while to engage in a more discursive form of thought. But if this is done precisely for the purpose of deepening one's understanding of the object of contemplation, it would seem to belong to contemplation itself in a stronger way than discursive thought usually does. Perhaps this is what Aquinas has in mind in *ST* II-II, q. 180, art. 6, ad 3, commenting on a remark of Richard of St. Victor, when he says that thinking about the accidents that surround a thing counts as a kind of rectilinear or oblique motion, but one that is nonetheless "circuitous"; Aquinas clearly means this to be distinct from "circular," but the similarity, at least on the verbal level, is striking.³⁰ At any rate, one should expect that for rational animals, in this life, contemplative rest can never be fully complete and final: "rest," for us, will inevitably involve repeated return.³¹

To round out the account, it is important to add that for Aquinas, contemplative grasping of truth is related to joy. It is not just that grasping truth is intrinsically enjoyable, although that is certainly the case for Aquinas. It is also because

contemplation is made delightful on account of its object, inasmuch as someone contemplates something that he loves, as happens in the case of corporeal sight, which is delightful not only on account of the fact that seeing is delightful, but on account of the fact that one sees a person that one loves.³²

So contemplation is not merely holding on to truth but holding on to beloved truth, and delighting in it.

²⁹ See Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 38.

³⁰ "[I]llae diversitates motuum quae accipiuntur secundum differentiam eius quod est sursum et deorsum, dextrorsum et sinistrorsum, ante et retro, et secundum diversos circuitus, omnes continentur sub motu recto vel obliquo.... Si vero sit secundum accidentia quae circumstant rem, propinqua vel remota, erit circuitus.... Solum autem immobilitas quam point, pertinent ad motum circularem."

³¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 2, ad 4. See also, importantly, Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 12–16.

³² *ST* II-II, q. 180, a. 7: "Alio modo contemplatio redditur delectabilis ex parte obiecti, inquantum scilicet aliquis rem amatam contemplatur, sicut etiam accidit in visione corporali quod delectabilis redditur non solum ex eo quod ipsum videre est delectabile, sed ex eo etiam quod videt quis personam amatam." See also: *Super Sent.*, lib. 3, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 3, co.

How Is Contemplation Simple?

But how is contemplation *simple*? If contemplation means not just apprehension of truth, but *simple* apprehension of truth, then one might object as follows: judgment, in virtue of its subject-predicate structure, is clearly not simple. Perhaps contemplation must be restricted to acts of simple apprehension.³³

A reason for thinking otherwise can be found in *ST I*, q. 85, art. 4. Aquinas asks whether we can understand more than one thing at a time. His answer, as so often, is “yes and no.” We can only think one thought at a time, but more than one thing can be brought together under that one thought. Taken together with art. 5 of the same question, which talks about composition and division, we can say that for Aquinas, it is possible to understand many things at once, as long as they are held together in the mind as parts of one logical whole. We cannot, say, have two simple apprehensions at once, one of “horse” and one of “warm-bloodedness,” but we can have one thought of the form “horses are warm-blooded.” This is a kind of simplicity, to the extent that simplicity can be had by complex creatures like us.³⁴

This leads to a further consideration. When we think of an act of contemplation, we might first think of some kind of large, all-encompassing vision. Just resting in one small-scale judgment might not seem worthy of being called “contemplation.” Now judgments do, in fact, come in various sizes. We can think merely that Socrates is rational, or we can think that all humans are rational, or that all humans are rational animals, or that all humans are created rational animals. We can think that all humans are rational while all angels are intellectual; or we can think that creatures are arranged in a hierarchy from non-living at the bottom, upwards through plants, animals, humans, and angels. We can, that is, think all of that as one thought. These examples are meant to illustrate that although grasping a truth means grasping *a* truth,

³³ That contemplation is to be contrasted with judgement appears to be the suggestion of Marie-Dominique Chenu in his doctoral thesis; see Carmello Giuseppe Conticello, “De Contemplatione’ (Angelicum, 1920): La thèse inédite de doctorat du P. M.-D. Chenu,” *Revue de Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 75, no. 3 (1991): 393. On the other hand, it may be that Chenu here means only to distinguish the act of contemplating from the act of *forming* a judgment, and does not mean that the content of contemplation must be utterly simple.

³⁴ The following remark by Gerald P. Boersma is on-target: “In accumulating a body of knowledge we proceed discursively, in *modus rationis*; this is a distinctly human mode of proceeding. However, once such knowledge is actually possessed, it is possessed as a whole: indivisible, simple, and one”; see Boersma, “Divine Contemplation as ‘Inchoate Beatitude’ in Aquinas,” 463.

grasping *one* truth, still, that one truth can be a whole encompassing *many* parts. Perhaps this way of understanding contemplation allows for the sort of wide vision that we might be tempted to associate with the word. But such a wide vision is not necessary for contemplation. One can simply contemplate the Pythagorean theorem.

Final Thoughts

I have proposed that to grasp a truth contemplatively is to grasp it and hold fast, rather than using it as a handhold to be released in favor of reaching for some further truth. To contemplate is not to look and move on, but to gaze in love. (“I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go.”) I have also proposed ways of thinking about how such a gaze might be simple. I now conclude with two brief applications.

The first has to do with teaching. In *De veritate* q. 11, a. 4, Aquinas asks whether teaching belongs more to the active life or to the contemplative life. He says in the *corpus* that the act of teaching belongs to the active life—the reason seems to be that its intrinsic goal is helping one’s neighbor. However, he also says, in the reply to the third objection, that the source of teaching—the *principium doctrinae*—is the teacher’s vision, the *visio docentis*.³⁵ Although teaching is not contemplating, teaching is still derived from contemplating. What Aquinas does not say, but which I would now like to add, is this: whenever we are asked to teach something, that gives us the opportunity to revive and refresh our vision. If teaching itself is not contemplation, it can nonetheless be the occasion of contemplation. Reviewing lecture notes can be a contemplative moment. Remembering that might make someone a better teacher, but even if it does not, it helps the teacher keep contemplation in his life, which is not always easy to do.

Second, it is worth asking about the role of contemplation in the life of the academic researcher. The academic research industry pushes us to always be looking for new topics to think about, lecture about, write about. This is not bad in and of itself. But it is worth wondering whether it does not, from time to time, tend to drive out that simple intuition of truth that Aquinas

³⁵ “Ad tertium dicendum, quod visio docentis est principium doctrinae; sed ipsa doctrina magis consistit in transfusione scientiae rerum visarum quam in earum visione: unde visio docentis magis pertinet ad contemplationem quam ad actionem.”

mentions. It is good not only to find more truths and publish them. It is also good to stop and gaze upon them.

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La *triplex via*: un incontro tra l'Aquinate e Hegel?

The *triplex via*: An Encounter Between Aquinas and Hegel?

Triplex via – spotkanie między Akwinatą a Heglem?

ABSTRACT: This article aims to draw attention to the need to compare the proposals of Thomas Aquinas and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel regarding their projects on attaining knowledge of God. These projects have a striking structural similarity, both being various editions of the *triplex via* presented by theologians over the centuries, which is divided into a positive way (*via affirmativa*), a negative way (*via negativa*), and a way of eminence (*via eminentiae*). The presentation of the origins of the threefold way in Greek thought and in the Bible is followed by a brief presentation of Thomas's approach and Hegel's philosophical project. The outline of the two proposals makes it possible to compare them at the end of the text and to offer their theological evaluation. They differ substantially in their understanding of God's transcendence, approach to history, and interpretation of the status of knowledge of God. Awareness of the consequences of adopting different perspectives on the interpretation of the *triplex via* must become the foundation of the contemporary theologian's work. Today, there are many interpretations that implicitly—without extensive discussion—presuppose one approach or the other, and each of them is fundamental to the interpretation applied in theological methodology of the truth about God, His relationship with the created world, and the status of theological statements.

KEYWORDS: Aquinas, Hegel, *triplex via*, theological methodology, knowledge of God

ABSTRAKT: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na potrzebę porównania propozycji Tomasza z Akwinu i Georga Wilhelma Friedricha Hegla co do ich projektów dotyczących poznania Boga. Projekty te wykazują uderzające podobieństwo strukturalne, ponieważ oba są różnymi wersjami potrójnej drogi (*triplex via*) przedstawianej przez teologów na przestrzeni wieków, która dzieli się na drogę pozytywną (*via affirmativa*), drogę negatywną (*via negativa*) i drogę uwznioślającą (*via eminentiae*). Po przedstawieniu źródeł potrójnej drogi w myśli greckiej i Biblii następuje krótka prezentacja podejścia Akwinaty i filozoficznego projektu Hegla. Zarys obu propozycji umożliwi następnie ich porównanie i zaproponowanie ich teologicznej oceny.

Różnią się one zasadniczo w rozumieniu transcendencji Boga, podejściu do historii oraz interpretacji statusu poznania Boga. Świadomość konsekwencji przyjęcia różnych perspektyw interpretacji *triplex via* musi stanowić podstawę pracy współczesnego teologa. Istnieje obecnie wiele interpretacji, które w sposób milczący – bez szerokiego omówienia – zakładają jedno lub drugie podejście, a każde z nich ma fundamentalne znaczenie dla interpretacji prawdy o Bogu, relacji Boga do świata stworzonego oraz statusu twierdzeń teologicznych – stosowanej w teologii metodologii.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, Hegel, *triplex via*, metodologia teologiczna, poznanie Boga

Introduzione

La via triplice (*triplex via*) è un tentativo di descrivere sinteticamente come avvicinarsi a Dio. È stata affinata nella tradizione cristiana come tentativo di articolare adeguatamente l'insegnamento delle Scritture; gli scritti dei filosofi greci hanno peraltro fortemente contribuito al suo sviluppo.

È interessante notare che la sua formulazione finale sembra essere molto simile nel pensiero di Tommaso d'Aquino e nella filosofia di Hegel. Infatti, mentre l'Aquinate parla di un percorso positivo (*via affirmativa*) che deve essere accompagnato da un percorso negativo (*via negativa*) e infine deve essere concluso da un percorso di eminenza (*via eminentiae*), la formula principale della dialettica del pensatore tedesco è spesso resa come tesi (e quindi affermazione positiva) – antitesi (confutazione negativa dell'affermazione presentata) – sintesi (conclusione che tiene conto di ciò che è vero in entrambe le posizioni). Sebbene un tale riassunto della dialettica non sia opera dello stesso Hegel, ma di uno dei suoi discepoli, fu rapidamente adottato come descrizione adeguata del percorso di ascesa allo Spirito assoluto proposto dal filosofo berlinese.

Questa somiglianza è del tutto casuale? Qual è la differenza tra i due progetti filosofici e teologici? È possibile trovare qualcosa in comune tra loro? Quale dei due è più adatto a esprimere la teologia cristiana? Queste sono le domande che vorrei affrontare in questo testo¹.

¹ Per quanto ne so, non esiste alcun tentativo sistematico e approfondito di confrontare la *triplex via* di San Tommaso e quella di Hegel. Il presente testo è solo un tentativo di segnalare in modo sintetico la necessità di affrontare questo argomento nella ricerca. Tale ricerca richiede certamente la presentazione di un contesto molto più ampio e la proposta di una metodologia più precisa di quella che sono stato in grado di proporre per questo testo. Sul confronto tra San Tommaso e Hegel, cfr. ad esempio: Emilio Brito, *Dieu et l'être d'après Thomas d'Aquin et Hegel*, *Théologiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991); Bernhard Lakebrink, *Perfectio omnium perfectionum: Studien zur Seinskonzeption*

La mia presentazione sarà composta da quattro parti. In primo luogo, cercherò di presentare brevemente le origini della *triplex via*, poi presenterò a turno l'interpretazione dell'Aquinate e di Hegel, infine tornerò alle segnalate domande. Auspico che questo piano di presentazione permetta di formarci un'opinione sulle possibili convergenze tra la riflessione dell'Aquinate e quella di Hegel.

Genesi della *triplex via*

Il primo autore a proporre la triplice via a Dio fu Albino di Smirne, filosofo platonico vissuto nel II secolo dopo Cristo e maestro del famoso medico antico Galeno². È interessante notare che egli trasse ispirazione da diversi filoni della tradizione filosofica greca. Nel formulare i principi del percorso negativo, l'*aphaïresis*, con cui iniziò, fece riferimento alla geometria euclidea; per quest'ultima, un punto è qualcosa di indivisibile e senza dimensioni. Pertanto, come si giunge a un punto astraendo dalle sue tre dimensioni, così si arriva a Dio spogliandolo dei comuni predicati sensoriali, uno per uno. Il secondo passaggio della sua descrizione, la via positiva dell'*analogia*, ha trovato ispirazione nella *Repubblica* di Platone³; all'interno del dialogo c'è un passo che accosta Dio al sole: come il sole è causa di comprensione per la vista, così Dio è causa di comprensione per la mente. Infine, l'ultimo passo dell'*hyperochē* ha il suo punto di partenza nel *Simposio* di Platone⁴, dove troviamo una descrizione, dai toni mistici, dell'ascesa nell'ordine del piacere della bellezza: dalla bellezza alla mente, attraverso la bellezza all'anima fino alla bellezza nella vita morale e nella legge.

Poco più tardi, sia Celso (seconda metà del II secolo) che Massimo di Tiro (retore e filosofo medioplatonico, vissuto anche lui nella seconda metà del II secolo dopo Cristo) riprenderanno questo schema trasformandolo leggermente. In seguito troviamo una descrizione dei tre passi anche in due frammenti di scritti di Plotino, ciascuno in un ordine leggermente diverso⁵.

bei Thomas von Aquin und Hegel, Studi Tomistici 24 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984).

² In questa parte mi ispiro liberamente della presentazione dello sviluppo della triplice via in: Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 7–25.

³ Cfr. Platone, *Repubblica*, 6.508–509.

⁴ Cfr. Platone, *Simposio*, 210–212.

⁵ Cfr. Plotino, *Enneads*, 5.3.14; 6.7.36.

Un punto di partenza biblico

Le idee dei filosofi platonici non potevano non interessare i cristiani. Come ricordiamo, la Scrittura ci parla di “vedere Dio”. Tuttavia, i testi non sono affatto univoci. Alcuni sembrano indicare l'impossibilità di vedere Dio. Il Signore risponde a Mosè, che chiede di vedere la gloria del Signore: “Ma tu non potrai vedere il mio volto, perché nessun uomo può vedermi e restare vivo” (Es 33,20). Anche il Nuovo Testamento sottolinea che la luce di Dio supera ciò che l'uomo può raggiungere: “il Re dei re e Signore dei signori, il solo che possiede l'immortalità e abita una luce inaccessibile: nessuno fra gli uomini lo ha mai visto né può vederlo” (1 Tm 6,15-16. Cfr. Gv 1,18; 1 Gv 4,12). D'altra parte, però, Gesù promette di vedere Dio come ricompensa per le persone dal cuore puro: “Beati i puri di cuore, perché vedranno Dio” (Mt 5,8). Allo stesso modo, san Paolo parla esplicitamente della nostra futura conoscenza di Dio: “Adesso noi vediamo in modo confuso, come in uno specchio; allora invece vedremo faccia a faccia. Adesso conosco in modo imperfetto, ma allora conoscerò perfettamente, come anch'io sono conosciuto” (1 Cor 13,12). Passi simili si trovano in san Giovanni: “Carissimi, noi fin d'ora siamo figli di Dio, ma ciò che saremo non è stato ancora rivelato. Sappiamo però che quando egli si sarà manifestato, noi saremo simili a lui, perché lo vedremo così come egli è” (1 Gv 3,2. Cfr. Gv 14,21; Ap 22,3-4).

Potremmo riassumere tutto questo in due affermazioni: (1) la Scrittura ci parla della visione diretta di Dio e ne sottolinea il potere trasformativo (ossia, tale visione ci rende simili a Dio); (2) questa visione non annulla la trascendenza di Dio, il quale rimane in definitiva incomprensibile⁶.

Il ruolo chiave dello Pseudo-Dionigi

Per il trasferimento dell'approccio tripartito dei platonici al cristianesimo, Pseudo-Dionigi e la sua *Teologia mistica* svolgeranno un ruolo fondamentale. Si tratta di una tappa talmente cruciale nella formazione di questo approccio che vale la pena di passare direttamente ai testi più importanti. Ecco il capitolo II della *Teologia mistica*: “Come adorare colui che è la causa di tutte le cose e unirsi a lui”.

⁶ Cfr. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Maître spirituel: Initiation*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 2017), 46-50. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 35.

Noi preghiamo di trovarci in questa tenebra luminosissima e mediante la privazione della vista e della conoscenza poter vedere e conoscere ciò che sta oltre la visione e la conoscenza con il fatto stesso di non vedere e di non conoscere – questa, infatti, è la maniera di vedere veramente e di conoscere – e lodare soprasostanzialmente l'Essere soprasostanziale escludendo le caratteristiche di tutti gli esseri; come fanno coloro che costruiscono una statua al naturale, staccando tutto ciò che si sovrappone alla pura visione della figura nascosta, e mediante questo lavoro di eliminazione manifestano in sé e per sé la bellezza occulta. Ma bisogna, io credo, celebrare le negazioni in maniera contraria alle affermazioni. Infatti, noi facevamo quelle affermazioni cominciando dalle più alte e passando attraverso quelle di mezzo fino a giungere alle estreme. Ora, invece, eliminiamo queste partendo dalle estreme e ascendendo fino alle più importanti, affinché scopertamente conosciamo quella ignoranza velata da tutte le cose conosciute in tutti gli esseri e vediamo quella caligine soprasostanziale nascosta da tutta la luce che brilla negli esseri⁷.

Ciò che vale la pena sottolineare in relazione al concetto di Pseudo-Dionigi può essere raccolto nelle seguenti osservazioni⁸.

1. Punto di arrivo: l'inconoscibilità razionale di Dio. Per Pseudo-Dionigi, Dio è assolutamente inconoscibile in modo concettuale e razionale.
2. Primato della via mistica dell'unione sulla speculazione. Il cammino negativo nella sua versione più pura è mistico e non concettuale – consiste nell'ascesa nell'oscurità silenziosa di Dio. A causa della nostra debolezza, può assumere, in un contesto catafatico, la forma di negazioni simboliche o concettuali. Nella sua realtà più profonda, tuttavia, è l'opposizione polare alle affermazioni e alle negazioni razionali⁹.
3. Due tappe del cammino. Il cammino verso Dio proposto dallo Pseudo-Dionigi è essenzialmente un cammino in due fasi: negazione e affermazione,

⁷ Dionigi Areopagita, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Piero Scazzoso and Enzo Bellini (Milano: Bompiani, 2009), 607.

⁸ Cfr. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 24–25.

⁹ Un'altra interpretazione è quella di Lossky, secondo il quale la via negativa non è solo un cammino verso l'unione mistica, ma anche una speculazione dogmatica sulla trascendenza divina. Vanneste, invece, vede tre momenti che costituiscono un insieme: l'abbandono dei termini affermativi e la logica delle negazioni successive (*aphairesis*), la non-cognizione (*agnosia*) e l'unione finale (*henosis*) con Dio. Cfr. Rocca, 17. Altri autori ancora (ad esempio Jones) indicano due teologie mistiche: una sarebbe l'ascensione mistica, l'altra avrebbe un livello di ascesa discorsivo. Rocca, 18–19. Secondo Rocca, la teologia negativa è per lo Pseudo-Dionigi prima di tutto mistica, non concettuale, e lei appare all'interno della teologia catafatica come un dono di un altro piano.

più precisamente: negazione basata su Dio come “al di là” trascendente di tutta la realtà e affermazione basata su Dio come causa di tutte le cose¹⁰.

Tommaso riprenderà in seguito la tesi dell'assoluta inconoscibilità divina per affermare cose fondamentalmente diverse da quelle che intendeva dire lo Pseudo-Dionigi. Egli cercherà una versione della via negativa che si inserisca nella sua teologia anche positiva¹¹. Inoltre, trasformerà lo schema in due parti dello Pseudo-Dionigi in uno schema in tre parti¹². Il testo che san Tommaso utilizzerà per giustificare la divisione in tre parti si trova anche nell'opera *I nomi divini*:

Inoltre, bisogna ricercare in che modo noi conosciamo Dio che non è né intelligibile, né sensibile e nulla di dō che possiede l'essere. Non è dunque vero dire che noi conosciamo Dio non dalla sua natura, in quanto non è conoscibile e supera ogni ragione e intelligenza, ma dall'ordine di tutti gli esseri, in quanto proposto da lui e contenente alcune immagini e similitudini dei suoi esemplari divini, secondo le nostre forze, ascendiamo ordinatamente verso dō che supera tutte le cose nella privazione e nella eccellenza e nella causa di tutte le cose? (*I nomi divini*, VII, 3)¹³.

L'interpretazione dell'Aquinate

Tommaso d'Aquino è stato probabilmente il più grande maestro dell'interpretazione della *triplex via*. Ecco la sua lucida e condensata descrizione di ciò che possiamo imparare per mezzo della ragione naturale. Tommaso riassume magistralmente nella *Summa Theologiae* la sua posizione che altrove è presentata in modo molto più esteso:

Risposta: la nostra conoscenza naturale trae origine dal senso; e quindi si estende fin dove può esser condotta come per mano dalle realtà sensibili. Ora, mediante le realtà sensibili il nostro intelletto non può giungere sino al punto di vedere

¹⁰ Lo Pseudo-Dionigi unisce il percorso della negazione e dell'eminenza in un unico insieme. Per lui, la trascendenza è la ragione della negazione. Per questo motivo, a volte si parla di negazione elevante (*hyperochike aphairesis*). Rocca, 22.

¹¹ Tommaso attenua molte delle tesi dello Pseudo-Dionigi. Ad esempio, la tesi che Dio è innominabile spiega che nessuno può presentare un essere divino con una conoscenza perfetta, o che Dio è innominabile in quanto esistente al di sopra di tutto (ma non come causa di tutto). Rocca, 29. Cfr. Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 59.

¹² Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 25.

¹³ Dionigi Areopagita, *Tutte le opere*, 481.

l'essenza divina, poiché le creature sensibili sono effetti di Dio che non adeguano la potenza della loro causa. Quindi mediante la conoscenza delle realtà sensibili non si può avere la piena conoscenza della potenza di Dio, e per ciò stesso neppure quella della sua essenza. Ma siccome tali realtà sono effetti dipendenti dalla loro causa, ne segue che per mezzo di esse possiamo essere condotti sino a conoscere di Dio *se esista*, e a conoscere altresì ciò che a lui conviene necessariamente come a causa prima di tutte le cose, eccedente tutti i suoi effetti. Quindi noi conosciamo di Dio la sua relazione con le creature, che cioè egli è la causa di tutte, e la differenza esistente tra queste e lui, che cioè egli non è nulla di quanto è causato da lui; e che ciò va escluso da lui non già perché egli sia mancante di qualche cosa, ma perché tutto le supera (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 12, corp.)¹⁴.

Notiamo la struttura di questo capolavoro di sintesi¹⁵, in quattro elementi:

1. Caratteristiche generali della cognizione naturale.
2. Riferimento della cognizione naturale all'essenza di Dio, insieme all'indicazione del (motivo del) suo carattere limitato (ovvero la trascendenza della potenza della causa prima).
3. Definizione di ciò che possiamo conoscere di Dio (se esiste, gli attributi di Dio: "ciò che a lui conviene necessariamente come a causa prima di tutte le cose, eccedente tutti i suoi effetti").
4. Breve caratterizzazione dell'ascesa conoscitiva – nell'ambito della teologia naturale – a Dio (*triplex via*).

L'ultimo elemento è incentrato sulla causa prima del mondo creato. È la relazione causale che si rivela essere la base di un procedimento teologico di ascesa conoscitiva a Dio. Cosa possiamo conoscere di Dio come causa prima? Fondamentalmente che:

- (1) Egli è la causa di tutte le cose,
- (2) tutte le cose si distinguono da Lui in quanto Egli non è uno dei loro effetti,
- (3) Dio si distingue dalle cose causate non perché manchi di qualche perfezione, ma perché trascende tutte le cose causate in perfezione.

Queste affermazioni possono essere intese come il fondamento di un'ascesa epistemologica verso le perfezioni divine. Prendiamo l'esempio della bontà di Dio.

¹⁴ La traduzione italiana: Tommaso d'Aquino, *La Somma Teologica: Prima Parte*, trans. Frati Domenicani (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2014), 149.

¹⁵ Nell'analisi di questo testo seguo: Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 75–77.

Sulla base del fatto che egli è la causa prima di tutte le cose buone del mondo creato, possiamo affermare che: 1. Dio è buono.

Ma comprendiamo che egli si distingue dall'intero mondo creato nel modo più radicale. Pertanto, questa prima affermazione dovrebbe essere immediatamente accompagnata dalla seconda: 2. Dio non è buono (come le creature).

Ebbene, comprendiamo che questa seconda affermazione non vuole respingere l'affermazione sulla bontà di Dio, ma vuole sottolineare che la bontà di Dio deve essere intesa come radicalmente diversa da quella che conosciamo nel mondo creato. Questa differenza non significa mancanza di perfezione, ma eminente sovrabbondanza. In questo modo, siamo condotti all'affermazione finale: 3. Dio è la bontà ultima.

Notiamo il cambiamento dell'aggettivo in sostantivo. Questa semplice operazione linguistica sarà utilizzata dalla teologia classica per sottolineare la differenza radicale delle perfezioni attribuite al Dio increato in base alla nostra conoscenza della creazione.

Questo triplice schema si riflette nella costruzione della *Summa Theologiae*. Il primo passo è stato compiuto da Tommaso nella seconda questione, in cui sostiene l'esistenza di Dio come causa prima. Quando si considerano le proprietà ontologiche delle cose che non sono intelligibili di per sé – essere mosse, contingenti, ecc. – si deve presupporre l'esistenza di un ente primo, che è la causa del mondo mobile e contingente. A partire dalla terza questione, Tommaso considererà ciò che deve necessariamente appartenere a Dio come causa prima, essendo Egli al di sopra di tutte le cose da Lui create.

Poiché il punto di partenza è l'accettazione di Dio come causa prima, il secondo passo è il tentativo di stabilire per negazione in che modo la causa prima si distingua dal suo effetto. La causa prima non è l'effetto, quindi tutto ciò che caratterizza la condizione ontologica dell'effetto deve essere rimossa da Dio. Il tema della semplicità divina nella questione terza permette di fare questo passo.

Infine, nella terza fase, articolata nelle questioni da 4 a 11 della *Prima Pars*, l'intenzione positiva del passo negativo deve essere rivelata portando tutta la sostanza positiva dell'effetto nella causa. In tal modo potremmo dire che la causa è l'effetto in modo più perfetto, perché possiede in sé come fonte, in un modo che trascende ciò che è disponibile per l'effetto, tutte le sue perfezioni.

Vediamo che il movimento triplice articola formalmente l'intelligibilità della causa sulla base del suo riflesso nell'effetto¹⁶. Il ruolo della negazione non è espressione di una consapevolezza agnostica del fatto che la conoscenza rimanga

¹⁶ Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 77.

imperfetta e frammentata e nemmeno una manovra per collocare Dio al di là della nostra conoscenza: fa parte di un metodo per mettere in evidenza come Dio possa essere mostrato correttamente dal lato dei suoi effetti. Nell'accettare l'esistenza di una causa, dobbiamo riconoscere che essa non è uno degli effetti, ma possiede tutte le sue perfezioni in modo più perfetto di essi. La negazione di Tommaso è di questo tipo.

Le tre vie nella *triplex via* sono ancora più chiaramente articolate nel testo che troviamo nel *Commento alla Lettera ai Romani* (si tratta di un commento a Rm 1,19: "poiché ciò che di Dio si può conoscere è loro manifesto; Dio stesso lo ha manifestato a loro"):

Pertanto occorre sapere che, riguardo a Dio, c'è qualcosa che è interamente sconosciuto nella vita presente, cioè che cosa Dio sia. Perciò lo stesso Paolo, ad Atene, trovò un'ara con l'iscrizione: Al Dio ignoto (At 17,23). E questo perché la conoscenza dell'uomo ha inizio dalle cose che gli sono connaturali, ossia dalle creature sensibili, che non sono adeguate a rappresentare la divina essenza. Tuttavia da queste creature l'uomo può ottenere una triplice conoscenza di Dio, come dice Dionigi nel libro *I Nomi Divini* (cap. 7, lez. 4). Secondo un primo modo, mediante la causalità. Infatti, poiché queste creature sono difettose e mutevoli, è necessario ricondurle a un principio immobile e perfetto. E così si conosce che Dio esiste. Secondo un altro modo, mediante la via dell'eccellenza. Infatti non tutte le cose sono ricondotte a un principio primo, come a causa propria e univoca, in quanto l'uomo genera l'uomo, ma come a causa comune ed eccedente. E in questo modo si conosce che Dio sta al di sopra di qualsiasi cosa. Secondo un terzo modo, mediante la via della negazione. Perché, se è una causa eccedente, nulla di quanto si trova nella creatura può competergli, così come neppure il corpo celeste si può chiamare propriamente pesante o leggero, caldo o freddo. E in questo modo chiamiamo Dio immobile e infinito e quant'altro viene detto in questo modo. Ora, questa conoscenza fu loro infusa mediante il lume della ragione, come si dice in *Sal* 4,7: «Molti dicono: "Chi ci farà vedere il bene? Risplenda su di noi Signore la luce del tuo volto"»¹⁷.

Come elemento di curiosità, vale la pena di ricordare che nell'opera di Tommaso lo schema appare espresso in ordini molto diversi. Gregory P. Rocca ha

¹⁷ Tommaso d'Aquino, *Lettera ai Romani*, vol. 1 of *Commento al Corpus Paulinum (Expositio et lectura super epistolas Pauli Apostoli)*, trans. Battista Mondin (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2005), 121, nos. 114–15.

calcolato che si possono individuare 5 combinazioni su 6 possibili, non solo una disposizione eminenza-negazione-causazione. I due ordini più comuni sono:

- causalità – negazione – eminenza;
- causalità – eminenza – negazione.

I commentatori scelgono più spesso il primo di questi, anche se va sottolineato che quest'ordine non è predominante rispetto al secondo nell'opera di Tommaso¹⁸. Questo probabilmente dimostra che, per Tommaso, ciò che era più importante nell'ordine di questi elementi era la loro interconnessione e interdipendenza. Questa tesi può essere suggerita per quanto riguarda le opere più tardive: nel *Commento alle Sentenze* e nel *Commento alla Trinità di Boezio*, egli sembra di vedere ancora i singoli percorsi come vie separate per arrivare alla verità su Dio¹⁹.

Parlando del metodo presentato dall'Aqinate, vale la pena di notare diversi aspetti:

- (1) La negazione è strettamente legata, sia in Tommaso che precedentemente nello Pseudo-Dionigi, all'eminenza. Il desiderio di eminenza è il motivo principale della negazione²⁰.
- (1) Per Tommaso, la negazione diventa possibile e significativa solo nella misura in cui è fatta sulla base di un'asserzione. Questo è un punto importante: se non lo si riconosce, si tende a cadere in interpretazioni che peccano di agnosticismo per quanto riguarda la possibilità di arrivare a una vera conoscenza nella scienza di Dio (approcci di questo tipo: David Burrell, Herwi Rijkhof, "di Dio sappiamo che è, non possiamo dire nulla su ciò che è", la scienza di Dio sarebbe solo la grammatica del linguaggio con cui parliamo di Dio)²¹.
- (2) La triplice via è, per Tommaso, un modo di articolare la dipendenza causale del mondo da Dio. Può essere intesa come un tentativo di far emergere l'intelligibilità della relazione causa-effetto tra Dio e il mondo.
- (3) Se notiamo questo, capiamo che la triplice via è destinata a sostituire una definizione che ci permetterebbe di conoscere Dio e di definire perfettamente ciò che è. L'effetto ha una certa somiglianza con la causa. Anche se non ci permette di raggiungere l'essenza di Dio, sulla sua base è possibile proporre una conoscenza vera, anche se indiretta, della causa. Questo tipo di conoscenza non è una conoscenza approssimativa, come se avesse qualche

¹⁸ Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 50.

¹⁹ Rocca, 51.

²⁰ Rocca, 66, 68.

²¹ Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 74–75.

carezza nella sua intelligibilità. La negazione come uno dei passaggi non abolisce, in fondo, la somiglianza con la causa, ma permette solo di metterla adeguatamente in evidenza: Dio non è nell'effetto come è in sé²².

Per Tommaso, la teologia negativa non è un passo fuori dai confini della teologia razionale, ma un momento all'interno di un approccio positivo che serve a correggere le debolezze della teologia catafatica²³. La teologia apofatica dell'Aquinate non è priva di tracce dell'approccio mistico che caratterizza l'opera dello Pseudo-Dionigi, ma è soprattutto parte di un metodo teologico che cerca di usare il linguaggio piuttosto che abbandonarlo²⁴.

La *triplex via* di Hegel

Nel caso di Hegel, il ruolo dello schema presentato si estende alla totalità del suo progetto di filosofia dialettica. Devo quindi delineare brevemente il suo intero progetto²⁵.

Hegel inizia la sua filosofia da dove Kant l'ha lasciata. Kant ha costruito un muro tra la conoscenza esperienziale e la "cosa-in-sé". Non esclude che al di sopra del livello di conoscenza basato sull'esperienza sensoriale (conoscenza fenomenica delle cose come ci appaiono) ci possa essere una conoscenza della cosa-in-sé (conoscenza di come le cose esistono realmente). Comunque non escludeva che fosse possibile arrivare alla cosa-in-sé solo con un appello al dovere – l'imperativo categorico. Era convinto che con il ricorso alla conoscenza esperienziale non si è in grado di risolvere responsabilmente alcuni problemi legati alla cosa-in-sé.

²² Velde, 77.

²³ Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 72.

²⁴ Per un confronto di base di questi due approcci vedere: Michał Paluch, "Pseudo-Dionysius and Thomas Aquinas: Two Languages, the Same Purpose," *Syn/thesis*, no. O (2013): 145–55.

²⁵ In questa e nella prossima sezione riprenderò le riflessioni presentate in forma leggermente più abbreviata in: Michał Paluch, "Prawda objawiona? Propozycja podejścia zawarta w konstytucji *Dei Verbum*," *Karto-Teka Gdańska*, no. 1(12) (2023): 9–12, <https://doi.org/10.26881/kg.2023.1.01>. Introduzioni concise al pensiero di Hegel, utili nel contesto delle nostre deliberazioni: John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 106–19; Roger Scruton, *From Descartes to Wittgenstein: A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (New York: Harper&Row, 1981), 165–80; Keith Ward, "Whatever Happened to Hegel," in *God and the Philosophers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 89–101.

Anche Hegel è interessato a trovare un'idea per arrivare alla cosa-in-sé. Tuttavia, vuole arrivarci per una via diversa. Per raggiungere la cosa-in-sé dobbiamo superare il nostro punto di vista particolare. Per dirla in modo figurato, quando il treno inizia a muoversi, dal punto di vista del passeggero del treno la stazione si allontana, dal punto di vista della persona sul binario il treno si allontana. Chi ha ragione? Dobbiamo trovare un punto di vista oggettivo al di sopra di entrambe le parti che ci permetta di valutare correttamente la questione. Per Hegel ciò significa superare la relazione soggetto-oggetto nella nostra cognizione.

Ma cosa significherebbe? Hegel si riferisce qui alla dialettica. Dialettica non è un termine nuovo. Per Kant, la dialettica era la tendenza della ragione a cadere in contraddizioni. Egli presentava queste contraddizioni sotto forma di antinomie – la pura ragione teoretica non era in grado di rispondere responsabilmente alle domande se esistesse o meno un essere assoluto, se il mondo avesse o meno un inizio, se le persone fossero libere o meno. Tutte queste grandi questioni filosofiche dovevano essere concluse, secondo Kant, in modo deliberatamente paradossale: la pura ragione teoretica non poteva propendere per una delle due parti. Per Hegel la dialettica non finisce qui: essa sarà piuttosto il processo di ascesa attraverso le contraddizioni verso la cosa-in-sé e, di conseguenza, verso la verità assoluta.

Conosciamo molto bene la descrizione di base di questa ascesa, già menzionata dall'inizio, che, peraltro, non è la proposta di Hegel stesso, ma di uno dei suoi discepoli: tesi – antitesi – sintesi. Si tratta di abolire le contraddizioni in una sintesi – unità – di ordine superiore. Secondo la logica tradizionale e il suo principio di non contraddizione, se a una tesi A corrisponde – nello stesso momento e sotto lo stesso aspetto – la sua negazione -A, allora abbiamo semplicemente una contraddizione che non può essere trascesa. Secondo Hegel, quando a una tesi A corrisponde la sua negazione -A, entrambe le proposizioni possono comunque essere incluse – abolite (di solito usa il verbo *aufheben* in questo contesto), nella loro sintesi, la proposizione B. Naturalmente, in relazione a questa proposizione B, probabilmente prima o poi apparirà una certa sua negazione -B, che sarà abolita nella proposizione C che comprende entrambe le tesi. In questo modo possiamo ascendere a una certa proposizione Z o Ω , che sarà un sapere assoluto – un sapere assolutamente vero, che comprende in sé tutte le contraddizioni esistenti.

Per dare un esempio di questo processo in cui le contraddizioni vengono abolite, possiamo considerare alcune conversazioni in cui iniziamo come rappresentanti di opinioni contrastanti e alla fine arriviamo a una posizione che, rispetto al punto di partenza, comprende ciò che è vero in entrambe le posizioni iniziali. Notiamo allo stesso tempo che in questo tipo di processo passiamo dalla

molteplicità (delle nostre opinioni) all'unità, e inoltre – se ricordiamo l'intero processo che deve terminare al punto Z o Ω – da ciò che è parziale, e quindi relativo e finito, a ciò che è intero, e quindi a ciò che è assoluto e infinito.

Consideriamo l'ultima proposizione: la dialettica nell'edizione di Hegel era una proposta di nuova soluzione ai problemi della filosofia che affliggevano i pensatori di tutti i tempi – il rapporto tra unità e molteplicità, la relazione tra l'Assoluto e il relativo. Non sorprende, quindi, che la descrizione presentata del movimento dialettico sia diventata il principale strumento sistematico applicato da Hegel per illuminare e interpretare tutti i più importanti problemi e campi della filosofia.

Ciò che ho presentato, tuttavia, non è ancora il cuore della questione. Infatti, ciò che sta veramente sullo sfondo della dialettica di Hegel, come sua base ultima e giustificazione più importante, è la descrizione della vita dello Spirito assoluto. In larga misura, è proprio per questo motivo che l'argomento è sembrato e si è rivelato così incredibilmente attraente e stimolante.

Come immagina Hegel la vita dello Spirito assoluto?

Secondo Hegel, all'interno del soggetto assoluto, che egli chiama Spirito assoluto, esiste un processo interiore che consiste in due elementi: l'auto-differenziazione e l'auto-identificazione. Si può riassumere come segue²⁶. Un essere che non ha determinazione è il nulla. Ma ogni determinazione è possibile solo attraverso la differenza. Perciò, per poter parlare di essere, deve esserci una differenza – la differenza tra la determinatezza dello Spirito e il suo “dove”, che senza questa determinatezza sarebbe il non-essere. Per dirla in modo leggermente

²⁶ Il primo abbozzo su questo argomento è stato pubblicato nel 1807: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Leipzig: Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, 1907), 481–506. Il filosofo ha presentato uno studio più approfondito e sviluppato su questo argomento 20 anni dopo in: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986). Sull'aspetto trinitario del pensiero di Hegel si veda: Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott: Eine trinitarische Theologie*, 3rd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997), 136–41; Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, “Hegels Trinitätslehre: Zur Aufgabe ihrer Kritik und Rezeption,” *Theologie und Philosophie* 52, no. 3 (1977): 378–407; Jörg Splett, *Die Trinitätslehre G.W.F. Hegels*, Symposium 20 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Karl Alber, 1965); Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 19 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 547–59. Tra gli importanti progetti teologici degli ultimi decenni sviluppati con riferimento a Hegel figurano: Piero Coda, *Dalla Trinità: L'avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia*, Per-corsi di Sophia 1 (Roma: Città Nuova, 2011); Bruno Forte, *Trinità come storia: Saggio sul Dio cristiano* (Milano: Edizioni Paoline, 1985); Eberhard Jüngel, *Gott als Geheißnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

diverso: lo Spirito assoluto deve diventare un oggetto per se stesso. Questo è l'auto-differenziazione dello Spirito assoluto.

Ma non dimentichiamo che lo Spirito assoluto è un'unità: la differenza appena menzionata – tra il “da dove” indefinito e l'espressione definita dello Spirito – deve quindi essere trascesa. È nel trascendere la differenza che emerge dall'auto-differenziazione che consiste l'autoidentificazione dello Spirito. Questo processo specifico di uscita e ritorno (*exitus – reditus*) è completato dall'amore.

Il processo descritto può essere riassunto in modo ancora più sintetico: lo Spirito ha bisogno della differenza per diventare un essere, ma questa differenza deve essere trascesa per rimanere uno Spirito. L'auto-differenziazione e l'auto-identificazione sono quindi solo due momenti reciprocamente condizionanti della vita interiore dello Spirito.

Naturalmente, intuiamo senza difficoltà perché il processo che Hegel propone abbia due momenti correlati. Essi corrispondono infatti alle due processioni in Dio descritte per secoli dalla teologia cristiana. La prima di queste – la processione del Verbo eterno – è, in fondo, legata all'espressione, alla determinatezza. La seconda, la processione dello Spirito Santo, è legata all'amore e conduce all'unità.

Tuttavia il passo più audace e notevole di Hegel, che ha provocato un terremoto sia in filosofia che in teologia, è ancora davanti a noi. Si tratta dell'accostamento o meglio dell'identificazione del processo che descrive la vita interiore dello Spirito assoluto con la storia umana. Infatti, secondo Hegel, il processo interiore che si svolge “dentro” lo Spirito assoluto si svolge anche nella storia del mondo o attraverso di essa. Lo Spirito si esprime nella storia per elevarsi al di sopra della differenza tra il mondo e sé stesso attraverso l'amore.

Con questa interpretazione sembrava che la filosofia avesse guadagnato una prospettiva di pensiero che avrebbe permesso finalmente di mettere in relazione più convincente Dio e il mondo, la speculazione astratta e la storia (intesa come la conoscenza dei fatti).

Un unico triplice schema interpretativo per la coscienza umana, la vita di Dio e la storia, non poteva anche non interessare i teologi cristiani, compresi quelli cattolici. Perché? Le ragioni sono molte. Proviamo a ricordare quelle decisive.

1. Innanzitutto, notiamo che *l'interpretazione di Hegel era essenzialmente trinitaria*. Lo schema di pensiero dialettico da lui proposto era né più né meno che un tentativo di trarre conclusioni dalla descrizione della vita interiore dello Spirito assoluto. Ciò significava che esisteva un modello metafisico trinitario che permetteva di interpretare l'intera realtà (ricordiamo che Hegel cercò di passare in rassegna tutti i grandi campi della filosofia per mostrare come la dialettica permettesse di sintetizzarli). A questo proposito, Hans Küng scriveva già negli anni '70 che la proposta di Hegel era una sorta di miracolo intellettuale accaduto

al cristianesimo²⁷. Qui, nella modernità critica nei confronti del cristianesimo, è apparso un pensatore con un enorme campo di riflessione e un'influenza straordinaria, che ha creato un quadro essenzialmente trinitario per la filosofia e la teologia. Secondo Küng, il cristianesimo non deve trascurare e ignorare una tale opportunità; per questo motivo scrisse che in teologia non c'era possibile un ritorno prima di Hegel (*kein Zurück hinter Hegel*)²⁸.

2. Sembrava anche che l'interpretazione di Hegel permettesse di "recuperare" la storia per la teologia. Cioè, dare un'interpretazione della storia tale che la storia cessasse di essere qualcosa di aggiunto, esistente, come sembrava essere nelle interpretazioni precedenti, accanto a Dio, e diventasse parte della sua vita interiore. Sembrava che grazie a Hegel fosse finalmente possibile arrivare a una riflessione teologica che corrispondesse al termine biblico "Emmanuele": Dio cessava di essere un Dio lontano e diventava "Dio con noi".

3. L'interpretazione hegeliana della Trinità ha permesso di pensare all'Incarnazione in modo tale che l'accento – *in linea con la sensibilità luterana* – *cadde sulla croce*: l'"autodeterminazione" finale di Dio compiuta sulla croce si è rivelata un punto di svolta nel processo di auto-differenziazione e auto-identificazione dello Spirito assoluto. Un simile quadro sistematico di lettura della fede cristiana si rivelò molto auspicabile e attraente nel XX secolo, soprattutto nel mondo dell'esegesi protestante. Perché? Permetteva, durante le tempestose discussioni sulla demitologizzazione del cristianesimo suscitate da Rudolf Bultmann, di prendere le distanze dal problema della storicità della risurrezione. Secondo il modello hegeliano di riflessione su Cristo, nulla impedisce di interpretare la risurrezione in modo puramente spirituale, poiché l'accento, il punto di svolta nello sviluppo dello Spirito assoluto, cade sulla croce.

Sembra però che, nonostante tutte queste caratteristiche che a molti teologi sono sembrate importanti vantaggi della proposta hegeliana, sia stato e sia tuttora difficile assumerla come quadro filosofico per costruire un'interpretazione cristiana contemporanea. L'accostamento con la proposizione di Tommaso d'Aquino può aiutarci a capire perché.

²⁷ Cfr. Hans Küng, *Menschwerdung Gottes: Eine Einführung in Hegels theologisches Denken als Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Christologie* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1970), 346. A proposito, c'è un'altra possibile interpretazione cristiana della dialettica hegeliana: se ci si aggrappa alla vita la si perde, se la si perde la si guadagna. Se si insiste su un concetto, lo si perde, se si lascia andare il concetto afferrato, si arriva a una comprensione più profonda. Küng, 373–81. Una introduzione popolare – il BBC podcast di Melvyn Bragg, "Hegel's Philosophy of History," Radio Broadcast, BBC Radio 4 – In Our Time, May 26, 2022, 52 minutes, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0017k8w>.

²⁸ Küng, *Menschwerdung Gottes*, 296, 562, 578.

L'Aquinate contro Hegel: alcune differenze fondamentali

La formulazione della triplice via dall'Aquinate e l'idea di ascesa dialettica di Hegel sembrano avere una fonte comune. È il punto di partenza platonico o piuttosto neoplatonico. Del resto, non è un caso che l'importanza dello schema *exitus – reditus* sia stata sottolineata nel corso dei secoli per comprendere la struttura dell'architettura delle opere dell'Aquinate, e che Hegel sia stato talvolta definito uno degli ultimi grandi neoplatonici della cultura occidentale. Va inoltre sottolineato che, nel caso di entrambi gli autori, si tratta di un percorso intrapreso con l'intenzione di sfruttare appieno le possibilità della nostra ragione. Entrambi sono talvolta indicati come rappresentanti del razionalismo in filosofia, anche se naturalmente questa descrizione non significa la stessa cosa per ciascuno di loro (lo vedremo nel punto 3).

In ogni caso, mentre la formula esterna dei ragionamenti può sembrare simile, il loro contenuto ci porta in direzioni molto diverse.

1. Trascendenza di Dio. La differenza più importante riguarda il rapporto tra Dio e il mondo creato. La *triplex via* interpretata da Tommaso d'Aquino è formulata in modo da non dimenticare nemmeno per un attimo che Dio è una causa prima radicalmente trascendente, non riducibile in alcun modo al livello dei suoi effetti. Come è noto, il suo modo di pensare la relazione tra Creatore e creatura troverà una espressione famosa nella sua dottrina della relazione asimmetrica che doveva articolare che Dio è assolutamente esterno all'insieme delle creature. Secondo la proposta di Hegel, lo Spirito assoluto si realizza, cioè prende coscienza di sé, nella storia: ha bisogno del mondo per diventare pienamente Dio. Parlare di trascendenza e immanenza perde di significato, Dio cessa di essere trascendente, almeno in senso classico.

Vale la pena di rendersi conto che l'abbandono della trascendenza in senso forte (Dio radicalmente diverso dal mondo che ha creato) non è in armonia con l'insegnamento dei concili della Chiesa indivisa del primo millennio. È interessante notare che H. Küng, entusiasta dell'apertura del cristianesimo all'hegelianesimo, notava chiaramente tutto questo; egli sosteneva, tuttavia, che era tempo di porre fine a una teologia che aveva un piede nell'antichità e l'altro nella modernità e che era necessario mettere entrambi i piedi nella modernità, riformulando e rivedendo l'insegnamento dei concili dell'antichità. Da autore intelligente, ha sostenuto che, sebbene ciò comporti un revisionismo teologico, la riforma dell'insegnamento della Chiesa sulla trascendenza dovrebbe essere fatta... in nome della tradizione cristiana, che così potrebbe essere meglio

compresa ed espressa²⁹. In altre parole, dovremmo abbandonare la tradizione dei concili per il bene di questa tradizione: questa è l'argomentazione hegeliana per l'hegelianesimo.

2. L'approccio alla storia. Sembrava che l'interpretazione dialettica di Hegel avesse scoperto la storia e le avesse conferito una dignità straordinaria, grazie al fatto di averla resa parte della vita interiore dello Spirito assoluto. Si scoprì, però, che l'identificazione della vita interiore dello Spirito assoluto con la storia aveva un prezzo molto alto. Ci troviamo infatti di fronte alla seguente alternativa:

- o la vita interiore dello Spirito assoluto è un processo necessario e, di conseguenza, i processi storici diventano parte di un tutto necessario (e questa sembra la direzione presa da Hegel nella sua sintesi); allora la storia viene epurata dalla libertà e l'Incarnazione cessa di essere una libera iniziativa di Dio, ma diventa parte del processo necessario per arrivare all'autocoscienza dello Spirito assoluto;
- oppure (in questa direzione andranno alcuni teologi ispirati da Hegel³⁰) cerchiamo di mostrare che la storia non è soggetta alla necessità; allora, nella misura in cui manteniamo ancora la tesi dell'identificazione della vita interiore dello Spirito assoluto con la storia, troveremo che lo Spirito assoluto nella sua auto-differenziazione e auto-identificazione crea la sua natura sulla base di una libera decisione.

Entrambe le interpretazioni sono inaccettabili alla luce della teologia classica ispirata ai Concili universali del primo millennio che san Tommaso ha articolato in modo eccellente. In questa prospettiva, le azioni divine nella storia della salvezza non sono dettate dalla necessità (Dio non ha bisogno del mondo per essere se stesso, crea il mondo e lo porta a compimento nella libertà), e Dio è il Dio trino non per sua decisione, per quanto libera, ma “naturalmente”, semplicemente per il fatto di essere se stesso. Contrariamente alle frequenti e ingiuste accuse, tale prospettiva non sottovaluta il ruolo della storia della salvezza. Lo status contingente – libero – della storia della salvezza è la base per ammirare il provvidenziale piano divino di salvezza liberamente realizzato (cfr. l'argomentazione *ex convenientia*)³¹.

3. Olismo. Molto meno riconosciuto, ma comunque discutibile, sembra essere il problema dell'interpretazione olistica. È sempre entusiasmante abbracciare

²⁹ Cfr. Küng, 539.

³⁰ Una preziosa panoramica delle posizioni dei teologi ispirati da Hegel si trova in: Küng, 647–70.

³¹ Una presentazione di base dell'argomento *ex convenientia*: Michał Paluch, “Czy Doktor anielski nie doceniał Chrystusa?,” *Teologia w Polsce* 3, no. 1 (2009): 97–109.

l'intera realtà con una soluzione razionale. Sembra di possedere la chiave che ci permette di rispondere a tutte le domande, di abbracciare l'intera realtà con la nostra riflessione. Purtroppo, l'olismo è un altro nome per indicare la tentazione gnostica. A tal proposito, Hegel considerava la sua filosofia come un passo avanti rispetto al cristianesimo, come l'espressione della riconciliazione finale tra l'Illuminismo e il Cristianesimo. Questa riconciliazione dovrebbe avvenire secondo la logica dell'ascesa dialettica, cioè dopo la tesi cristiana e l'antitesi illuminista, si dovrebbe arrivare alla sintesi hegeliana come soluzione a un livello superiore che integra in modo riconciliante le due posizioni precedenti.

L'approccio cristiano cattolico ortodosso articolato da san Tommaso insisterà sempre con umiltà sul fatto che la sintesi finale non è da noi raggiungibile in questa vita. In altre parole, "da questo lato", resteremo per sempre nella fase di articolazione attenta di tutte e tre le fasi della triplice via, senza l'ambizione di dissolverle in un'unica visione finale dell'insieme. Inoltre, dobbiamo riconoscere che alcune verità – e mi riferisco ovviamente a quelle più straordinarie e intime riguardanti Dio, come la Trinità – non sono accessibili alla ragione e possono essere aperte a noi solo attraverso la magnanimità divina. Non saranno mai il risultato di una mera conoscenza razionale, ma anche di adorazione, amore e fede. Né possiamo aspettarci che in questa vita, da "questa parte", saremo in grado di abbracciare in modo soddisfacente con la nostra "presa" cognitiva (*Begriff*) l'intera realtà. Alcuni problemi – come per esempio quello dell'*unde malum* (da dove viene il male) – devono rimanere aperti, non chiusi. Ciò è dovuto anche al fatto che la nostra cognizione è soggetta ai limiti del tempo e non abbiamo ancora raggiunto la nostra destinazione finale. L'olismo cerca impazientemente di rispondere a domande che dovrebbero piuttosto rimanere aperte. Una buona teologia non dovrebbe avere paura della risposta: "non lo sappiamo". Il razionalismo di Tommaso d'Aquino è di questo tipo.

Conclusioni

Le analisi presentate in questo testo sono solo una prima – e piuttosto sommaria – bozza di un argomento che richiederebbe sicuramente uno studio molto più sistematico e approfondito. Il confronto tra due autori, le cui opere sono separate da più di mezzo millennio di storia dello sviluppo del pensiero umano, richiede sempre un ampio contesto. In questo abbozzo ciò è stato possibile in misura piuttosto limitata.

In attesa di studi più approfonditi, vale comunque la pena sottolineare l'importanza della questione sollevata. Il tema della triplex via è profondamente

radicato nella riflessione filosofica e nella tradizione teologica. Le sue origini possono essere ricercate nell'opera di Platone, anche se è stata la corrente di pensiero medio-platonica (Albino di Smirne) a dare forma unitaria a questa idea di raggiungere la conoscenza su Dio. Seguendo le ispirazioni bibliche e cercando una descrizione adeguata dell'esperienza mistica, Pseudo-Dionigi ha dato alla *triplex via* la sua forma "canonica" – per le successive riflessioni intraprese all'interno della teologia cristiana. San Tommaso d'Aquino sistematizzò la riflessione su questo modo di raggiungere Dio, rendendola un elemento strutturale e fondamentale della riflessione teologica, che oggi chiamiamo teologia naturale. Hegel, partendo da un punto di vista completamente diverso, idealistico, ha fatto di questa figura di pensiero il nucleo della sua interpretazione dell'intera realtà, aprendo così la strada allo sfruttamento della *triplex via* come importante risorsa della teologia trinitaria.

Nonostante la somiglianza strutturale ed esteriore, il modo in cui san Tommaso ed Hegel articolano la triplice via è fundamentalmente diverso. La sintesi presentata nel testo sopra riportato – certamente incompleta – delle differenze tra le proposte dei due pensatori evidenzia divergenze molto profonde nella comprensione di tre ambiti fondamentali dell'interpretazione teologica: la trascendenza di Dio, l'approccio alla storia e la comprensione delle nostre possibilità di giungere alla visione (in/completa) della conoscenza divina sulla realtà. Mentre il modo di pensare di Tommaso permette di far emergere la trascendenza, intesa in senso forte, di un Dio increato, il carattere contingente dell'intera opera della creazione e la natura parziale (*ergo* apofatica) della nostra conoscenza di Dio, tanto l'interpretazione di Hegel si allontana dall'interpretazione classica – concepita alla luce dei concili del primo millennio – della trascendenza di Dio, abolisce la casualità degli eventi della storia della salvezza e dà l'illusione gnostica di raggiungere non solo la conoscenza su Dio, ma addirittura la conoscenza di Dio stesso.

Le differenze segnalate nelle interpretazioni filosofico-teologiche qui discusse non sono ovviamente nuove. Sono regolarmente ricordate – in particolare dai tomisti – da quasi due secoli. A volte, tuttavia, passano così tanto in secondo piano nelle discussioni specifiche da scomparire dal campo visivo dei teologi. In occasione dell'800° anniversario della nascita di Tommaso d'Aquino, vale quindi la pena ricordare che le visioni presentate stabiliscono due punti di partenza e contesti molto diversi per lo sviluppo e la pratica della teologia. La conoscenza delle loro diverse dinamiche e implicazioni deve essere uno degli elementi più importanti di un cantiere teologico contemporaneo.

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Thomas Aquinas on the Cognitive Nature of Emotions

Tomasz z Akwinu o poznawczej naturze emocji

ABSTRACT: The article presents the concept of emotions in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In particular, the article focuses on the issue of the cognitive character of emotions and it attempts to answer the question: is the cognitive element constitutive of emotions? For this purpose, the article presents the debate of contemporary researchers of Aquinas' legacy on this topic and the arguments of both sides of the dispute. The first part of the article shows Aquinas' general concept of emotions, as well as his outline of the taxonomy of emotions. The following parts of the article consider the problems of the object of emotions and the intentionality of emotions. In particular, the article deals with the question of the mutual relationship between emotions and cognition. It is also an attempt to answer the question of how Aquinas explains the relationship between emotions and cognition. The second part of the article discusses the problem of the object of emotions as their efficient and formal cause. This part addresses the issue of how the object of emotions is the source of their nature and identity. The third part of the article is a reconstruction of the most important trends in the contemporary debate about the cognitive interpretation of Aquinas' theory of emotions.

KEYWORDS: emotions, cognition, intentionality, Thomas Aquinas, Medieval Philosophy

ABSTRAKT: W artykule przedstawiono koncepcję emocji w filozofii Tomasza z Akwinu. W szczególności skoncentrowano się na zagadnieniu poznawczego charakteru emocji i próbowano odpowiedzieć na pytanie: czy element kognitywny jest konstytutywny dla emocji? W tym celu zrekonstruowano m.in. debatę współczesnych badaczy spuścizny Akwinata na ten temat i zaprezentowano argumentację obu stron sporu. W pierwszej części artykułu przedstawiono ogólną koncepcję emocji w ujęciu Akwinata oraz zarys taksonomii emocji. Kolejne części poświęcono problematyce przedmiotu emocji i intencjonalności emocji. W szczególności skupiono się na kwestii wzajemnego stosunku emocji i poznania. Próbowano też odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jaki sposób Akwinata

wyjaśnia tę relację. Dlatego w drugiej części omówiono problem przedmiotu emocji jako przyczyny sprawczej i formalnej emocji. Skoncentrowano się na zagadnieniu, w jaki sposób przedmiot emocji jest źródłem charakterystyki i tożsamości emocji. W trzeciej części artykułu zrekonstruowano najważniejsze stanowiska współczesnego sporu o kognitywistyczną interpretację teorii emocji u Akwinaty.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: emocje, poznanie, intencjonalność, Tomasz z Akwinu, filozofia średniowieczna

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas presented his concept of emotions (*passiones*) in the part *Prima secundae* of *Summa Theologiae*, an unprecedented work with Aquinas' unique lecture on the theory of emotions against a broad metaphysical, anthropological, ethical and theological background.¹ *Prima secundae* presents the foundations of the theory of emotions and is a philosophical treatise on their nature,² while *Secunda secundae* deals with human affectivity and how virtue and grace bring human affectivity to perfection.

Due to the fact that numerous works have been published to date reconstructing both the general concept of emotions and a more detailed outline of Aquinas' taxonomy of emotions, I will only touch upon these issues in the first part of the article. The following parts of this paper will revolve around the problems of the object and intentionality of emotion. I will mainly focus on the correlation of emotion and cognition. I also intend to address the question of how Aquinas explains the correlation between emotions and cognition. The question is far from being trivial insofar as Thomas firmly separates acts of cognitive power from acts of appetitive power (emotions are, among other things, acts of the latter).³ Thus, in the second part of the article, I discuss the problem of the object of emotions as their efficient and formal cause, concentrating on the issue of how the object of emotions is the source of the nature and identity

¹ One can point to similar works by medieval authors discussing the theory of emotion against a broad psychological, anthropological and theological background, such as: William Peraldus, *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus* or Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologiae*. See Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 2.

² It should be mentioned that this article will only deal with *passiones* – the movements of the sensual appetitive power. Although Aquinas also described *affectiones* (*affectiones*), due to their purely mental nature, they are not the subject matter addressed in this text.

³ Christopher A. Bobier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 86, no. 2 (2022), 239–40, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2022.0023>.

of emotions. The third (last) part of the article is a reconstruction of the main trends in the contemporary dispute over the cognitive interpretation of Aquinas' theory of emotion. The central question of this dispute is whether the cognitive element (e.g., belief) is constitutive of the nature of emotion. I conclude the article with an attempt to situate Aquinas' views on the correlation between emotions and cognition against the background of a broader medieval debate over the intentional (and cognitive) nature of appetitive acts.

Definition of Emotions and Their Taxonomy

Passio is, according to Thomas Aquinas, an act of the sensitive appetite accompanied by a bodily change (e.g., a physiological reaction). Emotions are triggered by their objects (more accurately, apprehensions of objects), which are the efficient cause of emotions.⁴ Consider a simple example: a wolf encountered during a walk in the woods, apprehended as “evil” (*imaginatio mali*), evokes the emotion of fear, which manifests itself in an accelerated heartbeat (*motus appetitivae virtutis sensibilis*).⁵

Two moments can be distinguished in *passio*. The first, the moment of receptivity, involves stimulation by a sensory object. While *passio* is a sensation, an “act” and “being acted upon,”⁶ it is also, as Peter King points out, “a capacity for being in a given psychological state—rather than something the soul ‘does.’”⁷ In other words, *passio* is a sensation, a passive state in which the subject is motivated by the object to act. Receptivity in *passio*, then, is that moment in which the cognitive powers grasp an object (e.g., a wolf) while apprehending that object in *imaginatione boni vel mali*.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 22 a. 3 s.c.: “Sed contra est quod dicit Damascenus, in II libro, describens animales passiones, passio est motus appetitivae virtutis sensibilis in imaginatione boni vel mali. Et aliter, passio est motus irrationalis animae per suspicionem boni vel mali.” For the purposes of this text, I translate the term *passio* used by Aquinas as “emotion,” because this term better captures the intentional and cognitive aspect of *passio* in contrast to the term “feeling.”

⁵ However, translating *passio* as “feeling” or “emotion” can be misleading insofar as, on the grounds of Thomistic psychology, it is possible to distinguish such feelings, which are not *passiones*, but *affectiones*.

⁶ Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 35.

⁷ Peter King, “Emotion,” in *The Oxford handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 210–11.

The second moment of *passio* is “movement towards some *telos*.”⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas argues that this is the most characteristic aspect of emotion, since even subjects without receptivity or passivity (he refers here to God) possess *appetitus* (acts of will), but do not possess *passio*.⁹ An object that delights or arouses desire will cause the subject experiencing the emotion to make a “motion” aimed at obtaining the object. An object that evokes repulsion or horror will also cause a “motion,” but an opposite one in the form of fleeing, escaping, dodging, etc. At the same time, the “motion” should be interpreted broadly, as both “intentional” and “behavioral.”

Emotions, according to Thomas, fall into two basic categories, belonging to two different sensory appetitive powers:¹⁰ the concupiscible power (*concupiscibilis*) and the irascible power (*irascibilis*). This division comes from Aristotle, who wrote in *De anima* that the reactions of the concupiscible power are desires for objects recognized as pleasurable, and the reactions of the irascible power are desires to defeat opponents and repel harmful things.¹¹ Basically, the *concupiscibilis* pursues what corresponds to nature and shuns what is harmful to nature. The *irascibilis* encompasses the emotions that follow the repulsion of an attack against something recognized as harmful to nature;¹² this power apprehends the good as the effort a person must make in obtaining good or avoiding evil. St. Thomas explains that the *concupiscibilis* includes higher order emotions, and the *irascibilis* power includes lower order emotions, i.e., *irascibilis* emotions already presuppose *concupiscibilis* emotions, since “irascible” emotions have their origin in “concupiscible” ones. For example, my fear of the wolf has its origin in the emotion of attachment to my own life and health.¹³

Aquinas distinguishes 11 emotions: love, hatred, concupiscence, disgust, delight and pain (belonging to the concupiscible power); hope, despair, fear, daring and anger (belonging to the irascible power).¹⁴

⁸ Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 34.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia* q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1: “Potentia quae in Deo ponitur nec proprie activa nec passiva est, cum in ipso non sit nec praedicamentum actionis nec passionis, sed sua actio est sua substantia; sed ibi est potentia per modum potentiae activae significata. Nec tamen oportet quod filius sit actus vel factus, sicut nec oportet quod proprie sit ibi actio vel passio.”

¹⁰ See Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 50.

¹¹ Aristotle, *De anima* I.5, 83; IV.4, 56–57.

¹² Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 50–51.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 25 a. 1; see Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 52.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 22–48; see Artur Andrzejuk, *Uczucia i sprawności: Związek uczuć i sprawności w Summa Theologiae św. Tomasza z Akwinu* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza “NAVO,” 2006), 31–50.

Intentional Concept of Emotion: The Object of Emotion

Although emotions are rooted in objects (e.g., a wolf can be an object of fear), a material object is not, however, what actualizes emotions directly. While one person may feel fear of the wolf, perceiving it as a threat, another person experiences pleasure in the awe of the wolf – a beautiful and wild animal encountered in its natural habitat. Martin Pickavé cites a similar example: an emotional reaction to a spider. On the one hand, the spider may evoke emotions of disgust and fear, but on the other hand, the biologist may react with cognitive fascination or curiosity.¹⁵ In other words, what actualizes the “movement of the sensitive appetite” is the apprehension of an object as good or harmful, i.e. the intentional apprehension of an object in some aspect of it. In *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*, Thomas adds that intentions are evaluative judgments that enable one to know the object in its relation to one’s own judgments and preferences.¹⁶

The intention is then contrasted with sensitive appetite (*sensibilis appetitus*), whose response can be twofold: either in the form of a movement tending *toward* the object (if the object is pleasant), or in the form of a movement tending *away from* the object (if it is harmful).¹⁷ In this sense, the object of emotions is their intentional cause. Since the sensitive appetite is an act of bodily power, emotions necessarily involve bodily change. Thomas writes: “Some bodily change therefore always accompanies an act of the sensitive appetite.”¹⁸ For example, when one encounters a wolf in the woods, the emotion of fear may express itself in a physiological bodily response in the form of pupil dilation, increased muscle tension, accelerated heart rate, etc.¹⁹

¹⁵ Martin Pickavé, “Emotion and Cognition in Later Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Adam Wodeham,” in *Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4; I–II, q. 22, a. 2, ad. 3; *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*, q. 26, a. 4; Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 222.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* q. 26, a. 1; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 21, a. 1.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 20, a. 1, ad. 2.

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that not all medieval philosophers believed that emotions were a bodily phenomenon. Peter Auriol, for example, on the one hand agrees with Aquinas that emotions are acts of sensory appetitive power, but on the other denies that they involve a bodily change. John Duns Scotus, on the other hand, held the position that emotions are instantiated in the will (intellectual power). He thus rejected the notion that human emotions are in any way similar to animal acts of lower appetite. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas therefore essentially reduces emotion to two movements: 1) the intentional and behavioral movement of the appetitive power in relation to the object of emotion, and 2) movement in the form of a bodily change. The first movement is the formal element of the emotion, the second is its material element.²⁰ It is worth mentioning that although Aquinas included both types of movement when characterizing the emotions, there is an ongoing dispute among modern scholars over the question of which “movement” is more characteristic of the emotions themselves. The dispute boils down to the question: what is the correlation between the formal element of emotion and its material (somatic) element? Peter King has argued that physiological change is the *sine qua non* of emotion. All emotions are emotions precisely because they are “felt” in the body.²¹ Accelerated heartbeat is inherent and inalienable in the emotion of fear, as is accelerated breathing and muscle tension (commonly referred to as “butterflies in the stomach”) in the case of the emotion of love or desire. King concludes that fear or desire would not be the same emotions if they were stripped of their bodily element.

Nicholas E. Lombardo interprets the movement that is part of an emotion as a movement of the appetitive power in relation to the object of the emotion. He argues that the moment of an intentional movement toward the object, i.e., the intentional apprehension of the object as an object of appetite or disgust, is most characteristic of emotion, since the moment of desire is common to *passio* and *affectio*. Lombardo is reluctant to agree with King’s interpretation because, as may be assumed, defining emotions through their bodily aspect makes the status of *affectiones* as emotions questionable.²² Particularly noteworthy in this debate, however, is the voice of Christopher A. Bobier, who emphasized that emotions are not directly movements of the sensitive soul that cause bodily change. Rather, they are movements of the sensitive soul mediated by bodily change. He wrote that it is the creature – not the soul of the creature – that is the subject experiencing the emotions.²³

The debate over the nature of emotions in Aquinas’ philosophy opens up a broader perspective on the problem of the relation of cognition to appetite.

described *affectiones* alongside *passiones* – movements of the apprehensive appetitive power, which are quite devoid of a bodily component. See the discussion on this topic in Pickavé, “Emotion and Cognition in later Medieval Philosophy,” 49.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 44, a. 1.

²¹ King, “Emotion,” 211.

²² Artur Andrzejuk, “The Problem of *affectiones* in the Texts of Thomas Aquinas,” *Rocznik Tomistyczny* 11 (2022), 181–92, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7539221>.

²³ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 223.

It is important to note that emotions – on the grounds of Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy – are not bodily “sensations,” moods or movements of the soul and body. On the contrary, insofar as their classification is based on the type of object actualizing them, they are intentional. A wolf, cognized through the senses, will evoke fear only if it is recognized as a “predator,” or more broadly as a “threat.” This means that the very first cognitive contact with the object of the emotion – the sensitive perception of the object of the emotion – includes intention and its evaluation. Robert C. Roberts points out that sensitive perception can evoke emotion only if it is a “rationally determined perception,” i.e. when I look at the object evoking the emotion, the “look” already includes judgments, beliefs, and norms.²⁴

On the other hand, however, the following difficulty arises: in what sense – on the grounds of Thomistic anthropology – can evaluative judgment accompany sensitive perception? In other words, does the intentionality of emotions determine that emotions are types of cognition or have a cognitive component?²⁵

These questions will be addressed in the next part of the article.

Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Concepts of Emotions

In the course of the debate over the characterization of emotions in Aquinas’ view, two opposing positions have developed. The supporters of the “non-cognitive” position claim that emotions are caused by cognitive elements, yet remain separate from them.²⁶ Representatives of this position include Shawn D. Floyd and Christopher A. Bobier. The supporters of the “cognitive” position: R. C. Roberts, Thomas Ryan and M. Pickavé insist to the contrary that cognitive

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, describing in *Summa Theologiae* the role of reason in sensitive cognition, emphasized the special importance of *vis aestimativa* and its relation to higher cognitive powers. However, the subject of the correlation between abstract cognition (reason) and sensitive cognition (sensitive perception) is beyond the scope of this text. However, in this context it is worth quoting the works of Daniel De Haan, which can shed considerable light not only on the treatment of this issue in Aquinas’ philosophy, but also in other medieval authors. See Daniel De Haan, “Aquinas on Perceiving, Thinking, Understanding, and Cognizing Individuals,” in *Medieval Perceptual Puzzles* (Brill, 2019), 238–68, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004413030_010; Daniel De Haan, “The Interaction of Noetic and Psychosomatic Operations in a Thomist Hylomorphic Anthropology,” *Scientia et Fides* 6, no. 2 (2018), 55–83, <https://doi.org/10.12775/setf.2018.010>.

²⁵ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 223.

²⁶ Bobier, 224.

elements (more precisely, intentional apprehensions of an object) belong to the essence of emotions.

Why Emotions Are Not a Type of Cognition?

In this part of the article, I will reconstruct the arguments for a non-cognitive interpretation of the Thomistic theory of emotions.

The task of the proponents of this position is to analyze the nature of the correlation between a given emotion and its object. They argue that even if Thomas Aquinas himself wrote that the kind and nature of an emotion comes from its object,²⁷ the correlation between the two is causal, not constitutive.²⁸ Even if my fear of the wolf is derived from the object itself, i.e., the cause of my fear is this particular wolf, and I do not experience general but specific fear of this particular wolf, the intentional apprehension of the wolf is only the cause of my fear, not an element of it. Christopher A. Bobier offers the following analogy: imagine a potter making a pot. Although the potter is the efficient cause of the form of the pot, we would be unlikely to say that the potter is part of this form. Similarly, emotions receive their forms from objects, but this does not mean that objects (i.e., their intentional apprehensions) are part of the form of emotions.²⁹

Another argument of proponents of a non-cognitive interpretation of the concept of emotions refers to the totality of Thomistic anthropology. Firstly, emotions are fundamentally bodily phenomena (Aquinas includes them in the sensitive appetite). No cognitive power is associated with the bodily change, as is the case with emotions.³⁰ Therefore, since emotions involve the bodily change, and cognition is not in close connection with the body, one may conclude that emotions – on the basis of Aquinas' philosophy – are non-cognitive. Secondly, emotions are movements of the sensory appetitive power, separate from the cognitive powers (the powers responsible for cognition, perception or the formulation of beliefs).³¹ Aquinas repeatedly describes emotions as movements flowing from cognition, being its effect: "The movement of the appetitive power

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 46, a. 6.

²⁸ Shawn D. Floyd, "Aquinas on Emotion: A Response to Some Recent Interpretations," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1998), 165.

²⁹ Bobier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion," 238.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 22, a. 2.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, I–II, q. 22, a. 2.

follows (*sequitur*) an act of the apprehensive power.”³² Therefore, as Ch. A. Bobier points out, given the holistic nature of Thomistic psychology, according to which the powers of the soul have various functions, it is not clear in what sense an emotion, which is part of the appetitive power of the soul, can be constituted by the cognitive (cognitive) element.³³

The argumentative strategy taken by proponents of the non-cognitive interpretation of Thomas’s concept of emotion is to distinguish between “emotion” and “emotional experience.” The strategy aims, on the one hand, to preserve Aquinas’s suggestions locating emotion within the appetitive power, and, on the other hand, to preserve basic intuitions about the complex nature of emotion. Bobier’s proposal to distinguish between “emotion” and “emotional experience” boils down to defining “emotion” as a movement of appetitive power devoid of the cognitive element, while defining the scope of “emotional experience” as including both emotion and complex cognitive acts. For example, when I experience fear of the wolf, the emotion of fear is merely a movement of sensory appetitive power, upon which I can either proceed to attack or flee. The belief “this particular wolf is a threat to me” is not part of the emotion itself, but a complex “emotional experience” that consists not only of the emotion itself, but also of beliefs, valuations, somatic changes, behavioral reactions, etc.³⁴

Why Are Emotions a Type of Cognition?

However, a non-cognitive interpretation of the Thomistic concept of emotion is fraught with difficulties as well. First of all, not all emotions – according to Aquinas’ concept – are “movements.” Aquinas notes that in the area of the concupiscible power (*concupiscibilis*) there are both emotions that have an element of movement in them (e.g. desire) and emotions that are devoid of the element of movement (e.g. joy and sadness).³⁵ The difference between emotions as movements and emotions as a rest can also be seen in the difference between desire of *x* and giving love to *x*: love is a kind of affective, but constant and relatively stable resonance between desire and the object of desire. Desire, on

³² Thomas Aquinas, I–II, q. 46, a. 2; I–II, q. 22, a. 3, sc.

³³ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 230. “Given Aquinas’s psychology, according to which the powers of the soul have distinct functions, it is difficult to know how to make sense of the claim that an emotion, being situated in the noncognitive part of the soul, can be partly constituted by a cognitive element.”

³⁴ Bobier, “Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion,” 236.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 25, a. 1.

the other hand, is a movement of the appetite toward an absent object. Desire is a movement, but love is not.

The second difficulty boils down to the fact that adopting a non-cognitive interpretation of the Thomistic concept of emotion undermines, according to their opponents, the hylomorphic theory of human nature. If we were to consider that emotions fall within the scope of the sensory appetitive power and do not have constitutive cognitive elements, we would thereby introduce a boundary between the actions of the appetitive and cognitive power. However, it seems that such a boundary does not correspond with the more general Thomistic concept of man as a hylomorphic whole. Following Aquinas, it can be reiterated that human emotions do not belong exclusively to the rational aspect of human nature nor to its bodily aspect.³⁶

The major objection to the non-cognitive interpretation of the concept of emotions is that on its grounds the identity of emotions and their correlation to intentionality is unsettled. Consider an example: even if my fear of the wolf is reduced to somatic symptoms (accelerated heartbeat, adrenaline rush, etc.) and to “the movement of the sensory appetitive power” (a strong desire to flee from the wolf or an attempt to fight it), the emotion I feel is a “fear-before-this-particular-wolf.” In a word, it is impossible to separate the bodily and behavioral response from the intentional content of the emotion. The nature, structure or formal cause of my fear of the wolf depends on the intentional object of the emotion. Moreover, the intentionality of particular emotions is not exhausted by the fact that emotions are “about something,” intentionality is also responsible for the identity of emotions.³⁷ Thus, it can be assumed that cognitive contents are constitutive elements of emotions, since they make emotions what they are, i.e., an individual emotion is always related to its object.³⁸ Such a conclusion was reached, among others, by P. King, who believes that the cognitive element is not only the causal aspect of emotions, but also their formal aspect.³⁹

A broader historical context of the medieval debate over the cognitive nature of emotions should be offered here. This context was theological as it addressed the question of whether love can be a type of cognition and whether emotions can have a cognitive function. Martin Pickavé points out that the debate was not so much about emotions themselves, but about the problem of the intentionality

³⁶ Judith Barad, “Aquinas on the Role of Emotion in Moral Judgment and Activity,” *The Thomist* 55, no. 3 (1991), 402, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1991.0007>.

³⁷ Martin Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions (and of Other Appetitive Acts),” *Quaestio* 10 (January 2010), 46, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.quaestio.1.102325>.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 42, a. 4, ad. 1.

³⁹ King, “Emotion,” 212.

of acts of the appetitive power. For Aquinas, *appetitus* is intrinsically intentional, being – according to the definition – “nothing else than an inclination of a person desirous of a thing towards that thing.”⁴⁰ However, the intentional nature of the appetitive power does not explain why particular emotions relate to particular objects, why my fear is a fear-before-this-particular-wolf.⁴¹ Hence the question: are acts of the appetitive power intrinsically cognitive?

The philosophy of Thomas Aquinas gives a negative answer to the above question. Nevertheless, Pickavé points to several medieval authors who recognized the problem of the tension between appetitive and cognitive aspects in experience.⁴² Walter Chatton (c. 1290–1343) was the first author who explicitly poses the question of whether acts of the appetitive power are themselves a type of cognition. He considers this problem in the question: “Is an angel’s love separate from his cognition?” Chatton formulates a series of arguments over the recognition of the identity of love of object *x* with cognition *x*, although his final conclusion is positive.⁴³ Adam Wodeham (ca. 1298–1358) insisted that love (and other acts of appetitive power) is a kind of cognition.⁴⁴ In the commentary to the *Sentences*, A. Wodeham writes that

every act of desire, hatred or joy is a kind of cognition (*quaedam cognitio*) and a kind of apprehension (*quaedam apprehensio*), since every experience of an object is also a cognition of that object. But every act of appetite is an experience of that object, i.e., an act by means of which that object is experienced.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 8, a. 1. “Omnis autem appetitus non est nisi boni. Cuius ratio est quia appetitus nihil aliud est quam inclinatio appetentis in aliquid. Nihil autem inclinatur nisi in aliquid simile et conveniens.”

⁴¹ Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions,” 49.

⁴² See Pickavé, 45–63.

⁴³ Walter Chatton, *Reportatio super Sententias* II, d. 5, q. 1, dub. 3, ed. Joseph C. Wey and Girard J. Etzkorn, vol. 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 238–42.

⁴⁴ On Adam Wodeham’s position and his discussion with William Ockham, see Dominik Perler, “Emotions and Cognitions. Fourteenth-Century Discussions on the Passions of the Soul,” *Vivarium* 43, no. 2 (2005), 250–74, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853405774978353>.

⁴⁵ Adamus de Wodeham, *Lectura secunda in primum librum Sententiarum* d. 1, q. 5, § 2, ed. Rega Wood and Gedeon Gál (St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1990), 278. “Omnis actus appetendi et odiendi, et ita frui, est quaedam cognitio et quaedam apprehensio, quia omnis experientia alicuius obiecti est quaedam cognitio eiusdem. Sed omnis actus appetitivus est quaedam experientia sui obiecti, id est quo experitur tale obiectum, quia omnis actus vitalis est quaedam experientia.”

Wodeham further argues that it is not possible for the object of love to be unknown to the will. Since the act of love is an act of the will alone (acts of the intellect or acts of sensitive cognition are not involved), the will must know its object. In other words, according to Wodeham, the act of will is also a cognition.⁴⁶

Summary

Thomas Aquinas *explicitly* expresses the belief that emotions (*passiones animae*) are dependent on the species of their objects. This emotion of fear has its particular object in the form of a wolf.⁴⁷ The dependence of the emotion on the object, more precisely, on the intentional apprehension of the object in some aspect of it, allows us to classify the Thomistic theory of emotions as an intentionalist theory. However, a question should be posed whether the mere fact that emotions are intentional allows the conclusion that they are a certain kind of cognition.⁴⁸

On the basis of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, this question must be answered in the negative. The whole of Thomistic psychology draws a distinction between the cognitive and appetitive powers.⁴⁹ Aquinas' description of emotions suggests that emotions are acts of the appetitive power, not the cognitive one. Even if we refer, as Bobier writes, to Aquinas' postulated psychophysical unity of man, we cannot draw the conclusion that cognition lies in the nature of emotions.⁵⁰

Therefore, on the one hand, Thomas claimed that emotions are a movement of sensitive appetite, but on the other hand, he wrote about their intentionality. Yet, even if the object of emotion is a particular sensitive object, emotions refer to it *secundum aliquam intentionem universalem*.⁵¹ They are already a certain apprehension of the object, they grasp the object in a certain aspect. Moreover,

⁴⁶ Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 57; Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 227.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 41, a. 2. "Passiones animae recipiunt speciem ex obiectis. Unde specialis passio est quae habet speciale obiectum. Timor autem habet speciale obiectum, sicut et spes."

⁴⁸ Pickavé, "On the Intentionality of the Emotions," 49.

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 1.

⁵⁰ See Bobier, "Thomas Aquinas on the Relation Between Cognition and Emotion," 230.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* q. 25, a. 1, ad. 3. "Nam sensus percipiunt sua obiecta particulariter, ratio vero inferior habet actum circa sensibilia secundum aliquam intentionem universalem. Sensualitas vero hoc modo tendit in obiecta sensuum sicut et ipsi sensus, scilicet particulariter."

Thomas, in describing even animal emotions, wrote about the “prudence” (*prudentia*) of animals, because the emotional reference to object *x* is an intentional and evaluative reference to object *x*.⁵² Subsequently, intentional and evaluative reference to an object presupposes the prior possession of beliefs, judgments, norms, in a word, cognitive apprehensions that are beyond the competence of appetitive power.

Thomas Aquinas presents the concept of *ratio particularis* and *vis aestimativa* as a type of intellectual cognition that would apply to particular and sensitive objects. One proposal for resolving the dispute over the nature of emotion in Thomas’s philosophy suggested that the term *passio*, used by Aquinas, has a narrower meaning than the modern term “emotion.” While the term “emotion” refers to a cognitive state, the term *passio* refers to a conative state.⁵³ Hence, S. D. Floyd argued that what we call emotion today consists of two separate acts: *passio* and the act of cognition.⁵⁴

However, Pickavé insists that Floyd’s suggestion is not only anachronistic, since it starts from a certain contemporary idea of what emotion should be, but also erroneous. He points out that we assign certain functions and roles to emotions: emotions enhance perceptions, accompany the formation of dispositions, to name but a few. These roles are performed by what Aquinas calls *passiones animae*.⁵⁵

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⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate* q. 25, a. 2, which states: “Sicut vis imaginativa competit animae sensibili secundum propriam rationem, quia in ea reservantur formae per sensum acceptae; sed vis aestimativa, per quam animal apprehendit intentiones non acceptas per sensum, ut amicitiam vel inimicitiam, inest animae sensitivae secundum quod participat aliquid rationis: unde ratione huius aestimationis dicuntur animalia quamdam prudentiam habere.”

⁵³ See Thomas Ryan, “Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (February 2005), 53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390506600103>.

⁵⁴ Floyd, “Aquinas on Emotion,” 160.

⁵⁵ Pickavé, “On the Intentionality of the Emotions,” 47.

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Aquinas on Christ's Passion: Redemption as Human Achievement and More than Satisfactory

Męka Chrystusa w pismach Tomasza z Akwinu – odkupienie jako ludzkie osiągnięcie przekraczające zadośćuczynienie

ABSTRACT: The subject is Aquinas's treatment of Christ's Passion as redemptive in the *Summa Theologiae*. Many theologians judge that the key notion of Aquinas's soteriology is atonement whose underlying structure is justice and also that the concepts of "redemption" and "sacrifice" are simply metaphors. Aquinas suggests that Christ's Passion as redemptive is more than a metaphor. While writing two articles, each on the moral modes of merit, satisfaction and sacrifice, Aquinas writes four on redemption. While affirming the Passion's two causalities, principal and instrumental, Aquinas writes that the effects are achieved in three ways: by way of exciting charity, by way of redemption and by way of efficiency. The purpose of the article therefore is to find why Christ's Passion is so important by examining these four articles. An analysis of *ST* 3.48.4 shows that Christ's Passion as redemptive is ordered toward a positive goal, the union with Christ, while atonement towards a negative one. An analysis of *ST* 3.48.5, shows that the divine and human causalities, principal and instrumental, so work together in affecting the will acts of Christ, elicited and commanded, that even Christ's soul is perfected. An analysis of *ST* 3.49.2 shows that by way of faith in Christ's Passion and by way of its power Christ can aid us in our struggle against sin and the devil. Finally, an analysis of *ST* 3.49.3 shows how Christ through Baptism, Penance and suffering aids us in attaining a perfection of soul and its powers, not immediately but through the choices we make in our life and dying. On the Last Day, when souls are joined to bodies, those, who had cooperated with Christ in their suffering and dying and thereby attained their soul's perfection, will have achieved a glorified immortality as well as beatific vision.

KEYWORDS: Atonement, Commanded Act, Causality, Elicited Act, Human Act, Justice, Punishment, Redeemer and Redemption, Christ's Passion, Thomas Aquinas

ABSTRAKT: Tematem artykułu jest męka Chrystusa ujmowana przez św. Tomasza w *Sumie teologicznej* jako odkupienie. Wiele teologów uważa, że kluczowym pojęciem

soteriologii Akwinaty jest pokuta wynikająca ze sprawiedliwości, zaś pojęcia odkupienia i ofiary są jedynie metaforami. Tomasz z Akwinu jednak sugeruje, że męka Chrystusa jako odkupienie jest czymś więcej niż metaforą. Na dwa artykuły o moralnych aspektach zasług – zadośćuczynienia i ofiary – Tomasz z Akwinu pisze cztery na temat odkupienia. Wskazując na dwie przyczyny męki – główną i instrumentalną – twierdzi, że skutki osiąga się na trzy sposoby: poprzez pobudzanie miłości, poprzez odkupienie i poprzez skuteczność. Celem artykułu jest zatem ustalenie na podstawie analizy tych czterech artykułów, dlaczego męka Chrystusa jest tak ważna. Artykuł 3.48.4 pokazuje, że męka Chrystusa jako odkupienie jest ukierunkowana na pozytywny cel, czyli zjednoczenie z Chrystusem, podczas gdy pokuta ma cel negatywny. Analiza *ST* 3.48.5 wskazuje, że boskie i ludzkie przyczyny sprawcze, główne i instrumentalne, współdziałają w taki sposób, że wpływają na akty woli Chrystusa, wywołane i nakazane, że nawet dusza Chrystusa zostaje udoskonalona. Analiza *ST* 3.49.2 pokazuje, że poprzez wiarę w mękę Chrystusa i poprzez jej moc Chrystus może pomóc nam w walce z grzechem i diabłem. Wreszcie z *ST* 3.49.3 wynika, że Chrystus poprzez chrzest, pokutę i cierpienie pomaga nam osiągnąć doskonałość duszy i jej mocy, nie bezpośrednio, ale poprzez wybory, których dokonujemy w naszym życiu i umieraniu. W dniu ostatecznym, kiedy dusze połączą się z ciałami, ci, którzy współpracowali z Chrystusem w swoim cierpieniu i umieraniu, a tym samym osiągnęli doskonałość duszy, osiągną chwalebny nieśmiertelność, a także wizję uszczęśliwiającą.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: odkupienie, akt nakazany, przyczynowość, akt wywołany, akt ludzki, sprawiedliwość, kara, Odkupiciel, męka Chrystusa, Tomasz z Akwinu

Introduction

Rachel Cresswell's article and Joel R. Gallagher's have offered important insights regarding Aquinas's soteriology as found in his treatment of Christ's Passion, in the *Summa Theologiae*.¹

After demonstrating how much more alike Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* is to Aquinas's so called improvement of Anselm's Satisfaction Theory, R. Cresswell presented how Anselm's and Aquinas interpretation of the Philippian hymn differed.² More than interesting, it was theologically significant that Aquinas emphasizes the extent and magnitude of Christ's suffering and death rather than His humility as constituting His abasement. Did Aquinas do this only

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3.6–49, trans. Laurence Shapkote, <https://aquinas.cc> (hereafter *ST*).

² Rachel Cresswell, "Reframing Anselm and Aquinas on Atonement," *New Blackfriars* 104, no. 1109 (2023): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12802>.

that it might excite a person's love for the crucified Christ?³ Or did Aquinas also want to connect that suffering with Christ's exaltation?⁴

Joel R. Gallagher, for his part, in comparing Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*⁵ to Aquinas's Theology of the Passion, made the important point that whereas Aulén emphasized the conquering of the devil and evil in view of God's overcoming evil in the world without any human aid, Aquinas argued that Christ's being the agent of victory includes the entire human activity of Christ, including all of His salvific work that He accomplished as a human being.⁶ What Gallagher also observed in his article was that many scholars characterize Aquinas's soteriology in the way Cessario Romanus had done in his work *The Godly Image*, namely that "Satisfaction: [is the] Key-Notion for Interpreting Christ's Death."⁷ Thus Brian Davies divided his commentary on Aquinas's treatment of the Passion under the heading "The Big Picture" which is about Christ's satisfaction and under the heading "Some Details" which is about Christ's incarnation, hypostatic union, preaching, miracles, Passion, Redemption and Ascension.⁸ Thus Rik Van Nieuwenhove examines Christ's Passion and death, first under the title, "Satisfaction," pages 281–92, then under the title "Sacrifice and Sacrament," pages 292–95.⁹ Paul M. O'Callaghan did spend 32 pages on satisfaction and 44 pages regarding the devil, including 3 pages on the Ransom Theory.¹⁰

Robin Ryan, on the other hand, in his excellent overview of Aquinas's Soteriology begins with examining Aquinas's subtle changes of Anselm's Satisfaction Theory and ends with Ryan noting Aquinas's consideration of Christ's Death

³ *ST* 3.49.1.

⁴ *ST* 3.49.6.

⁵ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003).

⁶ Joel R. Gallagher, "Christus Victor Motifs and Christ's Temptations in the Soteriology of Thomas Aquinas," *New Blackfriars* 101, no. 1094 (2020): 368, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12415>.

⁷ Gallagher, 361 Romanus Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas*, Sacra Doctrina (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020) [E-Book].

⁸ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 311–15, 315–22.

⁹ Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion: Aquinas' Soteriology," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Peter Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 277–302.

¹⁰ Paul M. O'Callaghan, "The Effects of the Passion and Death of Christ in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas" (PhD diss., Universidad de Navarra, 1981).

and Resurrection and our participation in these by the sacraments as saving.¹¹ Moreover, Ryan also writes “In treating the efficacy of Christ’s Passion in his *Summa Theologiae*, [Aquinas] employs the metaphors of merit, satisfaction, sacrifice and redemption/ransom.”¹²

But, going back to the very text of Aquinas in which he addresses the modes of Christ’s instrumental causalities, one finds that while Aquinas’ treatment of Christ’s Passion is quite simple: considering the Passion itself, a human act, even in giving its circumstances of time, place, situation and person,¹³ its causes, Christ, the Father, His slayers and the devil¹⁴ and its effects.¹⁵ This is done in a very balanced way, arranging the intentional modes of acting: merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, redemption and efficiency according to what is first in the order of intention,¹⁶ and arranging their complimentary effects according to what is last in execution.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Aquinas makes two exceptions regarding a balanced treatment. First, in dealing with the mode of redemption, Aquinas devotes not one, but two articles regarding its order of intention,¹⁸ and not one, but two articles regarding its order of execution.¹⁹ The second exception occurs in Aquinas’s treatment of the Passion’s causalities and effects. In *ST* 3.48.6, Aquinas writes that the Passion has two efficient causes, principal, according to Christ’s divinity, and instrumental, according to Christ’s humanity. However, when considering how their effects are brought about, Aquinas refers to three, not two ways. One is psychological “by way of exciting our charity.” The second way is personal, i.e. “by way of redemption” in which Christ’s person, as it were, uses hands to make up for the fault of feet. The third way effects are brought about is ontological,

¹¹ Robin Ryan, *Jesus and Salvation: Soundings in the Christian Tradition and Contemporary Theology* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2015), 83–91.

¹² Ryan, 88.

¹³ *ST* 3.46.9, 10, 11 and 12; 3.46–49. Treating 30 articles on the Soteriology of Christ’s Passion in terms of three parts of the human act is different from being what Cresswell calls as multipartite account and one which Gallagher describes as combining “satisfaction with some of the elements: merit, sacrifice, charity, obedience, justice or the fulfilment of the Old Law.” (Cresswell, “Reframing Anselm and Aquinas on Atonement,” 36; Gallagher, “Christus Victor Motifs,” 361).

¹⁴ *ST* 3.47.

¹⁵ *ST* 3.48, 49.

¹⁶ *ST* 3.48.1, 2, 3, 6.

¹⁷ *ST* 3.49.6, 5, 4, 1.

¹⁸ *ST* 3.48.4, 5.

¹⁹ *ST* 3.49.3, 2.

"by way of efficiency."²⁰ In writing this, it is as if Aquinas were seeking to match his Soteriology with the Christology of the Third Council of Constantinople, which considers the person of Christ having a divine and a human will which are not mixed but work together.

Consequently, it seems appropriate to examine these four articles on Christ's Passion as redemptive, namely its intended end, *ST* 3.48.4, the nature of its act, *ST* 3.48.5, its effect, *ST* 3.49.3 and the way it enables one to deal with sin and the devil, *ST* 3.49.2. Thus one can ask: is the Passion as redemptive simply one way among others to understand Christ's Passion, or is it an analogy comparing Christ's physical actions of suffering and death to our spiritual actions regarding sin and death, or is it a reality in which our human actions are to be like Christ's human actions and are to attain with His aid a perfection of human nature like His?

What Aquinas wishes to do is to reflect on the scriptural notion of redemption, as arising from God's revelation. The idea itself is an ancient one, going back to ancient Jewish history and Moses himself. It calls to mind how those who had sold themselves into slavery or were taken captive were set free.²¹ Redemption has the drama of someone giving all his possessions to buy back his kinsman²² or of someone struggling to liberate his people from captivity.²³ Because the notion of redemption has such dramatic power, therefore, the ancient Fathers of the Church, such as Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa, used it to speak about the mystery of Christ's Passion.²⁴ Christ is presented as either the defeated warrior who ultimately triumphs in setting the captives free, or as the one who pays the price of His life to save mankind, His kinsmen.

²⁰ *ST* 3.49.1.

²¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes: "In the OT, Yahweh is often depicted in the role of Israel's *gō'ēl*, 'redeemer,' i.e., the kinsman to whom fell the duty of buying back the lost freedom of a relative." Also: "Another notion, however, was often linked with the redemptive liberation, viz., that of 'acquisition, possession.'" "It was a deliverance, then, that terminated in 'acquisition,' and even in 'adoption.'" (Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968], 816, 79:91–92).

²² Consequently, Thomas quotes from 1 Pet 1:18. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver . . . but with the precious blood of Christ. . . ." (*ST* 3.48.4).

²³ Thus Thomas writes: "On the contrary, Our Lord said (John 12:31), when His Passion was drawing nigh: Now shall the prince of this world be cast out; . . ." (*ST* 3.49.2).

²⁴ Jean Rivière says that Irenaeus was the first to develop this idea from the Scriptures about Christ's Passion. Jean Rivière, *The Doctrine of the Atonement: A Historical Essay*, trans. Luigi Cappadelta, vol. 2 (Saint Louis, MO: Herder, 1909), 113–16.

Unfortunately, these dramatic representations of Christ's work were marred by the other things they implied. If Christ must ransom persons from the devil, that would imply there that God did not always have power over man.²⁵ If Christ must be the ransom-payment, this would imply that the devil is the one to whom God gives the ransom.²⁶

At issue is whether one can keep the dramatic power in the notion of redemption and at the same time attain a correct and further understanding of Christ's Passion as redemptive. Anselm had succeeded in clarifying certain things by abstracting the notion of justice from the idea of ransom. But in leaving the images of redemption behind, what he gained in clarity of thought he lost in the dramatic force of his ideas.²⁷ It is one thing to understand that Christ saves us by fulfilling the requirements of justice. It is another thing to link this understanding with the disheartening experience of struggling with temptation constantly until one at last succumbs to Satan's weapons of suffering and death. As will be shown, Aquinas seeks to show how Christ's Passion can aid one in one's struggle against sin and the devil and even deliver one should one have fallen into sin at the devil's tempting.²⁸

Redemption: ST 3.48.4

When one speculatively examines what the scriptural metaphors for redemption imply about the natures and relationships between God and the devil, the very

²⁵ ST 3.48.4.1.

²⁶ ST 3.48.4.3.

²⁷ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange sees no loss in this regard. Rather, because Christ's Passion is seen as a just repairing of the offense against God, Garrigou-Lagrange writes that this was "a most excellent correction of certain exaggerations of Origen and St Gregory of Nyssa." (Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa*, trans. Bede Rose [Saint Louis, MO: B. Herder Book, 1950], 595). Hans Kessler, however, does not think this is an achievement at all. Citing Otto Hermann Pesch, he writes: "Redemption hat also bei Thomas einem anderen Bildsinn, aber keinen anderen Sachsinn als Satisfaction" (Hans Kessler, *Die theologische Bedeutung des Todes Jesu: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Themen und Thesen der Theologie [Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1970], 184; Otto Hermann Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin: Versuch eines systematisch-theologischen Dialogs*, Walberberger Studien 4 [Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1967], 558). The following analysis should show that Thomas does not just [simply] use the notion of satisfaction to explain what redemption means, but that he does add new understanding about Christ's Passion by using the notion of redemption.

²⁸ ST 3.49.2.

idea of redemption seems impossible. To say that God redeems us is to imply that God has lost His hold on us.²⁹ To say that Christ is the price of our redemption is to imply that the deceiver who holds us captive unjustly benefited by being paid to let us go.³⁰ Thirdly, in no way could Christ give His blood to the devil to ransom us from the devil who holds us captive because of our sin.³¹

Despite the force of these objections and contrary to what some of his interpreters have said, Thomas very strongly affirms that redemption is a fact.³² God's own word in the Scriptures says that Christ became a curse in order to redeem us. Consequently, Aquinas sees his task as not to prove Christ's Passion saves us by way of redemption, but to explain how this takes place.

In as much as redemption is to be delivered from captivity and restored to God, Aquinas first considers how we become captive. First, in succumbing to the devil's deception and disobeying God's command we make ourselves not only a sinner but a captive of the devil. Secondly, in sinning, one goes against God's order of justice so that one's captivity is in having to pay the penalty for doing so.³³ In other words, those who sin make themselves a captive both to the devil and to God.

To this, Aquinas writes, "Christ in His Passion was a sufficient and a superabundant atonement for the sin and the debt of the human race, it was as a price at the cost of which we are freed from both obligations." That is, Christ's Passion as a sufficient and superabundant atonement delivers us not only from our own sin and debt of punishment, but also "the sin and debt of the human race,"³⁴ namely, original sin whose debt of punishment was damnation, separation from God, and death, beginning with the separation of our powers from reason and ending in the separation of our soul from our body.³⁵

²⁹ *ST* 3.48.4.1.

³⁰ *ST* 3.48.4.3.

³¹ *ST* 3.48.4.3m.

³² Namely "redemption" is not a metaphorical term, i.e. about an image or narrative to help one understand Christ's Passion; Ryan, *Jesus and Salvation*, 88. Nor is it an analogical term, i.e. about one reality being partly like another reality, e.g. our spiritual dying to sin is like Christ's physical dying; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 2 of *Le Christ en ses mystères*, Jésus et Jésus-Christ 79 (Paris: Desclée, 1999), 397. Rather, "redemption" is a term for a distinct reality, i.e. it is about an act whose intention is to be united to Christ, *ST* 3.48.4.2m and is different from the act of satisfaction whose intention is the paying the debts of sin; *ST* 3.48.2.

³³ *ST* 1-2.17.1.

³⁴ *ST* 3.48.4.

³⁵ *ST* 1.64.4.1.

What becomes problematic is what Aquinas writes next. “For the atonement by which one satisfies for self or another is called [*dicitur*] the price, by which he ransoms himself or someone else from sin and its penalty.” In giving the word “price” for atonement, and the word “ransoms” for the action of satisfaction, is Aquinas identifying atonement with redemption? Is redemption nothing other than the action of delivering us from sin and the debt of punishment? Jean-Pierre Torrell writes that redemption is a consequence of atonement.³⁶ Davies writes, “It can also be thought of as redemptive since it releases us from the imprisonment of sin.”³⁷

However, in the last two sentences of the body of the article, it seems Aquinas intends to distinguish Christ’s Passion as an atonement from Christ’s Passion as a redemption. For atonement, Aquinas uses the verb, *satisfacit*. For redemption Aquinas uses the word *dando* (‘to bestow or hand over’) and the pronoun *nobis* (‘for us’). Thus Aquinas writes, “Now Christ made satisfaction not by giving money or anything of the sort but by bestowing what was of the greatest price—Himself—for us. And therefore Christ’s Passion is called our redemption.”³⁸

To further clarify the difference between (*satisfactio*) and redemption, Aquinas, in reply one, states that there are two ways we belong to God, one by being “under God’s power” and the other “by being united to Him in charity.”³⁹ As these are distinct ways one is bound to God, then one must read Aquinas’s last sentence in the body of the article as distinguishing satisfaction from redemption rather than as identifying them as practically the same thing. Thus when Aquinas writes, “And therefore in so far as he was delivered from sin by the satisfaction of Christ’s Passion, he is said to be redeemed by the Passion of Christ,”⁴⁰ Aquinas means that in addition to our being liberated from sin

³⁶ Torrell, *La vie et l’oeuvre de Jésus*, 417. Previously, Torrell said that atonement is not the par excellence concept for the theology of redemption. Rather Torrell refers to what Albert Patfoort said, namely that satisfaction is an important piece, but not the only one for understanding Christ’s Passion. It has the value of a true theological analogy to which the notions of sacrifice and redemption, which are merely metaphors, must be reduced. Thus Torrell writes that this is his position as well. Then Torrell writes, “For a complete and satisfactory exposition,” see Romanus Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought from St. Anselm to Aquinas*, Studies in Historical Theology 6 (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1990), 397 and n. 31.

³⁷ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, 320.

³⁸ *ST* 3.48.4.

³⁹ *ST* 3.48.4.1m.

⁴⁰ *ST* 3.48.4.1m.

and its punishment by atonement, we are being united to God in charity by redemption.⁴¹

Aquinas uses the next two replies to the objections to tell the story of redemption in terms of the cause and effect relationships that one can have with the devil, God, and Christ.

By consenting to sin, one puts one's self under the devil. "But as to the penalty, man was chiefly bound to God as his sovereign judge, and to the devil as his torturer, according to Matt 5:25: Lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer."⁴² That is, it is by God's permission that the devil can exercise his power to tempt one to sin and it is by God's ordination that one suffers the penalty from the devil.⁴³ God is in charge.

Consequently, the redemption that is required for the liberation of human beings is with respect to God, not with respect to the Devil. The price was not to be paid to the Devil but to God. Thus the blood of Christ, which is the price of our redemption, is not said to be offered to the Devil but to God. Atonement (*satisfactio*) releases us from sin and debt of punishment; redemption unites us to God in charity. Atonement is different from redemption because they fulfill different purposes.⁴⁴

⁴¹ While Cessario, *The Godly Image*, 195; Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae*, 313–15. Gallagher, "Christus Victor Motifs," 361, Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus*, 397, 417, and Van Nieuwenhove, "Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion," 287–92, see satisfaction as an analogy for understanding Christ's Passion, and Torrell considers "sacrifice" and "redemption" as metaphors that have to be related to the concept of "merit" and "satisfaction," Aquinas writes that redemption is a human act whose intended end is different from satisfaction. Satisfaction's end is the paying of the debts of sin. The end of redemption is to unite us to Christ in charity. Redemption is more than a metaphor, which is but another way of understanding the value of Christ's Passion and more than a good analogy in which Christ's physical death is the cause of our spiritual dying unto sin. Redemption as a term refers to a distinct reality of Christ Passion. Christ's Passion unites us to Christ in charity and is different from satisfaction whose intention or end is the paying the debt of sin. In *ST* 1–2.12.3, Aquinas writes that "one thing can be chosen in preference to another, because of the greater number of purposes for which it is available: so that evidently a man can intend several things at the same time."

⁴² *ST* 3.48.4.2m.

⁴³ *ST* 3.48.4.2m.

⁴⁴ In *ST* 1–2.12.3: "... one thing can be chosen in preference to another, because of the greater number of purposes for which it is available: so that evidently a man can intend several things at the same time."

The Redeemer: *ST* 3.48.5

Christ's role in this power struggle for our redemption is unique. In fact, particular effects of redemption must be attributed immediately to Christ and to no one else. In other words, Christ's immediate role in redemption is different from the roles that the trinitarian God and others play.

In answer to his question whether it is proper for Christ to be the redeemer, Aquinas's first answer is taken from the revealed Word of God, Gal 3:13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" to which Aquinas adds: "But only Christ was made a curse for us."⁴⁵

Helpful for understanding Galatians is the distinction Aquinas made between the slayers' choice to kill Jesus and Jesus' choice to die. Christ's death was His slayers' choice and intent; Christ's death was His choice to not stop it from happening, but death was not His intent.⁴⁶ Christ's intent was to hand Himself over to God.⁴⁷

In the body of the article, Aquinas indicates the two conditions according to which one can be called the redeemer. The act of paying and the price paid must be by and belong to the same person. Both "of these belong immediately to Christ as man." But in regard to the remote and first cause, it was the Trinity, "to whom Christ's life belonged as to its first author, and from whom Christ received the inspiration of suffering for us."⁴⁸

It is in his replies to the objections that Aquinas explains in what sense the Trinity is the cause of our redemption and in what senses the Son of God incarnate is, and then indicates in what sense our sufferings are not the cause of, but contribute to, our redemption.

To explain how the Trinity's causality of our redemption is different from Christ's, Aquinas uses the metaphysical concepts of principal and instrumental efficient causality. It is the Trinity that supplies what Christ's humanity does not have of itself, namely, divine power and divine grace. Christ's humanity is the instrument of this power and grace,⁴⁹ which He exercises and brings about by his own free will. Therefore, Aquinas writes, "and so redemption belongs immediately to the Man-Christ, but principally to God." It is in *ST* 3.49.3 that Aquinas considers the effects these different powers bring about, which will be considered below.

⁴⁵ *ST* 3.48.5.s.c.

⁴⁶ *ST* 3.47.1.3m.

⁴⁷ *ST* 3.48.4.1m

⁴⁸ *ST* 3.47.1.

⁴⁹ *ST* 1-2.112.1.1m.

In answer to the second objection that “not only Christ, but the Father also redeemed us,” Aquinas considers redemption not in the metaphysical terms of principal and instrumental efficient causality, but in human act and interpersonal terms. He writes that the Son of God as the Man-Christ “paid the price of our redemption immediately, but at the command of the Father as the original author.”⁵⁰ This is important because it is in His human act that the Son of God incarnate makes its own contribution to our redemption.⁵¹ In so far as Christ’s act made His own humanity the price, directed to God as end and on our behalf, then His act should affect His own humanity in these ways.

In order to understand how this is possible, one first needs to understand that Aquinas works with two kinds of willing, elicited and commanded.⁵² Command is “an act of the reason presupposing, however, an act of the will.”⁵³ Namely the will lends its power to reason and reason uses that power to command one’s will, reason, sensitive appetite and or bodily members.⁵⁴ When the command is repeated enough or powerful enough, it causes what is commanded to be inclined to the object of the command.⁵⁵ So if the object is good and the command is repeated enough or powerful enough, what is commanded receives a good habit. This is what happened for Christ when He cried out “Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.”⁵⁶ By the miraculous power which He had,⁵⁷

⁵⁰ ST 3.48.5.2m.

⁵¹ Christ’s commanded act of dying is metaphysically unique in that it is done by the incarnate Son of God whose act of existence is not proper to His humanity but to His divinity, and thus distinct from our graced acts of dying described by Karl Rahner. Also, it is unique in its singularity, in that it is different from all Christ’s other acts in that its object is Christ’s soul, done by the Son Incarnate and directed not to God in general but specifically to the Father, as stated by the Gospel of Luke: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). All other human acts of Christ no matter what the object affect His operational powers not His soul. As a singular event it is a matter of Theology, which according to Hans Urs von Balthasar is a knowledge and science of singular events. For references, see Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 2 (New York: Herder / Herder, 1961), 79 and see Fergus Kerr on Von Balthasar’s critique of Aquinas: Fergus Kerr, “The Varieties of Interpreting Aquinas,” in *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. Fergus Kerr (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 32.

⁵² ST 1-2.8, prologue.

⁵³ ST 1-2.17.1.

⁵⁴ ST 1-2.17.5, 6, 7, 9. “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

⁵⁵ ST 1-2.51.2.

⁵⁶ ST 3.48.5.1m.

⁵⁷ ST 3.47.1.2m: “at the last moment He was able to cry out with a loud voice: and hence His death should be computed among His other miracles.”

the Son of God incarnate inclined His soul to the Father, giving it the habit of glory.⁵⁸

In contrast, in the third reply, Aquinas writes that “the sufferings of the saints are beneficial to the church as by way, not of redemption, but of example and exhortation.” They have but a psychological effect, not an ontological one.

Even though Thomas in the above articles has solved the speculative problem of treating Christ’s Passion as a redemptive activity, without impugning His power and without a ransom being paid to the devil, two fundamental questions remain. If the devil, other human beings, and Christ are instruments of God’s providence, then what is so unique and special about Christ’s role in our redemption? Second, even if one postulates that Christ is our redeemer, how does one contend with the obvious evidence that the devil still has the upper hand? Even after the coming of Christ, damnation is still possible; having sinned, people must still pay their debts of punishment; and all people die.⁵⁹

In order to answer these questions, Thomas writes two more articles, in which he considers how Christ’s Passion delivers us from our bondage to the devil,⁶⁰ and from God’s punishment.⁶¹

Christ Redeems Us from the Devil: *ST* 3.49.2

Having established that Christ is our redeemer by paying the price of His own life, Aquinas writes of its effect by contrasting the three things about the power of the devil with the three things Christ’s Passion effected.

Aquinas begins by admitting to a three-fold power in the devil.⁶² He can seduce us. He can act as God’s instrument of punishment. He can, by his own wickedness, hinder us from securing salvation, as he did with the Patriarchs by keeping them in Hell, even though they had died in faith and grace.⁶³

Nevertheless, the devil’s power is not as great as Christ’s. First, whereas the devil can tempt us by influencing our cognitive powers and corresponding appetites, Christ alone can directly influence our will. That is, when a person

⁵⁸ *ST* 1.97.1: “a thing is incorruptible in its form, inasmuch as being by nature corruptible, yet it has an inherent disposition [habit] which preserves it wholly from corruption; and this is called incorruptibility of glory.”

⁵⁹ *ST* 3.49.3.1, 2, and 3.

⁶⁰ *ST* 3.49.2.

⁶¹ *ST* 3.49.3.

⁶² *ST* 3.49.2.

⁶³ *ST* 3.49.2.2m; 5.1m.

commits a sin, he or she alone is responsible for consenting to it. The devil has no power over the human will. When we receive forgiveness from Christ, however, our conversion of heart is due both to our own will and to Christ's influence. In forgiving us, Christ gives our own will the power to make this conversion. That is, one can turn from sin to God by God's grace enabling one to do so.⁶⁴

Second, the devil has less power than Christ's concerns mankind's offense against God which in justice incurred God's punishment. When "Christ offered Himself up for us in the Passion . . . [His] voluntary enduring of the Passion was most acceptable to God as coming from charity. Therefore . . . Christ's Passion was a true sacrifice" overcoming our offense and reconciling us to God.⁶⁵

As for the devil's power of hindering persons from securing salvation by keeping them in hell,⁶⁶ Aquinas writes that Christ vanquishes the devil not by His force but by His justice. Because the devil went beyond his limit of power by giving the debt punishment for sin, death, to an innocent person, who was Christ, so God removes the debt punishment for sin, death, from guilty persons, who believe in Christ "whom the devil slew, though he was no debtor."⁶⁷ One could say that the innocent Christ offered his weakness in dying as an act of satisfaction for peoples' sins, so they can receive God's grace to be cleansed from sin and merit eternal life. The injustice of Christ's death was corrected by His Resurrection.

An illustration that can be generalized is in the Gospel of Luke. "Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. And Jesus said to him, 'Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:42–43). That is, nailed to their crosses, two human beings both in their weakness of dying, interact. The one acknowledges his sinfulness and having faith in Jesus asks for forgiveness. Then, Christ, as it were, in his weakness offers His own suffering in satisfaction for the man's sins so he can receive God's grace and enter with Christ into Paradise. Sometimes our greatest acts occur in our weakest moments.

⁶⁴ *ST* 3.49.2. When Thomas in this passage says that the devil has power over man by leading him into sin and then says that Christ delivers man from the devil's power by obtaining forgiveness, one should study what Thomas says elsewhere about the devil having sufficient power to lead man into sin (*ST* 1–2.80.1), and about what is effected in man's will when he is forgiven (*ST* 1–2.113.2, 3). In these passages Thomas indicates that the devil can influence one's choice only by proposing to one's senses and mind certain objects of choice. The devil cannot move one's will; only God and one's self can do that (*ST* 1–2.80.1).

⁶⁵ *ST* 3.48.3.

⁶⁶ *ST* 3.49.2.1m.

⁶⁷ *ST* 3.49.2.

It his second reply regarding the devil's power to tempt and molest persons' bodies, Aquina states that "there is a remedy provided for man though Christ's Passion whereby he can safeguard himself against the enemy's assaults, so as not be dragged down into the destruction of everlasting death,"⁶⁸ i.e. by mortal sin. However, in explaining how this happens Aquinas makes distinctions in the *Summa Theologiae* that he did not make when explaining this in his earlier work, the *Sentences*. In the *Sentences* as in the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas holds that Christ's Passion and death are sufficient as an atonement for all sin and punishment, both personal sin and original sin. In fact in the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas writes that the atonement is superabundant.⁶⁹ As for the effectiveness of Christ's Passion and death delivering us from sin and its punishment, in the *Sentences* Aquinas simply says that it depends on faith, charity and the sacraments,⁷⁰ but in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas makes important distinctions in explaining how this occurs.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas writes that it is faith and its accompanying charity that is sufficient for delivering us from mortal sin and its punishment, but not from original sin.⁷¹ This is because mortal sins reside in one's powers of action and faith and charity are strong enough to draw these powers away from what is not of God and to what is of God. However such faith and its accompanying charity, while strong enough to cleanse one of mortal sin are not strong enough to rid one of original sin and its effect of blocking one's way to heaven. It is only after Christ's Passion that this can happen. This is for two reasons. One is on the part of Christ, the other on the part of ourselves. It is only by His Passion that Christ's humanity actually gains the power to deliver us from original sin and its punishment,⁷² which happens when Christ merits His exaltation.⁷³ It is then that He can act as both the efficient and exemplar cause of our own dying and rising, so that we can imitate Him in His dying and He, by His Godhead, can liken us to Himself in His resurrection on the Last Day.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *ST* 3.49.2.2m.

⁶⁹ *ST* 3.49.3.

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis: Liber III a distinctione XVII ad distinctionem XX, III, d. 19, q. 1, a. 2co*, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp3017.html#9816>.

⁷¹ *ST* 3.49.2.2m.

⁷² *ST* 3.49.2.2m: "But after Christ's Passion, men can defend themselves from this by its power."

⁷³ *ST* 3.49.6.

⁷⁴ *ST* 3.56.1.3m: "But just as the Resurrection of Christ's body, through its personal union with the Word, is first in point of time, so also is it first in dignity and perfection; as the gloss says on 1 Cor. 15:20, 23. But whatever is most perfect is always the exemplar, which

On our part, besides faith and charity likening us to Christ we need the sacraments. Not only do we need grace to make elicited acts to merit eternal life, we also need sacramental character to receive the aid of Christ⁷⁵ to do the commanded acts⁷⁶ of making the signs of faith⁷⁷ in the sacraments but also to do commanded acts like Christ in the face of opposition and death, things that are not desired. Thus one needs the sacramental character in addition to the grace that is given to give witness to one's faith the way Christ gave witness to Himself in the face of opposition and death.⁷⁸ In worship as ritual there is the "Liturgy of the Word" and the "Liturgy of the Eucharist," while in living there is the witness of one's faith and martyrdom.

Christ Redeems Us from the Debt of Punishment: *ST* 3.49.3

If Christ's influence in delivering us from the bondage of the devil is so great, then why does He seem to be less effective in delivering us from our other bondage, our debt of punishment due to God's justice? These debts seem to endure till this day. In fact, those who deny that Christ redeems humankind from due punishments marshal three reasons why.

First, it is a testimony of faith that there is still the punishment of damnation. As this is a fact of faith, then how can one say that Christ has redeemed us by removing our debt of punishment? Second, it is a penitential practice in the Church that those who have confessed their sins must do a particular penance. Why then is this penance imposed? Third, it is a matter of common sense that all are subject to the punishment of original sin which is death.⁷⁹ If Christ has removed all God's punishments for sin, then why do people die?⁸⁰

the less perfect copies according to its mode; consequently Christ's Resurrection is the exemplar of ours."

⁷⁵ *ST* 3.62.3: "sacramental character is specially the character of Christ, to Whose priesthood the faithful are likened by reason of the sacramental characters, which are nothing else than certain participations of Christ's priesthood flowing from Christ Himself."

⁷⁶ *ST* 3.63.4.3m. Character resides in one's cognitive power. *ST* 1-2.17.1: "Command is an act of the reason presupposing, however, an act of the will."

⁷⁷ *ST* 3.63.4.3m. Sacramental character is ordained to things pertaining to Divine worship which is a "protestation of faith expressed by exterior signs."

⁷⁸ *ST* 3.72.5. "in Confirmation he receives power to do those things which pertain to the spiritual combat with the enemies of the Faith."

⁷⁹ *ST* 1-2.81.3.1m.

⁸⁰ *ST* 3.49.3.1, 2 and 3.

Aquinas's overall answer is to state the two ways we have been delivered from the debt of punishment. The first way is direct. We are delivered from the sins of the human race by Christ's sufficient and superabundant atonement.⁸¹ A sufficient atonement, should we take Aquinas's definition, is offering something which God loves equal to the offense which God detests.⁸² That is, there is a self-denying offering of obedience and love by the incarnate and infinite Son of God which is equal to the self-indulging offense of disobedience and self-love against the infinite God and its effect, when this is accompanied by the restoration of human nature to its original condition at creation. Then it makes up for original sin. Thus a superabundant atonement would be one in which the act of love and obedience would be the same,⁸³ but one in which human nature is "restored into something better."⁸⁴

The second way we have been delivered from the debt of punishment is indirect, "that is to say—in so far as Christ's Passion is the cause of the forgiveness of sin, upon which the debt of punishment rests."⁸⁵ This would be caused by God's restoration of grace.⁸⁶

In his objections and replies, Aquinas makes key distinctions that in fact explain how Christ's Passion does more than what is done by Christ's atonement.

The difference between atonement and redemption is due to three things. First, the different ways we can come in contact with Christ's Passion, one way being by faith and charity, the other way by the sacraments of faith. Second, the different ways Baptism and Penance, though working instrumentally, bring about different effects. Third, the fact that the Christian's act done in cooperation with Christ is both similar to and distinct from Christ's act, both in time and in effect.⁸⁷

The first objection argues that since "the chief punishment of sin is eternal damnation" still exists, then "it seems, therefore, that Christ's Passion did not deliver men from the punishment of sin," of any kind. In reply, Aquinas's writes that this is the case, since the work of Christ's Passion was not applied

⁸¹ *ST* 3.49.3.

⁸² *ST* 3.48.2.

⁸³ *ST* 3.48.1.3m: "Christ's Passion has a special effect, which His preceding merits did not possess, not on account of greater charity, but because of the nature of the work."

⁸⁴ *ST* 1.97.1.1m: "yet he did not recover immortality, the loss of which was an effect of sin; for this was reserved for Christ to accomplish, by Whom the defect of nature was to be restored into something better."

⁸⁵ *ST* 3.49.3.

⁸⁶ *ST* 1-2.113.2: "Now the effect of the Divine love in us, which is taken away by sin, is grace, whereby a man is made worthy of eternal life, from which sin shuts him out."

⁸⁷ *ST* 3.49.3.1m, 2m and 3m.

to them. They made no contact with Christ's Passion either through faith and charity or through the sacraments of faith.⁸⁸

The second objection argues that since there is a satisfactory punishment given in the sacrament of penance, then Christ's Passion does not deliver us from the punishment of sin. In reply Aquinas gives the principle that "to secure the effects of Christ's Passion, we must be likened [*configurari*] unto Him." This is done "sacramentally in Baptism according to Rom 6:4: 'For we are buried together with Him into death.'"⁸⁹

This can be interpreted analogically. Namely we are likened to Christ in that as he dies a physical death we die spiritually by putting sin to death.⁹⁰ However Aquinas makes two further statements about what happens at Baptism. First, "no punishment of satisfaction is imposed upon men at their Baptism, since they are fully delivered by Christ's satisfaction."⁹¹ Second, while the baptized are "likened unto Christ's death," those who sin afterward, can only be likened to "Christ suffering."⁹² This would mean that Baptism delivers one from all sin committed before Baptism, both original sin and personal sin and their punishments.

But if persons would sin afterward, which would tarnish their likeness to Christ because of their personal sins, they can be "likened unto Christ suffering by some form of punishment or suffering they endure in their own person,"⁹³ That is, by doing the penance or undergoing some suffering, persons can counter their sinful inclinations, seeking to replace vice with virtue. Moreover, "by the cooperation of Christ's satisfaction, much lighter penalty suffices than one that is proportionate to the sin."⁹⁴

⁸⁸ ST 3.49.3.1m.

⁸⁹ ST 3.49.3.2m.

⁹⁰ Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus*, 434.

⁹¹ ST 3.49.3.2m.

⁹² ST 3.49.3.2m.

⁹³ ST 3.49.3.2m.

⁹⁴ ST 3.49.3.2m. This means that Christ helps us to make satisfaction for these sins, for the practice of penance is an external act, i.e. arising outside of the will, i.e. from reason, but uses the power of the will to command an act of satisfaction, see ST 3.48.2.1m. On the other hand, instead of seeing Christ helping the penitent make an adequate satisfaction, Torrell sees it the other way around. He writes, "It is only because the person's satisfaction is 'caught in' 'incorporated into' the satisfaction of Christ already present and giving it strength that that of the penitent has any value." Then, instead of explaining how this happens Torrell writes that "the precise point of this solution is less interesting than the appeal to the Pauline teaching of sacramental conformity to Christ which occupies such an important place in Aquinas." (Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus*, 433).

It is Aquinas's reply to the third objection that is needed to clarify what is going on. When Christ died, His atonement as spoken of before was not simply sufficient but superabundant, one in which human nature is restored into something better. Consequently, Aquinas describes what takes place in Christ the head and then in us who are incorporated with him as members. Of Christ, Aquinas writes "[1] Christ first had grace in His soul with bodily possibility, and [2] through the Passion attained to [3] the glory of immortality." Then Aquinas writes "[1] so we likewise who are His members, are freed by His Passion from all debt of punishment"⁹⁵ having "a passible and mortal body: [2] but afterwards, 'being made conformable' to the sufferings and death of Christ, [3] we are brought into immortal glory."⁹⁶

What is important to recognize is that for Christ the progression from having grace and a passible body to attaining immortal glory is all done by Christ alone but it is not done by our selves alone. This is shown even grammatically. Whereas Christ first had grace in His soul with bodily possibility and through the Passion attained [active voice] to the glory of immortality," "we first receive in our souls *the spirit of adoption of sons*, whereby our names are written down for the inheritance of immortal glory, while we yet have a passible and mortal body: but afterwards, *being made conformable* [passive voice] to the sufferings and death of Christ, we are brought [passive voice] into immortal glory."⁹⁷ Of such assistance Aquinas had previously explained: "atonement consists in an outward action for which helps may be used, among which friends are to be

⁹⁵ Either by Baptism without sinning or also by penance having sinned.

⁹⁶ *ST* 3.49.3.3m. In interpreting this passage about how Christ attains immortal glory and how we do, Torrell centers on Aquinas's words about our receiving "in our souls the spirit of adoption of sons," and attributes this to the grace of the Holy Spirit and writes, that "it is the Holy Spirit who acts in the sacraments and that he is guarantee of our inheritance." Thus, Torrell writes that the Aquinas's text has an eschatological perspective. There is a progressivity in the process of conformity to Christ beginning with Baptism. Then Torrell writes what is the key difference of his position from mine above. This conformity to Christ is accomplished only through the same trials that Christ has already undergone; not in our place, but rather like us, so that we may learn to live these things and surmount them "like him." (Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus*, 434). That is, Torrell holds that all that Christ did and endured shaped the grace that is now communicated to us, so that we can act as Christ did in His life, Passion and death and then at God's disposal and power have our resurrection brought about. Torrell, 640-41.

⁹⁷ *ST* 3.49.3.3m.

computed.”⁹⁸ So in our very act of dying Christ assists us to commend our soul to the Father, and thereby acquire the habit of glory.⁹⁹

To understand how the above takes place, we can use Aquinas's principle about how habits are caused. For everything that is passive and moved by another is disposed by the action of the agent; wherefore if the acts be multiplied a certain quality is formed in the power which is passive and moved, which quality is called a habit.¹⁰⁰ In the case of the Passion, Christ is the agent who as the Redeemer brings about His own salvation and ours.¹⁰¹ As Redeemer, the act that is done is His and the object of the act is His soul, as expressed by His words, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit (Luke 23:46).” That is, Christ commends His soul to the Father by way of command. A command, in general is an “act of reason, presupposing an act of the will, in virtue of which the reason, by its command, moves (the power) to the execution of the act.”¹⁰² One can command one's will, reason, sensitive appetite and bodily members.¹⁰³ Christ is able to command His soul and not just His powers for two reasons. First, while the soul is inclined by its nature to its body, because His slayers are causing it to separate from His body, it is open to being influenced by an outside power. Second, that outside power is due to Christ's hypostatic union because He can not only call on His will and grace to make that command, but upon the miraculous power of His divinity¹⁰⁴ and incline His soul to the Father. In this way Christ acquires the habit of glory for His soul.¹⁰⁵ Then by the power of His Godhead and thus in union with Father and Holy Spirit, after three days, Christ is able to join His soul perfected by this new habit to His body so that it acts as the formal cause of His human nature's immortality and glory.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, Christ can use His powers to help us not only in turning our commanded powers from sin back to God but also help us as we are dying to

⁹⁸ *ST* 3.48.2.1m.

⁹⁹ For a description of how Christ causes the habit of glory in Himself see W. Jerome Bracken, “Of What Benefit to Himself Was Christ's Suffering?: Merit in Aquinas's Theology of the Passion,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 65, no. 3 (2001): 385–407, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2001.0002>.

¹⁰⁰ *ST* 1–2.51.2.

¹⁰¹ *ST* 3.48.1.

¹⁰² *ST* 1–2.17.1.

¹⁰³ *ST* 1–2.17.5, 6, 7, 9.

¹⁰⁴ *ST* 3.47.1.2m.

¹⁰⁵ *ST* 1.97.1: “Second, a thing is incorruptible in its form, inasmuch as being by nature corruptible, yet it has an inherent disposition which preserves it wholly from corruption; and this is called incorruptibility of glory.”

¹⁰⁶ *ST* 2–2.58.2. This paragraph can describe metaphorical justice.

command and commend our souls to the Father and thereby acquire the habit of glory. Then, on the Last Day, our having already attained the more excellent goal of the vision of God, Christ, by His Godhead and with the Father and Holy Spirit, will join our souls to our bodies whereby we will be made glorious and immortal like the risen Christ Himself.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, what Christ underwent in His Passion and death was not simply a satisfaction for sin to remove all debts of punishment. It was also a redemptive act in which mankind's very weakness in dying became the moment for Christ the man and the moment for us as well to achieve through an outward act of command¹⁰⁸ the highest human but invisible good,¹⁰⁹ the habit of glory in one's

¹⁰⁷ ST 3.49.3.2m. To be redeemed is to be likened to the Redeemer.

¹⁰⁸ ST 3.48.2.1m. While Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae*, 313; Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus*, 407, and Van Nieuwenhove, "Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion," 290, comment on ST 3.48.2.2m about satisfaction being an "outward act" for which another can satisfy, ST 3.48.2.1m, only Torrell recognizes it as *l'acte exterieur*. None write that the exterior act is a command, in which our reason, exterior to our will, commands and another of our powers obeys and is perfected thereby; ST 1-2.17.1. As such, command is the bases for explaining how Christ's act in dying can attain for his human nature the glory of immortality, ST 3.49.3.3m. Also command is basis for explaining how Christ can help us to do the same, ST 3.49.3.3m. This is because Christ by commanding His own soul and inclining it to His Father in his dying, ST 3.49.5.2m, so perfected His soul with the habit of glory, ST 1.97.1, that it became, when rejoined to His body, the formal cause of His bodily resurrection and exaltation. ST 3.48.1.3m; 3.49.6.2m. Thereby, through the sacraments, Christ can communicate to us not only the grace of the Holy Trinity to merit eternal life, ST 3.62, but also sacramental character, ST 3.63, which flows from Christ himself, ST 3.63.3.2m, and which enables us to receive the help of Christ Himself to command our sinful powers and direct them back to God, ST 3.49.3.2m. Moreover, at our dying, we can receive the help of Christ to command our soul and incline it to the Father, as Christ did, and thus attain the habit of glory, as Christ did. Then on the Last Day, when the Incarnate Son with the Father and Holy Spirit joins our souls to our bodies, we will be like Christ, not only in terms of grace but also in terms of our bodily likeness to the resurrected and glorious incarnate Son of God.

¹⁰⁹ Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*. To account for the scriptural testimony that we are saved by Christ's death, Rahner developed his "Theology of Death," considering what takes place in every human death and applying it to Christ. In death, one, in his very weakness, surrenders his bodily life and at the same time one morally consummates his spiritual reality as to be either in harmony or disharmony with the world of God (Rahner, 33), and body-spirit beings (Rahner, 31), either contributing or not contributing to the establishment of the right order of this world (Rahner, 33). Applying this to Christ, the following can be said. In His surrender of bodily life, experiencing God's abandonment and the darkness of its outcome (Rahner, 49-50) Christ by grace made a "free offering of His entire created existence to God" (Rahner, 70). In doing so the human reality of Christ is consummated through His death and His death grafted into the oneness of this world" becomes "a destiny

soul. Only on the Last Day, will we see that our soul with the habit of glory gives us a likeness to the risen Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

Conclusion

From the analysis of these articles on redemption, therefore, one can see that Thomas has given a much more comprehensive understanding of Christ's redemption than has either the devil's ransom theory of the early Fathers or the satisfaction theory of Anselm. Neither the metaphor of the devil's battle against God nor the moralistic description of our duty to God adequately explains what Christ accomplished by redeeming us. Only by seeing redemption in the metaphysical and moral act terms of our participation in God's providence, can one appreciate the value of suffering in our struggle with evil. Furthermore, this point of view enables one to see how the Incarnate Son of God and the sacraments supply us with the power to prevail.

Insofar as redemption is part of God's providence, it is a process by which we are converted from sin and transformed into glory. As part of this process, suffering has a number of functions. It maintains God's justice by punishing us with damnation, because we choose to remain in sin. It helps us to correct the faults still remaining after we are forgiven and are converted to God. Finally,

and intrinsic principle" of the world of "personal human actions" (Rahner, 73). Rahner says "He performed all this in virtue of a grace necessarily his due as a divine person, while the grace which helps us to face our death, is his grace." (Rahner, 70). Rahner later makes the statement that while "Christ was poured out over all the world; he became actually, in his humanity, what he had always been according to his dignity, the heart of the world, the innermost center of creation" (Rahner, 74). It seems Rahner is attributing too much to Christ's humanity, making it more than being an instrument of grace (Rahner, 74), making one think Rahner is attributing to Christ's humanity what His divinity is for the world. In what I have written I have considered the risen Christ being the conjoined instrument of His Godhead and the sacraments to be His separated instruments, whereby Christ communicates grace and sacramental character. By grace we can merit eternal life. By grace and sacramental character which flows directly from Christ, *ST* 3.63.3, we can receive Christ's personal aid during our lifetime and when we are dying. We will receive Christ's personal aid to command our powers and direct them to the Father; *ST* 3.49.2.2m. Then at our dying, through both these gifts we will be able to command and commend our souls to the Father, *ST* 3.49.2.3m, as Christ did in his dying, and acquire the habit of glory, *ST* 3.49.2.3m, as Christ did in His dying, *ST* 3.48.5.1m, making us become like Christ, in His humanity, in sanctifying grace and in having the habit of glory. Then, on the Last Day, when our souls are joined to our bodies we will become like the resurrected Christ Himself.

suffering contributes to our transformation into glory. Thus, submission to suffering, under the influence of the Incarnate Son of God enables the power of God to have its greatest effect.¹¹⁰

It is through the sacraments that the Incarnate Son of God can affect us. First, these sacraments help us to overcome the effects of sin. Baptism wipes sin away.¹¹¹ Penance assists us in performing satisfactory acts so that less suffering is needed to remove the residual effects of personal sin.¹¹² Second, the sacraments, particularly Baptism and Confirmation, enable us to be subject to the influence of Christ whereby suffering and particularly death are moments to do acts that can perfect us and attain the glory of immortality itself.¹¹³

Christ by way of His hypostatic union has the power to command His own human nature and direct it to His Father and assist us in commanding our own powers and ultimately our soul to the Father. This is the ultimate reason why suffering can be changed from a destructive to a constructive force. Whereas grace elicits acts of love for God and neighbor and thereby merits eternal life, it is Christ, in His hypostatic union, who enables us to command our human powers and ultimately our soul that changes the function of suffering. It evolves from being a punishment for sin and a correction of its effect into being an opportunity for our human nature to be transformed.¹¹⁴ Now, whereas a virtue is a specific kind of habit, a habit in general "is a disposition whereby that which is disposed, is well or ill-disposed either in regard to itself, that is, to its nature, or in regard to something else, that is to the end."¹¹⁵ By assisting us to command and commend our souls to the Father and thereby acquire the habit of glory for them, Christ, the Son of God incarnate, brings us to share in the glory and immortality of His own risen human nature.

Through the prism of redemption, therefore, suffering and death are seen as occasions when Christ not only exercises His personal influence on us by way

¹¹⁰ *ST* 3.48.6.1m; *ST* 3.48.1.3m: "Christ's Passion has a special effect, which His preceding merits did not possess, not on account of greater charity, but because of the nature of the work, which was suitable for such an effect," *ST* 3.48.2.1m: "But the same reason does not hold good of confession and contrition, because atonement consists in an outward action, for which helps may be used, among which friends are to be computed."

¹¹¹ *ST* 3.49.3.1m.

¹¹² *ST* 3.49.3.2m.

¹¹³ *ST* 3.49.3.3m.

¹¹⁴ Human virtue is an operative habit (*ST* 1-2.55.2). Now, whereas a virtue is a specific kind of habit, a habit in general "is a disposition whereby that which is disposed, is well or ill disposed either in regard to itself, that is, to its nature, or in regard to something else, that is to the end" (*ST* 1-2.49.3).

¹¹⁵ *ST* 1-2.49.3.

of command but also comes to possess us in a most radical way by the habit of glory. The way a virtue in a person comes to possess the power in which it inheres is the way Christ comes to possess us. As a virtue gives a new mode of being and a greater facility in operating to a power of a person's soul,¹¹⁶ Christ gives a new mode of being and facility of operating to our very essence.¹¹⁷ The unique relationship that Christ attains with us through His redemptive act, therefore, is as pervasive as the relationship that a virtue has with any of a person's powers of acting. Moreover, like virtue itself, the power that comes from Christ is at the disposal of our freedom to use or reject. We can call upon Christ to help us overcome the devil's temptations. We can also call upon Christ to help us deal with the devil's power to separate soul from body and make that the occasion whereby He enables us to cooperate with Him in commanding and commending our souls to the Father, thereby acquiring the habit of glory as He did.

As redemptive, therefore, Christ's Passion not only delivers us from the punishment of the sin of the human race, but initiates a process by which His own human act of dying by way of His command is the immediate and in that sense the unique cause of His bodily transformation and exaltation and also a process by which we, His members, according to grace and by cooperation with Christ can undergo to become bodily like Him. While the triune gift of grace enables us to merit eternal life, it is Christ Himself who personally influences us so that we can command acts that so affect our powers of acting that vices can be replaced by virtue and the debilitating habit of original sin¹¹⁸ can be replaced by the habit of glory. That is, Christ is the immediate cause of the process by which He and then we are bodily transformed, becoming not only immortal but glorious.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ One can choose to go contrary to his virtue and thus corrupt it (*ST* 1–2.53.2). One is free, therefore, to follow the inclination of virtue or not to follow it.

¹¹⁷ *ST* 3.49.2.3m.

¹¹⁸ *ST* 1–2.82.1: "In this sense original sin is a habit. For it is an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice," *ST* 2–2.164.1: "But inasmuch as through sin man's mind withdrew from subjection to God, the result was that neither were his lower powers wholly subject to his reason, whence there followed so great a rebellion of the carnal appetite against the reason: nor was the body wholly subject to the soul; whence arose death and other bodily defects."

¹¹⁹ It should be pointed out that the above is an interpretation of Aquinas that is different from Torrell's. For Torrell what is valuable and effective is due to grace regarding merit (Torrell, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus*, 392–93), satisfaction (Torrell, 406–7) and redemption (Torrell, 419). Thus, Torrell describes grace as Christo-forming and writes that only at the resurrection is grace able to deploy all its virtualities (Torrell, 633).

What remains to be seen is how the interaction between Christ and His fellow human beings causes this change to come about. Later in *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas shows how Christ's death and Resurrection act not only as an efficient cause, but also as exemplary causes likening us to Himself¹²⁰ and how the sacraments, by the gifts of sacramental grace¹²¹ and sacramental character,¹²² enable one to share in Christ's priesthood,¹²³ with sacramental character enabling one to receive Christ's aid and give witness to Christ "even in the face of the enemies of the Christian faith."¹²⁴

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¹²⁰ *ST* 3.56.1.3m.

¹²¹ *ST* 3.62.

¹²² *ST* 3.63.

¹²³ *ST* 3.62.5.1m.

¹²⁴ *ST* 3.72.5. For an explanation of these causalities see Chapter 10 of W. Jerome Bracken, "Why Suffering in Redemption? A New Interpretation of the Theology of the Passion in the Summa Theologica, 3. 46–49, by Thomas Aquinas" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 1978), 349–70.

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Mariology and the *Tertia Pars*

Mariologia w świetle trzeciej części *Sumy teologicznej*

ABSTRACT: This essay argues that Christology needs Mariology, and specifically that Thomistic Christology needs to integrate Mariology in a more conscious manner today. In questions 27–32 of *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas treats such topics as the Blessed Virgin Mary’s sanctification, her virginal conception of her Son, her virginal integrity in giving birth, her perpetual virginity, and the matter from which her Son’s body was formed. These questions are relatively neglected in contemporary Thomistic Christology. By comparison, past theologians drew significantly upon these questions. One thinks of writings by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Benoît-Henri Merkelbach, and Édouard Hugon – although R. Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa* leaves out questions 27–32. The present essay focuses on questions 28–32, with particular emphasis on questions 28–30. My approach will be broadly expository, but I will also bring in contemporary theological resources for defending Aquinas’s perspectives. I propose that the *Tertia Pars*’s Mariological questions deserve a place in contemporary Thomistic Christology because they help to underscore that Jesus Christ really was “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4) and because they highlight the eschatological signs of the inaugurated kingdom of God.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas, Mariology, virgin birth, Thomistic Christology, *Summa Theologiae*, *Tertia Pars*, Mary’s perpetual virginity, inaugurated kingdom, eschatological signs

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wykazanie, że chrystologia potrzebuje mariologii, a w szczególności, że chrystologia tomistyczna musi dziś w bardziej świadomy sposób zintegrować mariologię. W pytaniach 27–32 trzeciej części *Sumy teologicznej* Tomasz z Akwinu porusza takie zagadnienia, jak: uświęcenie Najświętszej Maryi Panny, dziewicze poczęcie Syna, dziewicza czystość podczas porodu, wieczyste dziewictwo, materia, z której zostało poczęte ciało Jej Syna. Zagadnienia te są we współczesnej chrystologii tomistycznej niedostatecznie opracowane, mimo że we wcześniejszym okresie teologowie (m.in. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Benoît-Henri Merkelbach czy Édouard Hugon) poświęcali im znacznie więcej miejsca (choć R. Garrigou-Lagrange

w *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa* pomija zagadnienia 27–32). W niniejszym artykule omówiono szeroko zagadnienia 28–32 (a zwłaszcza 28–30). W obronie argumentów Akwinaty uwzględniono też współczesne źródła teologiczne. Zagadnienia mariologiczne *Tertia Pars* zdecydowanie zasługują na ponowne opracowanie we współczesnej chrystologii tomistycznej, ponieważ kładą nacisk na osobę Jezusa Chrystusa jako rzeczywiście „zrodzonego z niewiasty” (Ga 4, 4) oraz podkreślają eschatologiczne znaki nadchodzącego królestwa Bożego.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, mariologia, dziewicze narodziny, chrystologia tomistyczna, *Summa teologica*, *Tertia Pars*, wieczyste dziewictwo Maryi, zapoczątkowanie królestwa Bożego, znaki eschatologiczne

Introduction

In questions 27–32 of the *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas is concerned not only with the Blessed Virgin Mary's sanctification—he comes close to the doctrine of the immaculate conception while rejecting it on soteriological grounds—but also with her virginal conception of her Son, her virginal integrity in giving birth, her perpetual virginity, and the derivation and purity of the matter from which her Son's body was formed.¹ Such questions comprise a pivotal section of the *Christology* of the *Tertia Pars*. They constitute a transition from the first section of the *Tertia Pars* (questions 1–26), which Aquinas describes as being “about the mystery of the Incarnation itself, whereby God was made man for our salvation,” to the second section of the *Tertia Pars* (questions 27–59), “about such things as were done and suffered by our Saviour—i.e. God incarnate.”²

¹ In the prologue to question 27, Aquinas states that he will consider four topics: her sanctification, virginity, espousal, and annunciation. I do not attempt in this essay to cover all these topics.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981) III, Prologue (hereafter: *STh*). In the prologue to question 27—marking the transition from questions 1–26—Aquinas describes his approach (in questions 27–59) in a more complex manner: “After the foregoing treatise of the union of God and man and the consequences thereof, it remains for us to consider what things the Incarnate Son of God did or suffered in the human nature united to Him. This consideration will be fourfold. For we shall consider (1) Those things that relate to His coming into the world; (2) Those things that relate to the course of His life in this world; (3) His departure from this world; (4) Those things that concern His exaltation after this life. The first of these offers four points of consideration: (1) The Conception of Christ; (2) His Birth; (3) His Circumcision; (4) His Baptism.”

Questions 27–32 have not been without influence during the 750 years since Aquinas's death. For instance, when the Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez published what is now considered the first modern Mariological treatise, he did so in the guise of a commentary on questions 27–30.³ Yet, questions 27–32 have not been integrated into Thomistic Christology as fully as one would wish. Consider for example the recent revitalization of Thomism, after some decades of relative desuetude after the Second Vatican Council. Many books on Aquinas's Christology have appeared, especially in English and French. To my knowledge, however, none of these volumes has dealt in any extensive way with Aquinas's Mariology as part of his Christology.⁴ Nor have scholarly journals in these decades published much on Aquinas's Mariology, beyond an occasional piece on Aquinas and the Immaculate Conception.

This situation stands in some contrast to the interest in Mariology taken by the leading Thomists of the early twentieth century. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange's *Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, for example, remains a valuable resource for contemporary Mariology.⁵ Benoît-Henri Merkelbach's *Mariologia* also deserves mention, both in its own right and as one of R. Garrigou-Lagrange's most important sources.⁶ Many other works could be named, including Édouard Hugon's *Mary, Full of Grace*.⁷

³ See Francisco Suárez, *Commentaria ac disputationes in Tertiam Partem D. Thomae*, R.P. Francisci Suarez e Societate Jesu Opera Omnia 19 (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1867), 2–144. I owe this citation to John L. Nepil, *Bride Adored: Mary—Church Periochoreosis in Modern Catholic Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic Press, 2023), 19. I note that, strictly speaking, questions 31 and 32 are not “Mariological” but rather are “Christological,” because they treat “the matter from which [Christ's] body was conceived” (*STh* III, q. 31, prologue) and “the active principle in Christ's conception” (*STh* III, q. 32, prologue). In my view, however, these questions are both Mariological and Christological, because the matter comes from Mary, and Christ's conception involved Mary in a profound way. Although I will include questions 31 and 32 in what follows, I will not give them a thorough treatment.

⁴ I am part of the problem, although in Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), I do briefly discuss some places where Aquinas reflects upon Mary, including in relation to the Temple.

⁵ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, trans. Bernard J. Kelly (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1993).

⁶ Benoît-Henri Merkelbach, *Mariologia: Tractatus de beatissima Virgine Maria, matre Dei atque Deum inter homines mediatrice* (Paris: Desclée, 1939).

⁷ Édouard Hugon, *Mary, Full of Grace*, ed. and trans. John G. Brungardt (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2019). For a valuable recent study by a noted Thomist theologian, see Thomas Joseph White, “Mariology and the Sense of Mystery: The Virgin Mary and the Spiritual Practice of Catholic Theology,” in *Thomas Aquinas as Spiritual Teacher*, ed.

In “S. Thomas et la Vierge Marie”—a study included in his *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*—Jean-Pierre Torrell notes that in his Christology, “Aquinas puts in relief the two great essential truths of the motherhood of Mary and her virginity.”⁸ But J.-P. Torrell comments that Aquinas’s “insistence on the physical sign of her virginity can be surprising for a modern reader,”⁹ and one comes away from Torrell’s brief essay—and from his commentary on the *Tertia Pars* as a whole—with the impression that Torrell himself believes that Aquinas’s approach to these matters will not be of great help to contemporary theologians. Indeed, in his widely influential *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, Torrell expositis Aquinas’s theology with verve and profundity, but never mentions Mary. To his credit, Torrell in *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin* gives extensive attention to questions 27–32, whereas R. Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa* leaves out those questions.¹⁰

In what follows, I will focus my attention on questions 28–32 (and especially 28–30, though without being comprehensive).¹¹ I will suggest that Aquinas’s Mariological questions require careful attention in a well-balanced Thomistic Christology especially for two reasons: the Incarnation is not an abstraction or a theory, but rather Jesus Christ really was “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4); and

Michael A. Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger W. Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2023), 211–44. On a popular level, see Romanus Cessario, *The Seven Joys of Mary* (New York: Magnificat, 2011); Romanus Cessario, *The Seven Sorrows of Mary* (New York: Magnificat, 2014).

⁸ Jean Pierre Torrell, “S. Thomas et la Vierge Marie,” in *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin: Encyclopédie: Texte de la Tertia Pars (ST III^e) traduit et commenté, accompagné de Données historiques et doctrinales et de cinquante Textes choisis*, Jean Pierre Torrell (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 1096.

⁹ Jean Pierre Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin: Encyclopédie: Texte de la Tertia Pars (ST III^e) traduit et commenté, accompagné de Données historiques et doctrinales et de cinquante Textes choisis* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 493.

¹⁰ See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa*, trans. Bede Rose (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1957).

¹¹ For relatively recent studies of Aquinas on the Virgin Mary, see also Basil Cole and Francis Belanger, “The Immaculate Conception, St. Thomas, and Blessed Pius IX,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 4, no. 3 (2006), 473–94; Terence Quinn, “St. Thomas’ Teaching on the Immaculate Conception,” *Dominicana* 39 (1953), 297–303; Daniel Ols, “La bienheureuse Vierge Marie selon saint Thomas,” in *Littera, Sensus, Sententia. Studi in onore del Prof. Clemente J. Vansteenkiste O.P.* Ed. A. Lobato, Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe 33 (Milan: Massimo, 1991), 435–53; George Frendo, “The Mariology of St Thomas Aquinas in the Light of Vatican II,” *Scientia*, 1986, 26–35; Gabriel Maria Roschini, “Ciò che è stato scritto sulla mariologia di S. Tommaso,” in *San Tommaso e l’odierna problematica teologica: Saggi*, Studi Tomistici 2 (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1973), 159–95.

the mysteries of Mary are eschatological signs of the new creation inaugurated by the Incarnation. As I hope to show, the Mariology of Aquinas manifests these two fundamental principles. I should note that my investigation will be constructive as well as expository, insofar as I write as a theologian and not a historian. I will attempt to defend Aquinas's arguments in contemporary terms and to bring his perspective into conversation with Catholic and Protestant theology and exegesis.¹²

Summa Theologiae III, Question 28: Of the Virginity of the Mother of God

Question 28 of the *Tertia Pars* treats Mary's virginity, including her virginal conception of Jesus and her *virginitas in partu*.¹³ It is her *virginitas in partu* that is most controversial today, and so my treatment of it will include some contemporary theological engagement. Even the truth of the virginal conception of Jesus is debated today, and so my discussion of question 28 will not be solely expository.

In article one, on Mary's virginal conception of her Son, Aquinas's five objections are important. Taken together, they contend that affirming Mary's virginal conception of Christ would make the Incarnation *less* concrete, turning the Incarnation into something ideal and separating Christ from the human race. The first two objections argue that Jesus must have had a human (biological) father and that his Davidic descent requires a biological descent from Joseph. In the third objection he observes that although Paul in Gal 4 knows that Jesus is born of a woman, Paul appears to have in view a woman who is

¹² Inevitably, this will mean that my analysis will sometimes occlude the particularities of Aquinas's texts in the context of the medieval debates. For a full exposition of these particularities, see Torrell's *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*.

¹³ For background see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 492–500; and John Baptist Ku, "The Fittingness of Mary's Virginity in Birth," *The Thomist* 87 (2023), 451–62, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2023.a900227>. John Baptist Ku provides patristic and magisterial support for Mary's *virginitas in partu*, and he then examines Aquinas's three reasons for the fittingness of this mystery. Ku focuses on how Mary's "virginity in birth . . . points ahead to the glory of beatitude with which Christ can endow our human bodies" (Ku, 458), and he explores the properties of a glorified body, especially subtlety. He maintains, "This [i.e. Mary's virginity in birth] was a proleptic manifestation: Christ's subtlety in the virgin birth 'represented' the future subtlety of his body. Mary's giving birth without losing her virginity, then, is an affirmation of Christ's beatitude" (Ku, 461).

not a virgin.¹⁴ The fourth objection states that to be a member of the human race one needs to be generated according to the human mode, namely, sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. The fifth and final objection makes a similar point. Concretely, a human body is comprised of semen from a male and a female—a father and a mother.¹⁵ Since this is so, it seems that a body constituted in any other way would not be human. If Jesus were conceived solely by his mother, his flesh—far from being grounded in the concreteness of human history—would be an oddity, not human but freakish.

In the *sed contra* of the article, Aquinas points to Isa 7:14, quoted in its LXX version in Matt 1:23, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” His point is that God willed Jesus to be born of a virgin. But how does this truth comport with the objections that Aquinas has raised? In his response to the fifth objection, he argues that it is not a requirement of human nature, as such, to come forth from a man and a woman.¹⁶ For instance, Adam was directly created by God, but he still had human nature. Although Aquinas does not mention it here, Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib would also be an instance of what Aquinas has in view. God’s power can act upon the ovum in a manner sufficient to bring forth a human child (including by ensuring that the needed chromosomes are present, not least the Y chromosome, something that Aquinas is unaware must be done). Since this is so, Jesus can possess human nature and

¹⁴ The objection runs as follows: “Further, it is written (Gal. iv. 4): *God sent His Son, made of a woman*. But according to the customary mode of speaking the term *woman* applies to one who is known of a man. Therefore Christ was not conceived by a virgin mother.”

¹⁵ Alicia D. Myers notes, “For Aristotle, the *pneuma* is part of the unique contribution from male semen that initiates life in the matter provided by the woman. . . . Galen mixes Aristotelian ideas with his two-seed theory that allows for *pneuma* to be provided by both the male and female, though the male’s provision is of greater heat and, therefore, potency, thus supplying the necessary ‘motion’ for life” (Alicia D. Myers, *Blessed among Women? Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 61). Drawing from the work of Gwynn Kessler, A. D. Myers adds that “later Second Temple Jewish sources *do* convey familiarity with Aristotelian ideas by describing the male’s ‘virile’ and causative seed, which shapes the nourishing female blood” (Myers, 61). See Gwynn Kessler, *Conceiving Israel: The Fetus in Rabbinic Narratives*, *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and see also Matthew Thiessen, “The Legislation of Leviticus 12 in Light of Ancient Embryology,” *Vetus Testamentum* 68 (2018), 297–319.

¹⁶ In making his point, Aquinas draws upon Aristotle’s faulty biology. For discussion, contrasting Aquinas’s use of Aristotle with his use of Genesis in the same reply to the fifth objection (and arguing that “difficulties or solutions that claim to stay on the biological level alone can only constitute a distorted path” for resolving issues pertaining to Mary’s virginal conception), see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 495.

be a full member of the human race without having a human father. This point includes answers to both the fifth and the fourth objection.

Regarding Paul's remark in Gal 4:4, Aquinas argues (in his reply to the *fourth* objection) that being born of a woman need not entail being conceived through sexual intercourse, once the divine power is taken into account. Regarding Matthew's genealogy (the second objection), Aquinas relies upon the responses offered by Jerome and Augustine, who argue that there are reasons to suppose that Mary was of the lineage of David.¹⁷ Finally, indebted to Augustine, Aquinas observes in response to the first objection that Mary and Joseph had a real marriage and so Joseph can truly be called Jesus' father, even if not his biological father.

In the *respondeo* of the article, Aquinas underlines that the human concreteness of Jesus' conception in Mary's womb certainly does not require that no miracle be involved.¹⁸ Indeed, Aquinas thinks it fitting that a miracle *should* be involved, although Aquinas does not use the term "miracle." Mary truly conceives Jesus in her womb. But since the Incarnation is an eschatological event (to employ contemporary language), it is fitting that God highlight its uniqueness by enabling Mary to conceive in her womb in a unique way. The Incarnation is the entrance into the world of "the true and natural Son of God" who, fittingly, has no other "father than God."¹⁹ The purpose of the Incarnation is that human beings become adopted children of God, sharing in the inheritance of the Son. This filial adoption occurs when we are "born again as sons of God" through the grace of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ Aquinas explains that just as our adopted sonship occurs by the divine power rather than by a natural

¹⁷ Aquinas takes up the genealogies in detail in question 31, and so I will discuss them more fully when I treat that question.

¹⁸ Aquinas's *respondeo* in *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1 argues, "We must confess simply that the Mother of Christ was a virgin in conceiving, for to deny this belongs to the heresy of the Ebionites and Cerinthus, who held Christ to be a mere man, and maintained that He was born of both sexes. It is fitting for four reasons that Christ should be born of a virgin"—to maintain the divine Father's dignity, as befitting the Word's eternal conception without corruption, as befitting Christ's sinless humanity, and as befitting the goal of the Incarnation (namely, that humans should be born anew as sons of God by the power of God rather than by any human power). In this paragraph, I engage three of these four reasons of fittingness, without providing a detailed exposition of Aquinas's *respondeo*. It bears noting that Aquinas, in his reasons of fittingness, focuses on Christology.

¹⁹ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1.

²⁰ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1. See Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John A. Kincaid, *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), chapter 5; Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 22 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); and see also Daria Spezzano,

process, so also it is fitting that Christ's Incarnation occur not *solely* by a natural process but also by divine power. Just as the Holy Spirit is responsible for the conception of Christ, the Holy Spirit is responsible for our becoming adopted sons in the Son.²¹ As the angel of the Lord tells Joseph in a dream in the Gospel of Luke, Mary "will bear a son," and "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:19–20).²²

In the second article of question 28, Aquinas asks whether Mary preserved her virginal integrity during Christ's birth.²³ He remarks in the second objection of this article that an affirmative answer would seem to undermine the human

The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015), 179–207, especially 192–207.

²¹ See Gilles Emery, "The Holy Spirit in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans," in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Dauphinais Michael (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 144–49. See also the extensive background in Luc-Thomas Somme, *Fils adoptifs de Dieu par Jésus Christ* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997).

²² In his *respondeo*, Aquinas observes that "it was not possible in a nature already corrupt, for flesh to be born from sexual intercourse without incurring the infection of original sin." He notes that this fact makes fitting the virginal conception of Christ. Torrell clarifies here that Aquinas "does not say that the conjugal act is the cause of 'corruption' of the flesh," and so it is necessary to be careful when reading Aquinas's teaching on this matter through an Augustinian lens" (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 495). Aquinas holds that "the conjugal act can only transmit a 'corrupted' nature, that is to say a nature deprived of grace, because it is already in this state since the original sin" (Torrell, 495).

²³ Torrell comments, "For Thomas, there is no doubt about Mary's *virginitas in partu*, but it is necessary to recognize that this affirmation about Mary is a matter less anciently attested than the virginal conception" (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 496). According to Torrell, the first magisterial text that clearly teaches Mary's *virginitas in partu* is Leo's Tome, and it was also taught by Pope Martin I and, in solemn fashion, by Pope Paul IV. Torrell comments that from Pope Leo the Great through 1950, Catholic theologians affirmed Mary's *virginitas in partu* almost unanimously. However, beginning around 1950, "many theologians have emphasized that the normal consequence of a childbirth does not involve any injury to Mary's virginity, and these theologians have therefore contested the view that the miraculously preserved permanence of the physical sign of her virginity belongs to the contents of faith" (Torrell, 496). For a significant recent defense of the doctrine of Mary's *virginitas in partu*, see Brian A. Graebe, *Vessel of Honor: The Virgin Birth and the Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021). Brian A. Graebe points out that rejection of Mary's *virginitas in partu* undermines the traditional doctrine of the virgin birth not least by "reducing it to the natural consequence of the virginal conception," thereby separating out the birth itself as not part of the miracle (Graebe, 300). Graebe also comments that the doctrine helps to highlight Mary's status as the intact vessel of the Word (divine revelation) and Mary's status as "the Virgin Bride. It is she, as Daughter Zion, who leads Israel to the goal and reward of the covenant. . . . The Assumption not only crowns Mary's physical integrity, which remains uncorrupted, but becomes the hope for the faith of the new Israel on their journey to the Promised Land"

concreteness of the Incarnation. The danger again is that the Incarnation may seem to be an ethereal event that does not credibly involve real bodies. Aquinas states in this objection: “nothing should have taken place in the mystery of Christ, which would make His body to seem unreal. Now it seems to pertain not to a true but to an unreal body, to be able to go through a closed passage; since two bodies cannot be in one place at the same time.”²⁴ If one claims that Christ came through the birth canal without causing any physical damage, it may appear that the realism or concreteness of the Incarnation has been lost. Insisting upon Mary’s virginal (bodily) intactness throughout the childbirth may seem to remove the event of Jesus’ birth far away from the realities of human flesh.

What is Aquinas’s answer to this objection? First, he feels biblically compelled to hold to Mary’s virginity in giving birth. Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23, he thinks, teach not only that Mary will be a virgin in conceiving her Son (“a virgin shall conceive”) but also that Mary will be a virgin in giving birth to her Son (“a virgin shall . . . bear a son”). But why should “virginity” entail physical intactness in giving birth? Aquinas turns again to his guiding principle: the miraculous is combined with the mundane in everything pertaining to the Incarnation. Christ, in order to show the truth of his Incarnation, “mingled wondrous with lowly things. Wherefore, to show that His body was real, He was born of a woman. But in order to manifest His Godhead, He was born of a virgin.”²⁵ In Aquinas’s view, for Mary to be a virgin in conceiving her Son is a miracle that is fittingly paired with the miracle of her continuing to bear the mark of virginity in giving birth.

Aquinas’s position is not a matter of supposing that women who lack virginal integrity are no longer “pure.”²⁶ For Aquinas, instead, what is at stake is the

(Graebe, 302). See also the defense of the doctrine in René Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* (Washington, NJ: Ave Maria Institute, 1991), 324–34.

²⁴ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1, obj. 2. The Latin word here translated ‘unreal’ is *phantasticum*.

²⁵ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2, ad 2.

²⁶ See also Ignace de La Potterie, *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza* (Genova: Marietti, 1988), 118–43, cited in Manfred Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, trans. Richard Chonak (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 185–86. Whether or not Ignace de La Potterie is correct in his reading of John 1:13 and Luke 1:35, he is correct to draw attention to the significance of ritual purity. Matthew Thiessen has recently focused attention upon Luke 2:22, “And when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’” Scholars have previously assumed that the evangelist

nature of the virgin birth in light of the mission of the Son. Christ does not come to wreak damage. As the Messiah, he comes instead as the healer, the one who inaugurates the new creation and who does so, Catholics believe, in a unique way in Mary's flesh.²⁷ Certainly, Christ comes to call his followers to carry their own crosses, even unto martyrdom. But he does not inflict damage upon those who love him. Fleshly damage involves bodily "corruption" and tends in the direction of death, and childbirth often resulted in the mother's death in the ancient world. By contrast, as Aquinas observes, Christ's Incarnation has among its primary purposes "that He might take away our corruption."²⁸ Since the Incarnation has this eschatological purpose, Aquinas concludes with Augustine that "it is unfitting that in His birth He should corrupt His mother's virginity. Thus Augustine says in a sermon on the Nativity of Our Lord: *It was not right that He who came to heal corruption, should by His advent violate integrity.*"²⁹

This argument regarding the virgin birth is one of fittingness, based on Matt 1:23 as interpreted by the Church Fathers. Aquinas is receiving and handing on what he understands to be a settled point of the doctrinal inheritance of the Church. In his *sed contra* in this article, he places front and center a sermon preached at the Council of Ephesus, a sermon that suggests that the virgin birth did not corrupt Mary's virginal integrity. While Augustine and Bede are among his sources, he draws his central analogies from this sermon,

made a mistake in supposing that not only Mary, but also the infant Jesus would have been considered to be in a state of ritual impurity. As M. Thiessen shows, even though Leviticus 12 speaks only of the ritual impurity of the woman after childbirth, Luke demonstrates a firm knowledge of the Judaism of his day by including the infant Jesus, since contemporaneous texts such as *Jubilees* and 4Q265 also implement Leviticus 12 in this manner. See Matthew Thiessen, "Luke 2:22, Leviticus 12, and Parturient Impurity," *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012), 16–29, <https://doi.org/10.17613/7KFP1-JB335>; and, for further background, see also Thiessen's "The Legislation of Leviticus 12 in Light of Ancient Embryology." In my view, it is plausible that Mary participated in the rite of purification as a public sign of fidelity to God's Torah, even while knowing that neither she nor Jesus was in a state of ritual impurity.

²⁷ For the latter point, see Matthew Levering, *Mary's Bodily Assumption* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

²⁸ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2.

²⁹ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2; translation slightly altered. Brian A. Graebe examines some mid-twentieth-century misunderstandings of Aquinas's position on Mary's *virginitas in partu*: see Graebe, *Vessel of Honor*, 58–60, 67. He also discusses the Holy Office's July 1960 monitum, which brought to an end (if only for a short period) a discussion in which the more notable participants were casting doubt on the doctrine of Mary's *virginitas in partu* as traditionally understood.

which states: “Whosoever brings forth mere flesh, ceases to be a virgin. But since she gave birth to the Word made flesh, God safeguarded her virginity so as to manifest His Word, by which Word He thus manifested Himself: for neither does our word, when brought forth, corrupt the mind; nor does God, the substantial Word, deigning to be born, destroy virginity.”³⁰

If Christ’s birth left Mary’s bodily integrity undamaged, does this miracle undermine what I have called the concreteness of the Incarnation? I have made clear above that Aquinas is sensitive to arguments that it does.³¹ Yet, he deems it fitting that just as the virginal conception of Christ is both ordinary in certain respects and extraordinary in others, so the same is true of the virgin birth. In his view, the twofold operation of the virginal conception of Christ—both a real human conception in Mary’s womb and a miraculous virginal conception caused by God—fittingly reflects Christ’s humanity and divinity. Similarly, the virgin *birth* reflects Christ’s humanity and divinity, in that Christ passes through the birth canal but miraculously does not cause Mary bodily damage.

At the heart of Aquinas’s understanding of Christ’s birth is his insistence that it was virginal, in fulfillment of the Isaianic (LXX) / Matthean text, “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” Again, it is not only the virginal *conception* that shows the divine presence and action in the eschatological coming of the divine Son into the world; the virgin *birth* also shows this same miraculous power. Jesus’ birth is as much a theological mystery as is his conception—as befits the coming of the Messiah and Lord.

Let me illumine Aquinas’s perspective a bit more by directing attention to a recent exchange between two Evangelical scholars, Andrew T. Lincoln and Daniel Treier, neither of whom accepts Mary’s perpetual virginity or her *virginitas in partu*. In his *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology*, A. T. Lincoln asks: “Does belief that Jesus Christ was God incarnate necessarily entail belief in his virginal conception?”³² He replies that

³⁰ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2.

³¹ Commenting on Aquinas’s answer to the third objection of article 2, Torrell makes the case that by rejecting the future Pope Innocent III’s position that the infant Christ possessed the gift of subtlety (which pertains to glorified bodies), Aquinas “is making an anti-Docetist profession of faith that connects with that of the authors of the first centuries who rejected, on these grounds, the physical integrity of Mary during childbirth” (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 497). To my mind, however, Aquinas’s reasons for affirming—not rejecting—the physical integrity of Mary during childbirth go much further and are more persuasive than Torrell supposes.

³² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology*, ed. Andrew T. Lincoln (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 7. In the Anglican Church, A. T. Lincoln notes, denying the virgin birth has been repeatedly recognized as

the answer is no. The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke are shaped by a great deal of theological portraiture, as the evangelists seek to highlight the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Lincoln argues, furthermore, that if Jesus' flesh came solely from his mother, then he could not have had a male Y chromosome. His (virginal) conception would therefore have required a special divine creation, which is unfitting. While Lincoln professes a firm faith in "such realities of the Christian faith as creation, incarnation, atonement, resurrection and consummation," he does not believe in the virginal conception of Jesus.³³

Responding to Lincoln, Treier points out that the theological portraiture in the infancy narratives does not prove that the event of Mary's virginal conception did not happen. Indeed, all the events of Jesus' life are presented by the evangelists with a great deal of theological coloring, but it does not follow that (for example) Jesus was not crucified. Treier holds that God miraculously produced the Y chromosome and augments the genetic material given by Mary, so as to produce the full 46 chromosomes normally given by sperm and egg.³⁴

acceptable in support of faith in the Incarnation (see Lincoln, 300–301). For an instructive response to Lincoln, see Oliver Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 162–78. Lincoln responds to Crisp in Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Bible, Theology, and the Virgin Birth: Continuing a Conversation?," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 14, no. 2 (2020), 267–85, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.14.2.0267>.

³³ Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 12. By contrast, David Braine points out the deep theological connection between the doctrine of the virginal conception and the doctrine of the Incarnation: "If Mary and Joseph had had Jesus as their child by the natural process of their having intercourse and its bearing fruit in Jesus, then this Jesus would be first an embryo, then a child, and later an adult of whom one could say that he would have existed anyway as a human person, even if God had not willed him to be divine. His divinity would then be not key to his natural identity and existence but, as it were, an extra gift, one of his properties, or, in Aristotelian terms, 'accidents'—a matter relating to the point of his human life, not to his origin. A slightly different suggestion might be that, in this case, Mary and Joseph did not have fruitful intercourse except by special divine providence, and that it was by the same providence that God willed this fruit should be divine and called Son of God. However, this suggestion will not stand scrutiny, since it would be by one act of God's free will that Jesus existence as a human person, and still be by a logically independent act of God's free will that this person would be divine" (David Braine, "The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith: The Development of the Church's Teaching on the Virgin Mary in Modern Perspective," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 7, no. 4 [2009], 878–79).

³⁴ See Daniel J. Treier, "Virgin Territory?," *Pro Ecclesia* 23, no. 4 (2014), 375, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121402300401>. Lincoln criticizes positions like Treier's: "The more usual recent defence of the traditional view in the light of knowledge of genetics is to accept its findings but to claim that they do not constitute a problem. The miracle of Jesus' virginal

This miracle does not entail, however, that Jesus was not fully human, since it does not change the fact that he possessed a human nature in full.

Treier observes that Jesus' human nature is not in the same situation as ours, even if one brackets the issue of the virginal conception. In other humans, the coming-to-be of a human nature entails the coming to be of a human person. But Jesus' human nature always subsists in the Person of the Son, not in a *human* person.³⁵ Thus the subsistence of Jesus' human nature (namely, in the Person of the Son) differs radically from ours. Yet, the hypostatic union does not make Jesus less than fully human.

Regarding the virginal conception, Treier also asks "whether . . . God would have allowed the entirety of Christendom to get *fundamentally* off track on a vital doctrine for almost two thousand years."³⁶ Arguing that the answer is no,

conception simply involved the divine provision of the missing male Y chromosome. [Fergus] Kerr appeals to a statement of Aquinas: 'the divine power, which is boundless, completed what was necessary for the foetus' (*Summa Theologiae* 3.28.1). But, as we have seen, for Aquinas the mother supplied all that was necessary for the humanity of the foetus and the divine power completed not its human substance but what was necessary for the gestation and birth of the foetus, the active principle usually supplied by the human male. In any case this response fails to meet the problem. If the Y chromosome supplied was a human one but miraculously transferred without sexual contact, what was the point of the miracle and what is the message it conveys about sexuality? Why not use that of Joseph or some other male through the normal means?" (Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 260, referring to Fergus Kerr, "Questioning the Virgin Birth," *New Blackfriars* 75 [1994], 132–40). Aquinas offers numerous reasons "why not," as I have noted above. Lincoln also cites Oliver Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 79–85; and see Oliver Crisp, "On the 'Fittingness' of the Virgin Birth," *The Heythrop Journal* 49, no. 2 (2007), 197–221, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2007.00336.x>. In this discussion, a salutary warning comes from Juan Eduardo Carreño in "Theology, Philosophy, and Biology: An Interpretation of the Conception of Jesus Christ," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 22, no. 1 (2024), 77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2024.a919266>, emphasizing that God does not do an "assisted fertilization" (as though divine causality were ontologically on the same level as creaturely causality) and ruling out parthenogenesis. See also Michael L. Peterson, Timothy J. Pawl, and Ben F. Brammell, *Jesus and the Genome: The Intersection of Christology and Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 106–11, reviewing the options and advocating for Crisp's position.

³⁵ For further discussion, see Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 5 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

³⁶ Treier, "Virgin Territory?," 379, emphasis added. I note that for a millennium, many or most theologians in the West failed to affirm Mary's Immaculate Conception. It seems to me that this does not represent a case in which Catholicism went fundamentally off track, however, because these same theologians almost all affirmed Mary's profound holiness

he suggests that for someone who believes in the doctrine of the Incarnation—as Lincoln does—this point should carry weight. Treier adds that Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox can agree about this “tradition-historical factor.”³⁷

Indeed, Aquinas’s conclusions regarding Mary’s *virginitas in partu* operate along just such tradition-historical lines.³⁸ The doctrine that Mary’s bodily integrity was not damaged by giving birth to Jesus was defended by Augustine and numerous other Church Fathers, appeared in Pope Leo’s Tome at the Council of Ephesus in relation to the defense of the Theotokos, and continued to be taught by the Church throughout the late patristic and early medieval periods.³⁹ For example, Bernard of Clairvaux argues that Mary’s childbearing of the Incarnate Lord reflects her stature as the New Eve, cooperating with her Son in his undoing of the curse of sin and death. Since the curse associated with Eve’s fall has to do with pain in childbearing (Gen 3:16), Bernard proclaims: “Eve’s curse was transformed in our Virgin, for she bore a child without pain. . . . A virgin gave birth and remained inviolate after the birth; she possessed the fecundity of offspring with the integrity of her flesh.”⁴⁰

and did not attribute sin to her. For further discussion, see Matthew Levering, “Mary and Grace,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 289–302; and see my discussion of John Henry Newman’s argument that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is a case of doctrinal development rather than (as Edward B. Pusey thought) rupture with the Church Fathers, in Matthew Levering, *Newman on Doctrinal Corruption* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2022), chapter 4.

³⁷ Treier, “Virgin Territory?,” 379.

³⁸ Treier is aware that Catholics will be quick to point out this implication of Treier’s proposal. Thus, he notes that some Catholic scholars gladly “concede . . . that the explicitly scriptural case for the virgin conception is, like those for Mary’s immaculate conception and bodily assumption, tenuous—but traditional dogmas these remain” (Treier, 378). While firmly disagreeing with the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, Treier would agree that Christians need not suppose that only doctrines demonstrable by historical-critical methods are truly biblical doctrines. As Treier notes, without rejecting historical-critical scholarship and its insights, we can recognize that some “assumptions implicit in modern historical argumentation can gradually lead even scripturally committed Trinitarian Christians to deny or fundamentally reinterpret articles of ecumenically orthodox faith” (Treier, 378).

³⁹ See Graebe, *Vessel of Honor*, 33–42.

⁴⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption,” in *St. Bernard’s Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. a Priest of Mount Melleray (Chulmleigh: Augustine, 1984), 206–7. For discussion of the scope of Bernard’s Mariology, see Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 131–41; Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2009), 184–89.

For Aquinas, then, the doctrine of the virgin *birth* communicates the truth about what God actually accomplished in the childbearing of the New Eve: a woman has given birth (miraculously) without damage to her bodily integrity, because her Son is the incarnate Lord, the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation, and she herself is a sign of this new creation. Thus, as we read in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, "the birth of Our Lord . . . did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it."⁴¹

⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (1964), §57, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes the same point, quoting *Lumen Gentium* (and citing numerous earlier magisterial teachings): "The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth 'did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. [Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997], §499). Thomas G. Weinandy argues that it would be more fitting for the New Eve to suffer physical pain in childbirth. The reversal of Adam and Eve's sin and its curses is accomplished by Christ through entering into suffering and death and reversing the curse from within. Likewise, it seems appropriate that Mary should have entered into pain in childbirth so as to reverse the curse (given to Eve) from within. Weinandy explains, "As Christ, in becoming human, assumed the penalty of Adam's sin and so, on the cross, transformed it into an act of loving salvation, so Mary assumed the curse of Eve, giving birth in pain, and so transformed it into a loving act of giving birth to the one who would free humankind from all pain and suffering" (Thomas G. Weinandy, "The Annunciation and Nativity: Undoing the Sinful Act of Eve," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 [2012], 229, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2011.00623.x>). For Weinandy, Mary could have experienced this pain in childbirth even while miraculously preserving her bodily integrity, although he does not rule out the possibility that Jesus' birth damaged her bodily integrity (depending upon what is required by the Church's magisterial tradition, which Weinandy does not here resolve). I think it was fitting that Mary enter into the suffering and death endured by Christ, but I think the virgin birth was most fittingly a sign of the inauguration of the new creation. Among recent notable Catholic theologians who suggest that the birth of Jesus damaged Mary's bodily integrity, Weinandy names Karl Rahner, Otto Semmelroth, and Jean Galot—and to this list can be added Walter Kasper and also Gerhard Müller (in Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Was heißt: Geboren von der Jungfrau Maria? Eine theologische Deutung*, 2nd ed. [Basel: Herder, 1989], 100–104). On the issue of whether Mary's *virginitas in partu* has been solemnly taught by the Catholic Church and thus is *de fide*, see also Robert Fastiggi, "Fr. Peter Damian Fehlner on Divine Maternity," in *The Spirit and the Church: Peter Damian Fehlner's Franciscan Development of Vatican II on the Themes of the Holy Spirit, Mary, and the Church*, ed. J. Isaac Goff, Christian W. Kappes, and Edward J. Ondrako (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 83–84, revising the position he took in Robert Fastiggi, "Francisco Suárez, S.J. (1548–1617) on Mary's *Virginitas in Partu* and Subsequent Doctrinal Development," *Marian Studies* 58

I will only briefly treat the question of whether Mary remained a virgin *after* Christ's birth, as Aquinas holds. Aquinas is well aware of the objections raised against Mary's perpetual virginity, concerns expressed by Helvidius in the fourth century.⁴² Aquinas recognizes that Matt 1:25 says that Joseph "knew her not *until* she had borne a son"—the implications of the Greek conjunction being the contested point, as noted above.⁴³ He knows of the brothers of Jesus mentioned at various points in the New Testament. Aquinas's answers to these issues rely partly upon Augustine's reading of Scripture, specifically Ezek 44:2 where the prophet receives the following command during his vision of the eschatological Temple: "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut."⁴⁴ In Aquinas's view, Augustine's reading of this text deserves to be accepted, given the text's reference to the eschatological age that Christ inaugurates.

Aquinas gives reasons of fittingness for Mary's perpetual virginity, including Joseph's knowledge that the conception of Jesus had been accomplished by the Holy Spirit. This would have made Mary's womb a sacred Temple in Joseph's eyes. Similarly, it is reasonable to suppose that Mary, having given birth to

(2007), 26–45. For the main lines of the twentieth-century debate, see Juan Luis Bastero, "La *virginitas in partu* en la reflexión teológica del siglo XX," *Scripta Theologica* 32, no. 3 (2017), 835–62, <https://doi.org/10.15581/006.32.14916>; Graebe, *Vessel of Honor*, 55–111; Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, 190–92. For Rahner's influential article, see Karl Rahner, "Virginitas in Partu: A Contribution to the Problem of the Development of Dogma and of Tradition," in *More Recent Writings*, vol. 4 of *Theological Investigations*, Karl Rahner, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Seabury, 1974), 134–62.

⁴² See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 497–98. James B. Prothro has recently shown that even from a historical-critical perspective, the Gospels' references to Jesus' "brothers" do not necessarily indicate that Mary had additional children. See James B. Prothro, "Semper Virgo? A Biblical Review of a Debated Dogma," *Pro Ecclesia* 28, no. 1 (2019), 78–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063851219829935>. See also Braine, "The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith," 898–904; and Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, 194–97. Hauke points out, "The indication that Jesus is the 'first-born' [Luke 2:7] does not imply anything about other possible brothers. But the reference is important because it casts doubt on the theory that the Gospels are talking about other children of Mary, because in Mark 3:21, 3:31–35 and John 7:2–5, the 'brothers' act in a dominating manner, and this, in the ancient East, is unthinkable on the part of younger brothers addressing the first-born" (Hauke, 195). For further helpful argumentation, see Josef Blinzler, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967).

⁴³ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 3, obj. 3.

⁴⁴ It should be clear that, for Aquinas, "virginity" denotes—at least in the case of Mary—both the absence of sexual intercourse and the presence of bodily integrity. Arguments regarding which of these elements is primary for Aquinas miss the point, since he affirms both.

the perfect Son, would have devoted all her attention to that Son rather than striving for more children.⁴⁵

Summa Theologiae III, Questions 29–30

At some length, Aquinas in question 29 explores why Mary was espoused to Joseph when she gave birth to Jesus. The reasons why God ordained this to be so are fairly evident and uncontroversial, and so I will largely pass over them here. Without Joseph's presence, Mary would have been defamed as an adulteress. The baby Jesus would not have had the support of a father. Since the couple were engaged but not married when Mary became pregnant, Joseph was able to give witness to Mary's virginity. For Aquinas, the marriage of Mary to Joseph ensures that in her person she honors both virginity and marriage, and that she stands as a typological (eschatological) sign of the virgin-mother Church.⁴⁶

In the first article of question 30 (a question devoted to the Annunciation), Aquinas highlights the spiritual or personal dignity of Mary at the Annunciation. She is no mere funnel for the Incarnation; the Lord does not simply make use of her womb. It is highly fitting that "she should be informed in mind concerning Him, before conceiving Him in the flesh."⁴⁷ Aquinas quotes Augustine, who points out (in accord with Mark 3:35) that it is more blessed to conceive Christ in one's heart—to have faith—than to conceive Christ in one's womb. If Mary were merely a conduit in conceiving and gestating Jesus, her role in this event would be a purely biological one, and in this sense less than fully human.

Aquinas is eager to insist, on biblical grounds, that Mary's virginal conception of Jesus involved Mary's graced intellect and will. Mary receives the angel's communication about the plan of salvation, and she inquires into this plan, asking how it could be since she is a virgin. She consents with great faith and full freedom of will. She thereby becomes a full participant and a real "witness of this mystery," offering to God the obedience of faith in welcoming the incarnate Lord on behalf of his people.⁴⁸ Indeed, Mary's consent is the

⁴⁵ For discussion of these reasons of fittingness as found in Origen and Augustine, see John C. Cavadini, "The Sex Life of Mary and Joseph," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 13, no. 2 (2015), 365–77.

⁴⁶ *STh* III, q. 29, a. 1. For discussion of question 29, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 500–503.

⁴⁷ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1.

⁴⁸ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1.

greatest act that a mere human being (as distinct from the God-man) ever accomplished. She is so personally, intelligently, and spiritually engaged in her concrete act of faithful obedience that we can say of the Annunciation: “the Virgin’s consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature [*loco totius humanae naturae*].”⁴⁹ Her “yes” is the opposite of a lighthearted response; it is an extraordinary profession of faith, representing all humanity: “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:28, 38). In light of Luke 1:38, Aquinas concludes that the eschatological marriage of God and humanity takes place in the Incarnation. Mary’s active spiritual role in her virginal conception of Jesus ensures that in the Incarnation, “there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature.”⁵⁰

The dignity of Mary’s participation is amplified by the second article of question 30. The first objection wonders why God sent an angel to make the

⁴⁹ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1. For the sources of Aquinas’s insight here—including pseudo-Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and (in a certain way) Augustine himself—see Pierre Kocian, *Marie et l’Église: Compénétration de deux mystères*, Bibliothèque de la Revue thomiste (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2018), 615, n. 59. Edward B. Pusey registers a concern with the way in which some devotional Catholic books “have delighted to dwell on the Incarnation, as though our redemption depended upon the ‘fiat’ of Mary. For, although God,—in conformity with that His wondrous condescension, whereby He reverences (if I may so speak) the free will with which He has endowed us, and will not force our will—would not accomplish the Incarnation without the free will of His creature, yet, of course, there was nothing really in suspense. Had He indeed, amid the manifold failures which He has allowed in His work of grace, willed to allow this scope also to free-will, that it should reject the privilege of being Theotokos, and so have offered it to one who would not accept it, the Incarnation might have been delayed for a while; it could not have failed. But He did not so will” (Edward B. Pusey, *First Letter to the Very Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D., In Explanation Chiefly in Regard to the Ever-Blessed Theotokos, and the Doctrine of Her Immaculate Conception* [Oxford: Parker, 1869], 23). Aquinas affirms that Mary was predestined in the order of grace, but in Aquinas’s view this fact should not hinder in any way our praise for Mary’s fiat, just as the fact that Jesus was predestined does not hinder our praise for Jesus’ willingness to endure the Cross. For his part, Pusey recognizes Mary’s greatness: “she, of whom He deigned to take His Human Flesh, was brought to a nearness to Himself above all created beings; . . . she stood single and alone, in all creation or in all possible creations, in that, in her womb, He Who, in His Godhead, is Consubstantial with the Father, deigned, as to His Human Body, to become Consubstantial with her” (Pusey, *First Letter to the Very Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D.*, 24).

⁵⁰ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1. See also Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 505–6. Torrell observes that for Aquinas’s medieval predecessors, notably Albert the Great and Bonaventure, “Mary is little more than the place where this union is accomplished (‘the nuptial chamber’); this is perhaps the reason why the scholastics could envisage, at least in the abstract, that the Incarnation could have been accomplished without the knowledge of Mary” (Torrell, 506).

announcement rather than making it directly. The second objection, citing 1 Cor 14:34–35 about women’s silence in church, asks whether a male human being, such as Joseph, should have been chosen to make the announcement to Mary. In his *respondeo*, Aquinas offers various reasons of fittingness, such as Bede’s remark that it was fitting that a good angel announce the Good News, given that the fallen angel Satan contributed to the fall of Adam and Eve. But most noteworthy are Aquinas’s replies to the objections, where he underscores that Mary “was above the angels as regards the dignity to which she was chosen by God,”⁵¹ and where he points out that Mary, the Mother of God, was not under her husband’s authority. The deeper he probes into Luke’s narrative, the more he perceives the exalted character of Mary’s participation in Christ’s inauguration of the new creation.

Summa Theologiae III, Questions 31–32

Question 31, comprised of eight articles, considers the matter from which Jesus’ body was conceived in the womb. Some of the argumentation in this question reflects outdated Aristotelian science. Neither Aristotle nor Aquinas accurately understood the process by which conception occurs. Even so, a number of issues raised by these eight articles remain theologically important, including whether Christ’s human nature was fallen as well as whether Christ truly descended from Adam and from David.

The first article of question 31 remarks that Christ did not heal the human race by starting a new human species. Receiving a human nature traceable to Adam, Christ restored fallen human nature from within.⁵² But the Son did not assume a human nature that contracted original sin. According to Aquinas, this is because Christ’s human nature, even while derived from Adam in bodily substance, is not linked by the thread of sexual intercourse to Adam’s “seminal virtue” or generative power, through which fallen humans are one with Adam as our first mover, and through which we inherit human nature in a disgraced state of original sin.⁵³ Aquinas recognizes that if Christ’s humanity were in

⁵¹ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 2, ad 1.

⁵² Torrell states, “the Word has not saved solely *a* concrete human nature, that which he personally assumed, but *the* human nature as such” (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 511). He emphasizes Aquinas’s Pauline insistence upon Christ’s status as the second Adam.

⁵³ *STh* III, q. 31, a. 1, ad 3: “corpus Christi fuit in Adam secundum corpulentam substantiam, quia scilicet ipsa material corporalis corporis Christi derivata est ab Adam: non autem fuit

a fallen state, then he too would need salvation. Fallenness is not a prerequisite for possessing a human nature derived from Adam.⁵⁴

In the second article of question 31, Aquinas states that Christ must come from the physical stock of Abraham and David. Such descent is required to fulfill the promises of Gen 17:18 (as interpreted by Paul in Gal 3:15) and of Ps 132:11, “The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.’”⁵⁵ Following Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Jerome, and John of Damascus, among others, Aquinas therefore seeks to harmonize the genealogies, even while he

ibi secundum seminalem rationem, quia non est concepta ex virili semine.” See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 511–12, exposing Aquinas's debt here to Augustine. I explore Aquinas's theological account of the transmission of original sin in Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), chapter 6. See also Mark F. Johnson, “Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin: Doctrine, Authority, and Pedagogy,” in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 145–58; and, more broadly, Daniel W. Houck, *Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). See the valuable contextualization and response to D. W. Houck offered by Reinhard Hütter, “Original Sin Revisited: A Recent Proposal on Thomas Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 21, no. 2 (2023), 693–732, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2023.a919220>.

⁵⁴ Weinandy argues that Christ's flesh is fallen: see Thomas G. Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); Thomas G. Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 104–9. For Aquinas, it is of course true that Jesus takes on some bodily defects caused by original sin, including mortality. For a valuable discussion of the issues involved here (and for criticism of Weinandy's position), see Joshua Evans, “What Is Not Saved Is Not Assumed: Thomas Weinandy, Julian of Eclanum, and Augustine of Hippo on Whether Salvation Requires Christ's Temptations to Sin,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 19, no. 2 (2021), 563–86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2021.0024>.

⁵⁵ I employ here the RSV, but Aquinas's Vulgate version communicates still more clearly the promise of a biological descendant: “Of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne” (Ps 131:11). Like the Church Fathers, Aquinas reads this psalm as a Messianic prophecy. In the view of Raymond Brown, it is not necessary for the Messiah to be descended biologically from David, so long as he is in the Davidic line by adoption. Brown states that “in a Jewish mindset, through Joseph's acknowledgment, Jesus could be legally, even if not biologically, Joseph's son and thus share Joseph's Davidic descent” (Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2nd ed. [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 589). See also the emphasis on Jesus' Davidic kingship in Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

recognizes that the genealogies have distinct theological-apologetic purposes.⁵⁶ The genealogies trace Jesus' Davidic lineage through Joseph, but of course Joseph was not his biological father. As noted above, Aquinas solves the problem of Davidic descent not only by insisting on the efficacy of adoption, but also by suggesting that Mary too could have been in the line of David. There are other problems as well, which Aquinas (following the Fathers) harmonizes: for instance, Matthew's identification of Joseph's father as Jacob (Matt 1:16), by contrast to Luke's identification of Joseph's father as Heli (Luke 3:23).

I agree with Joseph Ratzinger that this approach is not necessary.⁵⁷ Ratzinger points to the genre of the genealogies: "Neither evangelist is concerned so much with the individual names as with the symbolic structure within which Jesus' place in history is set before us: the intricacy with which he is woven into the historical strands of the promise, as well as the *new beginning* which paradoxically characterizes his origin side."⁵⁸ While Jesus is part of the people of Abraham and is in the line of David, the evangelists have freedom to reconstruct his genealogy in order to serve theological purposes.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See *STh* III, q. 31, a. 3. For discussion, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 512–14.

⁵⁷ See Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 8. See also Raymond E. Brown's observation: "Both genealogies can be truly scriptural and inspired by God [even] if only one or neither was a historically accurate family record. (Indeed, pressing further, I would ask: If one appeals to God's intention to argue that the genealogies *must* be historically reconcilable, why did God not inspire each evangelist to give us the same record?) Genealogies serve different purposes, and no assumption can be made that the format demands genuine lineal descent" (Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 588).

⁵⁸ Ratzinger/Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, 8–9. See Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 70–83, 117–24. Oddly, however, Lincoln considers it "plausible . . . that Matthew held that Jesus was illegitimate simply in the sense that he was illegitimately conceived by someone other than Joseph and that he depicts this issue as immediately resolved through Joseph's public acknowledgement of Jesus as his own son. Although Jesus had been conceived irregularly, Joseph's acceptance of him meant that he would not have been seen as a *mamzer*; there would have been no public questioning of his paternity or treatment of him as having any other status than Joseph's son. Matthew's account effectively further excludes any good reason for Jesus' compatriots to question his paternity because, by the time his parents set up home in Nazareth, they already constitute a bona fide family" (Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 83).

⁵⁹ I note here that, like both the Church Fathers and modern readers, Aquinas is impressed by the theological points that the genealogies make, such as that Jesus comes from a line of sinners (including some women who committed adultery or prostitution) in order to redeem sinners: see *STh* III, q. 31, a. 3, ad 5.

Aquinas devotes two articles to the fact that Jesus' flesh came from a woman. He observes that this fact serves to ground the Incarnation in human history. Indeed, the role of Mary pertains to the dignity of the whole human race, since not only a man, but also a woman was at the center of the event of the Incarnation.⁶⁰

For Aquinas, as he discusses in article 5 of question 31, Jesus' flesh came from Mary's "purest blood." Here he relies upon Aristotle's view that the conception of a child involves "the woman's blood, not any of her blood, but brought to a more perfect stage of secretion by the mother's generative power, so as to be apt for conception."⁶¹ This biology is false, but I agree that the Incarnation took place through Mary's bodily material and through the activity of Mary's body (along with the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit) in preparing that bodily material. Employing his outdated biology, Aquinas states that "this blood was brought together in the Virgin's womb and fashioned into a child by the operation of the Holy Spirit."⁶²

Question 32 treats the active cause of Christ's conception. Aquinas affirms that the whole Trinity, acting as one *ad extra* by the divine power, caused the conception of Christ in Mary's womb. Yet, he also affirms that this conception is rightly attributed to the Holy Spirit, as we read in the Gospels of Matthew

⁶⁰ Among Aquinas's Aristotelian errors is the following unfortunate claim, made in article 4 of question 31: "The male sex is more noble than the female, and for this reason He took human nature in the male sex. But lest the female sex should be despised, it was fitting that He should take flesh of a woman" (*STh* III, q. 31, a. 4, ad 1). For a sharp critique of Aquinas's view of women, see Lindsey Hankins, "Aquinas on Woman at Prayer" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2020). For a critique of Aquinas's view of women, but with more nuance, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 514.

⁶¹ *STh* III, q. 31, a. 5. See Bernard Hubert, "Le statut de l'embryon humain: une relecture d'Aristote," *Nova et Vetera* 76, no. 4 (2001), 53–81.

⁶² *STh* III, q. 31, a. 5, ad 3; translation slightly altered. Aquinas also addresses the implications of Heb 7:9–10, "One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him." In Aquinas's view, what the Letter to the Hebrews here says of Levi cannot be said of Christ. He explains, "Therefore by giving tithes to Melchisedech, Abraham foreshadowed that he, as being conceived in sin, and all who were to be his descendants in contracting original sin, needed that healing which is through Christ. And Isaac, Jacob, and Levi, and all the others were in Abraham in such a way so as to be descended from him, not only as to bodily substance, but also as to seminal virtue, by which original sin is transmitted. Consequently, they all paid tithes in Abraham, i.e. foreshadowed as needing to be healed by Christ. And Christ alone was in Abraham in such a manner as to descend from him, not by seminal virtue, but according to bodily substance" (*STh* III, q. 31, a. 8). For discussion of these passages, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 514–16.

and Luke.⁶³ The first reason for the fittingness of this attribution is that in the Trinity, the Spirit's personal property is Love proceeding. This fits with the Incarnation, which is grounded in divine Love. Since the Spirit is rightly said to be the cause of the conception, the evangelist Matthew is not exaggerating when he states that Mary "was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18).⁶⁴

Like Augustine, Aquinas carefully shows that the causality of the Spirit (and of the whole Trinity) does not make Christ, in his humanity, the son of the Spirit (or of the Trinity). In his humanity, Christ the divine Son is the Son of Mary. Aquinas remarks, "Christ was conceived of the Virgin Mary, who supplied the matter of His conception unto likeness of species. For this reason He is called her Son."⁶⁵ The Spirit caused Jesus' conception in Mary's womb, but "not unto likeness of species," and so the Spirit is not the *father* of Jesus in his humanity.⁶⁶ The incarnate Son has only one Father, namely, his Father according to his eternal generation as the Son.

In accord with his Aristotelian biology, Aquinas holds that only the male "seminal virtue" causes the woman's special blood to form a child's body. In this sense, he mistakenly assumes that Mary did not "co-operate actively in the conception of Christ's body."⁶⁷ As noted above, however, Aquinas does think

⁶³ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2 of *Spiritual Master*, ed. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 157–61. More broadly, see Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Bruce D. Marshall, "What Does the Spirit Have to Do?," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 62–77. See also the thorough treatment of Trinitarian appropriation—placing Aquinas's approach in the context of the approaches taken by Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Abelard, William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure—by Dominique-Marie Cabaret, *L'étonnante manifestation des personnes divines: Les appropriations trinitaires chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, ed. Gilles Emery, Bibliothèque de la Revue thomiste, Études (Paris: Parole et silence, 2016). Cabaret treats the Spirit's role in the Incarnation both as found in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and as found in the *Summa Theologiae*: see Cabaret, 286–89 and 373–76.

⁶⁴ See *STh* III, q. 32, a. 2.

⁶⁵ *STh* III, q. 32, a. 3, ad 1.

⁶⁶ *STh* III, q. 32, a. 3, ad 1. For discussion of the issues treated in this paragraph, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 516–19.

⁶⁷ *STh* III, q. 32, a. 4, *sed contra*. Torrell points out that Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure take the opposite position: see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 519. David Braine offers a clarification: "Jesus' conception was not a work in which a woman was a sole creaturely agent unassisted by a man, but a work in which neither woman nor man exercised their normal agentive function in procreation—or indeed in which either exercised any agentive function at all. Mary exercises, not agency, but only consent in respect

that *prior* to the conception, Mary's body cooperated actively in preparing the matter needed for Jesus' conception. Again in accord with his Aristotelian biology, Aquinas thinks that normally the matter is not ensouled in the womb prior to quickening and therefore does not become a human body until quickening. However, in the case of Christ, Aquinas makes an exception to this Aristotelian biology, since the divine power can speed up the process and "it was unbecoming that He should take to Himself a body as yet unformed."⁶⁸

Of course, Mary's divine motherhood is very much a grace, as shown in the angel's greeting and in her ability to obey God on behalf of all Israel and all humanity. Although Aquinas does not get Mary's grace quite right (insofar as he denies her immaculate conception), he is correct that Mary could not have properly been Mother of the Redeemer had she been tainted by actual sin, because in such a case she would not have had the full freedom to consent. When Mary is thought to be a normal sinner like the rest of us, it is no wonder that she quickly becomes merely a funnel through which the Son of God comes to earth. Her participation in the Incarnation is such as to require radical grace. Through his entrance into Mary's womb, Mary's Son grants Mary a profound participation in the event of the Incarnation. Aquinas aptly praises "the singular manner in which the Son of God, who is the *Divine Wisdom* (1 Cor 1:24) dwelt in her, not only in her soul but in her womb."⁶⁹

Conclusion

Even theologians can sometimes write as though it is "inappropriate that God should be involved with *bios* and matter."⁷⁰ By contrast, the Bible does not shy away from an emphasis on Mary's childbearing, and neither does Aquinas. In the above, I have suggested that Aquinas's engagement with this reality in the

to the conception of the Word. What comes about comes about by the power of the Holy Spirit, with this consent" (Braine, "The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith," 882). Braine's point is true insofar as Mary could not produce Jesus Christ from any resources of her own. Even so, she is involved both spiritually and physically—in an active way, though not in a constitutive or sufficient way for causation—in the conception of the incarnate Lord by the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁸ *STh* III, q. 33, a. 1. See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 520.

⁶⁹ *STh* III, q. 27, a. 4.

⁷⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 59.

Tertia Pars remains instructive. Aquinas takes up the biblical and patristic witness to Mary and demonstrates its theological fittingness and intelligibility.

In Mary's womb, the Incarnation involves both natural processes and divine miracles. Jesus Christ is truly conceived and born; Mary is truly his mother. Yet, as befits the eschatological coming of the Son of God, both his conception and birth have miraculous elements. The child conceived in Mary's womb is "Emmanuel," "God with us" (Matt 1:23). Contemplating Mary's spiritual and bodily participation in the event of the Incarnation, we rightly exclaim with her cousin Elizabeth: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42). Contemporary Thomistic Christology would therefore do well to fully include his Mariology, which highlights the Incarnation's concretely bodily character and eschatological dimension.

Although Aquinas's Mariology is an important part of his Christology, I should grant that his exposition of Mary has some notable lacunae. For example, Aquinas could have integrated more fully the theme of Mary's relation to the people of Israel, a theme that he does not ignore but does not accentuate either.⁷¹ This dimension of Mariology is presented much more richly in twentieth-century works such as Louis Bouyer's *The Seat of Wisdom* and Joseph Ratzinger's *Daughter Zion*.⁷² Likewise, in accordance with the Catholic Mariological tradition, Pope John Paul II teaches in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Mary's faith can also be compared to that of Abraham. . . . In the salvific economy of God's revelation, Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant."⁷³ In *Daughter Zion*, Ratzinger goes quite far in this direction. He shows that "the image of Mary in the New Testament is woven entirely of Old

⁷¹ See, however, *STh* III, q. 28, a. 3, ad 3, where Aquinas compares Mary's face to the face of Moses; and see Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*.

⁷² See Louis Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom: An Essay on the Place of the Virgin Mary in Christian Theology*, trans. A. V. Littledale (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962); Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*.

⁷³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), §14, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html. Louis Bouyer similarly comments, "It is to her [Mary] that the supreme announcement of the Word is to be made; in her is to take effect the divine initiative that will bring into being the new creation. Her faith will utter that 'fiat' necessary to a creation which is not a creation from nothing, but from human freedom under sentence of death and in need of new life. The Church has always, in reflecting on St Luke's narrative, been convinced that Mary's faith was the supreme fulfilment of all the Old Testament holiness, a holiness of preparation, aspiration, acceptance and consent to the divine plan in a growing detachment from self" (Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom*, 119).

Testament threads.”⁷⁴ Mary represents the whole people of Israel, which in the Old Testament often appears in feminine terms, as “woman, virgin, beloved, wife and mother.”⁷⁵ Ratzinger emphasizes that Mary participates in the event of the Incarnation as “the authentic daughter Zion . . . who is thereby the mother of the savior.”⁷⁶

Aquinas’s insistence upon Christology requiring Mariology is characteristic of Ratzinger’s work as well. In Ratzinger’s view, without attention to Mary, the theology of the Incarnation falls into Nestorianism, which “surgically removes God so far from man that nativity and maternity—all of corporeality—remain in a different sphere.”⁷⁷ I agree with this concern, which highlights why Aquinas’s Mariological reflections within the Christology of the *Tertia Pars* are so important, both for Aquinas and for contemporary Thomistic Christology. To understand the Incarnation of the Word in its historical concreteness, which is an *eschatological* concreteness, Christology must embrace and explore the biblical testimony to Mary’s miraculous motherhood.

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⁷⁴ Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 12.

⁷⁵ Ratzinger, 21.

⁷⁶ Ratzinger, 24.

⁷⁷ Ratzinger, 35.

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Did Christ Enjoy the Beatific Vision on Earth? Testing the Soteriological Hypothesis of Thomas Aquinas

Czy Chrystus doświadczał wizji uszczęśliwiającej na ziemi?
Sprawdzenie hipotezy soteriologicznej Tomasza z Akwinu

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to test Thomas Aquinas’s firm conviction that Jesus Christ enjoyed the direct beatific vision of his Father while on earth. The first part presents the variety of objections that may be raised to this hypothesis: the suggestion of a Monophysite Christology; the prejudice against the authentic exercise of Jesus’s human freedom and conscious obedience; the impression that Christ did not live by faith like the rest of humanity. The second part offers an overview of Aquinas’s texts and teaching on this issue. St Thomas does not deal extensively with the complex anthropological outworkings of a possible earth-bound beatific vision; rather, he starts with the theological argument, referring to the fundamental principle that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of humanity and thus the mediator of all the gifts of grace that God gives humans, including that of beatific vision. This part concludes with the anthropological consequences – since Jesus is the Savior and not the saved, Aquinas explains that the vision was present in him from the moment of the Incarnation; otherwise he would have received it as a reward for his fidelity. In the final third part, we attempt to explain, taking into account present-day Biblical and Patristic exegesis, to what degree beatific vision (1) renders faith unnecessary in Jesus, yet (2) affirms his true freedom and obedience in spite of the suffering that took place on the Cross.

KEY WORDS: Thomas Aquinas, beatific vision, Monophysitism, Christology, soteriology, grace, theological anthropology, faith in/of Jesus, suffering and obedience of Jesus

ABSTRAKT: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie hipotezy św. Tomasza z Akwinu, że Jezus Chrystus cieszył się bezpośrednią wizją uszczęśliwiającą swojego Ojca podczas swojego ziemskiego życia. W pierwszej części przedstawiono zastrzeżenia dotyczące tak postawionej hipotezy, gdyż sugeruje monofizytyzm, wydaje się podważać autentyczną ludzką wolność i świadome posłuszeństwo Jezusa oraz sprawia wrażenie, że Chrystus

nie żył wiarą tak jak reszta ludzkości. Kolejna część obejmuje analizę tekstów św. Tomasza z Akwinu oraz jego nauczanie na ten temat. Punktem wyjścia rozważań św. Tomasza nie są szczegóły złożonych antropologicznych konsekwencji ewentualnej ziemskiej wizji uszczęśliwiającej, tylko argument teologiczny – rozpoczyna swoje rozumowanie od fundamentalnej zasady, że Jezus Chrystus jest jedynym Zbawicielem ludzkości, a zatem jest pośrednikiem wszystkich darów łaski, które Bóg daje ludziom, w tym daru widzenia Boga. Stąd św. Tomasz przechodzi do wniosków antropologicznych – Jezus jest Zbawicielem, a nie zbawionym, zatem doświadczał wizji uszczęśliwiającej od momentu Wcielenia; w przeciwnym razie otrzymałby ją jako nagrodę za swoją wierność. W ostatniej trzeciej części podjęto próbę wyjaśnienia, uwzględniając współczesną egzegezę biblijną i patrystyczną, w jakim stopniu wizja uszczęśliwiająca (1) sprawia, że wiara u Jezusa nie jest potrzebna, choć jednocześnie (2) potwierdza jego prawdziwą wolność i posłuszeństwo pomimo cierpienia, które miało miejsce na krzyżu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, wizja uszczęśliwiająca, monofizytyzm, chrystologia, soteriologia, łaska, antropologia teologiczna, wiara (w) Jezusa, cierpienie i posłuszeństwo Jezusa

Catholic theology has traditionally held that even during the course of his earthly sojourn, Christ in his humanity enjoyed the perfect vision of the divine essence proper to the blessed in heaven. Several Church documents have taught so.¹ This notion, though held valid by many authors,² in recent decades

¹ Cf. especially: decree of the Holy Office (1918): Heinrich Denzinger, Peter Hünermann, and Anne Englund Nash, eds., *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012) (hereafter: DH), nos. 3645–47; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943): DH 3812; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Haurietis Aquas* (1956): DH 3924. It is interesting to note the soteriological tone of these declarations, especially the latter two. Regarding the soteriological issues involved in the perfection of the knowledge of Christ, cf. also Pius XI, “Litterae encyclicae *Miserentissimus Redemptor*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 20 (1928): 174. And in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), no. 473, we read that the “truly human knowledge of God’s Son is expressed the divine life of his person. ‘The human nature of God’s Son, not by itself but by its union with the Word, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God.’ Such is first of all the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father. The Son in his human knowledge also showed the divine penetration he had into the secret thoughts of human hearts” (citing St Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones et dubia*, 66 [PG 90,840a]). The *Catechism* (no. 474) also says: “By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal. What he admitted to not knowing in this area, he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal.” Cf. also the 1985 report of the International Theological Commission, *The Consciousness of Christ Concerning Himself and His Mission* (1985), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1985_coscienza-gesu_en.html.

² Cf. Luigi Iammarone, “La visione beatifica di Cristo viatore nel pensiero di san Tommaso,” *Doctor Communis* 36 (1983): 287–330; Jean-Hervé Nicolas, *Synthèse dogmatique* (Paris:

has been called into question, and in many cases denied outright.³ And this has been done for solid reasons.⁴ In this study I intend to offer an analysis of the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas on the matter. Aquinas in fact clearly teaches and attempts to justify Jesus's beatific vision during his earthly sojourn. He generally states his case in brief terms, yet draws on important principles of his Christology and soteriology, which would be seriously prejudiced should Christ's earthly vision of the divine essence be denied.

Difficulties Relating to the Earthly Beatific Vision of Christ

Three principal difficulties may be mentioned: Christological, anthropological, and spiritual.⁵ The first difficulty involves insistence upon the authenticity of Christ's true, historical humanity.⁶ This of course raises the more fundamental question of *what it means to be authentically human*, a question we shall

Beauchesne, 1985), nos. 341–65; Angelo Amato, *Gesù il Signore: Saggio di cristologia*, 5th ed., Corso di teologia sistematica 4 (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1999), 472–89; Fernando Ocariz, Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, and José Antonio Riestra, *Il mistero di Cristo: Manuale di cristologia*, Sussidi di teologia (Roma: Apollinare Studi, 1999), 159–71; Anton Ziegenaus, *Jesus Christus, die Fülle des Heils: Christologie und Erlösungslehre*, Katholische Dogmatik 4 (Aachen: MM Verlag, 2000), 420–42; Christoph Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn: Christologie*, Amateca 7 (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2002), 159–76. Cf. also Jean-Miguel Garrigues, “La conscience de soi telle qu’elle était exercée par le Fils de Dieu fait homme,” *Nova et Vetera* 79, no. 1 (2004): 39–51; Thomas Joseph White, “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” *The Thomist* 69, no. 4 (2005): 497–534, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2005.0001>.

³ Cf. Gerald O’Collins and Daniel Kendall, “The Faith of Jesus,” *Theological Studies* 53, no. 3 (1992): 403–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399205300302>.

⁴ Christ’s beatific vision would provide a useful solution to the question of the knowledge he had of being divine: cf. Paul Galtier, *De incarnatione ac redemptione* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1947), 256f.; and especially Paul Galtier, *L’unité du Christ: Être... personne... conscience*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1939), 358–64. The theme of the consciousness of Christ is a delicate one and more apt than others to suffer from the extrapolations and comparisons in respect of our personal consciousness. Still it is hard to defend that Christ would not have been conscious of his divine sonship were he to enjoy the beatific vision, as Galot seems to claim in his work: Jean Galot, *Who Is Christ? A Theology of the Incarnation* (Rome: Gregorian University Press; Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1980), 357–59.

⁵ For a summary cf. Simon Francis Gaine, *Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation, and the Vision of God* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 3–14.

⁶ Cf. the important article of Jean Galot, “Le Christ terrestre et la vision,” *Gregorianum* 67, no. 3 (1986): 429–50.

return to presently. The principal danger authors perceive in the affirmation of Christ's earthly vision is that of a return to *monophysitism*, a relegation of the humanity of Christ to the level of mere appearance, a more sophisticated version of Docetism. Insistence on Christ's earthly beatific vision would seem to take away from the extraordinary seriousness of the Incarnation, death and resurrection of the divine Word.

Several medieval authors maintained that Christ enjoyed an intuitive vision of God on earth, putting this down simply to the fact of the hypostatic (or personal) union between the humanity and divinity in Christ. This was called the "principle of perfection": the hypostatic closeness of the divinity to the humanity of Christ would require the latter to be elevated by the former.⁷ According to XII-century author Hugh of St Victor, for example, the human soul of Jesus possessed by grace what God himself possessed by nature; the divine and the human nature enjoyed identical fullness and perfection of knowledge and wisdom.⁸ Hugh's contemporary, Gerhoh of Reichersberg, shared this position.⁹ Precedents for this understanding may be found in patristic authors such as Fulgentius of Ruspe,¹⁰ who attributes to Christ's humanity the entirety of divine wisdom.¹¹ However, the position lends itself readily to a confusion of the two natures in Christ, a confusion obviated by the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon.¹² A more refined version of the theory was developed by Peter Lombard,¹³ Alexander of Hales¹⁴ and others, in which the distinctness of one

⁷ Cf. Joshua Lim, "The Principle of Perfection in Thirteenth-Century Accounts of Christ's Human Knowledge," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 3 (2022): 352–79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12541>.

⁸ Cf. Hugh of St Victor, *De sapientia animae Christi* (PL 176:845–56, especially 853A–B); Hugh of St Victor, *De sacramentis* II, 1:6 (PL 176:383D–384A).

⁹ Cf. Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *De gloria et honore Filii hominis* 17:3–5 (PL 194:1135B–1136A), following Hugh of St Victor.

¹⁰ Cf. Fulgentius of Ruspe, *Epistula* 14, q. 3, 25–34 (PL 65:415–24), especially no. 31.

¹¹ For an overview of the question of the knowledge of Christ among the Fathers, cf. William G. Most, *The Consciousness of Christ* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Publications, 1980), 93–133. On Augustine, cf. André-Marie Dubarle, "La connaissance humaine du Christ d'après saint Augustin," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 18 (1941): 5–25.

¹² Cf. DH 302.

¹³ Cf. Peter Lombard, *III Sent.*, d. 14, no. 2 (PL 192:783f.). A similar position may be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Tertia Pars et Supplementum* (Taurini: Marietti, 1956), III, q. 9, a. 4 (hereafter: *S.Th.* III).

¹⁴ Cf. Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica*, III, inq. 2, tract. 1, cap. 4, 694 (Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica: Pars Tertia* [Venetiis: Franciscus Senensis, 1576], accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb11205426?page=,1>).

and the other nature is retained, at least ostensibly, though founded monophysite suspicions would remain over this explanation that are not easy to shake off.

Here a second difficulty arises. Karl Adam and Karl Rahner¹⁵ cogently argue that the beatific vision of Christ on earth would seriously prejudice his real exercise of human freedom. It would distort the doctrine of Christ's loving and obedient self-offering to the Father, which reconciled us to him. How meaningful would Christ's suffering on the Cross be if he enjoyed the vision of God constantly? It would make the horrors of his passion and death seem like a charade. Karl Adam leaves the question in the air, and Rahner, unconvincingly, suggests that Christ possessed a direct though non-beatific vision of the divine essence during his earthly sojourn.¹⁶

In the third place, closely connected with the question of the true exercise of Jesus's human freedom and the realism of his sufferings is that of whether or not he had *faith*. In spite of the fact that the Gospel texts do not at first sight speak of the faith of Jesus, but rather of our faith in him (which the Johannine texts consistently present as equivalent to faith in the Father), it is sometimes claimed that Christ indeed had faith,¹⁷ that he had no choice but to trust unseeingly in his Father like the rest of mortals, perhaps that he experienced the "dark night" of abandonment at the hour of his crucifixion and death as part of the common mortal human condition. And of course if Jesus had faith, *ipso facto* he would not have had vision. Later on we shall return to this issue, and attempt to clarify *what kind of faith* could be involved in this context.

In this paper we shall concentrate principally on the first and third difficulties, the Christological and the spiritual. Elsewhere we have explained that to speak of the identity of Christ from an openly anthropological angle can easily lead to a reductionist Christology, seeing God's Incarnate Word as a projection of the situation we, as fallen human beings, find ourselves in. Not only is Christ God's Incarnate Son, the Lord of the Universe, but he is also the Saviour of

¹⁵ Cf. Karl Adam, *The Christ of Faith: The Christology of the Church* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 302–7; Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; Baltimore: Helicon, 1974), 193–215.

¹⁶ Cf. Alberto Galli, "Perché Karl Rahner nega la visione beatifica in Cristo," *Divinitas* 13 (1969): 417–54.

¹⁷ For example, cf. Claude Richard, *Il est notre Pâque: la gratuité du salut en Jésus Christ* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 196–206; Jacques Guillet, *La foi de Jésus Christ* (Paris: Desclée, 1980); O'Collins and Kendall, "The Faith of Jesus." The notion of Christ being a "believer" is also explored by Karl Rahner and Wilhelm Thüsing, *A New Christology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 143–54 and by Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Fides Christi," in *Sponsa Verbi*, vol. 2 of *Saggi teologici*, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Opere 21 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1970), 41–72.

humanity. His humanity is authentic but special; he is the paradigm and perfection of being human, but is not merely “one of us.” Otherwise he would be the prototype of “the blind leading the blind” (Matt 15:14). Whereas in fact it is his authentic humanity that defines and saves ours: “Christ manifests man to man,” as *Gaudium et Spes* teaches.¹⁸ And as we shall see, it is this fundamental identity of being the Savior of humanity that makes it appropriate for us to speak of his earthly beatific vision.

The Position of Thomas Aquinas on Christ's Earthly Vision of the Divine Essence

The Teaching of Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas deals with the question of Christ's earthly beatific vision openly. He does not attempt to resolve the problems arising from the abandonment of Christ by the Father in the Passion (cf. Matt 27:46), or with the apparent incompatibility between the suffering on the Cross and the joy afforded by the beatific vision. Nonetheless, he clearly maintains that Christ had beatific vision on earth.¹⁹ Though many authors do not accept it, recent studies of Thomas confirm the coherence of his position.²⁰

¹⁸ See the chapter “Jesus Christ the Redeemer,” in my work: Paul O'Callaghan, *Children of God in the World: An Introduction to Theological Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 64–85. It attempts to develop the Vatican II teaching “Christ manifests man to man” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

¹⁹ Cf. *S.Th.* III, q. 46, a. 8. Cf. Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 5 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 236–74.

²⁰ Cf. Robert Wielockx, “Incarnation et vision béatifique: Aperçus théologiques,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 86, no. 4 (2002): 601–39, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rspt.864.0601>; Gainé, *Did the Saviour See the Father?*; White, *The Incarnate Lord*; Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017); Simon Francis Gainé, “The Beatific Vision and the Heavenly Mediation of Christ,” *TheoLogica* 2, no. 2 (2018): 116–28, <https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v2i2.7623>; Charles Rochas, *La science bienheureuse du Christ simul viator et comprehensor: Selon les commentaires bibliques et la Summa theologiae de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 2019); Simon Francis Gainé, “Must an Incarnate Divine Person Enjoy the Beatific Vision,” in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger W. Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2021), 126–38; Joshua Lim, “The Necessity of Beatific Knowledge in Christ's Humanity: A Re-Reading of Summa Theologiae III, Q. 9,” *The Thomist* 86, no. 4 (2022), 515–42, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-2022-001>.

It is interesting to note that this final doctrine is not to be found in earlier works, such as the *Commentary on the Sentences*. This fact does not take away from the firmness of his teaching but in some ways adds to it. For it simply goes to prove that he did not receive it from previous Scholastics such as Hugh of St Victor or Peter Lombard, but developed it personally. That is why Thomas' position should be aired independently of theirs.

Both earlier Scholastics and Thomas draw on the so-called "principle of perfection": that Christ, due to his proximity to the divine Person of the Word, should enjoy in his humanity the fullness of all possible divine graces, among them, the beatific vision. Yet the apparent similarity between this understanding and the one explained by Thomas, is deceptive. For whereas the former tend to draw directly on the ontological (hypostatic) constitution of the God-man ("deducing" beatific vision by extrapolation and proximity), the latter takes his cue principally from the *saving purpose of Christ's life*. That is, beatific vision is not based on the perfection of his being, but rather on that of his mission. He is quite clear that the hypostatic union *per se* is not a sufficient reason to actually *require* the beatific vision in Christ, though it may be fitting (*conveniens*) since "the divinity is united to the humanity of Christ in person, not in essence or nature; with the unity of person remains the distinction of natures."²¹ However appropriate earthly beatific vision may be for Christ, Aquinas is not prepared to allow theological enthusiasm run away on him. Yet, the method of focusing on Christ's beatific vision from a soteriological viewpoint is a singular and significant contribution of his.

doi.org/10.1353/tho.2022.0034; Matthew Levering, *Reconfiguring Thomistic Christology*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Simon Francis Gaine, "Some Recent Arguments for Christ's Earthly Beatific Vision and Aquinas's Own Argument in *Summa Theologiae* III, qq. 9 and 34," *The Thomist* 88, no. 1 (2024): 77–97, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2024.a914473>.

²¹ *S.Th.* III, q. 9, a. 2, ad 1; cf. III, q. 9, a. 1, ad 3. Humbert Bouëssé, commenting on Aquinas's teaching states that "on ne peut démontrer simplement à partir de l'union hypostatique l'existence de cette vision dans l'âme du Christ. Il est en effet impossible d'établir la répugnance d'une âme d'Homme-Dieu non dotée de la vision de Dieu. . . . L'argumentation ne peut procéder que dans l'ordre de la sagesse. Il faut donc la situer en fonction de la finalité rédemptrice qui est la finalité même de l'union" (H. Bouëssé, *Le mystère de l'Incarnation*, vol. 2 of *Le Sauveur du monde* [Paris: Office général du livre, 1953], 377); K. Adam (*The Christ of Faith*, 302) says: "the hypostatic union does not signify assumption into the nature of the Logos, but only into his person."

Principal Texts of Thomas Aquinas

There are the two principal texts we shall draw upon as the centerpieces of this reflection: one from the *Summa Theologiae*, and the other, somewhat later, from the *Compendium Theologiae*.

Summa Theologiae III, q. 9, a. 2, c. reads: "Utrum in Christum fuerit scientia beatorum vel comprehensorum," ("whether in Christ was to be found the knowledge of the blessed, of those who comprehend God"). It may be noted that this question is an extension of Aquinas's study on Christ's "capital" grace (q. 8), which explains that Christ as the head of humanity and the Church, his body, contains within himself all possible graces.

What is in potentiality is reduced to act by what is in act . . . Now man is in potentiality to the knowledge of the blessed, which consists in the vision of God, and is ordained to it as an end; inasmuch as he is made in the image of God, the rational creature is capable of that blessed knowledge. Now humans are brought to this end of beatitude by the humanity of Christ, according to Hebrews 2:10: "As it was his purpose to bring a great many of his sons to glory, it was appropriate that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make perfect through suffering, the leader who would take them to their salvation." And hence it was necessary (*or fitting, oportuit*) that the beatific knowledge which consists in the vision of God, should belong to Christ pre-eminently (*excellantissime*), since the cause ought always be more efficacious than the effect.²²

This is the only reason Aquinas gives for Christ's earthly beatific vision in the *Summa Theologiae*. Though expressed in philosophical terms, it is not a purely philosophical argument, because the minor premise is clearly of faith, that is, that Jesus Christ, God's only-Begotten Son, is the savior of the world and the source of all grace. Thus he says that "humans are brought to this [ultimate] end of beatitude by the humanity of Christ." Obviously God is the only ultimate

²² "... illud quod est in potentia, reducitur in actu per id quod est actu: oportet enim calidum esse id per quod alia calefiunt. Homo autem est in potentia ad scientiam beatorum, quae in visione Dei consistit et ad eam ordinatur, sicut in finem: est enim creatura rationalis capax illius beatae cognitionis, in quantum est ad imaginem Dei. *Ad hunc autem beatitudinis finem homines reducuntur per Christi humanitatem*, secundum illud Heb 2:10. . . . Et ideo oportuit quod cognitio ipsa in Dei visione consistens excellentissime Christo homini conveniret: quia semper causam oportet esse potius causato." Cf. also *S.Th.* III, q. 34, a. 4; q. 49, a. 6, ad 3.

source of grace which brings about the divinization of the spiritual creature. But the immediate source is the humanity of Christ which, as we shall see, serves as an “animate instrument” of the divine action.

The same issue arises, more extensively, in the *Compendium Theologiae* I, c. 216:

Even as man, Christ has a twofold knowledge. The one is godlike, whereby he sees God in his essence, and other things in God, just as God himself, by knowing himself, knows all other things. Through this vision, God himself is happy, as is every rational creature admitted to the perfect fruition of God. Therefore, *since we hold that Christ is the author of man's salvation*, we must also hold (*necesse est dicere*) that such knowledge as befits the author of salvation pertains to the soul of Christ.

But a principle must be *immovable*, and must also be *pre-eminent in power*. Hence that vision of God in which human beatitude and eternal salvation consist, ought to be more excellent in Christ than in others, and indeed, ought to be found in him as in an *immovable principle*. The difference between what is moveable and what is immovable comes to this: moveable things, so far as they are moveable, do not possess their proper perfection *from the beginning*, but acquire it in the course of time; but immovable things, as such, always possess their perfections from the first moment of their existence. Accordingly Christ, the author of man's salvation, should rightly (*conveniens*) have possessed the full vision of God *from the very beginning of his Incarnation*; propriety would not allow him to have attained to it in the course of time, as other saints do [Emphasis added].²³

²³ “Hominis autem Christi est duplex cognitio. Una quidem deiformis, secundum quod Deum per essentiam videt, et alia videt in Deo, sicut et ipse Deus intelligendo seipsum, intelligit omnia alia, per quam visionem et ipse Deus beatus est, et omnis creatura rationalis perfecte Deo fruens. Quia igitur Christum dicimus esse humanae salutis auctorem, necesse est dicere, quod talis cognitio sic animae Christi conveniat ut decet auctorem. Principium autem et immobile esse oportet, et virtute praestantissimum. Conveniens igitur fuit ut illa Dei visio in qua beatitudo hominum et salus aeterna consistit, excellentius prae ceteris Christo conveniat, et tamquam immobili principio. Haec autem differentia invenitur mobilia ad immobilia, quod mobilia propriam perfectionem non a principio habent, inquantum mobilia sunt, sed eam per successionem temporis assequuntur; immobilia vero, inquantum huiusmodi, semper obtinent suas perfectiones ex quo esse incipiunt. Conveniens igitur fuit Christum humanae salutis auctorem ab ipso suae incarnationis principio plenam Dei visionem possedissee, non autem per temporis successionem pervenisse ad ipsam, ut sancti alii perveniunt” (Thomas Aquinas, “Compendium Theologiae,” in *De re dogmatica et*

In the *Compendium Theologiae*, I, c. 216, Aquinas goes on to explain other kinds of human knowledge possessed by Christ, the “infused” and the “acquired,”²⁴ and then adds a further, secondary reason – based on the classical “principle of perfection” – to explain his beatific vision on earth:

It is also appropriate that the soul which was united to God *more closely than all others* should be beatified by the vision of God beyond the rest of creatures. Gradation is possible in this vision, according as some see God, the cause of all things, more clearly than others . . . Accordingly, the soul of Christ, possessing the highest perfection of the divine vision among all creatures, *clearly beholds in God himself all the divine works and the exemplars of all things that are, will be, or have been*; and so he enlightens not only men, but also the highest of the angels. Hence the Apostle says in Colossians 2:3 that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” of God; and in Hebrews 4:13 he points out that “all things are naked and open to his eyes.”²⁵

And Aquinas adds: “No perfection conceded to creatures may be withheld from Christ’s soul, which is the most excellent of creatures.”²⁶

He goes on to explain that in Christ are to be found different kinds of knowledge: experimental, like all humans; infused, in view of the perfection of created reality. And he comments: “It was proper from human nature assumed by God’s Word would be lacking in nothing, because through it the whole of human nature had to be restored.”²⁷

But then he adds:

moralis, vol. 1 of *Opuscula Theologica*, ed. Raymundi A. Verardo [Torino: Marietti, 1954], no. 435; hereafter: *Comp. theol.*).

²⁴ *Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 (ed. Marietti, no. 438f).

²⁵ “Et inde est quod eorum qui essentiam Dei vident, aliqui plures effectus vel rationes divinorum operum in ipso Deo inspiciunt, quam alii qui minus clare vident . . . Anima igitur Christi summam perfectionem divinae visionis obtinens inter creaturas ceteras, omnia divina opera et rationes ipsorum, quaecumque sunt, erunt vel fuerunt, in ipso Deo plene intuetur, ut non solum homines, sed etiam supremos angelorum illuminet, et ideo Apostolus dicit ad Coloss., 2, 3, quod in ipso sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae Dei absconditi: et ad Hebr. 4, 13, quod omnia nuda et aperta sunt oculis eius” (*Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 [ed. Marietti, no. 438f]).

²⁶ “Nulla perfectio creaturis exhibita, animae Christi, quae est creaturarum excellentissima, deneganda est,” (*Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 [ed. Marietti, no. 439]).

²⁷ “Conveniens enim fuit ut humana natura a Dei verbo assumpta in nullo a perfectione deficeret, utpote per quam tota humana natura restauranda esset,” (*Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 [ed. Marietti, no. 439]).

Since Christ according to his human nature is not just the restorer of nature, but *also the propagator of grace*, there would have to be a third kind of knowledge, by which he knew at the widest possible level whatever belonged to the mystery of grace, for this exceeds natural human knowledge, but may only be known by humans through the gift of wisdom, or by the gift of prophecy.²⁸

From this dense reflection Aquinas concludes: “It is clear (*patet igitur*) from what has just been said that the soul of Christ obtained the supreme grade of knowledge from among other creatures in respect of the vision of God by which the essence of God is seen and all other things in him.”²⁹

From these texts we may conclude that the principal reason Aquinas gives in favour of Christ enjoying the beatific vision on earth is soteriological, simply because *he must provide it for us*. His perfection is not “metaphysical” in character, based on the hypostatic closeness of the humanity of Christ to his divinity,³⁰ but rather is “economic” in kind, “based on the ordering of Christ’s humanity to the incarnation’s concrete and soteriological end.”³¹ In that sense Thomas takes the realism of Incarnation very seriously, and is doctrinally situated far away from both Nestorianism and Monophysitism. In the words of Joshua Lim:

If his humanity is to be the source of grace for the rest of humanity, its perfection must be unambiguously human. Christ, therefore, possesses the perfection of grace and knowledge because his humanity is the instrument through which God causes our salvation (specifically, communicating grace, illuminating minds, and leading men to the vision of God). In order to be such an instrument, according to the principle of the causality of the maximum, it is necessary that

²⁸ “Sed quia Christus secundum humanam naturam non solum fuit reparator naturae, sed et gratiae propagator, affuit ei etiam tertia cognitio, qua plenissime cognovit quidquid ad mysteria gratiae potest pertinere, quae naturalem hominis cognitionem excedunt, sed cognoscuntur ab hominibus per donum sapientiae, vel per spiritum prophetiae,” (*Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 [ed. Marietti, no. 439]).

²⁹ “Patet igitur ex praedictis, quod anima Christi summum cognitionis gradum inter ceteras creaturas obtinuit quantum ad Dei visionem, qua Dei essentia videtur, et alia in ipsa,” (*Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 [ed. Marietti, no. 439]).

³⁰ In the words of J. Lim: metaphysical “perfection is due to the human nature of Christ on account of its union to the Word (that is, independent of a consideration of the concrete end of redemption). Consequently, Christ’s perfection as man is in some way an immediate result of his divine perfection in such a way that, unhindered, would compromise the integrity of his human nature. . . . It argues from the bare fact of the hypostatic union” (Lim, “The Principle of Perfection,” 360).

³¹ Lim, 361.

Christ possess the fullness of grace and knowledge. . . . Christ must be full of grace to communicate grace to others; his fullness of grace enables him, in his humanity, to be principle of grace for others. . . . Christ must perfectly possess the grace that he alone mediates to the rest of humanity.³²

But is this really a convincing explanation? In particular, the following questions must be asked. *First*: to what degree does Christ truly communicate God's gift of eternal life to humans, and (with it) beatific vision? And *second*, even if his humanity *does* play an instrumental role in obtaining beatific vision for believers, what need is there for him to enjoy vision while *on earth*, when such a vision would only seem proper to his glorious state?

Simon Francis Gaine in a recent study³³ examines Lim's explanation to the effect that Thomas justifies Christ's earthly beatific vision from conception onwards soteriologically. But he specifies that the term *conveniens*, 'appropriate', 'fitting' is frequently used in these texts, the ones we have just cited. In other words, Thomas does not hold that Christ's universal saving mission strictly determines or requires that Jesus enjoyed the vision of God while on earth, but holds rather that it is very appropriate. "In fact, the mark of fittingness in Aquinas's approach instead allows the possibility of critics proposing alternative views of when it was fitting for Christ to be blessed with the beatific vision,"³⁴ especially in respect of its beginning at conception.

Let us examine these issues one by one; in doing so, it should be possible to eventually validate Thomas's position as a reasonable hypothesis.

The Gratuitous Character of Beatific Vision and the Universal Mediation of Christ

The first thing to be said is that for the rational creature, beatific vision – immediate intuitive knowledge of the divine essence – is a *gratuitous gift of God*. Though we may be naturally capable of seeing God (Thomas says that humans are *capax Dei*), beatific vision is a divine gift and it is entirely beyond the bounds of human nature.³⁵

³² Lim, 361.

³³ Cf. Gaine, "Some Recent Arguments for Christ's Earthly Beatific Vision and Aquinas's Own Argument in *Summa Theologiae* III, qq. 9 and 34," 84–89.

³⁴ Gaine, 90.

³⁵ Cf. O'Callaghan, *Children of God in the World*, 367–405.

Interestingly, some of the early redactions of the Apostles' Creed termed this the "*invisibility*" of God.³⁶ For Tyrranius Rufinus³⁷ and others, the affirmation of the invisibility of God was an anti-Sabellian reaction, which meant that the Son and not the Father became incarnate (or visible). Still, whatever reasons were given, "invisibility" is a significant divine attribute,³⁸ one which succinctly expresses several fundamental aspects of Christian faith and life: the need to believe; the chasm between the personal knowledge of God Christians have through revelation, on the one hand, and the limited knowledge of the divine nature available to reason alone, on the other. God in his essence is completely invisible for man, absolutely invulnerable and untouchable; he cannot be idolized or manipulated.³⁹ If, due to this very invisibility, one is led to think that "God is dead" or has gone into hiding, what it really means is that *humans* have rejected his revelation, and erected their own (visible, tangible, manipulable) gods.

The conclusion of this is simple: the divinity can only be seen in his essence by humans *if God makes himself seen*, in other words by a gift man is capable of receiving without losing his nature, but which he has no native capabilities of achieving.

But where does Christ enter here? In what way would our beatific vision depend on him? The thesis being put forward by Thomas is that *precisely insofar*

³⁶ Cf. G. Ludwig Hahn and August Hahn, eds., *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, 3rd ed. (Breslau: E. Morgenstern, 1897), no. 47 (Augustine; also in DH 21); no. 134 (Auxentius of Milan – Arian); no. 48 (*Quodvultdeus* of Carthage; also in DH 22); no. 212 (John of Jerusalem); no. 36 (Tyrranius Rufinus; also in DH 16); no. 49 (Fulgentius of Ruspe); no. 64 (Gallican *Auscultate Expositionem*); no. 76 (Bangor Antiphony; also in DH 29).

³⁷ Cf. Tyrranius Rufinus, *Comm. in Symb. Apost.* (Rufinus, *A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. John Norman Davidson Kelly, Ancient Christian Writers 20 [Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 1954]); Francis John Badcock, *The History of the Creeds* (London: SPCK, 1938), 103.

³⁸ Cf. Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (Munich: M. Hüber, 1953), 220–24 (#36, 2b); Johann Auer, *Gott der Eine und Dreieine*, vol. 2 of *Kleine katholische Dogmatik* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1978), #9, 1.

³⁹ The following text of Joseph Ratzinger (*Introduction to Christianity* [London: Herder / Herder, 1969], 31) is worth transcribing: "Between God and man there is an infinite abyss; because man was created in such a way that he can only see what is not God, and hence God is essentially invisible for man, who always remains outside the human field of vision. God is essentially invisible. This expression of the biblical faith in God which rejects the visible character of the gods is, perhaps above all, an affirmation regarding man: man is a being who sees and attempts to reduce the space of his real existence to that of what he can see and understand. But in man's visual field, which situates him in the world, God does not, indeed cannot, appear, no matter how much that visual field is widened. . . . God is the one who remains *essentially* outside our visual field."

as the beatific vision is a gratuitous concession, a gift of grace, it can only come to us through the mediation of Christ. As Aquinas says in the text cited above, "humans are brought to beatitude by the humanity of Christ."⁴⁰ This is simply an expression of the doctrine of the *universal mediation of Christ* in the order of salvation, a doctrine fundamental to Christianity. And when Aquinas asserts that Christ possessed the fullness of all divine gifts destined for man, he is not doing so in order to overdecorate and dehumanize the Savior, but simply to emphasize that "of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved" (Act 4:12); "there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). Certainly the creation of the world refers to the divinity of the Word, "through whom all things were made" (John 1:2),⁴¹ but in the supernatural sphere, which includes the beatific vision, the mediation of Christ in his humanity is required. If bound to seek an alternative, one would have to claim that, besides Christ, there would have to be another form of mediation parallel to and independent of his, *or* that man has native power to receive the beatific vision (that it is natural to him), *or* simply that God gives man the gift of vision without any form of mediation. Let us examine the latter possibility.

Difficulties Concerning the "Mediation" of Beatific Vision

What is being said here is that the humanity of Christ is in some way involved in providing us with the beatific vision. Two significant problems arise in this regard. *Firstly*, it would seem that the mediating role of Christ in the beatific vision would destroy the very nature of such vision, which occurs "face to face," "*without the mediation* of any creature as a seen object," in the words of Benedict XII's 1336 constitution *Benedictus Deus*.⁴² *Secondly*, once the just

⁴⁰ *S.Th.* III, q. 9, a. 2, c.

⁴¹ Cf. Paul O'Callaghan, *God's Gift of the Universe: An Introduction to Creation Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

⁴² DH 1000: "nulla mediante creatura in ratione obiecti visi se habente." On this important document, cf. Christian Trottmann, *La vision béatifique: des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1995); Josep Gil i Ribas, "El debat medieval sobre la visió beatífica. Noves aportacions (I)," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 27, no. 2 (2002): 295–351, <https://raco.cat/index.php/RevistaTeologia/article/view/71249>; Josep Gil i Ribas, "El debat medieval sobre la visió beatífica. Noves aportacions (II). La polèmica sobre el «quan» de la visió beatífica," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 28, no. 1 (2003): 135–96.

have received their eternal prize, the mediating role of Christ's humanity seems superfluous. Since the role of an instrument is normally a *transitory* one, it could hardly be said that Christ's humanity would be required to *maintain* the beatific vision eternally. Or could it?

The following could be said regarding the *first problem*. As a reaction to Arianism, there tended to arise among some theologians, such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus,⁴³ a position which distinguished really between the divine essence on the one hand, which is absolutely invisible for creatures – not even God could make it visible – and, on the other, the divine glory, power and splendour (*doxa*), which is visible for creatures, was encountered by Moses on the holy mountain, and likewise by Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration. In the time of Theodoret, however, Gregory the Great made the point that to *see* the one (the glory) and not the other (the essence) may lead to prejudicing the divine simplicity⁴⁴; either God is seen intuitively and directly – though never of course “comprehensively”⁴⁵ – or he is not seen at all. To say that God is simple in his essence means it is impossible to see “a bit of God” without seeing the rest. This is the point the doctrine of Benedict XII – *nulla mediante creatura* – attempted to clarify when teaching there is no intermediary involved in the beatific vision: God is simple in his essence.

Clearly, therefore, the humanity of Christ is not the medium *through which* the divinity is seen. The blessed are immediately conscious of seeing God, One and Three, and *as a result*, they behold other things and persons *in God*, – this includes for example the glorified humanity of Christ – “just as God himself, by knowing himself, knows all other things,”⁴⁶ to cite Thomas. One might say that God himself mediates their knowledge of the rest of reality, but nothing mediates their conscious knowledge of God. So where does the mediation of Christ fit in? What role does he play in communicating beatific knowledge to Christians?

⁴³ Cf. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Eranistes seu Polymorphus*, dial. I (Theodoret, *Eranistes*, ed. Gerard H. Ettlinger [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975], 75f.). Cf. Paul B. Clayton, *The Christology of Theodoret of Cyrus: Antiochene Christology from the Council of Ephesus (431) to the Council of Chalcedon (451)*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Vasilije Vranic, *The Constancy and Development in the Christology of Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 129 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

⁴⁴ Gregory the Great, *Moralium in Job*, 18, 54, 90 (PL 76:93).

⁴⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae. Pars Prima et Prima Secundae* (Rome: Marietti, 1952) I, q. 12, a. 7 (hereafter: *S.Th.* I [I–II]).

⁴⁶ *Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 (ed. Marietti, no. 435).

The doctrine of creation makes it clear that here is a distinction between what is seen and known (in this case God, immediately and intuitively), and the knowing subject itself.⁴⁷ From the point of view of the conscious activity of the blessed, there is no mediator between themselves and God: they are directly aware of God. But at no stage do the blessed become ontologically “amalgamated” with the divinity; rather they remain always as creatures, elevated creatures, and require as a divine gift a special “gnoseological apparatus” with which they behold the divinity. We may call it a “received capacity to see God” – Church documents speak of the *lumen gloriae*⁴⁸ – which they may be as unaware of as someone absorbed in thought is oblivious to their thought process and the workings of their brain.

Insofar as the *reception* of the *lumen gloriae* represents the culmination of saving grace, the blessed are indeed in need of a mediator, Christ, the source of all grace as we saw above. The humanity of Christ would not mediate the beatific vision *as such* – the blessed do not see Christ’s glorified humanity “first,” directly, and the divine essence “behind” as it were, indirectly – but he does mediate the grace which makes it possible, what Aquinas calls a *vis cognoscendi*.⁴⁹ In fact, Aquinas speaks of three kinds of mediation in human knowledge:⁵⁰ *firstly*, what he calls the medium *sub quo*, “under which,” that

⁴⁷ Cf. O’Callaghan, *God’s Gift of the Universe*, 1–35.

⁴⁸ This term is used in the Council of Florence (1312): DH 895. In Aquinas, cf. *C.G.* III, 53ff; *S.Th.* I, q. 12, a. 2 & 5.

⁴⁹ “Non dicitur cognitio mediata: *quia non cadit inter cognoscentem et rem cognitam*, sed est illud quod dat cognoscenti *vim cognoscendi*” (Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis: Liber IV, Distinctiones 23–50* [Parma: Petri Fiaccadori, 1858], D. 49, q. 2, a. 1, ad 15, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp40492.html>) (hereafter: *IV Sent.*).

⁵⁰ “Quod medium in visione corporali et intellectuali invenitur triplex. Primum est medium sub quo videtur; et hoc est quod perficit visum ad videndum in generali, non determinans visum ad aliquod speciale objectum, sicut se habet lumen corporale ad visum corporalem, et lumen intellectus agentis ad intellectum possibilem. Secundum est medium quo videtur; et hoc est forma visibilis qua determinatur uterque visus ad speciale objectum, sicut per formam lapidis ad cognoscendum lapidem. Tertium est medium in quo videtur; et hoc est id per cujus inspectionem ducitur visus in aliam rem, sicut inspiciendo speculum ducitur in ea quae in speculo repraesentantur, et videndo imaginem ducitur in imaginatum; et sic etiam intellectus per cognitionem effectus ducitur in causam, vel e converso. In visione igitur patriae non erit tertium medium, ut scilicet Deus per species aliorum cognoscatur, sicut nunc cognoscitur, ratione cujus dicimur nunc videre in speculo; nec erit ibi secundum medium, quia ipsa essentia divina erit qua intellectus noster videbit Deum, ut ex dictis patet; sed erit ibi tantum primum medium, quod elevabit intellectum nostrum ad hoc quod possit conjungi essentiae increatae modo praedicto. Sed ab hoc medio non dicitur cognitio mediata, quia non cadit inter cognoscentem et rem cognitam, sed est illud quod dat cognoscenti vim cognoscendi,” (*IV Sent.*, D. 49, q. 2, a. 1, ad 15. Cf. *S.Th.* I, q. 12, a. 5).

does not determine the content, but makes it possible; *secondly*, the medium *quo*, “by which,” that is the “forms” of the things to be known; and thirdly the medium *in quo*, “in which,” for example a mirror through which things may be seen. In the beatific vision, neither the second nor the third are to be found: the second, “by which,” because the divine essence (and not a separate concept) is what makes our intellect see God directly; the third, “in which,” for God is seen directly, face to face. But in beatific vision, there is a medium *sub quo* that is not God and gives the power to know, the *vis cognoscendi*.

According to Aquinas, in the words of José Antonio Riestra, “the beatific vision was not communicated in itself through the instrumentality of Christ, but directly by his divinity. But as man, Christ gave us the *lumen gloriae*, and as God he united himself directly to the human intelligence fortified and prepared in this way.”⁵¹

On the Permanence of the Incarnation

Let us now examine the *second problem* referred to above: how permanent or continuous need the mediating work of Christ’s humanity be? What need do we have of the Incarnation once definitive salvation (and with it beatific vision) is conceded to the elect, and the *Parousia* has taken place? It is interesting to note that over the centuries, the *logion* of 1 Cor 15:28 – which speaks of God being “all in all” at the end of time once Christ places the kingdom in the hands of the Father – has, not uncommonly, been interpreted as a sign of an ultimate cessation of the Incarnation of the Word.⁵² A brief study of these positions should afford useful insights into the significance of the permanence, or otherwise, of the Incarnation of the divine Word.

In Patristic Times

The doctrine of the impermanence and eventual ending of the Incarnation was rejected at Constantinople in 381 by the addition of the phrase “and his kingdom

⁵¹ José Antonio Riestra, *Cristo y la plenitud del cuerpo místico: Estudio sobre la Cristología de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, Colección teológica 44 (Pamplona: Euns, 1985), 176. The delicate question of the mediating role of Christ in the beatific vision is carefully handled here: Riestra, 170–76.

⁵² Cf. the useful article of J. F. Jansen, “1 Cor. 15. 24–28 and The Future of Jesus Christ,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40, no. 4 (1987): 543–70, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600018561>, which we shall draw upon considerably in the following pages.

shall have no end" to the Nicene creed,⁵³ most probably as a refutation of the position of Marcellus of Ancyra, a IV century theologian.⁵⁴ He was convinced that the Incarnation of the Word was not eternal, and that its continuance will become quite unnecessary once Christ "delivers the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor 15:24). Likewise, this doctrine may be found in a variety of followers of Origen, and especially in Marcellus's contemporary Evagrius Ponticus.⁵⁵

Leaving aside a host of other issues which go to explain this position, it may be said that these authors have in common a *soteriology* with a somewhat Gnostic⁵⁶ or Manichaean taint,⁵⁷ one in which the unequivocal gratuitousness of salvation – and hence of beatific vision – is unclear. To some degree this involved a doubtful doctrine regarding the full corporeity of the risen body; and obviously

⁵³ Cf. DH 150. Cf. Karl Anton Maly, *De verbis symboli nicaeno-constantinopolitani «cuius regni non erit finis»* (Munich: Druck der Salesianischen Offizin, 1939).

⁵⁴ On Marcellus, cf. Jansen, "I Cor. 15. 24–28 and The Future of Jesus Christ," 546–55. Eusebius records 127 fragments from his works: cf. Erich Klostermann, *Eusebius Werke*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Berlin: Nabu Press, 1972).

⁵⁵ "We know the temptation which I Cor. 15.24–28 has been to theologians: the Arians found in it their thesis of the inferiority of the Son to the Father, and Marcellus of Ancyra, Evagrius and the Origenists wanted to derive from it the abolition of the incarnation and the separation of the Logos from the flesh, so that in the return of the Logos to the Father the latter became all in all" (Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* [London: A.R. Mowbray, 1965], 399). Cf. also: Eckhard Schendel, *Herrschaft und Unterwerfung Christi: 1. Korinther 15, 24–28 in Exegese und Theologie der Väter bis zum Ausgang des 4. Jahrhunderts*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese 12 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971). On Evagrius, cf. François Refoulé, "La christologie d'Évagre et l'Origénisme," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 27 (1961): 221–66.

⁵⁶ Marcellus took a somewhat Gnostic approach to soteriology, according to Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 274–96, especially 295. Cf. also Klaus Seibt, *Die Theologie des Markell von Ankyra*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 59 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994). Something of a kind may be said of Origenism: cf. Jean Daniélou, *Origène, Génie du christianisme* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 100, 294–95. Salvation is not perceived as truly gratuitous since the soul is naturally "divine," though at present encumbered by matter. Evagrius Ponticus has a somewhat intellectualist view of Christ's saving work: cf. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 297: "the result (of the work of redemption) is the equality of all spirits with Christ in the vision of God."

⁵⁷ In frag. 117, 118, Marcellus interprets John 6:63 ("The spirit makes alive, the flesh is useless"), and Rom 8:21 (which speaks of the Christian being freed from the "slavery of decadence") in a way contrary to matter. Origenists on the whole held that the world was created in order to punish man: Daniélou, *Origène*, 207–17; 277–83. This is certainly the case for Evagrius, for whom matter is created to redeem fallen souls (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 297). "Corporeality no longer has any real significance for the restored world. It is merely the temporal manifestation of the *nous-Christos* for us. . . . Only the spirit has significance, and knowledge of all spiritual acts" (Grillmeier, 298).

if the risen body of Christ is not truly corporeal and material, then the “Incarnation” in real terms can only be temporal. So if salvation consists primarily in the acquisition of divine knowledge and the shaking off of corporeal matter, it is easy to conclude that the Incarnation may be considered as a temporary measure.

Among Protestant Authors

Similarly the permanence of the Incarnation was called into question by John Calvin, and in present times by the Calvinist scholar Arnold A. van Ruler.⁵⁸ It is not that Calvin expressly affirms the eventual termination of the Incarnation *as such*, but it would seem that he makes its permanence superfluous.⁵⁹ Calvin’s commentary on 1 Cor 15:24–28 is indicative: at the end of time, he says, “Christ will be subjected to the Father because, when the veil has been removed, we shall see God plainly . . . and the humanity of Christ will no longer be between us to *hold us back* from a nearer vision of God.”⁶⁰ At the present moment, the Father governs us through the lordship of Christ, he says, “yet it is for but a time until we enjoy the direct vision of the Godhead.”⁶¹ Other Calvinist authors such as Jonathan Edwards and John Owen have attempted to correct Calvin’s position by insisting on the Christological aspect of eternal life.⁶² Other authors have attempted to establish an unwarranted assimilation of Thomas to Calvin.⁶³

Perhaps due to an excessive application of the *communicatio idiomatum*, and a conviction that human nature has been corrupted by sin, classical Protestant authors tended to downplay the mediating function of Christ *according to his*

⁵⁸ Cf. Jansen, “1 Cor. 15. 24–28 and The Future of Jesus Christ,” 555–70.

⁵⁹ Cf. Jansen, 556, n. 24. According to Jansen, Egbert Emmen, Frederik Willem Adrianus Korff and Arnold A. van Ruler affirm that for Calvin, Christ’s humanity will cease at the end of time. G.C. Berkouwer, William B. Eerdmans, Edward David Willis deny this. Heinrich Quistorp and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 258f. leave the question open, but feel that an eternal Incarnation for Calvin is at least superfluous.

⁶⁰ Jean Calvin, *Comm. in 1 Cor. XV*, 27, cit. by Jansen, “1 Cor. 15. 24–28 and The Future of Jesus Christ,” 557.

⁶¹ Jean Calvin, *Institutiones christianae religionis 1559 libros 1 et 2 continens*, vol. 3 of *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta* (München: Ch. Kaiser, 1928), 2, 14, 3; cf. *ibidem*, 15, 5.

⁶² Cf. Simon Francis Gaine, “Thomas Aquinas and John Owen on the Beatific Vision: A Reply to Suzanne McDonald,” *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1070 (2016): 432–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12218>; Gaine, “The Beatific Vision and the Heavenly Mediation of Christ.”

⁶³ Cf. Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018). The position is critiqued by Gaine, “The Beatific Vision and the Heavenly Mediation of Christ.”

humanity,⁶⁴ and attributed it more properly to the divinity. This could lead at times to a tacit Monophysitism.⁶⁵ The humanity of Christ is perceived as *a veil* for the divinity, rather than *a channel of divine recreative gifts*, gifts which a fallen humanity could not appropriate in any case.

The XX-century Calvinist author A. A. van Ruler,⁶⁶ in a paradoxical attempt to counter the Christocentrism of Karl Barth, terms the Incarnation an *inter-*

⁶⁴ This may be said of Calvin and Osiander. Quoting 1 Tim 2:5 ("there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ"), Calvin says that Paul "could have said 'God,' or he could at least have omitted the word 'man' just as he did the word 'God,'" (*Institutiones christianae*, 2, 12, 1). In Calvin's *Responsio ad fratres polonos*, we read that "Christ began to perform the office of Mediator not only after the fall of Adam, but insofar as he is the Eternal Son of God . . . because already from the beginning of creation he was truly Mediator because he was always the Head of the Church and held primacy even over the angels and was the first born of all creatures," cit. by Edward David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 70. Luther, less clear-minded and consequential, yet more intuitive and profound than Calvin, gave a very human and pious view of the figure of the Mediator. Yet in his 1528 commentary on 1 Tim 2:5, he makes *homo Christus Iesus* equivalent to *Filius Dei*: Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Weimarer Ausgabe], vol. 26 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1964), 26,38; cf. the important study of Yves Congar, "Regards et réflexions sur la christologie de Luther," in *Chalkedon heute*, vol. 3 of *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Alois Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht (Würzburg: Echter, 1954), 467. Another indication that Christ was understood as mediator according to his divinity among Protestants may be seen in the controversy instigated by Francesco Stancaro († 1574) who claimed that Calvin's assertion – to the effect that Christ is mediator as God – was Arian; he was expelled from the Protestant communion as a Nestorian.

⁶⁵ On Luther, cf. Congar, "Regards et réflexions sur la christologie de Luther," 485–86, especially n. 112, which offers further support for this opinion, for example that of Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1, bk. 2 (Zürich: Zölikon, 1945), 27, who also puts Calvin into the same category. Barth indeed rejects both monophysitism and Nestorianism (cf. Henri Bouillard, *Parole de Dieu et existence humaine*, vol. 1 [Paris: Aubier, 1957], 115–20), but he tends to run down the value of the humanity of Christ, as Bouillard also points out; the same opinion is held by Raúl Gabás Pallás, *Escatología protestante en la actualidad*, Victoricensia 20 (Vitoria: Eset, 1965), 76f. and Brunero Gherardini, *La seconda Riforma: Uomini e scuole del protestantesimo moderno*, vol. 2 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1966), 123ff. Monophysitism is to be found perhaps in Barth's early works, characterised by Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity," but his progressive "conversion to analogy" (cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* [Olten: J. Hegner, 1951], 94ff.) probably also corresponds to a "gradual moving away from monophysitism." The following text of Rudolf Bultmann is also indicative: ". . . if the Christ who died such a death was the pre-existent Son of God, what could death mean for him? Obviously very little, if he knew that he would rise again in three days!" (Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth* [New York: Harper & Row, 2005], 25).

⁶⁶ Cf. A. A. van Ruler, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 94; cf. Jansen, "1 Cor. 15. 24–28 and The Future of Jesus Christ," 563.

mezzo, “an emergency measure that God postponed as long as possible,”⁶⁷ and expressly and repeatedly denies its permanence. This doctrine has a particular view of history,⁶⁸ and rests on the soteriological doctrine of *penal substitution*.⁶⁹ After all, if Christ’s saving work consists simply of a punishment inflicted on him in our stead, the time would come when this work comes to completion. From then onwards, the Incarnation and all it involves would become superfluous.

Aquinas brings up this very point when studying the “eternal priesthood” of Jesus Christ. He asks whether or not his priesthood will continue once the “debt of punishment” of the elect has been fully expiated, and says: “the saints in heaven have no need of expiation through the priesthood of Christ, but, once their sins are expiated, they require final consummation through Christ himself, *on whom their glory depends*, as Rev 21:23 says: ‘the city was lit by the radiant glory of God, *and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it*.’”⁷⁰

So all in all we can hold that the Incarnation is eternal *a parte post*, and the elect will live off God in and through the mediation of the humanity of Christ. As the Creed says, “and his kingdom shall have no end.”

Issues Involved in the Negation of Permanence of the Incarnation

We have just seen that several authors reject the permanence of the Incarnation, and render insignificant the *Christological side of eternal life*.⁷¹ Reasons for this may include: a somewhat Gnostic or Manichean soteriology which prejudices

⁶⁷ Ruler, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*, 69.

⁶⁸ Moltmann (*The Crucified God*, 261) puts it as follows: “But can the consummation be understood as being quite untouched by the history out of which it emerges?”

⁶⁹ Cf. Jansen, “I Cor. 15, 24–28 and The Future of Jesus Christ,” 568. A. A. van Ruler (*Theologisch werk*, vol. 1 [Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1969], 173) says: “Did the Incarnation ever serve any purpose save that of substitution?”

⁷⁰ “... sancti qui erunt in patria non indigebunt ulterius expiari per sacerdotium Christi, sed, expiati iam, indigebunt consummari per ipsum Christum, a quo gloria eorum dependet: ut dicitur, Apoc. 21,23 quod ‘claritas Dei illuminat illam’ scilicet civitatem sanctorum, ‘et lucerna eius est Agnus’” (*S.Th.* III, q. 22, a. 5, ad 1).

⁷¹ The VII-century Bangor Antiphonary Creed has: “Credo . . . vitam aeternam in gloria Christi” (DH 27); cf. Paul O’Callaghan, “The Bangor Antiphonary Creed: Origins and Theology,” *Annales Theologici* 6, no. 2 (1992): 255–87. Second Vatican Council’s, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (1964), nos. 48, 49 speaks often of the Christological aspects of eternal life, following numerous scriptural texts, especially Rom 6:23, as well as Matt 25:34, 41; Luke 23:43; John 14:3; Act 7:59; Phil 1:23–24; 4:19; Col 3:3–4; 1 Thess 4:17. Other Vatican II documents repeatedly refer to the Christological nature of God’s gifts: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 2, 5, 102; *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 2, 7, 8; *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 10, 22, 32 etc.

the gratuitousness of salvation; the humanity of Christ seen as a veil, but not as a channel of grace; the relevance of “penal substitution” in salvation and eternal life. But Christian soteriology moves on a different plane. At heart it affirms that salvation is gratuitous and “re-creational,” that it is mediated to us through the humanity and entire human life of Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Word (and hence through the sacraments), that Christ’s work involves the mediation of divine gifts for us, and not merely a vicarious and temporary penal substitution that makes up to God for our offences until they are definitively expiated. Now included among the divine gifts destined for man – indeed the culmination of such gifts – is that which makes the beatific vision possible. If Christ were not to mediate such a gift, the amplitude of his saving role would be considerably impoverished and the essential Christocentric aspect of Christian life and theology would be minimized.⁷²

The Soteriological Necessity of Christ’s Earthly Beatific Vision of Christ due to his ‘Capital’ Role

Yet another serious objection could be made to the suggestion that from our eternal dependency on the Incarnation can be inferred Christ’s beatific vision *while yet on earth*. Even if it is true that Christ’s humanity eternally mediates and makes present the *lumen gloriae* which founds the beatific vision, why would be it necessary for him to possess it in *this* life? Would it not be sufficient for him to receive beatific vision of the Father, along with the Resurrection, as a reward for his fidelity and love? This is the way Jean Galot argues when he says that Christ indeed could communicate beatific vision to humans through his *glorious* humanity, but that as *viator*, he merited it for himself, and merited its extension in benefit of the elect.⁷³ The argument is certainly worth considering given the fact that Christ in dying on the Cross, according to Aquinas, may be said to merit his own resurrection (immortality), and that of humanity as well.⁷⁴ In other words, if he merited immortality while being mortal and by obediently accepting his very mortality,⁷⁵ could he not be said to merit beatific vision, while having faith? That is, if he merits immortality for himself and for

⁷² Cf. Paul O’Callaghan, “El cristocentrismo de Joseph Ratzinger,” *Scripta Theologica* 56, no. 3 (2024): 683–702, <https://doi.org/10.15581/006.56.3.683-702>.

⁷³ Cf. Galot, *Who Is Christ?*, 357.

⁷⁴ Cf. *S.Th.* III, q. 49, a. 6.

⁷⁵ Cf. *S.Th.* III, q. 48, a. 1; q. 49, a. 6.

the human race, is there any reason why he should not merit beatific vision for himself and for the elect?

A second objection suggests itself at this juncture. The *lumen gloriae*, which is what makes beatific vision possible, would seem to require the divine creative *concursus* in order to be “maintained in being.”⁷⁶ But since the role of Christ’s humanity in respect of the beatific vision can at best be instrumental – and instrumental causality is often, though not always, transitory – it cannot be held with certainty that Christ eternally mediates the *lumen gloriae*. Let us look at the first objection now, since it goes a long way towards shedding light on the second one.

As we saw earlier on, Aquinas does indeed hold that Christ enjoyed the beatific vision from the outset of his human life; and this doctrine is closely related to his “capital role,” that is of being Head and Savior over all creation. Note that Aquinas’s doctrine in the *Summa Theologiae* on Christ as the head of the Church⁷⁷ precedes, and is clearly related to, his teaching on Christ’s earthly beatific vision. When examining the question of Christ’s possible beatific vision in the *Summa*, Aquinas does not really explain *why* the priority of Christ’s beatific vision over that of the elect requires him to enjoy it from the first moment of the Incarnation. He simply says: “men are brought (*reducuntur*) to this end of beatitude by the humanity of Christ . . . And hence . . .”⁷⁸ Perhaps this lack of explanation has brought some authors to put Christ’s *earthly* beatific vision down to his role *as head over the angels*.⁷⁹ After all, it would be improper for the angels to enjoy the beatific vision were their “Head” not to possess such a gift.⁸⁰ However valid this observation may be as a supporting argument, it misses the fundamental point insofar as the pre-eminence of Christ’s beatific vision is not a merely temporal one. This is explained in detail in a text already quoted from the *Compendium Theologiae*, and elsewhere in the *Summa*. Let us go back to the texts in question.

Texts of St Thomas Insisting upon Christ’s Vision on Earth

In the *Compendium Theologiae*, Christ is presented as the author of man’s salvation and so should possess beatific knowledge “. . . but a principle must be

⁷⁶ Cf. O’Callaghan, *God’s Gift of the Universe*, 214–20.

⁷⁷ Cf. *S.Th.* III, q. 7, a. 9; q. 8, a. 1.

⁷⁸ *S.Th.* III, q. 9, a. 2, c: “Ad hunc autem finem beatitudinis homines reducuntur per Christi humanitatem. . . . Et ideo oportuit quod cognitio ipsa in Dei visione consistens excellentissime Christo homini conveniret, quia semper causa oportet esse potius causato.”

⁷⁹ Cf. Galtier, *De incarnatione ac redemptione*, 255f.; Gaine, “The Beatific Vision and the Heavenly Mediation of Christ,” 126.

⁸⁰ Cf. *S.Th.* III, q. 8, a. 4.

immovable, and must also be *pre-eminent in power*. Hence the vision of God ought to be *more excellent in Christ than in others*, and indeed ought to be found in him as an *unmovable principle*.⁸¹

The *Summa* contains the same doctrine in more precise theological terms as it examines why Christ should be regarded as head over the Church. It says that order, perfection and power

belong to Christ spiritually. First (*order*) on account of his nearness to God, his grace is the highest and first, *though not in time*, since all have received grace on account of his grace (cf. Rom 8:29). Secondly, he had *perfection* as regards the fullness of all graces (cf. Jn 1:14 . . .). And thirdly, he has the *power* of bestowing grace on all members of the Church, according to John 1:16: "From his fullness we have all received."⁸²

Several observations should be made about this text. *First*, the priority of Christ's grace is not principally a temporal one (*etsi non tempore*). *Second*, graces of all kinds are included – also those, it would seem, related to the beatific vision – if Christ is to be regarded truly as the Head of the Church. In the *third* place, the doctrine on Christ's capital role runs in close dependency to his saving work.⁸³

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the pre-eminence of Christ's grace is one according to which "he has power of bestowing grace on all" (*virtutem habuit influendi gratiam*). Or, as he says elsewhere: "the soul of Christ so received grace that it is poured out from him onto others" (*ex ea quodammodo transfunderetur in alios*); "grace was bestowed upon him as upon a universal principle . . . of grace"⁸⁴ (*totum principium vitae nostrae et operationis est Christus*).⁸⁵ This point is significant insofar as it makes it clear that Christ not only enjoys the fullness of grace as superior to the rest, but he enjoys it precisely insofar as *he is destined to give it to others*. The explanation of St Thomas is simply another way of saying that Christ is the *only saving Mediator*.

⁸¹ *Comp. theol.* I, 216 (ed. Marietti, no. 435).

⁸² "Haec tria [ordo, perfectio, potestas] competunt Christo spiritualiter, *Primo* enim, secundum propinquitatem ad Deum gratia eius altior et prior est, etsi non tempore: quia omnes alii acceperunt gratiam per respectum ad gratiam ipsius, secundum illud Rom 8,29, . . . *Secundo* vero, perfectionem habet quantum ad plenitudinem omnium gratiarum, secundum illud Io 1,14 *Tertio*, virtutem habuit influendi gratiam in omnia Ecclesiae, secundum illud Io 1,16. . . . Et sic patet quod convenienter dicitur Christus caput Ecclesiae" (*S.Th.* III, q. 8, a. 1, c). The same position is expressed in *S.Th.* III, q. 7, a. 9.

⁸³ Cf. especially *S.Th.* III, q. 48, a. 1.

⁸⁴ *S.Th.* III, q. 48, a. 1 c.

⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Ad Phil.*, 1:21 (Thomas Aquinas, "Super Epistolam ad Philipenses lectura," in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 [Torino: Marietti, 1953], no. 32).

The “principle of perfection” as understood by St Thomas is clearly distinct from the way it is understood by other authors.⁸⁶ For previous Scholastics, Christ’s fullness of grace was affirmed in deference to the ontological proximity of his humanity to the divinity. For Aquinas, such a proximity makes the fullness of all graces appropriate, indeed, but the *ultimate purpose* of the supernatural perfection of his humanity is not merely decorative or fitting, but involves the salvation of humans, and not merely his personal, perpetual and adorable identity as God’s Incarnate Word.

Despite appearances to the contrary and common terminology used, Thomistic doctrine marks a definite and novel departure from earlier Scholastics. And this is so precisely inasmuch as he includes – perhaps for the first time, practically speaking, within the Scholastic period⁸⁷ – the doctrine of the instrumental efficacy of the humanity and human actions of Christ:⁸⁸ *virtutem habuit influendi gratiam*. In affirming this doctrine, Aquinas drank deeply from Christian tradition in considering the humanity of Christ as an *organon* (in the terminology of Athanasius⁸⁹), or *instrumentum animatum* (in that of John Damascene⁹⁰) of the divine saving power.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Cf. Lim, “The Principle of Perfection.”

⁸⁷ Cf. José Antonio Riestra, “Teologia cattolica della redenzione nella storia,” in *Salvezza e annunzio*, vol. 1 of *Salvezza cristiana e culture odierne* (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 1985), 295–319, 299f. with bibliography.

⁸⁸ On the instrumental causality of Christ’s humanity, cf. Humbert Boüessé, “La causalité efficiente instrumentale et la causalité méritoire de la Sainte Humanité du Christ,” *Revue Théologique* 44, no. 2 (1938): 256–98; D. Van Meegeren, *De causalitate instrumentali humanitatis Christi iuxta divi Thomae doctrinam expositio exegetica* (Venlo: Pontificium Institutum Angelicum, 1939); Theophil Tschipke, *Die Menschheit Christi als Heilsorgan der Gottheit: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1940); William D. Lynn, *Christ’s Redemptive Merit: The Nature of Its Causality According to St. Thomas* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1962); Paul G. Crowley, “Instrumentum Divinitatis in Thomas Aquinas: Recovering the Divinity of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 52, no. 3 (1991): 451–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056399105200303>; Elio Monteleone, *L’umanità di Cristo «strumento della divinità»: Attualità ed evoluzione del pensiero di Tommaso d’Aquino* (Acireale: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquinate in Urbe, 1999); White, *The Incarnate Lord*.

⁸⁹ Cf. Athanasius, *Orat. III contra Arrianos*, no. 31, accessed July 15, 2025, https://earlychurchtexts.com/main/athanasius/oratio_contra_arianos_III_29_34_01_local_morph.shtml; the same may be found in Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep. ad monach.*, no. 23 (Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter 1: To the Monks of Egypt*, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.fourthcentury.com/cyril-of-alexandria-letter-1-to-the-monks-of-egypt-cpg-5301-8621/>). On this issue, cf. vol. 3 of the Marietti edition of Aquinas’ *Contra Gentiles* (ed. Marietti, nos. 331, 435–37).

⁹⁰ Cf. John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa III*, 15; 19 (PG 94,1060A and 1080B).

⁹¹ Cf. for example Thomas Aquinas, *Ad Rom.*, 4, l. 3 (“Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura,” in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 [Torino: Marietti, 1953],

And yet Christ's humanity is not "merely" instrumental or external in the communication of grace, for the grace he "administered" was *truly belonging* to him: it was *his* grace. His humanity does not constitute a passive or external instance to the passage of grace, like a tube through which water passed. For Aquinas the fullness of grace is proper to Christ⁹² in such a way that even the very grace we receive in some way remains truly his.⁹³ If this were not the case, he could not be said to be Head of the Church and Mediator of salvation *personally*. Through him, we become children of God, *filii Dei*, yet always *filii in Filio*.⁹⁴

The point just made is a critical one. In real terms it means that if Christ be considered as our Savior – that he brings divine life to us – then he must both *possess* and *partake in the administration* of all the gifts which go to make up that divine life in believers. He is not only the exemplar of grace; he is also the "agent" (the *auctor salutis*). Above we considered whether or not Christ's instrumentality might not in fact be a permanent one, and thus his beatific vision eternal. However, from what we have seen, his instrumentality is not transitory – he is not the mere channel, but also, as it were, the living *reservoir* of divine gifts – and hence may be considered eternal.

On the Singular Humanity of Christ

The principle established that in order to be truly regarded as our Saviour, Christ must at once *possess* the beatific vision, and *share* as a "conjoined instrument of the divinity" in its administration to the elect. But of course the question could be asked: why did Christ not receive the grace of the beatific vision – and other

no. 380); *I Ad Thess.*, 4, l. 2 ("Super primam Epistolam ad Thessalonicenses lectura," in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 [Torino: Marietti, 1953], no. 95); *S.Th.* III, q. 13, a. 2–3; q. 19, a. 1; q. 43, a. 2; q. 48, a. 6; *Comp. theol.* I, 231; 239. Aquinas regularly refers to the doctrine of Athanasius (*C.G.* IV, 41; Thomas Aquinas, *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium, qui dicitur Summa contra Gentiles*, ed. Petrus Marc, Ceslaus Pera, and Petrus Caramello, vol. 3 [Torino: Marietti, 1961], no. 3797), and to that of Damascene (*S.Th.* III, q. 2, a. 6, 2a; *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 3, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>).

⁹² Cf. *S.Th.* III, q. 7, a. 10. In this article he explains that Christ possesses the fullness of all graces, "et quantum ad essentiam, et quantum ad virtutem: . . . in maxima excellentia qua potest haberi et in maxima extensione ad omnes gratiae effectus."

⁹³ "Eadem est secundum essentiam gratia personalis, qua anima Christi est justificata, et gratia eius, secundum quam est caput Ecclesiae justificans alios" (*S.Th.* III, q. 8, a. 5).

⁹⁴ Cf. Émile Mersch, "Filii in Filio. I. Écriture, tradition," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 64, no. 5 (1937): 551–82; Émile Mersch, "Filii in Filio. II. Théologie," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 64, no. 6 (1937): 681–702; Émile Mersch, "Filii in Filio. III. Le surnaturel," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 65, no. 7 (1938): 809–30.

graces destined for mankind – at the moment of his glorification, as a reward perhaps, for his fidelity and heroic obedience on Calvary, as the fruit of his merit.⁹⁵ In other words: is there any need to insist on Christ being made Head over the human race (by right at least) at the *Incarnation*, and not rather at the *Resurrection*? In fact, the New Testament indicates that Jesus became “Lord” as he rose from the dead (Rom 1:4; 1 Pet 1:3). Aquinas seems to be aware of this possibility, but he insists that the beatific vision ought to be in Christ as an *immoveable principle*, that is from the moment of the inception of the Incarnation. If this were not the case, as the *Compendium Theologiae* seems to assert, Christ could not truly be considered the *auctor salutis* in the fullest possible sense, as we saw above:

The difference between what is moveable and what is immovable comes to this: *moveable things*, so far as they are moveable, do not possess their proper perfection from the beginning, but acquire it in the course of time; but *immoveable things*, as such, always possess their perfection from the first moment of their existence. Accordingly Christ, the author of human salvation, should rightly have possessed the full vision of God *from the very beginning of his Incarnation*; propriety would not allow him to have attained it in the course of time *as other saints do*.⁹⁶

The contrast just alluded to – between the way Christ in his humanity acquires the beatific vision, and the way *the saints* have it – is an interesting one. If Christ were to receive the beatific vision as a reward for his faithfulness and love, like the saints – as Galot suggests he should – then the mediating role of his humanity in obtaining the beatific vision would lose relevance. Louis Bouyer notes that Origen likewise suggested a doctrine of the fullness of grace given to the humanity of Christ and destined for the human race, but points out that for the latter, there is little real difference between Christ’s humanity and ours, and as a result, ordinary human beings would be as capable – other things being equal – of ‘administering’ divine grace as Christ would.⁹⁷ Leaving aside for the moment the problem issues of Origen’s Christology, suffice it to say that this possibility – the administration of grace through Christ or through the saints, indistinctly – accords precisely with the reduced importance

⁹⁵ Cf. Lynn, *Christ’s Redemptive Merit*.

⁹⁶ *Comp. theol.* I, 216 (ed. Marietti, no. 435).

⁹⁷ Cf. Louis Bouyer, *The Eternal Son: A Theology of the Word of God and Christology* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1978), 328. Bouyer is mistaken in seeing the same defect in Thomas’s doctrine, as we shall see (Bouyer, 390).

Origen attributes in fact to the Incarnation.⁹⁸ Also to be noted is that Evagrius Ponticus, who was influenced by Origen, ended up with a more or less open Nestorianism (before Nestorius). In the words of Alois Grillmeier, for Evagrius, “the one who becomes flesh is not so much the Logos as the pre-existent soul in which the Logos dwells.”⁹⁹ The same Evagrius, as we saw above, suggested the Incarnation would come to a close at the end of time.

Summarizing the above paragraph, there seems to be a close connection – historically and theologically – between *a certain Nestorianism and the ultimate ending of the Incarnation*, on the one hand, and the theory that there is *no appreciable qualitative difference in the mediation of divine grace between Christ's humanity and that of any of the saints*, on the other. To say that Christ receives the beatific vision as a reward for his fidelity – like the rest of the saints – simply takes away from the seriousness and singularity of his mediation, and *hence of the Incarnation*.¹⁰⁰ The difference between Christ's humanity and that of the saints is that the former is not just perfectly human, but possesses an altogether special and singular humanity, for it is the *humanity of the Word*. There is no *a priori* reason why humans would not possess a certain “fullness” of grace; the Blessed Virgin certainly did. Yet when all is said and done, the humanity of the saints can never become a “conjoined, animated instrument of the divinity,” as Christ's was, that is, from the moment of the Incarnation.

Having examined some of Thomas's arguments in favor of Christ's beatific vision on earth, there remains to be examined a series of significant issues.

⁹⁸ Cf. Daniélou, *Origène*, 258ff., and especially Origen, *De Principiis*, II, 6 (Origen, “De Principiis,” in *Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, vol. 4 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe [New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1905], 239–382).

⁹⁹ Cf. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 294.

¹⁰⁰ C. Richard's study of Christian soteriology, *Il est notre Pâque*, defends the thesis that Christ had faith and not vision on earth, and that his passion and death played a merely exemplary and didactic role. He suggests that God actually “saves” Christ in raising him from the dead, and in so doing constitutes him as head of humanity, and thus also saves mankind. The principal drawback of this study is that if Christ is “saved” by God, why does God not save us directly as well? Why not simply attribute to Christ an exemplary role across the board? The explanation leans towards a tacit Nestorianism, in so far as the hypostatic union with the Word, the Incarnation, seems superfluous. Cf. my critique of this work: Paul O'Callaghan, “Claude Richard, *Il est notre Pâque*, Paris, Cerf, 1980, 423 pp., 14 x 23,” *Scripta Theologica* 17, no. 1 (1985): 359–63, <https://doi.org/10.15581/006.17.20958>.

Situating Some of the Difficulties that Christ's Earthly Beatific Vision Involves

"Authentic humanity" in Tension Towards Eschatological Fullness

Can it be said that Christ's humanity is *authentic* if he enjoys the beatific vision while on earth? If he beheld the divine essence from the moment of his conception, can it be said that he was "like us in all things but sin" (Heb 4:15)? If he did not have faith, can we claim that he truly took on the human condition, becoming "incarnate" in the fullest sense of the word? Of course the basic question posed here is not really a Christological but rather an anthropological one: what does it mean to be "authentically" human? And more to the point: when will that take place . . . here on earth during our earthly sojourn, or in heaven after final resurrection? Are humans "more authentically human" having reached their ultimate end, or here on earth in the midst of doubts and suffering and growth? Ignatius of Antioch on his way to imminent martyrdom appealed to his fellow-Christians in Rome not to come in his assistance: "Please, my brothers, do not deprive me of this life, do not wish me to die . . . Allow me to contemplate the light, and *then I shall be a man fully*. Allow me to imitate the passion of my God."¹⁰¹ In other words, Ignatius understood his anthropological fullness or authenticity eschatologically.

While on earth Christians are pilgrims, but they would not be pilgrims were they not on a journey to the fatherland. Likewise the Church, the "people of God" is distinct from the nations of the earth because it is a pilgrim people¹⁰²; the true Church, Aquinas said, is the Church *in patria*, the Church in heaven.¹⁰³ Vatican II insists on the eschatological tension within the life of the Church and of Christians.¹⁰⁴

However, if Christ were to adopt our way of being and identify with us "in all things but sin," including faith, human "personality," being like "one of us," it might suggest that he is not our Savior, for he would no longer be the one who *leads us* to the *patria*, to his Father. He would stand in need of salvation

¹⁰¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Rom.* 6:2–3 (Ignatius, "Epistle to the Romans," in *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, vol. 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe [New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1905], 73–78).

¹⁰² Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 9; 48–51.

¹⁰³ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Ad Eph.* 3:10 ("Super Epistolam ad Ephesios lectura," in *Super Epistolam S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 [Torino: Marietti, 1953], no. 161).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 50, 51.

like everybody else. This would be contrary to the Gospels and Pauline epistles, according to which Christ is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). In effect, Christ is the one who *draws us* to our ultimate (eschatological) authenticity, precisely in so far as he is fully inserted into the definitive, eschatological state. If Christ’s humanity were entirely like ours *in its present (pilgrim) state*, he would be the prototype of “the blind leading the blind” (Matt 15:14). In his encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:13–35), the risen Jesus is presented as a pilgrim like themselves, yet he is the one who leads the way for them back to faith and hope.

“Faith” of Christ, and Faith in Christ

Even though the Johannine texts which speak of Jesus doing “what he *sees* the Father doing” (John 5:19)¹⁰⁵ need not strictly be interpreted as indications of direct vision of the Godhead,¹⁰⁶ nonetheless the Gospel texts do not allow us to say that Christ had faith as such; this is recognized by exegetes who deny his earthly beatific vision for other reasons.¹⁰⁷ Rather are Christians required to have faith *in him*,¹⁰⁸ and through the Spirit, in the Father. Yet nowadays, the

¹⁰⁵ Cf. also John 3:11; 32; 7:29; 8:38; 55; 17:5.

¹⁰⁶ In his commentary on John’s gospel, Aquinas does not generally apply these texts to Christ’s beatific vision on earth, but rather to his communion within the Trinity: cf. *In Ioannem*, 3, (Thomas Aquinas, *Lectura super Ioannem*, ed. Raffaele Cai [Torino: Marietti, 1952], no. 462); 7 (no. 1062); 8 (nos. 1216, 1284); some of these texts refer to what he calls the *perfecta cognitio comprehensionis*, which could only be applied to the Word. One exception is to be found in John 8:55 which is used as the *sed contra* in *S.Th.* III, q. 9, a. 2, that deals with his earthly beatific vision.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Guillet, *La foi de Jésus Christ*, 17–20; Gerald O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus*, Introducing Catholic Theology 2 (London: G. Chapman, 1985), 191; O’Collins and Kendall, “The Faith of Jesus.”

¹⁰⁸ Paul (Gal 3:26; 5:6; Col 1:4; 2:5; Eph 1:15; 1 Tim 1:14; 3:13; 2 Tim 1:13; 3:15) speaks of *pistis en Christo*: faith “in” Jesus Christ. Another series of texts (Rom 3:22; 26; Gal 2:16; 20; 3:22; Eph 3:12; Phil 3:9) employs the term *pistis Christou* (genitive) which is often translated as ‘faith of Christ’, not in the genitive objective meaning (‘the faith *that is due to* Christ’), but in the subjective sense (‘Christ’s personal faith’). Cf. Donald W. B. Robinson, “Faith of Jesus Christ—A New Testament Debate,” *Reformed Theological Review* 29, no. 3 (1970): 71–81; George Howard, “The ‘Faith of Christ,’” *The Expository Times* 85, no. 7 (1974): 212–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452467408500710>; Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies: The Pistis Christou Debate* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). From a theological standpoint, cf. José Antonio Riestra, “Cristo e la fede nella cristologia recente in Antropologia a Cristologia ieri e oggi,” *Aquinas* 30, no. 2 (1987): 271–87; Giacomo Canobbio, ed., *La fede di Gesù*, Scienze religiose 2 (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2000); David

claim that Christ had faith as the rest of wayfarers is not uncommon. What is at stake here of course is the precise meaning of the word “faith.”

In the biblical context, “faith” is undoubtedly a complex and multi-faceted concept.¹⁰⁹ Two fundamental aspects may be mentioned: on the one hand, faith is experienced as *a commitment of the will*, that involves confidence, trust, obedience, abandonment of oneself to God (this is usually called the *fides qua*); on the other, it is an *assent of the intellect* to the truths revealed by God through Christ and the prophets (the *fides quae*). The two elements are virtually impossible even to conceptualize apart from one another, for faith is the result of revelation, and the God who reveals is One. Yet there is a tendency, unavoidable in vetero-testamentary times,¹¹⁰ and also to be found in the classical Protestant tradition, to identify faith exclusively with the first aspect (personal commitment, confidence), or with “the certainty of one’s own salvation” typical of Luther.¹¹¹ In other words, *faith*, which has as its object “that which God

L. Stubbs, “The Shape of Soteriology and the *pistis Christou* Debate,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 2 (2008): 137–57. A careful study by Arland J. Hultgren, “The *Pistis Christou* Formulation in Paul,” *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (1980): 248–63, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853680X00143>, concludes that, whereas in general terms Paul “transcends all rules about subjective and objective,” in this case he is making use of the objective genitive, along with a genitive of quality, which is to be found in the NT due to Semitic influence and is *adjectival* in function (i.e. “Christological” faith): so “faith in Christ” = “faith due to Christ,” faith which responds to Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. “Faith of Christ is faith in Christ,” Hultgren says, “but this faith is both identified with and made possible by God’s justifying act in Christ . . . Hence for the purposes of translation, ‘faith in Christ’ is the most appropriate expression” (Hultgren, 263). Besides, the doctrinal parallel with other texts of the New Testament when confronted with the two series of Pauline texts demands the “faith in Christ” reading. Cf. also Léopold Malevez, “Le Christ et la foi,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 88, no. 10 (1966): 1009–43, who points out that the Gospels and John speak quite unequivocally of “faith in Christ.”

¹⁰⁹ Cf. On faith in the Bible, cf. Iohannes Alfaro, “Fides in Terminologia Biblica,” *Gregorianum* 42, no. 3 (1961): 463–505; Malevez, “Le Christ et la foi,” 1012–16; Riestra, “Cristo e la fede,” 276–79; O’Callaghan, *Children of God in the World*, 307–19.

¹¹⁰ Alfaro, “Fides in Terminologia Biblica,” 504f. says: “But while Old Testament faith emphasises trust in divine promises as its primary element, and knowledge of God’s intervention appears less explicitly than trust, New Testament faith highlights the aspect of knowledge and makes the element of trust in God less apparent . . . The main reason for this difference lies in the fact that divides the Old Testament from the New Testament: the fact of Christ.” The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber in his work *Two Types of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), speaks of the distinction *fides quae* and *fides qua*, saying that whereas in Judaism they are opposed, in Christianity they are not.

¹¹¹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Luther and the Unity of the Churches: An Interview with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 11 (1984): 218. On the notion of faith in Luther, cf. my studies: Paul O’Callaghan, *Fides Christi: The Justification*

worked and which the church witnesses,” in the words of Joseph Ratzinger,¹¹² becomes confidence that God will save me, the subjective certainty of personal salvation. The fruit of revelation, the *fides qua*, is confused with the source, God who reveals in Christ. Paul Hacker “saw the actual turning-point of the Reformation in the change in the basic structure of the act of faith.”¹¹³ Faith for Luther would no longer essentially be the communal, shared belief of the entire Church, as it is for Catholics.¹¹⁴

In fact, such an individualistic “faith” (or confidence or *fiducia*) is poorly based. This is so *firstly* because if hope and confidence in God are not based on the intellectual assent of faith which provides us with the objective thematic truths revealed by God, they become simply unreasonable, if not irrational. For there is only *one faith* that we all believe in; as Paul says, there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” And, as a result, there is only “one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:5f.). And *secondly*, perhaps more fundamentally, faith (as pure *fiducia*) tends to be lived out individually, independently of Christ and the Church, since the two poles involved in faith (object and subject) are taken to be *God* and *the human person*, no longer *Christ* and *the Church*, his body. That is, the interior logic of a purely subjective notion of “faith” ultimately eliminates the need for both Christ and the Church. It is “my” faith, that subsists between God and me. Whereas it is more correct to say that our personal confidence in, and abandonment to God, our Christian commitment, is rooted in revelation which comes through Christ and the Church. To put the same thing differently, the *subject* of Christian faith is not primarily the *self*, but the *Church* whose head is *Christ*. It is only within the Church and from Christ that man can commit himself unreservedly to the Father, where faith happens. If not, the chasm is too great: faith becomes “hopeless.”¹¹⁵

Now, if Christ is said to “believe,” if he believes as we do, without vision, we must ask: what is “his” faith based upon? Hardly on the Church, his Body, or on himself, its Head. The conclusion is simple. If Christ had faith, he could

Debate (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 27–31; Paul O'Callaghan, *God and Mediation: A Retrospective Appraisal of Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 59–77.

¹¹² Ratzinger, “Luther and the Unity of the Churches,” 218.

¹¹³ Cf. Paul Hacker, *Das Ich im Glauben bei Martin Luther* (Graz: Styria, 1966), cited by Ratzinger, “Luther and the Unity of the Churches,” 212.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Ratzinger, 219.

¹¹⁵ Benedict XVI in his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi*, nos. 7–9, speaks of the objective or substantial side of faith (and hope) in the context of Lutheran theology.

only have it as the rest of “Christians” do; fundamentally he would have a “confiding” faith that God would “save” him (raise him from the dead). And most importantly, our faith would be *of the same kind* as his (the personal certainty of salvation), and his human life would be exemplary (in faith as in all the other virtues) though not salvational. His singular humanity, indeed the Incarnation itself, would become superfluous, just one more among many; the Church would become irrelevant, invisible, or perhaps simply associative, insofar as its members do not share a common faith. Each one would be obliged to “monadically” grope about for his or her “own” faith, their personal, untransferable, confiding certainty of salvation, at best perhaps coming to an institutional agreement with other believers who think as they do, thus founding a believing community.

Could it be said in any sense that Christ had “faith”? Romano Penna makes the interesting observation to the effect that Christ inherited and lived according to the faith of the Old Testament, as commitment and as content.¹¹⁶ If faith is understood purely as commitment, obedience and confidence in the Father, it may be said that Jesus had faith. Many authors perceive this difference between Christ’s faith and ours, although they offer differing versions of his “vision” of the Father.¹¹⁷ The letter to the Hebrews speaks of him learning obedience (5:8), of being made perfect through suffering (2:10), of his fidelity (3:2). But if his faith does not go beyond ours, if it is based on a testimony not his own, then he can hardly be said “to lead us in (our) faith and bring it to perfection” (Heb 12:2).¹¹⁸ If his faith was of a kind with ours, then he could not be its *author* and *consummator*, but at best its *exemplar*.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Romano Penna, “La fede di Gesù e le Scritture di Israele,” *Rassegna di teologia* 48 (2007): 5–17.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Balthasar, “Fides Christi,” 45–79; Rahner, “Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ”; Malevez, “Le Christ et la foi,” 1018–39; O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus*, 190–93.

¹¹⁸ Heb 12:2: “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”: *aphorōntes eis ton tēs pisteōs archēgon kai teleiōtēn Iēsoun*. Some translations include “our” faith, for example the New English Bible and the Jerusalem Bible, but this is not found in Greek, Vulgate nor neo-Vulgate texts. Teodorico da Castel San Pietro (*L’epistola agli Ebrei* [Torino: Marietti, 1952], 208) writes: “The precise meaning of *archēgon* [pioneer] in our text depends in part on the relationship between Jesus and faith. If Jesus is conceived here as the one who exercised the same faith that we profess . . . then it is more natural to understand *archēgon* as guide and leader: Jesus would have preceded us in the practice of faith, undergoing the same trials to which this virtue is exposed in us.” But still, “the author’s meaning seems fundamental to this passage: he brought us faith, which has its *raison d’être* in him.” Note that the only other usage of *archēgon* in Hebrews (2:10) follows the second of these meanings, and is the very text Aquinas uses to speak of the beatific vision of Christ on

Perhaps the need for a *collective and intellectual* understanding of faith (as *fides quae*) was given excessive prominence in other times, yet without it, the much desired awareness of the need for the *personal commitment* side of faith (*fides qua*) would be severely prejudiced in practice. Attempts to install the latter in the place of the former by emphasizing the “faith of Jesus” is a short term solution, and would seriously prejudice the need for an Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father and gives rise to our faith, and to his extension in time, the visible Church, his Body.

The Realism of Christ's Human Actions

Yet problems still remain regarding Christ's vision. Would such a knowledge of God not obliterate or trivialize his integral human commitment, obedience and abandonment to the Father? Would it not make a facade out of his human activity the Gospels speak so “realistically” of: his thirty years of ordinary life, his gradual acquisition of knowledge, his temptations in the desert, his “normal” reactions (hunger, thirst, anger, joy, sadness, etc.), his loving and being loved, his need to pray; then his suffering, anguish and even feeling abandoned by his Father at Gethsemane and on the Cross, and above all, in his *true exercise of his freedom*? Is all this an elaborate theatre set up purely *for our sakes*, with a view to providing *us* with a good example? In this study, which considers Christ's earthly beatific vision from the *soteriological* standpoint, this issue must be addressed.

Perhaps what might happen to Christians might equally happen to Christ: that faith as the common (ecclesial) possession of revealed truths (the *fides quae*, or collective-intellectual side of faith) never quite manages to blossom into a personal, fruitful and confiding commitment to God and to his plan of salvation (*fides qua*). If Christ had vision, everything he knows and does would seem effortless, exempt from suffering, and would never really penetrate each layer and facet of his humanity; it would be difficult here to avoid monophysitism. Still, the following observations could be made.

No believer on earth has personal experience of the beatific vision as such, and as such it is impossible to come up with hard and fast conclusions in respect of the behavior of a *viator* were he or she to enjoy it as a *comprehensor*. In any case, let us examine certain aspects of the knowledge the vision would afford

earth in *S.Th.* I–II, q. 5, a. 7, ad 2 and *S.Th.* III, q. 9, a. 2, c. Cf. also Ceslas Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), 386; Riestra, “Cristo e la fede,” 275f.

Christ, under the following two headings: *firstly*, his knowledge of creation in the light of the beatific vision; and *secondly*, his immediate perception of the Father's will. This division is reflected in the theology of vision in Paul and Thomas Aquinas.¹¹⁹

Christ's Human Actions in the Context of the Knowledge Vision Affords Him of Created Reality

If Christ beheld the divine essence while on earth, this would involve not only a direct widening of the *content* of his knowledge,¹²⁰ but more importantly a change in *the way he knows things*. He would know creatures "in God," as they are in themselves, exactly as God made them, according to their origin and future destiny, according to their full essence, peculiarity and singularity. In the words of Aquinas, he would know "all the divine works and the exemplars of all things that are, will be or have been."¹²¹ Perhaps in this connection we can get some idea as we read the New Testament of Jesus's aesthetic sense, and especially the knowledge he had of the human heart. Paul shows a keen awareness of this in speaking of the "*faith* in the Son of God who loved *me* and sacrificed himself for *my* sake" (Gal 2:20).¹²² Christ of course did not suffer and die for "humanity," generally speaking, but for *each and every human*. And if he saw "in God" the salvation of many, so also did he see "in God" the lives and struggles and sinful deeds of many: he saw God being obeyed and glorified, one might say; he saw his Father being rejected and offended.¹²³

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor 13:12: "The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know *as fully as I am known*"; *Comp. theol.* I, 216: to "see God in his essence, *and other things in God*, just as God himself, by knowing himself, knows all other things" (ed. Marietti, no. 435).

¹²⁰ The question of Christ's beatific vision is not the same as the question of his possible "omniscience." The former does not bring about the latter: the beholder of the beatific vision sees God in his essence, and knows other things – but only those related to his task, situation, needs, mission etc. – "in God." In any case, Aquinas opines that Christ possessed a relative omniscience – through beatific and infused knowledge (*S.Th.* III, q. 10, a. 2; q. 11, a. 1) – insofar as he was Saviour of all (cf. John 12:32).

¹²¹ *Comp. theol.* I, c. 216 (ed. Marietti, no. 435).

¹²² On the question of the knowledge Christ needed in the order of his saving task, cf. the 1985 report of International Theological Commission, *The Consciousness of Christ Concerning Himself and His Mission*, and John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), no. 13.

¹²³ Cf. Manfred Hauke, "La visione beatifica di Cristo durante la passione: La dottrina di san Tommaso d'Aquino e la teologia contemporanea," *Annales theologici* 21, no. 2 (2007): 381–98. Hauke explains that Christ's vision of the Father during his Passion made it possible for him to "see" the sins and sufferings of humanity.

In principle, the vision Christ enjoyed was beatific, in that the ultimate source of his joy was his Father who was well pleased with him (Matt 12:18). However, insofar as his real body and soul are capable of suffering, that very vision may be said to be for him an occasion, even the indirect source, of suffering, of pain, anticipated if not real: suffering of course which to its last drop is meaningful, redemptive and brings about our reconciliation with the Father. Vision of the Father makes immediate and palpable to his consciousness his “solidarity” with the Father and the mission entrusted to him; likewise, it reveals to him his solidarity with a sinful humanity; a double solidarity that seems to tear at the core of his being. That Christ’s vision would be immediate and beatific while not “informing” or involving the entirety of his psycho-somatic life is not easy to fathom.¹²⁴

Need the beatific vision turn Christ’s human life into a charade? Not necessarily. To say that the beatific vision eliminates or excludes true human activity in Christ is not much different from saying that in heaven, after final resurrection, all authentic human activity ceases, and humans become absorbed into the quietude of God, disconnected, except through beatific vision, from the rest of humanity.¹²⁵ But this cannot be sustained, for it would take away from the seriousness and tangible realism of the resurrection. With the return of Christ in glory, the *parousia*, the whole of human life comes back into existence, purified, vivified, forever.¹²⁶

Christ’s Exercise of Human Freedom in the Context of his Knowledge – Through Vision – Of the Father’s Mandate and of His Saving Mission

Yet the issue here is not that of the risen Jesus, however real be his humanity, and however tangible his human actions in the eschatological state. The issue

¹²⁴ Aquinas only makes a half-hearted attempt at solving the dilemma of how Christ could enjoy vision and suffer at the same time (*S.Th.* III, q. 46, a. 8), perhaps recognising the mysteriousness – not the impossibility – of the coincidence. Yet the experiences of the mystics – Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis of Sales – demonstrate that severe suffering or even mental anguish is compatible with – and often related to – an extraordinary spiritual delectation. For examples of this, cf. Most, *The Consciousness of Christ*, 151–53; White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 236–70.

¹²⁵ Karl Adam (*The Christ of Faith*, 305) reasons somewhat *aprioistically* that the beatific vision in Christ “would have poured such an abundant measure of bliss upon the emotional life of Jesus that his soul would have lost all sensitivity to human suffering . . .”

¹²⁶ Cf. Paul O’Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 109–12; Gerard Cremin, *Anthropological Implications of the Doctrine of Final Resurrection in XX Century Theology* (Rome: Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, 2019).

is the nature of the vision he enjoyed during his earthly sojourn, as a *viator*. Perhaps the most serious and consequential issue to be dealt with is the exercise of his human freedom on earth, his obedience.¹²⁷ Vision does not eliminate the realism of human life. Neither does it turn humans into clones or robots, yet in principle it would seem to impair *the concrete exercise of human freedom* in Christ. And this is serious.¹²⁸

If Christ could not exercise his will because it was fixed in God, as is the case of the blessed in heaven, it would seem impossible for him to win over, to merit salvation for us. His humanity would perform a purely passive role in redemption, a penal substitution perhaps. His obedience would be of little value in respect of salvation: that “sacrifice of the humble and broken heart” (cf. Ps 51:17), long-awaited by the Jews and announced by the prophets, would never come to be. His saving work would be merely “descendent”; any apparently “ascendent” aspect – sacrifice, expiation, atonement etc. – would be mere gesture for our sakes.

As we already saw, Karl Adam¹²⁹ and Karl Rahner both argue against the earthly beatific vision in Christ on these grounds.¹³⁰ The latter admits in Christ “an original unobjectified consciousness of divine sonship which is present by the mere fact that there is a hypostatic union.”¹³¹ There is no immediate intuitive thematic vision here, he claims, since otherwise one could hardly maintain his “death agony and feeling of being forsaken by God.”¹³² These conclusions relate to Rahner’s anthropological vision – the athematic presence and perception of God in every spiritual experience¹³³ – yet the premises are reasonable. “There is certainly a nescience which renders a finite person’s exercise of freedom possible . . . This nescience is, therefore, more perfect for the exercise of freedom than knowledge which would suspend the exercise.”¹³⁴ And elsewhere: “the objective perception of every individual object right down to the last detail would be

¹²⁷ On the obedience of Christ, cf. White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 277–307.

¹²⁸ On the notion of human freedom in the context of theological anthropology, cf. O’Callaghan, *Children of God in the World*, 340–74; 442–71.

¹²⁹ Cf. Adam, *The Christ of Faith*, 305.

¹³⁰ On others who do likewise, cf. Johannes Stöhr, “Reflexiones teológicas en torno a la libertad de Cristo en su pasión y muerte,” in *Cristo, Hijo de Dios y redentor del hombre: III Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra*, ed. Lucas F. Mateo-Seco, Colección teológica 31 (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1982), 821f., especially nn. 40ff.

¹³¹ Rahner, “Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ,” 208.

¹³² Rahner, 203, 207.

¹³³ For a critique of Rahner’s position, cf. Galli, “Perché Karl Rahner nega la visione beatifica in Cristo.”

¹³⁴ Rahner, “Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ,” 202.

the end of freedom.”¹³⁵ Rahner is not saying here that free will is obliterated by vision; but simply that it cannot be exercised fully in the presence of vision. It is the freedom of the *comprehensor*, fixed in God, immovable, and not of the *viator*, who has to forge a pilgrim way step by step.

Earlier on, we saw that Christ's beatific vision on earth might prejudice his authentic humanity; this led us to enquire into the meaning of “authentic humanity.” The same enquiry must be made here on a more specific issue: what is required for the exercise of free will? What does the authentic (meritorious) exercise of free will involve? Could Christ exercise his freedom on earth while enjoying the beatific vision? The issue is a delicate and important one, and can only be examined briefly.¹³⁶

Can it be said that Christ obeyed freely¹³⁷ if *in fact* he simply could not disobey the Father, not only metaphysically (due to the hypostatic union), but also physically (due to the beatific vision)? If we are to hold that Christ received a mandate from his Father to die for the sins of humankind,¹³⁸ the double union – of his being (hypostatic union), and consciousness (vision) – would seem to make it impossible for him to disobey, he would have no *real possibility* of rejecting the divine will.

Yet Jesus did perceive the *hypothetical possibility* of disobeying, as is manifested during his temptations in the desert and the Agony in the Garden. The “temptation” as it were, of disobeying, was present to his consciousness under the attractive guise of avoiding the tremendous torture he was about to assume, achieving the salvation of humanity in a less costly way. But how can this be held if through the beatific vision his human consciousness experienced “the objective perception of every individual object, right down to the last detail,”¹³⁹ the knowledge, through “God's eyes,” of everything involved in the Passion? If Christ enjoyed the beatific vision, he could perceive the *good* of obeying his

¹³⁵ Rahner, 214.

¹³⁶ Cf. Stöhr, “Reflexiones teológicas,” especially 828ff.; Alfonso Carlos Chacón, “La libertad meritoria de Cristo y nuestra libertad,” in *Cristo, Hijo de Dios y redentor del hombre: III Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra*, ed. Lucas F. Mateo-Seco, Colección teológica 31 (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1982), 875–92. On freedom and beatific vision for the saved in heaven, cf. O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, 170–74. On Christ's suffering, cf. Paul O'Callaghan, “Estudio soteriológico de los sermones cuaresmales de Alonso de Veracruz,” in *Evangelización y Teología en América (Siglo XVI): XI Simposio Internacional de Teología*, ed. José Ignacio Saranyana (Pamplona: Sepunsa, 1990), 1221–35.

¹³⁷ Freedom and obedience are not opposed as such: cf. Stöhr, “Reflexiones teológicas,” 811–19.

¹³⁸ Cf. John 5:19; 8:28ff.; 12:49ff.; Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8; 10:7.

¹³⁹ Rahner, “Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ,” 214.

Father, and consequently of winning the earthly and eternal happiness of innumerable persons, yet he simultaneously perceived the *suffering* this would involve.

However, and this is the key question, is suffering and pain one of the elements that is perceived – and hence resolved, understood, and integrated – by seeing things through “God’s eyes”? The problem with this understanding is that we experience suffering and pain as destructive, negative and often the result of sin; they do not enter the “picture” afforded by the beatific vision. If Christ could experience suffering and pain as just another element of the knowledge the beatific vision gives, then his entire passion and death would be harmonically perceived in God as something good.¹⁴⁰ In that case indeed, Christ would not exercise his freedom – nor suffer any pain – just as the blessed in heaven, for whom sin is impossible since the partial good they might otherwise choose can never be perceived as superior to the divine Good by nature, from whom, besides, all partial goods derive.

But no, Christ’s beatific vision cannot “resolve” or liquidate his suffering, because *suffering is non-divine*. God does not know suffering – only in Christ can it be said that “God suffers” – for suffering as such produces an existential *Sorge*, which in a sense anticipates the final annihilation of death. It is a non-intellectual apprehension of possibly succumbing to passivity, to the total extinction of personal freedom. In this sense, suffering is distinct from simple strong sensation, which may equally well produce pleasure and a complacent consciousness of permanence or independence. But Yahweh is “God of the living and not of the dead” (Matt 22:32), he is Life itself; death and mortality are opposed to his nature; hence suffering – the promise and anticipation of death – finds no place in him.

Consequently, everything could be fitted into Christ’s consciousness through the beatific vision; everything that is except his experience of suffering. So he could indeed exercise his freedom insofar as *in fact* he had to make a point of accepting suffering intimately perceived, of embracing death staring him in the face, in order to do his Father’s will and redeem humanity. Paradoxically, suffering and sacrifice made him free. He had to exercise his will to overcome the deeply seated fear of being swallowed up by death, in spite of “knowing” this would not happen. Only in this way, we are told in the letter to the Hebrews, would he be able to “take away all the power of the devil, who had power over death, and set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14–15).

¹⁴⁰ On the question of Christ’s perception of suffering and death in a variety of authors, Stöhr, “Reflexiones teológicas,” 836f.

Therefore the exercise of his freedom was not impaired either by the beatific vision in one direction, or by the numbness of will the suffering might have induced in the other; he made a real choice, he paid the full price: "He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of Love," in the words of Josemaría Escrivá.¹⁴¹ The very coincidence of vision and suffering made his decision even more conscious, lucid, pure and meritorious. This principle – this way of meriting, of exercising his free will – is also applicable to the rest of his earthly life, insofar as, like everybody else, he had to overcome natural reluctance – what Aquinas terms the *voluntas ut natura* – develop habits, get accustomed to new situations, although of course he exercises his free will most powerfully and decisively at his passion and death. In this sense Christ's knowledge by vision is not incompatible with his acquired and experiential knowledge which could grow.

In sum, even though he enjoys the beatific vision, the very fact of being able to suffer made Christ capable of exercising his freedom in a meritorious way. Vision does not exclude such exercise of freedom; indeed in some respects it makes it more valuable.

The fact is that the objections to Christ's beatific vision on earth are considerable, though not insurmountable or totally conclusive. Conversely, its denial would put a wide range of fundamental Christian doctrines under strain, particularly the gratuitousness of salvation, the eternal significance of the Incarnation, and Christ's merit, that is the profound significance God has wished to attach to the exercise of human freedom.

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¹⁴¹ Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *The Way of the Cross* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1983), tenth station.

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St. Thomas on Devotion and Contemplation

O relacji między pobożnością a kontemplacją w pismach św. Tomasza z Akwinu

ABSTRACT: The article aims to explore the interconnectedness of contemplation and devotion according to the theological insights of St. Thomas Aquinas. Central to this exploration is the dynamic relationship between the intellect and the affections (*affectus*). The first section of the article notes that while Thomas's understanding of contemplation is fundamentally intellectual, he emphasizes the role of the affections as its motive cause. The second section presents the reciprocal interaction between devotion – one such motive cause – on the one hand, and meditation and contemplation, on the other hand, which interaction instantiates the dynamics of reciprocal interaction between intellect and will. The third section first deals with the disruptive effect of sin on devotion which, as an act of the virtue or religion pertaining to the will, orients towards final beatitude. It then demonstrates that the power of Christ's Passion, communicated through faith and the sacraments, is the remedy for this disorder. The conclusion summarises the main findings, relating them to Thomas's celebrated experience during Mass at the Chapel of St. Nicholas, Naples, on 6 December 1273, and pointing to the significant role that the Eucharist plays in cultivating both devotion and contemplation.

KEY WORDS: devotion, contemplation, meditation, intellect, will, affections, Thomas Aquinas, Eucharist

ABSTRAKT: Celem artykułu jest analiza wzajemnych powiązań między kontemplacją a pobożnością w teologicznej myśli św. Tomasza z Akwinu. Centralnym punktem tej analizy jest dynamiczna relacja między intelektem a uczuciami (*affectus*). W pierwszej części artykułu zauważono, że chociaż kontemplacja w pismach św. Tomasza ma charakter zasadniczo intelektualny, to podkreśla on rolę uczuć jako przyczyny motywującej. W drugiej części przedstawiono zagadnienie pobożności i szczegółowo omówiono relację między pobożnością (jedną z przyczyn motywujących) a medytacją i kontemplacją jako przykład dynamiki wzajemnego oddziaływania między intelektem a wolą. W trzeciej części najpierw omówiono destrukcyjny wpływ grzechu na pobożność, która jako akt cnoty lub religijności związany z wolą, ukierunkowuje

na ostateczne szczęście, a następnie wskazano, że według św. Tomasza lekarstwem na ten destrukcyjny wpływ jest przekazana poprzez wiarę i sakramenty moc Męki Chrystusa. W podsumowaniu główne wnioski z przeprowadzonej analizy zostały przedstawione na tle słynnego doświadczenia św. Tomasza podczas Mszy Świętej w kaplicy św. Mikołaja w Neapolu 6 grudnia 1273 r.; wskazano także na znaczącą rolę Eucharystii w kultywowaniu zarówno pobożności, jak i kontemplacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: pobożność, kontemplacja, medytacja, intelekt, wola, uczucia, Tomasz z Akwinu, Eucharystia

William of Tocco in his biography of St. Thomas reports that every day Thomas read a passage of John Cassian's *Conferences*.¹ In order to do so Thomas set aside his contemplation (*speculatio*), that is to say, his consideration of universal and necessary things.² When asked why he sometimes forsook this contemplation (*speculatio*) in order to read Cassian's *Conferences* Thomas replied: "In this reading I nourish my devotion. On the basis of this devotion I rise up more easily into contemplation. Affection (*affectio*) thus pours forth into devotion

¹ Angelicus Ferrua, ed., *S. Thomae Aquinatis vitae fontes praecipuae* (Alba: Edizioni Domenicane, 1968), 64.

² See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II–II, q. 49, a. 6, ad 2, accessed July 27, 2024, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I-II> (hereafter: *STh*). *Speculatio*, Thomas notes, "would seem to be reducible to meditation (*meditatio*)" (*STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 3, ad 2). In equating *speculatio* and *meditatio* Thomas draws upon a gloss of Augustine who writes that the word *speculatio* is derived from *speculum* (mirror). *Speculatio* is thus likened to seeing in a mirror. Thomas adds that to see something in a mirror is "to see a cause in its effect wherein its likeness is reflected" (*STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 3). The effect wherein the likeness of something is reflected is predicated upon the fact of man's hylomorphic constitution, that is to say, the fact that he is constituted as a psychosomatic unity. As a result, he perceives a simple truth at the term of a process which has its point of departure in various premises. As Jan Aertsen states the point, "The way of reason, which is grounded in man's mode of being, is a discursion *from* something *towards* something, is a movement and therefore has a succession, also in a temporal sense" (Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988], 191). *Speculatio*, which according to Thomas can be reduced to meditation, is concerned with deducing from principles the truth that is sought, which deduction is a necessary prelude to "the contemplation itself of the truth" (*ipsa contemplatio veritatis* [Ferrua, *S. Thomae Aquinatis vitae fontes praecipuae*, 64]). The reception of principles furnishes the starting-point from which a man sets forth on the path towards the contemplation of truth. Since the reception of these principles and the deduction that unfolds based on them receive their completion in the contemplation of the truth, the contemplative life as it is pertains to man – which includes these two acts – derives its unity from contemplation of the truth. The vocabulary that we encounter in William of Tocco's biography of Thomas thus places us firmly within the context of what Thomas understands by contemplation as it applies to man as a psychosomatic being.

and by the merit of this devotion intelligence ascends to greater heights.”³ In this regard Thomas followed the example of Saint Dominic who, by frequently reading the *Conferences*, attained the heights of perfection. Devotion – which according to Thomas “is a special act of the will”⁴ – by moving the intellect thus cultivates the contemplative life since “the contemplative life, as regards the essence of the action, pertains to the intellect.”⁵ As Thomas writes in the *sed contra* of the first article devoted to the contemplative life, this life has “something to do with the affective or appetitive power.”⁶ By the same token, the intrinsic cause of devotion on the part of man is meditation or contemplation (*meditatio seu contemplatio*).⁷ Thomas’s exegesis of Ps 38:4 at *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3, makes the same point as follows: “It is written (Ps. xxxviii. 4): *In my meditation a fire shall flame out*. But spiritual fire causes devotion. Therefore meditation is the cause of devotion.”

In brief devotion causes contemplation while contemplation – and meditation, which is included within contemplation as one of its acts – causes devotion. A dynamic reciprocity thus characterizes the relationship between devotion and contemplation. This relationship in effect furnishes a particular instance of the relationship of dynamic mutual interaction that obtains, according to Thomas, between the intellect and the will. This article therefore turns in the first instance to this more general relationship between the intellect and the will in order to elaborate further the interinvolvement of intellect and will before turning to the specific instance of the mutual causal influence that contemplation and devotion exercise on each other.

The Affective Aspect of the Contemplative Life

The principle object of contemplation is the divine truth since “this contemplation is the end of the whole human life,”⁸ a point that Thomas establishes in the treatise on beatitude that prefaces his treatment of the moral life in the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. The final article of the third question, which is concerned with the nature of happiness or beatitude (*beatitudo*), argues

³ Ferrua, *S. Thomae Aquinatis vitae fontes praecipuae*, 64: “Ego in hac lectione devotionem colligo, ex qua facilius in speculationem consurgo, ut sic affectus habeat, unde se in devotionem diffundat, et intellectus ex huius merito ad altiora conscendat.” My translation.

⁴ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1.

⁵ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1.

⁶ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1, *sed contra*.

⁷ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3.

⁸ See *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4.

that “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”⁹ Two considerations support this contention: firstly, man cannot be perfectly happy so long as there remains something for him to seek and desire; secondly, the perfection of any particular power depends on the nature of its object. In order to explicate the point that only vision of the Divine Essence can afford us final and perfect happiness, Thomas begins with the second consideration, namely that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object which, in the case of the intellect, is “*what a thing is (quod quid est)*, i.e. the essence of a thing.”¹⁰ It follows therefore that the intellect is perfected inasmuch as it knows that essence of a thing. In this life however the human intellect, on the basis of its knowledge of created effects, can know no more about God than the simple fact of His existence. It still does not know the Essence of the First Cause, namely God, and so is not yet perfectly happy. Perfect happiness or beatitude requires that the intellect attain to the very Essence of the First Cause. Thus, concludes Thomas, “it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man’s happiness consists.”¹¹

In his discussion of the contemplative life Thomas expresses this conclusion in these words: “[C]ontemplation will be perfect in the life to come, when we shall see God face to face, wherefore it will make us perfectly happy.”¹² In our present condition as *viatores* however our contemplation of the divine truth is necessarily imperfect for we see in a mirror (*per speculum*) and obscurely (*in aenigmate*), as Thomas explains referring 1 Cor 13:12.¹³ In other words we are constrained in this life to contemplate God, the First Cause, by means of His created effects. As Thomas writes in his commentary on First Corinthians,

every creature is for us like a certain mirror (*tota creatura est nobis sicut speculum quoddam*); because from the order and goodness and magnitude which are caused in things by God, we come to a knowledge of His divine wisdom, goodness and eminence. And this knowledge is called seeing in a mirror (*visio in speculo*).¹⁴

⁹ *STh* I–II, q. 3, a. 8.

¹⁰ *STh* I–II, q. 3, a. 8.

¹¹ *STh* I–II, q. 3, a. 8.

¹² *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4.

¹³ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4.

¹⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Super I ad Corinthios* c. 13, l. 4 [800], accessed July 27, 2024, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~1Cor.C13.L4.n800.4> (hereafter: *Ad I Cor.*). Translation slightly amended. Thomas’s commentary is based on the *reportatio* of Reginald of Piperno.

Inasmuch as we know the invisible things of God we are said to see in a mirror, while insofar these invisible things remain hidden or are secrets to us “we see in an enigma” (*videmus in aenigmate*),¹⁵ that is to say, we see darkly. This obscure *speculatio* affords us “a certain inchoate beatitude,”¹⁶ which begins in this world and will receive its completion in the next. Thus, as Thomas writes in the *De Malo*, “as a created good is a certain likeness and participation of the uncreated good, so the attainment of a created good is a certain likeness of true beatitude.”¹⁷ By contemplating created goods, the finite effects of the First Cause, we are led by the hand (*manuducimur*) as it were to the contemplation of God.¹⁸ Rom 1:20 provides Scriptural warrant for this notion: “The invisible things of God . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”¹⁹ The contemplation of the effects of God’s creative causality thus pertains in a secondary way to the contemplative life inasmuch as it leads man to the knowledge of God. Contemplation of truths apart from the divine truth perfect the intellect in relation to the divine truth, which constitutes the ultimate perfection of the intellect.²⁰

Having established that the object of contemplation is truth – ultimately divine truth – we now turn to the subject of contemplation. The contemplative, Thomas not surprisingly tells us, is chiefly concerned with “the contemplation of truth.”²¹ To be more precise he ‘intends’ the truth. As such he can be said to move towards the truth since the word ‘intention’ (*intentio*) means “to tend to something” (*in aliquid tendere*).²² Thomas argues however that intention is

¹⁵ *Ad I Cor.*, c. 13, l. 4 [801].

¹⁶ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4.

¹⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo* q. 5, a. 1, ad 5, accessed July 27, 2024, <https://www.corpusthomaticum.org/iopera.html>. My translation. Giacomo Samek Lodovici writes that “every finite good is a symbolic anticipation of the infinite good” (Giacomo Samek Lodovici, *La felicità del bene: una rilettura di Tommaso d’Aquino* [Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2007], 107). My translation.

¹⁸ Peter M. Candler Jr. rightly underscores the notion of participation in this regard. See Peter M. Candler Jr., *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 111: “Thomas explicitly links beatitude with the activity of contemplation as the *ductus* which leads us unto beatitude. Though the beatitude of God in which we participate through contemplation in the present life is an imperfect one, “Nevertheless it is a participation of happiness [*beatitudo*]: and so much the greater, as the operation can be more continuous and more one” (*STh* I–II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4). Emphasis added by Candler.

¹⁹ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4.

²⁰ See *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4, ad 4.

²¹ See *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1.

²² *STh* I–II, q. 12, a. 1. See Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 350: “What strives after an end must be in some way determined to it. Otherwise there would be no reason why the agent

properly speaking an act of the will. He explains that when one thing acts on another, “both the action of the mover and the movement of thing moved, tend to something.”²³ The fact that the movement of the thing moved tends to something is grounded in the causal action of the mover. Intention therefore belongs, Thomas argues, “first and principally to that which moves to the end: hence we say that an architect or anyone who is in authority, by his command moves others to that which he intends.”²⁴ The will however moves all the other powers of the soul to their respective ends and so intention properly speaking “is an act of the will.”²⁵ The acts of these other powers of the soul, including the act of the intellect, constitute particular ends which are included in the universal end, which pertains to the will.²⁶ Thus, writes Thomas, “The will

would tend towards just this rather than some other terminus. That determination must proceed from the intention of the end. The end can only motivate the agent if it already pre-exists in the agent. This presence cannot be, however, according to the natural mode of being of the end; for then the agent would already possess the intended [sic], and the movement would come to rest. The end must be present in what strives as *intentio*, that is, as “intelligible species.” This representation is the essence of knowledge. The determination of the agent must be through an intellect that determines the end for the action. An end can only be intended when the end as end is known, together with the means to it.” See also Michael S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 199. Sherwin writes that Thomas is clear in his mature work that “the will does not order anything directly” (Sherwin, 199). Quoting *STh* I–II, q. 12, 1, ad 3 (“The will does not ordain, but tends to something according to the order of reason. Consequently this word *intention* indicates an act of the will, presupposing the act whereby the reason orders something to the end”), Sherwin continues: “The will acts as the efficient cause of the act, but as ordered to its end by reason. Hence, although the goodness of the will’s exterior act is the form of the exterior act, properly speaking this form, as a principle of right order and proper measure, exists in the intellect” (Sherwin, 199).

²³ Sherwin, 199.

²⁴ Sherwin, 199.

²⁵ Sherwin, 199.

²⁶ See *STh* I–II, q. 9, a. 1: “Now good in general, which has the nature of an end, is the object of the will. Consequently, in this respect, the will moves the other powers of the soul to their acts, for we make use of the other powers when we will. For the end and perfection of every other power, is included under the object of the will as some particular good: and always the art or power to which the universal end belongs, moves to their acts the arts or powers to which belong the particular ends included in the universal end.” See also *STh* I, q. 82, a. 4: “Now the object of the will is good and the end in general, and each power is directed to some suitable good proper to it, as sight is directed to the perception of color, and the intellect to the knowledge of truth. Therefore the will as agent moves all the powers of the soul to their respective acts, except the natural powers of the vegetative part, which are not subject to our will.”

moves the intellect as to the exercise of its act; since even the true itself which is the perfection of the intellect, is included in the universal good, as a particular good.”²⁷ Viewed in the light of these considerations it becomes clear that the contemplative life pertains to the intellect insofar as the essence of its action is concerned. It belongs to the will however to move the intellect to the exercise of this action.²⁸

It is precisely this motive force of the will that is crucial to a correct understanding of contemplation as Thomas understands it. As he progresses his argument concerning the role of affectivity in the contemplative life, he notes that the appetitive power moves one to observe either sensibly or intellectually. Sometimes it is love (*amor*) of the thing seen that moves one, a fact that Matt 6:21 communicates: “[W]here thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.”²⁹ Sometimes the motive force is “love (*amor*) of the very knowledge that one acquires by observation.”³⁰ It is “love of God” (*caritas Dei*) as seen – obviously *per speculum* and *in aenigmate* – and as affording us “a certain inchoate beatitude,”³¹ that constitutes the contemplative life, a point that Thomas makes by way of appeal to the authority of Gregory the Great. Elsewhere, in his treatment of the beatitudes, Thomas writes that “contemplative happiness (*beatitudo*), if perfect, is the very essence of future beatitude, and, if imperfect, is a certain beginning thereof.”³²

Yet while *caritas Dei* constitutes the contemplative life, it remains that “The beatitude of an intellectual nature consists in an act of the intellect.”³³ In this regard we must remind ourselves that charity perfects the will, which moves the other powers of the soul, including the intellect, to their particular ends. When the will delights in the intellect’s grasp of its object, there arises the experience of beauty – for the beautiful, Thomas tells us, is that the apprehension of which gives pleasure (*pulchrum autem dicatur id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet*).³⁴ Thomas argues that the beautiful and the good are in fact identical,

²⁷ *STh* I–II, q. 9, a. 1, ad 3.

²⁸ See *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1.

²⁹ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1.

³⁰ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1.

³¹ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 4.

³² *STh* I–II, q. 69, a. 3.

³³ *STh* I, q. 26, a. 3.

³⁴ *STh* I–II, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3. See also *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1: “Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally (*in subiecto quidem sunt idem*); for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically (*ratione differunt*), for goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being

the difference between them being a logical one: while the essence of the good consists in the fact that it calms the appetite, the essence of a beautiful thing consists in the appetite's being calmed by the vision or knowledge of it. Beauty in effect "adds to goodness a relation to the cognitive faculty: so that *good* means that which simply pleases the appetite,"³⁵ while the pleasure that attends apprehension is what gives rise to the experience of the beautiful.³⁶ The will, strengthened by charity, in effect moves the intellect to contemplate the divine truth, in which it then delights. The contemplative life begins on the basis of the motive force of charity and it "terminates in delight, which is seated in the affective power (*in affectu*)."³⁷

In summary, therefore, the essence of contemplation pertains to the intellect, while the affections (*affectus*) furnish the motive cause – whence "the love of God and our neighbor (*dilectio Dei et proximi*) is requisite to the contemplative life."³⁸ Motive causes, it ought to be emphasized, do not however enter into the essence of any reality but rather dispose and perfect it. The next section turns to one such motive cause that disposes and perfects the contemplative life, namely devotion, the first of the interior acts of the virtue of religion. As readiness to give oneself to the things of God, it constitutes a special act of the will. Its intrinsic cause on our part however is meditation or contemplation. As has been shown, the essence of the meditative or contemplative act pertains to the intellect. There thus obtains a dynamic interinvolvement between the contemplative act and devotion, an interinvolvement that constitutes a particular instantiation of the general dynamic reciprocal interaction that characterizes

a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen (*[p]ulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam, pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent*)."

³⁵ *STh* I–II, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3.

³⁶ For a brief treatment of goodness and beauty, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 64–66. The author concludes that "given the fact that beauty is a perichoresis of truth and goodness (as the quotation from *ST* I–II, q. 27, a. 1 makes clear) and contemplation comes to fruition in both knowing and loving truth, it stands to reason to suggest that things of beauty are themselves an excellent medium for contemplation. Given the brevity of the remarks Aquinas dedicates to the topic of beauty, this must remain a somewhat tentative suggestion" (Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas*, 65). For book-length treatments of Thomas's aesthetics, see Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Christopher Scott Sevier, *Aquinas on Beauty* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); and, Miriam Savarese, *La nozione trascendentale di bello in Tommaso d'Aquino* (Rome: EDUSC, 2014).

³⁷ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 1.

³⁸ *STh* II–II, q. 180, a. 2, ad 1.

the relationship between the intellect and the will. Devotion, as an interior act of religion, cannot however be considered apart from the reality of sin, which disrupts man's ordering to God as his unfailing principle and ultimate end; neither can it be considered apart from the restorative power of the grace of Christ.

The Intellectual/Rational Cause of Devotion

Devotion, as already intimated, constitutes an interior act of the virtue of religion, to which it belongs "to show reverence to one God under one aspect, namely, as the first principle of the creation and government of things."³⁹ Religion is in turn what Thomas refers to as a virtue annexed to justice, which is defined as "a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will"⁴⁰ and which has the will as its subject.⁴¹ It is worth noting that in his discussion of whether justice is in the will as its subject, the intimate relationship of reason to justice is highlighted in response to an objection that since justice is sometimes called truth and since truth does not reside in the will but rather in the intellect, neither does justice have the will as its subject. In his reply Thomas points out that the will is a rational appetite. Consequently, "when the rectitude of the reason which is called truth is imprinted on the will on account of its nighness to the reason, this imprint retains the name of truth; and hence it is that justice sometimes goes by the name of truth."⁴²

As a virtue annexed to justice, religion has something in common with it while at the same time it falls short of the perfection of justice. The essential character of justice, as already noted, "consists in rendering to another his due according to equality."⁴³ While what man renders to God is due, however, it is not and cannot be equal, "as though man rendered to God as much as he owes Him."⁴⁴ Religion, which "consists in offering service and ceremonial rites or

³⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 81, a. 3. At *STh* II-II, q. 81, a. 3, ad 1, Thomas states this point in Trinitarian terms: "The three Divine Persons are the one principle of the creation and government of things, wherefore they are served by one religion."

⁴⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 1. See also *STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 11: "[T]he proper act of justice is nothing else than to render to each one his own."

⁴¹ See *STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 4.

⁴² *STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 4, ad 1.

⁴³ *STh* II-II, q. 80.

⁴⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 80. Josef Piper writes that "The fact that some debts are not or cannot be repaid is essential to the world's actual condition" (Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966], 104).

worship to *some superior nature that men call divine*⁴⁵ thus falls into the category of virtues that render his due to another but are nevertheless “unable to render the equal due.”⁴⁶ While it falls short of the perfection of justice, however, religion nevertheless “excels among the moral virtues.”⁴⁷ Its excellence is owed to the fact that “its actions are directly and immediately ordered to the honor of God.”⁴⁸ Matthew Levering captures the significance of Thomas’s position in these words: “The key to human excellence is right worship.”⁴⁹ The seeming inconsistency in maintaining at one and the same time that religion on the one hand falls short of the perfection of justice while on the other hand it is the most excellent of the moral virtues evaporates in the face of the idea that “Virtue is praised because of the will, not because of ability.”⁵⁰ Thus, Thomas continues, “if a man fall short of equality which is the mean of justice, through lack of ability, his virtue deserves no less praise, provided there be no failing on the part of his will.”⁵¹

It is in this context that devotion takes its place as characterizing those persons who subject themselves completely to God.⁵² It is, it seems, nothing else than a certain will “to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God.”⁵³ Since this self-donation constitutes a special kind of act, devotion is to be considered as a special act of the will. One might nevertheless wonder how this can be so given that devotion “is common to various genera of acts, namely, corporal and spiritual acts: for a person is said to meditate devoutly and to genuflect devoutly.”⁵⁴ It cannot be denied that devotion is to be found in various genera of acts, as the two examples cited illustrate. It is found in these genera however not as species thereof but rather “as the motion of the mover is found virtually in the movements of the things moved.”⁵⁵ Thomas also points out that the mover communicates the mode of movement to whatever it moves. As an act of the will whereby a man offers himself readily to the service of God, the ultimate end, devotion accordingly imparts a particular mode to human acts – both to those acts that pertain to the will itself as concerned with the

⁴⁵ Pieper, 104.

⁴⁶ Pieper, 104.

⁴⁷ *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 6.

⁴⁸ *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 6.

⁴⁹ Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 114.

⁵⁰ *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 6, ad 1.

⁵¹ *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 6, ad 1.

⁵² See *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1.

⁵³ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1.

⁵⁴ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1, obj. 2.

⁵⁵ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1, ad 2.

means to the end (*ea quae sunt ad finem*) and to those acts that pertain to the other powers of the soul as moved by the will.⁵⁶

Notwithstanding the causality of the will both with respect to its own acts and with respect to the acts of the other powers of the soul, the intrinsic cause of devotion on our part is meditation or contemplation (*meditatio seu contemplatio*),⁵⁷ the essence of whose act, as has been stated, pertains to the intellect.⁵⁸ There obtains a dynamic reciprocity between the acts of contemplation and devotion, a reciprocity that constitutes a particular instantiation of the general interaction between intellect and will.⁵⁹ Thus on the one hand, in order to understand, the intellect must be moved by the will, and on the other hand the act of the will must be preceded by an act of the intellect since the idea of the appetible good is in the intellect, and so on. The mutual causal influence of these faculties does not however admit of an infinite regress. Thomas argues that “we must stop at the intellect as preceding the rest.”⁶⁰ He adds, pertinently, that “every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will.”⁶¹ The causality exercised by the intellect on the will must however not be construed as extrinsic to the will for according to the order of generation of the powers of the soul the will issues from the intellect and therefore shares in its nature.⁶² The will, on account of its participation in the life of the intellect, is intrinsically characterized by intellectuality. As Michael S. Sherwin puts it: “The will is a rational appetite, and as such always acts from knowledge.”⁶³

Devotion consists in an act of the will whereby a man readily surrenders himself to the service of God. As an act of the virtue of religion, the consideration

⁵⁶ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1, ad 1. See Odon Lottin, *L'âme du culte: la vertu de la religion d'après s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Abbaye du Mont-César, Louvain: Bureau des Œuvres Liturgiques, 1920), 25–26: “The will is in effect the mover of all moral activity. Oriented to God by the act of devotion, the will in turn makes all the acts of the other faculties which are subject to its motion converge to the same end.” My translation.

⁵⁷ See *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3.

⁵⁸ Before dealing with the intrinsic cause of devotion on the part of human beings, Thomas notes that “The extrinsic and chief cause of devotion is God, of Whom Ambrose, commenting on Lk. ix. 55, says that *God calls whom He deigns to call, and whom He wills He makes religious: the profane Samaritans, had He so willed, He would have made devout.*”

⁵⁹ For an extended treatment of the interaction between the intellect and the will, see Kevin E. O'Reilly, *The Hermeneutics of Knowing and Willing in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Utrecht: Thomas Instituut; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 80–108, esp. 96–105.

⁶⁰ *STh* I, q. 82, a. 4, ad 3.

⁶¹ *STh* I, q. 82, a. 4, ad 3. See also *STh* I–II, q. 9, a. 4.

⁶² See *STh* I, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

⁶³ Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 20.

from which this act of will issues concerns the ultimate ground of reality, namely God as Creator of all that exists and as our ultimate beatitude; it also regards the reality of sin as destroying our ordering to God, and the recovery of this ordering on the basis of faith. As Thomas writes, religion properly denotes "a relation to God" since "it is He to Whom we ought to be bound as to our unfailing principle; to Whom also our choice should be resolutely directed as to our last end; and Whom we lose when we neglect Him by sin, and should recover by believing in Him and confessing our faith."⁶⁴ The speculative reason is capable of discerning that God is our first unfailing principle and our final end, a fact evidenced by Thomas at *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3,⁶⁵ and at *STh* I–II, q. 2,⁶⁶ respectively. Man is ontologically absolutely dependent on God as His creature that He has brought into being out of nothing. The practical reason as the extension of the speculative reason translates the debt owed to God as our Creator and as our Ultimate Beatitude into those acts that manifest the virtue of religion.⁶⁷ These acts proportion a man to God on account of their being suitably ordered to Him in a becoming (*convenienter*) manner.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *STh* I, q. 81, a. 1. R. Jared Staudt writes: "The virtue of religion recognizes God's absolute primacy over every created good and seeks to rightly order all things in subordination to him. The right ordering of religion arises as a matter of justice toward God, while also forming an aspirational goal of the Christian life to give him honor in all things, looking forward to the moment when Christ will be fully 'all in all' (Col 3:11)" (R. Jared Staudt, *The Primacy of God: The Virtue of Religion in Catholic Theology* [Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021], 1).

⁶⁵ For a critical engagement with the Five Ways see, for example, C. J. F. Martin, *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); and Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (London: Routledge / Kegan Paul, 1969). For an account of the general background to the *Five Ways* within the context of Thomas's doctrine of being, see John R. Catan, ed., *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens C.Ss.R.* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980), 52–131.

⁶⁶ For a brief discussion of this point, see Kevin E. O'Reilly, "Transcending Gadamer: Towards a Participatory Hermeneutics," *The Review of Metaphysics* 65, no. 4 (2012), 851–55.

⁶⁷ See *STh* I, q. 79, *sed contra*: "The speculative intellect by extension becomes practical." On this point, see Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things and Reality and the Good*, trans. Lothar Krauth and Stella Lange (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 141–44. "The concept of the practical reason," writes Pieper, "necessarily includes and asserts the theoretical as well. The 'basic faculty' is the theoretical reason, which 'extends' to become the practical. The theoretical includes the practical, somewhat at the genus includes the distinct species. Only insofar as it is theoretical is the reason also practical. Prior to all action is the 'theoretic' perception of reality. *Intellectus speculativus fit practicus*, the theoretic reason 'becomes' practical. All that is practical is rooted in the theoretical and presupposes it" (Pieper, 143).

⁶⁸ See *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 2.

This ordering is possible however only in one who is not affected by mortal sin, which “destroys the principle of the order whereby man’s will is subject to God.”⁶⁹ The disorder entailed by mortal sin, while in itself irreparable, can nevertheless be restored by the power of God because “disorders in things referred to the end, are repaired through the end, even as an error about conclusions can be repaired through the truth of the principles.”⁷⁰ One can express this point in terms of grace, as indeed Thomas does: “Now everlasting life is an end exceeding the proportion of human nature . . . Hence man, by his natural endowments, cannot produce meritorious works proportionate to everlasting life; and for this a higher force is needed, viz. the force of grace. And thus without grace man cannot merit everlasting life.”⁷¹ With the help of grace, which resides in the essence of the soul,⁷² a man can however avoid all mortal sin.⁷³ Faith as an infused virtue is derived from and ordained to the light of grace.⁷⁴

Consideration of God as the First Efficient Cause of all that exists and as the Final End of all things is in effect “the consideration of God’s goodness and loving kindness,”⁷⁵ as Thomas puts it in his discussion of whether meditation or contemplation is the cause of devotion. In a question devoted to the

⁶⁹ *STh* I–II, q. 87, a. 3. In contrast, sometimes “the sinner’s will is directed to a thing containing a certain inordinateness, but which is not contrary to the love of God and one’s neighbor, e.g., an idle word, excessive laughter, and so forth: and such sins are venial by reason of their genus.” Steven J. Jensen explains that although venial sins are not directed virtually to the divine good, they are nevertheless directed habitually to the divine good in the case of one who is in a state of grace. See Steven J. Jensen, *Sin: A Thomistic Psychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 26.

⁷⁰ *STh* I–II, q. 88, a. 1. For an argument in favour of the notion that there can be one ultimate end only, the position espoused by Thomas, see Jensen, *Sin: A Thomistic Psychology*, 15–40.

⁷¹ *STh* I–II, q. 109, a. 5.

⁷² See *STh* I–II, q. 111, aa. 3 and 4.

⁷³ *STh* I–II, q. 109, a. 8. Notwithstanding this point, for Thomas, as Rude te Velde notes, “the primary motive of grace does not lie in the restoration of the defect in human nature as a consequence of sin. Even if the Fall had not happened, grace would still be necessary for man to attain his ultimate end, which consists in the union of man with God (*coniunctio ad Deum*)” (Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* [Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006], 151).

⁷⁴ See *STh* I–II, q. 111, a. 3: “[E]ven as the natural light of reason is something besides the acquired virtues, which are ordained to this natural light, so also the light of grace which is a participation of the Divine Nature is something besides the infused virtues which are derived from and are ordained to this light, hence the Apostle says (Eph. V. 8): *For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light.* For as the acquired virtues enable a man to walk, in accordance with the natural light of reason, so do the infused virtues enable a man to walk as befits the light of grace.”

⁷⁵ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3.

goodness of God, Thomas argues that "since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him."⁷⁶ Thomas approvingly quotes *De Divinis Nominibus* of the Pseudo-Dionysius in this regard: "Dionysius (*Div. Nom.* iv) attributes good to God as to the first efficient cause, saying that, God is called good *as by Whom all things subsist*."⁷⁷ Goodness is, however, also that which "all things desire"⁷⁸ and this belongs preeminently to God.⁷⁹ Here we witness the Neoplatonic principle according to which, in the words of Fran O'Rourke, "every effect is converted to the cause from which it proceeds"⁸⁰ since the good of an effect derives from its cause. An effect thus seeks its cause as its own good. In this regard Thomas writes that "the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness."⁸¹ All created things thus receive their goodness from "the divine goodness, as from the first exemplary effective and final principle of all goodness."⁸² In other words, "God's will is the cause of all things"⁸³ and, as such, wills some good to them all. Since to will good to something is to love it, it follows that "God loves everything that exists."⁸⁴

According to Thomas, consideration of God's goodness and loving kindness wakens *dilectio*, the interior act of charity, "which is the proximate cause of devotion."⁸⁵ While things concerning the Godhead are "in themselves, the strongest incentive to love (*dilectio*) and consequently to devotion, because God is supremely lovable,"⁸⁶ the weakness of the human mind means that it requires to be guided (*manuduci*) by means of certain sensible things both with regard to knowledge and to the love (*dilectio*) of Divine things.⁸⁷ Christ's humanity is

⁷⁶ *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1.

⁷⁷ *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1.

⁷⁸ *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4.

⁷⁹ See *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1.

⁸⁰ Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 235.

⁸¹ *STh* I, q. 6, a. 1.

⁸² *STh* I, q. 6, a. 4.

⁸³ *STh* I, q. 20, a. 2.

⁸⁴ *STh* I, q. 20, a. 2.

⁸⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 82, a. 3.

⁸⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

⁸⁷ This fact is predicated on man's hylomorphic constitution. As Jan Aertsen puts it, "As incarnated mind, he is dependent upon sense experience" (Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 194). Thomas, however, is not at all straightforwardly Aristotelian in his account of human cognition. See *STh* I, q. 84, a. 4, ad 1: "The intelligible species which are participated by our intellect are reduced, as to their first cause, to a first principle which is by its essence

chief among these things as the Preface for Christmastide makes clear when it prays “that through knowing God visibly, we may be caught up to the love of things invisible.”⁸⁸ The reference here is to the hypostatic union, that is to say, the doctrine that “the Person of Christ subsists in two natures.”⁸⁹ This doctrine entails that in beholding the man Jesus, we at the same time behold God since by virtue of the hypostatic union “human nature is assumed so as to be in the Person of the Son of God.”⁹⁰ It is precisely on account of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, that is to say, “through knowing God visibly”⁹¹ that we been able to come to know God as a Trinity of Persons and it is thanks to meditation on the Word’s assumption of human nature that we have been “be caught up to the love of things invisible.”⁹² The fact of the incarnation brings us to the second consideration concerning meditation as the cause of devotion, namely that of “man’s own shortcomings (*defectus*) on account of which he needs to lean on God.”⁹³

Examination of the relevant texts shows that the *defectus* that characterize the human condition in its fallen state are twofold, namely bodily and spiritual. Bodily *defectus* include death⁹⁴ as well as hunger and thirst.⁹⁵ With regard to the *defectus* of the soul, these include such things as sin;⁹⁶ the *fomes* of sin, that is to say, “an inclination of the sensual appetite to what is contrary to reason”;⁹⁷

intelligible – namely, God. But they proceed from that principle by means of the sensible forms and material things, from which we gather knowledge, as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* vii).” Here we witness an original synthesis of Platonism and Aristotelianism. For a discussion of this point, see Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d’Aquino* (Segni: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2005), 325–47. In brief, they are brought together into a living unity on the basis of their mutual complementarity (“vengono fatti convivere insieme secondo una mutua complementarietà,” Fabro, 342).

⁸⁸ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

⁸⁹ *STh* III, q. 2, a. 4.

⁹⁰ *STh* III, q. 2, a. 10. For a discussion of Thomas’s treatment of the hypostatic union, see Joseph P. Wawrykow, “Hypostatic Union,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 222–51.

⁹¹ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

⁹² *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3, ad 2.

⁹³ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3.

⁹⁴ See *STh* II–II, q. 164, a. 1; II–II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 1; II–II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 4; II–II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 5; III, q. 14, a. 1; III, q. 14, a. 2; III, q. 14, a. 3, ad 2; III, q. 14, a. 3, ad 2.

⁹⁵ *STh* III, q. 14, a. 1.

⁹⁶ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 1.

⁹⁷ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 2.

ignorance,⁹⁸ passibility,⁹⁹ sensible pain,¹⁰⁰ sorrow,¹⁰¹ fear,¹⁰² wonder,¹⁰³ and anger.¹⁰⁴ Natural reason tells us that we are subject to a higher being, namely God, on account of these *defectus* and that we need help and direction from Him.¹⁰⁵ The *defectus* of sin is of particular relevance in the context of the virtue of religion since, as we have seen, we lose God “when we neglect Him by sin.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, the principle of order whereby our will is subject to God is destroyed by mortal sin, as already intimated.¹⁰⁷ This disorder occasioned by mortal sin can and indeed has been restored by the power of God by virtue of Christ’s Passion, which is “the proper cause of the forgiveness of sins.”¹⁰⁸ By extension the debt of punishment incurred on account of sin has been abolished and Christ has opened the gate of heaven by His Passion.¹⁰⁹

According to Thomas, devotion is caused in a secondary way by the consideration of one’s own *defectus*, for “this consideration regards the term from which man withdraws by the movement of his devout will, in that he trusts

⁹⁸ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 3.

⁹⁹ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 5.

¹⁰¹ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 6.

¹⁰² *STh* III, q. 15, a. 7.

¹⁰³ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 8.

¹⁰⁴ *STh* III, q. 15, a. 9.

¹⁰⁵ See *STh* II–II, q. 85, a. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 1.

¹⁰⁷ *STh* I–II, q. 87, a. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *STh* III, q. 49, a. 1. For a treatment of Christ’s Passion and death on the Cross as an act of religion, see R. Jared Staudt, “Did Christ Worship the Trinity?,” *The Thomist* 76, no. 2 (2012), 233–72, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2012.0026>. On the relationship between sin and the virtue of religion, see R. Jared Staudt, “Sin as an Offence against God: Aquinas on the Relation of Sin and Religion,” *Nova et Vetera: English Edition* 9, no. 1 (2011), 195–207. Staudt explains that Thomas “lays out the foundations for sin as a personal offence by recognizing the fundamental need to honor God through particular religious actions and through a general obedience to his moral law. Failure to do so is an irreligious act, even of idolatry. In fact, Aquinas recognizes idolatry as the origin of all sin, which characterizes in sin in its contempt for God. In sin one turns away from God and toward a created good. This is the essence of idolatry and also the essence of sin” (Staudt, “Sin as an Offence against God,” 196).

¹⁰⁹ See *STh* III, q. 49, aa. 3 and 5. As Rik Van Nieuwenhove writes, Thomas “describes sin in terms of a sickness of the soul whereby the sinner loses her proper focus in life,” while “our incorporation in Christ through faith and charity radically transforms us, heals the soul, and allows us to begin to share the trinitarian life” (Rik Van Nieuwenhove, “Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion: Aquinas’ Soteriology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005], 296).

not in himself, but subjects himself to God.”¹¹⁰ Consideration of one’s own sin, which gives rise to sorrow (*tristitia*), is a particular case in point. This sorrow is good inasmuch as “it denotes perception and rejection of evil.”¹¹¹ Inasmuch as sorrow is due to a right judgment of reason and a well-disposed will that detests the evil, sorrow is a virtuous good.¹¹² This sorrow, which is “according to God”¹¹³ is the secondary and accidental effect of devotion. It leads moreover to salvation, “i.e., eternal salvation, which is a steadfast salvation belonging to the blessed,” Thomas tells us in his commentary on 2 Cor 7:10.¹¹⁴ It is precisely this virtuous good that is in question with respect to consideration of Christ’s Passion. As Thomas tells us, “In the consideration of Christ’s Passion there is something that causes sorrow, namely, the human defect, the removal of which made it necessary for Christ to suffer [Luke 24:25].”¹¹⁵ This sorrow, occasioned in effect by contemplation, is a participation in Christ’s Passion and in effect imparts a cruciform dynamic to devotion.

While consideration of one’s *defectus* gives rise to devotion that has sorrow as its secondary and accidental effect, its first and direct effect is joy (*delectatio*). This accidental joy (*per accidens laetitia*)¹¹⁶ arises on account of the “hope of Divine assistance,”¹¹⁷ Whose Passion has brought about our salvation efficiently. The salvific effect of Christ’s Passion is communicated to us by faith and the sacraments of faith: “Christ’s Passion, although corporeal, has yet a spiritual effect from the Godhead united: and therefore it secures its efficacy by spiritual contact – namely, by faith and the sacraments of faith, as the Apostle says (Rom 3:25): *Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood.*”¹¹⁸ Going beyond what Thomas writes, one could say that the Sacraments, acts of religion whereby God is worshiped, both call forth the devotion of believers

¹¹⁰ See *STh* II–II, q. 82, aa. 3 and 4. On the threefold subjection of human nature to God, see *STh* III, q. 20, a. 1.

¹¹¹ *STh* I–II, q. 39, a. 2. See also I–II, q. 39, a. 1.

¹¹² See *STh* I–II, q. 39, a. 2. Sorrow ought of course be proportionate to the evil which gives rise to it in order to be virtuous. In this regard, Thomas writes: “All the passions of the soul should be regulated according to the rule of reason, which is the root of the virtuous good; but excessive sorrow, of which Augustine is speaking, oversteps this rule, and therefore it fails to be a virtuous good.”

¹¹³ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 4. The reference is to 2 Cor 7:10.

¹¹⁴ See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, accessed July 27, 2024, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~2Cor.C7.L3.n268>.

¹¹⁵ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 4, ad 1.

¹¹⁶ The words *delectatio* and *laetitia* are used synonymously in this article.

¹¹⁷ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 4.

¹¹⁸ *STh* III, q. 49, a. 6, ad 2.

as they contemplate the realities that are celebrated, while this contemplation of the realities celebrated serves to enkindle further devotion. Preeminent in this regard is the Eucharist, to which greater devotion is owed than to the other Sacraments since “the entire Christ is contained therein.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, Thomas adds, “this sacrament requires a more general devotion, i.e., on the part of the whole people, since for them it is offered; and not merely on the part of the recipients, as in the other sacraments.”¹²⁰

Conclusion

Our considerations in this article have focused on Thomas’s account of contemplation and of devotion as instantiations of acts of the intellect and of the will respectively; the essence of contemplation pertaining to the intellect and its motive force to the will. While Thomas does not refer explicitly to devotion in this regard, it ought to be pointed out that neither does he refer to any other specific affection. What he does say however is completely consonant with allowing for devotion as a motive force. Devotion, after all, concerns the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service or worship (*obsequium*) of God,¹²¹ and contemplation of God is arguably an act of worship – or, more precisely, can be rendered an act of worship when commanded by the virtue of religion.¹²²

The reverse dynamic, namely contemplation as a cause of devotion is dealt with explicitly by Thomas: consideration of God’s goodness and loving kindness awakens *dilectio*, which is “the proximate cause of devotion.”¹²³ Thus the good apprehended by the intellect by virtue of meditation or contemplation moves the will to devotion, while acts of devotion in turn move the intellect to deeper contemplation. The report in William of Tocco’s biography of St. Thomas, regardless of whether or not it is historically accurate, in effect communicates the essence of Thomas’s considerations concerning the influence of affectivity on the life of the intellect: *affectio* “pours forth into devotion and by the merit of this devotion intelligence ascends to greater heights.”¹²⁴ Thomas himself writes explicitly about meditation or contemplation as the cause of devotion. Thomas’s

¹¹⁹ *STh* III, q. 83, a. 4, ad 5.

¹²⁰ *STh* III, q. 83, a. 4, ad 5.

¹²¹ See *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 1.

¹²² See *STh* II–II, q. 81, a. 1, ad 1.

¹²³ *STh* II–II, q. 82, a. 3.

¹²⁴ Ferrua, *S. Thomae Aquinatis vitae fontes praecipuae*, 64. My translation.

own testimony, both direct and indirect, thus points to the interaction between devotion and contemplation that redounds to the intensification of each. His experience during Mass at the Chapel of St. Nicholas, Naples, on 6 December 1273, is arguably a case in point.¹²⁵ The rite of the Eucharist in effect furnishes the most exalted context in which the believer, stirred up by devotion, can contemplate divine things and, on the basis of this contemplation, be moved to yet greater devotion. Devotion and contemplation, while independent realities, are nevertheless bound up in the dynamics of reciprocal influence that obtain between intellect and will.

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¹²⁵ For a treatment of this experience, see Kevin E. O'Reilly, "Patiens Divina in the *Summa Theologiae*: A Key to Understanding Thomas's Experience during Mass at the Chapel of St. Nicholas, Naples, on 6 December 1273," in *Initiation and Mystagogy in Thomas Aquinas: Scriptural, Systematic, Sacramental and Moral, and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Henk J. M. Schoot, Jacco Verburgt, and Vijgen Jörgen (Utrecht: Thomas Instituut; Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 223–50.

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The Theology of the Senses of Scripture According to Joseph Ratzinger and Thomas Aquinas

Teologia sensów Pisma Świętego według Josepha Ratzingera
i Tomasza z Akwinu

ABSTRACT: Joseph Ratzinger recognized the doctrine of the four senses of Scripture, although he reinterpreted it in a new context. He referred with appreciation and at the same time critically to Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the senses of Scripture, emphasizing in particular the importance attached to the literal sense in medieval biblical hermeneutics. This article presents Ratzinger's and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of biblical senses. Particular emphasis is placed on the fundamental assumptions, primarily theological, of both approaches. The article addresses the issue of the relationship between spiritual and literal sense, the relationship between divine and human authorship, and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Attention is also drawn to the Christological-pneumatological and teleological interpretation of Scripture, the understanding of salvation history, and the properties of human language in which the word of God was communicated. The necessity of moving from the letter to the spirit of inspired texts was also strongly emphasized. The research began with Ratzinger's legacy, and then, based on the results obtained, the thought of the Angelic Doctor was systematized. Due to this approach both the similarities and differences between the approaches of the two scholars were brought to light.

KEYWORDS: Joseph Ratzinger, Thomas Aquinas, senses of Scripture, doctrine of the four senses, literal sense vs spiritual sense, biblical hermeneutics, Christological hermeneutics, letter and spirit, Old Testament and New Testament, salvation history, authorship of Scripture

ABSTRAKT: Joseph Ratzinger uznawał doktrynę czterech sensów Pisma Świętego, choć reinterpretował ją w nowym kontekście. Z uznaniem, a zarazem krytycznie odwoływał się do pojmowania sensów Pisma Świętego przez Tomasza z Akwinu, zwłaszcza podkreślał wagę przykładaną do sensu dosłownego w średniowiecznej hermeneutyce

biblijnej. W artykule zaprezentowano rozumienie sensów biblijnych przez Ratzingera i Tomasza z Akwinu. Szczególny akcent został położony na fundamentalne założenia, przede wszystkim teologiczne, obu podejść. Podjęto kwestię związku sensu duchowego z dosłownym, relację między autorstwem boskim i ludzkim, związek między Starym a Nowym Testamentem. Zwrócono także uwagę na chrystologiczno-pneumatologiczną i teleologiczną interpretację Pisma, rozumienie historii zbawienia oraz na właściwości ludzkiego języka, w którym wypowiedziane zostało słowo Boże. Mocno wybrzmiała także konieczność przechodzenia od litery do ducha tekstów natchnionych. Badania rozpoczęto od spuścizny bawarskiego teologa, by na podstawie uzyskanych wyników uporządkować następnie myśl Doktora Anielskiego. Pozwoliło to uwypuklić zarówno podobieństwa, jak i różnice między ujęciem obu uczonych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Joseph Ratzinger, Tomasz z Akwinu, sensy Pisma Świętego, doktryna czterech sensów, sens dosłowny a sens duchowy, hermeneutyka biblijna, hermeneutyka chrystologiczna, litera a duch, Stary Testament a Nowy Testament, historia zbawienia, autorstwo Pisma Świętego

Introduction

In his monograph *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Testing the Ratzinger Paradigm*, Aaron Pidel noted that Joseph Ratzinger took both an affirmative and critical stance toward Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the four senses:

On the one hand, Ratzinger praises Aquinas as a master of teleological hermeneutics, who rightly finds in Christ the culmination of salvation history. What is more, by insisting that the deeper meanings cannot contradict the historically indicated meaning, Ratzinger maintains in his own way Aquinas' principle that the literal sense serves as the foundation for the spiritual senses. . . . But unlike Aquinas, Ratzinger would hesitate to confine the premises of theological argumentation to the literal sense.¹

While one can agree with the above observation, Pidel's interpretation of this assessment seems not to be entirely accurate. According to the scholar,

Ratzinger's disagreement owes partly to his anachronistic identification of Aquinas' literal sense with the historical-critically indicated sense. . . . But it also has partly to do with Ratzinger's effective-historical model of the fourfold sense,

¹ Aaron Pidel, *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Testing the Ratzinger Paradigm*, Verbum Domini Series (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 134–35.

whereby the literal sense and spiritual senses interpenetrate too much to be isolated with clinical precision.²

In my opinion, the first sentence is far from being true, while the second does not explain Ratzinger's position in a satisfactory manner.

This article is intended to present Ratzinger's and Thomas Aquinas' understanding of biblical senses. I would like to place particular emphasis on the fundamental assumptions, primarily theological, that determined the approaches of both scholars. My aim is to show in what ways Ratzinger's and Aquinas' approaches are similar and in what ways they differ. I will begin with Ratzinger,³ whose legacy will allow me to organize the thoughts of the Angelic Doctor⁴ in such a way that the goal of the article is achieved.

Joseph Ratzinger's Understanding of the Senses of Scripture

The Literal and Spiritual Senses "without confusion and without separation"

Recognizing in *Verbum Domini* the importance of the exegetical approach of the Church Fathers, Benedict XVI recalled that they placed the comprehensive

² Cf. Pidel, *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture*, 135.

³ The reflections contained in this article will be discussed in more detail in the articles I drew on Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Aktualność egzegezy patrystycznej we współczesnej egzegezie według Josepha Ratzingera," *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*, [forthcoming]; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Cztery wymiary słowa – Benedykta XVI reinterpretacja doktryny czterech sensów Pisma Świętego," *Studia Bobolanum*, [forthcoming]; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Josepha Ratzingera zasada chrystologiczno-pneumatologiczna w hermeneutyce biblijnej," *Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeskie*, [forthcoming].

⁴ I refer to my earlier and planned publications: Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "What Place Does Scripture Have in Thomas Aquinas's Reasoning?," *Collectanea Theologica* 94, no. 1 (2024): 107–66, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2024.94.1.04>; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Tomasza z Akwinu obrona doktryny czyśćca," *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 17, no. 3 (2024): 317–49, <https://doi.org/10.12775/bpth.2024.017>; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Chrystus Zmartwychwstały a sensy Pisma Świętego: Refleksje na kanwie twórczości Tomasza z Akwinu," in *Wokół pytań o Zmartwychwstanie*, ed. Damian Wąsek and Przemysław Artemiuk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo "scriptum", 2025), 237–301; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Sens dosłowny i duchowy w świetle kwestii quodlibetalnych Tomasza z Akwinu," *Collectanea Theologica* 95, no. 2 (2025): 265–316, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2025.95.2.02>; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Sensy Pisma Świętego w *Summie teologicznej* św. Tomasza z Akwinu," *Rocznik Tomistyczny*, [forthcoming].

study of Scripture at the center and interpreted it in unity with the pilgrim Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵ The Pope wrote: “. . . we learn from the Fathers that exegesis ‘is truly faithful to the proper intention of biblical texts when it goes not only to the heart of their formulation to find the reality of faith there expressed, but also seeks to link this reality to the experience of faith in our present world’” (VD 37).⁶ Although in patristic and medieval times the philological and historical achievements of today were not available, attempts were made to start from the literal sense of Scripture (VD 37).⁷ Benedict XVI also notes that “in patristic and medieval times every form of exegesis, including the literal form, was carried out on the basis of faith, without there necessarily being any distinction between the *literal sense* and the *spiritual sense*” (VD 37).⁸

Benedict XVI, in the spirit of Leo XIII’s encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and Pius XII’s *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, calls for the rejection of “a split between the human and the divine, between scientific research and respect for the faith,

⁵ Benedykt XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010), no. 37 (hereafter: VD). See also Aurelius Augustinus, “De libero arbitrio,” III, XXI, 59, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 32 (Paris: Migne, 1877); Aurelius Augustinus, “De Trinitate,” II, I, 2, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 42 (Paris: Migne, 1886); Andrzej Proniewski, “L’ermeneutica del sensus fidei in Joseph Ratzinger,” *Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeszkie* 21 (2014): 152; Matthew J. Ramage, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Daniel Cardó and Uwe Michael Lang, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 94: “Endeavoring to retrieve the patristic approach to revelation, Ratzinger adds that, for the Fathers, ‘tradition is simply Scriptura in ecclesia’ – the playing out of Scripture in the living organism of the Church.”

⁶ Quoted after Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (April 23, 1993), II, A, 2, https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm. Cf. R. Jared Staudt, “Reality and Sign: Thomas Aquinas and the Christological Exegesis of Pope Benedict XVI,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 12, no. 1 (2014): 350.

⁷ Cf. VD 32 (“. . . the sound ecclesial tradition has always demonstrated a love for the study of the ‘letter’”); Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, art. 10, ad 1, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 4–12 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae; Editori di San Tommaso, 1888–1906) (hereafter: *ST*) (“all the senses of sacred Scripture are based on the literal sense”; cited in VD 37 and CCC 116). Cf. also Pidel, *The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture*, 135; Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 350.

⁸ Latin: “Memoretur tamen oportet quod patristica et mediaevali aetate quodlibet genus exegesis, etiam litteralis, agebatur sub fundamentis fidei et distinctio non necessario dabatur inter sensum litteralem et sensum spiritualem.” Cf. Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 348: “Aquinas’s position . . . indicates that the literal sense should not be confined simply to the human author’s intention, which would need to be ascertained historically. Rather, he affirms the primacy of God’s authorship, which includes the human author’s intentions but can also exceed them. From this perspective, sometimes what today would be called the spiritual sense may actually be part of the literal sense.”

between the literal sense and the spiritual sense” (VD 33).⁹ Referring to the classic couplet on the senses of Scripture,¹⁰ he writes that in this couplet “the unity and interrelation between the *literal sense* and the *spiritual sense*” (VD 37) are noticeable. Therefore, his recovery of the traditional doctrine of the four senses is also its modernization in a new, scientific (historical-critical method) context. Hence, the Pope postulates the coexistence of two methodological levels in exegesis, historical-critical and theological (VD 34). According to Nina Sophie Heereman, these correspond to the classical teaching of the two senses of Scripture.¹¹ But, one may add, only on condition that the historical-critical method itself becomes a theological method – because in such a situation, one can speak of a quasi-Chalcedonian connection between the two levels of Bible study, which “does not in any way mean to separate or oppose them, nor simply to juxtapose them” (VD 35).¹²

The author of the exhortation refers to the contemporary definition of the literal sense – he writes, drawing on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,¹³ that it is “the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation” (VD 37; CCC 116). One might conclude that Benedict XVI intends to emphasize more clearly than in the Middle Ages both the difference between the literal and spiritual senses (hence, taking into account the limitations of the historical-critical method, he acknowledges its value) and the unity between the two senses, so that the spiritual sense is connected with the literal one. Importantly, in line with the approach of the Church Fathers, the Pope believes that reaching the literal sense already presupposes faith, even at the stage of using the historical-critical method – “[t]he lack of a hermeneutic of faith” means that “in its place there

⁹ Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 56.

¹⁰ “Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia” – VD 37.

¹¹ Heereman, Nina Sophie. “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis of the Old Testament.” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 110. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17184>.

¹² Cf. Nicolas Bossu and Sameer Advani, “Resolving the Dualism Between Exegesis and Theology: Joseph Ratzinger and the Rediscovery of Tradition: A Case Study of the Purification of the Temple (Jn 2:13–25),” *Alpha Omega* 23, no. 1 (2020): 50; Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 355; Stefan Szymik, “Benedykta XVI hermeneutyka wiary,” *The Biblical Annals* 2 (2012): 220; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary w nauczaniu papieża Benedykta XVI*, Bibliotheca Biblica (Wrocław: Tum, Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 2014), 115–22.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993), https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (hereafter: CCC).

inevitably enters another hermeneutic, a positivistic and *secularized hermeneutic* ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history” (VD 35).¹⁴

This will be discussed further in the article, but it is worth mentioning now that, in Ratzinger’s opinion, contemporary exegetical and literary research allows us to recover and reinterpret the theory of the multiple senses of Scripture. Ratzinger prefers to speak not so much of senses as of dimensions of the meaning of the text.¹⁵ As he explained in 2003 in his discussion of the *Catechism*, “[t]here is first of all the so-called literal sense, that is, the historical-literary meaning, which an exegete seeks to re-present as the expression of the historical moment of the origin of the text.” The allegorical sense, discredited in modern times, can be derived from the fact that “[i]n the word, once you take it out of an earlier limited historical context, it actually contains a method of faith, which inserts this text within the whole of the Bible, and beyond that time directed as is every time, coming from God and going to God.”¹⁶ The moral dimension is determined by the fact that the word of God also gives direction, and the eschatological dimension (in Tradition: “anagogical”) results from moving toward what is definitive and striving in that direction.¹⁷ The *Catechism* emphasizes that “the profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church” (CCC 115).

The Historical-Critical Method and Patristic Exegesis

Ratzinger’s interpretative approach is described as “post-critical”: the historical-critical method is not rejected, but transcended in such a way as to preserve

¹⁴ See also VD 39 and 47. When asked why Ratzinger does not limit himself to pure historical reasoning, Roch Kereszty gives one reason: “Benedict knows that in the concrete order of salvation, no human being exists in the mere (pure) state of nature.” (Roch Kereszty, “The Challenge of *Jesus of Nazareth* For Theologians,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34 [2007]: 462).

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church,” October 9, 2002, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021009_ratzinger-catechetical-congress_en.html.

¹⁶ Ratzinger. Cf. CCC 116–17.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance”; CCC 117. Cf. Przemysław Przyślak, “Via biblica,” in *Via Benedicta: The Scholarly Method of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI*, ed. Bogdan Ferdek and Wiktor Trojnar (Wrocław: Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, 2019), 22.

the achievements of the “critical” period.¹⁸ Pablo Blanco-Sarto maintains that in Ratzinger’s interpretation *cum traditione*, “the writings of the Fathers offer a horizon that can be further enriched – in a line of continuity rather than of rupture – with the consonant contributions of contemporary exegesis.”¹⁹ The most important aspect of this approach is the recognition of the value of the historical-critical method, while at the same time calling for it to become a theological method. Only in this way can it become useful in discerning the literal sense, and thus also indirectly contribute to the discovery of the spiritual sense, which must be based on the literal.

This found expression, among other things, in the methodological remarks recorded in *Jesus of Nazareth*. Exegesis should submit to the historical-critical method because the *factum historicum* is the basis of the Christian faith. However, this method, whose limitations Ratzinger was aware of like few others, does not exhaust biblical interpretation.²⁰ Ratzinger therefore proposes to combine it with other methods (in the spirit of DV 12) and, above all, insists it should become a theological discipline:

¹⁸ Cf. Wright IV, William M. “Pre-Gospel Traditions and Post-Critical Interpretation in Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth: Volume 2*,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 10, no. 4 (2012), 1017; Denis Farkasfalvy, “In Search of a ‘Post-Critical’ Method of Biblical Interpretation for Catholic Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 13 (1986): 288.

¹⁹ Pablo Blanco-Sarto, “Catholics and Lutherans on Scripture: A Proposal by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 57–62, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.16754>. Cf. Matteo Crimella, “Hermeneutical and Exegetical Assumptions in the Work ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI: Some Examples,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 129, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17194>: “Thus, the choice is to combine the results of historical-critical exegesis and the great patristic and medieval tradition, so uniting the historical hermeneutic and that of faith.”

²⁰ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xv–xix; Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. the Vatican Secretariat of State (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), xvi–xvii. See also Blanco-Sarto, “Catholics and Lutherans,” 56; Denis Farkasfalvy, “Jesus of Nazareth and the Renewal of New Testament Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 3 (2007): 440, 453; Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 34–36, 42–43. It is worth adding that Ratzinger compares his work “with the theological treatise on the mysteries of the life of Jesus, presented in its classic form by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (ST III, qq. 27–59), although “it is nevertheless situated in a different historical and spiritual context, and in that sense it also has a different inner objective that determines the structure of the text in essential ways” – Joseph Ratzinger, “*Holy Week*,” xvi.

... it must take a methodological step forward and see itself once again as a theological discipline, without abandoning its historical character. It must learn that the positivistic hermeneutic on which it has been based does not constitute the only valid and definitively evolved rational approach; rather, it constitutes a specific and historically conditioned form of rationality that is both open to correction and completion and in need of it. It must recognize that a properly developed faith-hermeneutic is appropriate to the text and can be combined with a historical hermeneutic, aware of its limits, so as to form a methodological whole.²¹

The author of *Jesus of Nazareth* expects that “the great insights of patristic exegesis will be [thus] able to yield their fruit once more in a new context.”²²

In the paper entitled “Importance of the Fathers for the Structure of Faith” (Die Bedeutung der Vater im Aufbau des Glaubens), Ratzinger noted that “we might seem justified in asserting that the importance of the Fathers for Catholic theology has been, as it were, dogmatized.”²³ As he wrote, the question about the Church Fathers conceals the issue of theology existing between the worlds

²¹ Ratzinger, “*Holy Week*,” xiv–xv. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today,” trans. Adrian Walker, in *Opening up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez Navarro, Ressourcement (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 29. Cf. also Zatwardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary*, 97–108. Ezio Prato points out that the hermeneutical question reveals the relationship between faith and reason, which, according to Ratzinger, cannot be understood as narrowly as it has been in modern times – cf. Ezio Prato, “La parola di Dio è il fondamento di tutto’: Esegesi storico-critica ed ermeneutica teologica secondo Joseph Ratzinger – Benedetto XVI,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 156, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17370>.

²² Ratzinger, “*Holy Week*,” xv. Cf. Matthew J. Ramage, *Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI & Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 82. Ratzinger wrote in the Preface to the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that the constitution on Divine Revelation “provided us with a synthesis, which substantially remains, between the lasting insights of patristic theology and the new methodological understanding of the moderns” – Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible*. For the beliefs characteristic of traditional interpretation present in *Dei Verbum*, see Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 47–60, 152–53.

²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 135. Cf. e.g., DV 23. Cf. also Manuel Arostegi Esnaola, “I Padri come risposta (*Antwort*) alla Parola (*Wort*),” in *In Storia e Mistero: Una chiave di accesso alla teologia di Joseph Ratzinger e Jean Daniélou*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Jonah Lynch (Roma: EDUSC, 2016), 43–44.

of faith and science, in which one can see the former difficulty of reconciling the relationship between *auctoritas* and ratio.²⁴

In response to a question about the function of the Fathers in the structure of faith, Ratzinger pointed to the relationship between the word and the response. Although the word of God and the response of the Church Fathers cannot be intermingled, they must not be separated either – the response has become co-constitutive for the duration of the word of God.²⁵ As he put it, “[o]nly because the word [*Wort*] has found its answering word [*Ant-wort*] does it continue to be a word and to become effective.”²⁶ Ratzinger points to four elements that determine the irrevocability of the response given by the Church Fathers: the establishment of the canon of Scripture, the rule of faith (and its function in establishing the canon), the liturgical heritage (the reading of Scripture and the profession of faith were liturgical acts), and the commitment to rational responsibility for faith (*credo ut intelligam* as a condition for the persistence of faith).²⁷ According to Ratzinger, the enduring significance of the Fathers is expressed in the unity of the Bible, liturgy, and theology developed by the patristics.²⁸

Scott Hahn notes that a similar structure also characterizes Benedict XVI’s biblical theology, in which “can be seen the essential unity of and continuity between the Old and New Testaments, Scripture and liturgy, faith and reason, and exegesis and dogma.” According to this scholar, “[i]t is a theology that is

²⁴ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 137. Cf. also Proniewski, “L’ermeneutica,” 152.

²⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 147. Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Regula Fidei in the Light of Joseph Ratzinger’s Writings,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 26, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.16744>. José Granados links this conviction to the Bavarian theologian’s understanding of Revelation, developed on the basis of his studies of St. Bonaventure – cf. José Granados, “The Fathers of the Church,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Daniel Cardó and Uwe Michael Lang, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 109–25. On Ratzinger’s research on the Seraphic Doctor, see Marianne Schlosser and Franz-Xaver Heibl, eds., *Gegenwart der Offenbarung: Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzingers*, Ratzinger-Studien 2 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011).

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 147. Cf. Arostegi Esnaola, “I Padri come risposta,” 58–59; Bossu and Advani, “Resolving the Dualism,” 55; Mary McCaughey, “Through the Lens of the Pure in Heart: Ratzinger’s Theological Approach and the Interpretation of Revelation,” *Annales Theologici* 32, no. 1 (2018): 128, <https://doi.org/10.3308/ath.v32i1.275>; Proniewski, “L’ermeneutica,” 152.

²⁷ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 148–51. See also Zatwardnicki, “Regula Fidei,” 27; Arostegi Esnaola, “I Padri come risposta,” 58, 63–67.

²⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 151–52; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 83.

Christological, ecclesiological, and liturgical . . .”²⁹ Two elements appear to be most important for understanding Ratzinger’s conception of literal and spiritual senses: canon³⁰ and the rational responsibility of faith.³¹ The theologian emphasizes that one cannot go back to the Fathers or the Middle Ages and contrast them with modernity, but neither can one abandon the achievements of the exegesis of the Fathers or medieval philosophy.³² The new step that the scholar demanded from the historical-critical method is related to the reform of the understanding of rationality and the search for a “better philosophy” corresponding to the biblical text.³³ Ratzinger thus refers to the important decisions of the ancient Church concerning the relationship between faith and the search for human reason.³⁴

One History of Salvation and the Triple Authorship of Scripture

In 2003, Ratzinger stated that the starting point for the development of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* were questions about what Scripture is and what makes a heterogeneous collection of writings become a holy book. As the cardinal explained, what is specific to the Christian faith is its reference to a coherent history in which God acted. Due to the factual nature of events in the Christian faith, there should be room for the historical method; due to God’s action, the events described in the inspired books carry something that transcends their pure historical factuality and comes from outside themselves. Ratzinger emphasized that the “more” present in the events of salvation history

²⁹ Hahn, 23–24.

³⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 149: “Where the writings of the New Testament are read as canon and the Old Testament is read as the Christian Bible, there we find ourselves in the intellectual ambience of the struggle of the first centuries; there we have as Fathers those who were then teachers of the Church.”

³¹ Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 151: “It was, in fact, the precondition for the survival of Christendom in the ancient West, and it is the precondition for the survival of the Christian way of life today and tomorrow. This ‘rationalism’ of the Fathers has been often enough criticized, but its critics have, nevertheless, been unable to abandon the course it set . . .”

³² Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 19. Cf. also Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 56.

³³ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 20; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 95; Zatywardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary*, 101–6.

³⁴ Benedict XVI, “*Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections: Meeting with the Representatives of Science, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg*,” September 12, 2006, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

is inseparable from the facts and is not a meaning imposed on these events later, “from outside.” The history of salvation attested to in the biblical books is more than an expression of the historical experience of the People of God; it is a means by which God acting in the People speaks.³⁵ According to Ratzinger, we can therefore speak of a triple authorship of Scripture:

The figure of the “author,” which is so important for historical research, is therefore articulated on three levels: the individual author is in fact supported in his turn by the people as a whole. . . . In the end, it is not simply an individual author who speaks, rather the texts grow in a process of reflection, culture, and new understanding which surpasses each individual author. It is precisely in this process of continual surpassing, which relativizes the individual authors, that a more profound transcendence is at work: in this process of surpassing, of purification, of growth, the inspiring Spirit is at work, who in the word guides the facts and events and in the events and facts newly inspires the word.³⁶

This complexity of authorship is, of course, matched by the complexity of interpreting Scripture. Theological interpretation can only be discussed once the ultimate authority acting in the People of God has been taken into account. This type of interpretation does not abolish historical interpretation, but expands it by a new dimension. Hence, Ratzinger continued, the *Catechism* presented a dual dimension of biblical interpretation: historical interpretation (the intentions of the authors, the circumstances of the time and culture, the ways of thinking, speaking, and narrating at that time) and other methodological elements resulting from the unity of the Book and treating it as the basis of the life of the People of God (the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church, the analogy of faith).³⁷

³⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.”

³⁶ Ratzinger. Cf. Sławomir Zatwardnicki, “Benedykta XVI teologia natchnienia biblijnego,” *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 16, no. 3 (2023): 326, <https://doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2023.020>; Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 114; Anthony C. Sciglitanò Jr, “Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus of Nazareth: Agape and Logos,” *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 2 (2008): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385120801700203>; “Benedict thinks that scriptural texts emerge from a community of faith in relation to another ‘author,’ God. Because the same God travels with Israel throughout its lengthy history, new and fuller meanings can be given to earlier images and stories so that their words can carry more meaning in the future than their human authors know at any given time.”

³⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.” Cf. CCC 109, 112–14; DV 12. William M. Wright IV notes a tension in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965) (hereafter: DV). On the one hand, it postulates the search *for intentio auctoris*, thus

According to this approach, one can speak of a kind of relativization of the historical *intentio auctoris*. The potential meaning of a given text, Ratzinger argues, “is always being more fully disclosed, and therefore no text belongs simply to a single historical author”; one cannot “confine it to a determined historical moment and keep it there; in this case it would be confined to the past . . .”³⁸ As A. Pidel notes Ratzinger’s approach transforms the neo-Thomistic notion of the dyadic schema (divine author – human author). Firstly, it is the People of God who is indicated as an intending subject, internal to Scripture; secondly, this corporate intentionality has complex layers; and thirdly, it is Scripture (and not the hagiographer) that intends Christ as the final truth. Scripture always exists in connection with a living subject and therefore “intends” its own content. The focus is shifted from the author to the overarching intentionality of the entire Bible, and its global intention is identified with the internally diverse mystery of Christ. Pidel illustrates this approach with a metaphor of light refracting in the prism of human history with its successive stages. The perception of the pure light of Christ requires a reversal of direction: from individual bands (Old Testament, New Testament, Church) towards a common center.³⁹

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger also included among the essential aspects of theological exegesis the relationship of Scripture to the People of God as the living subject of Scripture, in whom Scripture originated and in whom it lives. The author of the work emphasized three mutually interacting subjects: (i) the individual author (group of authors); (ii) on a deeper level, the People of God, to whom the authors belong and on whose behalf and for whom they speak; (iii) God, who guides the People of God and speaks to them through people and their humanity.⁴⁰ Ratzinger emphasizes the two-way connection between Scripture and the subject of the People of God:

On the one hand, this book – Scripture – is the measure that comes from God, the power directing the people. On the other hand, though, Scripture lives precisely within this people, even as this people transcends itself in Scripture.

focusing attention on the text (DV 12), while on the other hand, it presents a sacramental theology of history and refers exegesis to the history of salvation presented in the text (DV 2) – William M. Wright IV, “*Dei Verbum*,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83–85.

³⁸ Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.”

³⁹ See Aaron Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Inerrancy,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 12, no. 1 (2014): 308, 314, 317–19, 321.

⁴⁰ See Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx–xxi.

Through their self-transcendence (a fruit, at the deepest level, of the incarnate Word) they become the people of *God*.

It is from Christ that the People of God receive their existence, which is also expressed in the written word of God, always present in the People of God.⁴¹ The relationship between Scripture and the People of God should not be limited only to the origins of the inspired books; it remains decisive for the entire history of the Church and the interpretation of Scripture.⁴²

The Word of God and the Multidimensionality of Human Speech

The author of *Jesus of Nazareth*, while appreciating the importance of historical-critical reconstructions of the original meaning of words written in a given place and time, points out that there is an intrinsic added value in human words. This is even more true of biblical words, which have matured along the history of the faith of God's people. In these words, the author does not speak from himself and for himself.⁴³

He is speaking from the perspective of a common history that sustains him and that already implicitly contains the possibilities of its future, of the further stages of its journey. . . . At this point we get a glimmer, even on the historical level, of what inspiration means: The author does not speak as a private, self-contained subject. He speaks in a living community, that is to say, in a living historical movement not created by him, nor even by the collective, but which is led forward by a greater power that is at work.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xxi. Cf. Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI the Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97; Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 62; Farkasfalvy, "Jesus of Nazareth," 442: "He also presupposes a certain concept of history which he applies to the concept of revelation: revelation is itself history, and Scripture comes about in a cumulative series of rereadings, conditioned by the interplay of both divine illumination of chosen individuals and the communal appropriation of the meanings assigned to events and experiences."

⁴² Cf. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 64: "Benedict believes that if we want to come up with theological, hermeneutical, and exegetical methods that have genuine explanatory power, we need to know where Scripture came from, how it was formed, and what were its original intention and function."

⁴³ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx.

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, xx. Cf. Heereman, "Joseph Ratzinger's Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis," 109.

Ultimately, it is the Divine Author who determines the multiple senses of Scripture, but on the other hand, this is only possible because human language itself allows for such a multiplicity. Ratzinger's approach allows him to reinterpret the traditional doctrine of the four senses: "There are dimensions of the word that the old doctrine of the fourfold sense of Scripture pinpointed with remarkable accuracy. The four senses of Scripture are not individual meanings arrayed side by side, but dimensions of the one word that reaches beyond the moment."⁴⁵ Where the *Catechism* refers to the theory of the four senses of Scripture developed by the Fathers and systematized in the Middle Ages, Ratzinger himself prefers to speak of the four dimensions of the meaning of the text.⁴⁶

In the first part of his trilogy, Ratzinger speaks positively about "canonical exegesis," according to which individual texts should be read in the context of the entire Scriptures. In addition, he also refers to the other two guidelines for theological interpretation mentioned in DV 12: the living Tradition of the whole Church and the analogy of faith, or, as Ratzinger prefers to call it, internal analogies in faith.⁴⁷ As for canonical exegesis, "[i]t does not contradict historical-critical interpretation, but carries it forward in an organic way toward becoming theology in the proper sense."⁴⁸ This follows from what has been said above: from the unity of *historia salutis* and from the nature of the human word, capable of expressing the word of God in new ways:

Older texts are reappropriated, reinterpreted, and read with new eyes in new contexts. . . . This is a process in which the word gradually unfolds its inner potentialities, already somehow present like seeds, but needing the challenge of new situations, new experiences, and new sufferings in order to open up.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xx. Cf. Heereman, "Joseph Ratzinger's Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis," 109.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, "Current Doctrinal Relevance." Cf. Gaál, *The Theology of Pope*, 117; Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 61; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 109. Sciglitano Jr. expresses the opinion that Benedict XVI is interested in recovering the tradition of the four senses insofar as all the senses are manifestations of a single Christological sense – cf. Sciglitano Jr., "Pope Benedict XVI's Jesus," 177.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xviii. Cf. Farkasfalvy, "Jesus of Nazareth," 441.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix. Cf. Crimella, "Hermeneutical and Exegetical," 127; Kereszty, "The Challenge of *Jesus of Nazareth* For Theologians," 463.

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xviii–xix.

The value of canonical exegesis not only allows us to read the previously hidden potential of the written word, but also determines our understanding of the literal (historical) sense itself.⁵⁰ As Anthony C. Sciglitano Jr. aptly notes:

Benedict holds to a rule-governed hermeneutic, whose central rule is holistic reading of the parts of the Bible in the context of the whole canon, as the canon is defined and understood by a determinate faith community. Without the rule-governed and unified vision that this hermeneutic grants, a “literal” interpretation can operate capriciously and arbitrarily by reading biblical passages in isolation from their full canonical context.⁵¹

According to Ratzinger, a given biblical text should first be interpreted in its historical context, already assuming God’s active role in history, and then read in the light of the entire historical movement with the central event of Christ. He recognizes that the Fathers and the Middle Ages lacked the first step, which made the second be arbitrary, and that contemporary scientific exegesis lacks the second step, which also renders the first meaningless, and paradoxically, methodological arbitrariness appears at the first step.⁵²

The development of historical consciousness considered the assumption of patristic exegesis that pre-Christian authors pointed to Christ to be ahistorical.⁵³ However, Ratzinger insists that “[t]he recognition of the multidimensional nature of human language, not staying fixed to a particular moment in history, but having a hold on the future,” helps in “understanding of how the Word of

⁵⁰ Cf. Benedykt XVI, “Dialog chrześcijańsko-muzułmański,” trans. Adam Błyszcz, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 58–59: “From a Christian perspective, only in terms of the New Testament can we establish what the lasting theological significance of the Old Testament is.”

⁵¹ Sciglitano Jr., “Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus,” 163.

⁵² Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 25; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 108. Cf. an interesting observation in Olivier-Thomas Venard, *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality*, trans. Kenneth Oakes and Francesca Aran Murphy, *Illuminating Modernity* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 7: “A new kind of allegorism seems to be at work here. This allegorism is no longer vertical like that of the Fathers, who at times overly harmonized and unified textual elements around Christ’s divinity, but seems to be a horizontal one: scholars extrapolate from the text to the historical reality through a type of homothetic imagination which moves from the signifier on the page to the referent in history.”

⁵³ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Preface,” in *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, by Pontifical Biblical Commission (2001), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html#PREFACE.

God can avail of the human word to confer on a history in progress a meaning that surpasses the present moment and yet brings out, precisely in this way, the unity of the whole.” Christian hermeneutics of the Old Testament, Ratzinger maintains, following the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, although it differs from Jewish hermeneutics, “corresponds nevertheless to a potentiality of meaning effectively present in the texts.”⁵⁴

As the author of *Jesus of Nazareth* wrote, the words of the Old Testament awaited the true owner of the texts.⁵⁵ Christological reading is, one might say, another rereading of the Old Testament in the light of the culminating historical and spiritual experience, and is “fully in line with its own architecture: At this new and decisive turning point in history, it is as if a veil has fallen from the words – through Jesus, they reveal new senses and take on a new context, shedding unexpected light.”⁵⁶

Ratzinger justifies his conviction by arguing that the words of Scripture are based on the experience of “revelation” transcending the hagiographer’s experience. When God speaks in human words, there is an inadequacy of the word in relation to its origin. Thus, the text can say more than the human author intended to say. Ratzinger refers to this as “exceeding” the historical *locus* of the text, opening the word to a new interpretation in a new historical setting and within new webs of meaning.⁵⁷ This, in turn, requires recognition of the role of

⁵⁴ Ratzinger. Cf. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 104; Farkasfalvy, “Jesus of Nazareth,” 441.

⁵⁵ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image Books, 2012), 17–18.

⁵⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary a pluralizm teologiczny: Wprowadzenie i komentarz do tez I–VIII i X–XII Międzynarodowej Komisji Teologicznej,” in *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji: Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Jarosław Merecki, vol. 1, Opera Omnia 9.1 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 152.

⁵⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 26–27; Sławomir Zatwardnicki, *Od teologii objawienia do teologii natchnienia: Studium inspirowane twórczością Geralda O’Collinsa i Josepha Ratzingera* (Lublin: Academicum, 2022), 178, 181, 325, 624, <https://doi.org/10.52097/acapress.9788362475919>. Ratzinger refers here to the patristic and medieval understanding of Revelation – cf. e.g.: Joseph Ratzinger, “The Question of the Concept of Tradition: A Provisional Response,” in *In God’s Word: Scripture – Tradition – Office*, ed. Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008), 51; Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 458, 460. Cf. also Rudolf Voderholzer, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Daniel Cardó and Uwe Michael Lang, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 84–85; Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger,” 316.

the People of God, viewed diachronically, as the place of understanding Scripture and the bridge between the “yesterday” and “today” of the word of God.⁵⁸

The Unity of God’s Plan and the Christological Unity of Scripture

Ratzinger claims, drawing on the *Catechism* that Scripture, although composed of various books, is one because of the unity of God’s plan, whose center and heart (cf. Ps 22:15), opened by Passover (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–46), is Jesus Christ.⁵⁹ The Cardinal also quotes a passage from Thomas Aquinas’ biblical lecture, cited in the *Catechism* (no. 112): “The phrase ‘heart of Christ’ can refer to Sacred Scripture, which makes known his heart, closed before the Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion; since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted.”⁶⁰ However, where Aquinas recognizes Christ in the words of Ps 22 in a literal sense,⁶¹ Ratzinger points rather to the previously emphasized potentiality of the word, which reveals its full sense only in the light of Christ’s event. Crucified, continuing the filial dialogue with the Father, he prays with the song of the persecuted righteous man and thus transforms prayer and reveals himself as the one who utters this Psalm. This word, incorporated into his death, became flesh and revealed its sense.⁶²

In Ratzinger’s view, the principle of the comprehensibility of history and its unity is the event of Christ.⁶³ This means “that the deeds that occurred in

⁵⁸ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Przedmowa do Joseph Ratzinger, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, Freiburg 1989,” in *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji: Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Jarosław Merecki, vol. 2, *Opera Omnia* 9.2 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 692; Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 29; Kevin E. O’Reilly, “The Theological Hermeneutics of St. Thomas and Benedict XVI,” *Angelicum* 97, no. 1 (2020): 61.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance”; CCC 112. Cf. also Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 54: “... a unity underlies the development and diversity within scripture that came about as a result of the divine pedagogy.”

⁶⁰ Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance.” Cf. Thomas de Aquino, *In Psalmos Davidis expositio*, 21, n. 11, vol. 14 of *Opera omnia*, ed. Raffaele Cai (Parmae: Typis Petri Fiacadori, 1863), 148–312 (hereafter: *In Ps.*).

⁶¹ I will discuss the comparison of Aquinas’ and Ratzinger’s interpretations of Ps 22 in a separate article.

⁶² See Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 144.

⁶³ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24; Maximino Arias Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget: Die prinzipien seiner Schriftdeutung und seine Lehre von den Schriftsinnem* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971), 85, 102, 106–7.

the Old Testament have their basis in a future deed in light of which it first becomes possible to understand them correctly.”⁶⁴ Therefore, in the interpretation of Scripture, “[t]he principle of discontinuity must therefore yield to the principle of the *analogia Scripturae* that emerges from the intrinsic claim of the biblical text itself; the principle of mechanism must give way to a principle of teleology.”⁶⁵ However, it is worth emphasizing that for Ratzinger, it is not only the goal that matters, but also the individual stages of salvation history. Christological hermeneutics presupposes faith and its connection with history.⁶⁶ As the author of *Jesus of Nazareth* emphasizes, “. . . this act of faith is based upon reason – historical reason – and so makes it possible to see the internal unity of Scripture. By the same token, it enables us to understand anew the individual elements that have shaped it, without robbing them of their historical originality.”⁶⁷ Thus, the literal sense is not identical to the historical sense discovered by the historical-critical method, unless the latter has become theological.

Ratzinger’s work also features a typological, or more precisely, Christological interpretation of the Old Testament. In 1979, Ratzinger noted that the author of the Letter to the Ephesians perceived Jesus as the mystery of the Torah, or the Bible of Israel.⁶⁸ These words and events are “symbolic references to Christ,” and “translated into Latin, this means: Scripture as a whole is *sacramentum*.” In the “interpretation of Scripture” by the apostle of the nations, “three types of *sacramenta* appear, namely, word sacraments, event sacraments, and creation sacraments.”⁶⁹ Individual words of Scripture in the Pauline language are types

⁶⁴ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24. Cf. Arias Reyero, *Thomas von Aquin als Exeget*, 102, 246–47.

⁶⁵ Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 25.

⁶⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix. See also Ilesanmi G. Ajibola, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Hermeneutics for Christians’ Faith Enhancement: An Appraisal,” *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 107; Blanco-Sarto, “Catholics and Lutherans,” 55.

⁶⁷ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, xix.

⁶⁸ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia II (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 209–10.

⁶⁹ Ratzinger, 210. Cf. also VD 13 (“we can contemplate the profound unity in Christ between creation, the new creation and all salvation history. . . . He is the center of the cosmos and of history . . .”); Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 342, 354. Bonaventure, whose work Ratzinger studied, believed that one should move from the “letter” to the “spirit” not only of Scripture but also of creation – cf. Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 84–85. Krzysztof Porosło wrote about the sacramentality of creation in Ratzinger’s thought: Krzysztof Porosło, “Sacramentality in the Perspective of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI,” *Collectanea Theologica* 93, no. 4 (2023): 62–66, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2023.93.4.06>.

of the One who was to come (Greek: *typoi tou mellontos*), sacraments of the Coming One (Latin: *sacramentum futuri*). Ratzinger noted that for the Church Fathers, the word *typos* coincided even more closely with *mystērion* – *sacramentum*. Christological interpretation is essentially identical with typological interpretation.⁷⁰

Ratzinger linked this interpretation of Scripture with the Catholic concept of *sacramentum*, and argued that when the connection between the word and the sacrament is no longer recognized, the correct interpretation of the New Testament as a Christological reading of the Old Testament is lost. Those who deny the Christological understanding of the Old Testament must understand it only literally, and in that case they also reject the New Testament. In modern times, there has been a shift away from typological reading in favor of a literary-historical interpretation focused on the original, oldest meaning of the texts. In this situation, the concept of the sacrament, reflecting the transition between the Old and New Testaments, also loses its basis.⁷¹

The transition from promise and preparation to fulfilment and presence⁷² means that the “New Testament are no longer simply *sacramenta futuri*, outlines of what is to come, but are, rather, representations of the present, the expression and fruit of the actual life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The Old Testament *sacramenta futuri* were a movement toward a future that they themselves were not. With the coming of Christ and his Passover, the expected reality became present, “a sacrament now is the representation of the given, a transfer to what has already happened.”⁷³ As Hahn notes in his publication

⁷⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 210–11. Cf. also Porosło, “Sacramentality,” 59; Staudt, “Reality and Sign,” 352: “The unity of Scripture in Christ can be seen especially in typology.”

⁷¹ Cf. Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 211–13. Cf. Benedykt XVI, “O znaczeniu komunii,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 194: “. . . exegesis that seeks to be rigidly historical confines the Old Testament to the past and does not have the tools to explain the dynamic of the passageways through which the past opens up into the present and the future.”

⁷² Cf. Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 213; VD 41; Benedykt XVI, “Łaska i powołanie bez nawrócenia,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 79: “The whole Old Testament is now thought of as prophecy, as a *sacramentum futuri*. . . . This entails a dynamic approach to the Old Testament in which the texts are not to be read statically in themselves, but must be understood as part of the whole, as a movement forward toward Christ.”

⁷³ Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 213–14. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Teologia liturgii,” in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdz and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 614: “. . . the ancient worship, with its substitutes and its often tragic

devoted to Ratzinger's thought, "the New Testament's typological interpretation of the Old is ordered to the sacramental encounter with Christ," and the ecclesiastical "typological reading tends toward mystagogy, toward bringing about a kind of communion with the events proclaimed in the sacred pages."⁷⁴

From this perspective, Benedict XVI's statements in the exhortation *Verbum Domini* are understandable. In them, the Pope recalled that Christian exegesis seeks to discover the spiritual sense, that is, "the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it." Since this context that constitutes the fulfilment of Scripture exists, "[i]t is therefore quite acceptable to re-read the Scriptures in the light of this new context, which is that of life in the Spirit" (VD 37).⁷⁵ This is in harmony with the Catholic belief that the Christian faith is not a "religion of the Book," because at its center is the Person of Jesus Christ as the living Word of God, who interprets himself in the words of Scripture that can only be understood in a living relationship with him.⁷⁶

Tension in the Unity Between the Old and New Testaments

In the preface to the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Ratzinger recalled that for the Church Fathers, the central theme was the question of the internal unity of the Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments. For the faith of the Church, it was of fundamental importance to read the Bible of Israel in a way that recognized its transparency to Christ and thus to the Logos as the voice of wisdom coming from God. Ultimately, it was not rabbinical methods or Greek allegory, as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith emphasized, but the New Testament itself – and earlier, Jesus of Nazareth, claiming the binding interpretation of "Scripture"

misunderstandings, comes to an end because the reality itself is manifested, the new Temple: the risen Christ who draws us to himself, transforms us, and unites us."

⁷⁴ Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 176–77.

⁷⁵ This is the definition given by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in: Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, II, B, 2. Benedict XVI, however, cautions that in applying typology, "we must not forget that the Old Testament retains its own inherent value as revelation, as our Lord himself reaffirmed (cf. *Mk* 12:29–31)." (VD 41).

⁷⁶ Cf. Ratzinger, "Current Doctrinal Relevance"; CCC 108. Cf. Benedict XVI, "Dialog chrześcijański-muzułmański," 59; Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 65.

(cf. Mark 1:22; Luke 24:27) – constitutes the foundation of Christian exegesis.⁷⁷ It can therefore be said that “the Fathers of the Church created nothing new when they gave a Christological interpretation to the Old Testament; they only developed and systematized what they themselves had already discovered in the New Testament.”⁷⁸

The resurrection of Christ from the dead proved decisive for Christian reading, when God sided with Jesus and his interpretation of the Old Testament. Therefore, the Church also read the Old Testament as focused on the Risen One, which meant the pneumatization (spiritualization) of scriptures and their liberation from political and legal connections.⁷⁹ “It was therefore evident to Christians that the preaching of Jesus Christ, his death and Resurrection, signified the God-given turning point of time, and consequently the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures in light of Jesus Christ was, so to speak, legitimized by God himself.”⁸⁰ Due to the complexity of the Old Testament, its Christological interpretation in the New Testament writings is diversely-one perception of God’s words from the perspective of the final word of God.⁸¹

In 1973, in his text *Jedność wiary a pluralizm teologiczny* [Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism], Ratzinger advocated maintaining the “unity through diversity” of both testaments. Rejecting Marcion’s division between the two testaments, and thus also between the Creator and the Savior, allows for the ontological interpretation of the figure of Jesus to be preserved. Conversely, the division between the Old and New Testaments places Jesus in opposition to being (creation), and then religion becomes a revolution (becoming opposed to being), modeled on Old Testament political salvation that can be realized in history. This would be tantamount to agreeing with Jesus’ opponents in his trial.⁸² To quote Ratzinger:

⁷⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, “Preface.” See also Benedykt XVI, “Łaska i powołanie bez nawrócenia,” 94; Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 102, 116; Przemysław Przysławski, “Benedict XVI in Dialogue with Judaism,” in *Postscripta: The Voice of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on Current Challenges for Theology and the Church*, ed. Bogdan Ferdek and Julian Nastałek (Wrocław: Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, 2022), 147–48.

⁷⁸ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 16.

⁷⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 152–53. See also Benedykt XVI, “Benedykt XVI – Arie Folger: Wymiana korespondencji sierpień–wrzesień 2018,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 109–19.

⁸⁰ Benedict XVI, “Łaska i powołanie bez nawrócenia,” 78.

⁸¹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 152–53.

⁸² Cf. Ratzinger, 156–57; Sciglitanò Jr., “Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus,” 172.

In both cases, we are dealing with uniformity: only the Old Testament or only the New Testament applies. Rejecting the unity in the diversity of the Old and New Testaments distorts the whole. This unity, whose tension must be maintained, means that Jesus and the Creator are one, that being belongs to Jesus, not only history: ontology belongs to faith, which is based on the unity of the Testaments.⁸³

This tension (unity and diversity of testaments) is of colossal importance for understanding the senses of Scripture. For it means that “we must reject . . . a naive, directly Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, which seeks to transfer Christology directly to the letter of the Old Testament, and thus misses both the reality of history and the dynamics that lead beyond the letter of faith.” In other words, it denies the previously emphasized connection between salvation history, the authorship of Scripture, and the multidimensionality of language. By leading us to dwell on literalism, it depreciates the spiritual tension of Revelation. “It is therefore necessary,” Ratzinger concludes, “to maintain the tension of the Old Testament in its openness to the New Testament: the essential form of the apostolic witness to Christ can only be preserved in the indelible connection between the letter and the spirit, and not in the literalness of the letter.”⁸⁴

A similar view was already evident in the comments of the young theologian as a council advisor. Ratzinger believed that in the *De fontibus revelationis* schema, the statement about the authority of the Old Testament in justifying the Christian religion expresses both too little (parts of the Old Testament belong to the past and do not play a role in justifying the Christian religion) and too much (other parts remain relevant as directly Christian). However, following the New Testament, it should be accepted that not only individual passages, but the entire Old Testament speaks of Christ and therefore can constitute the justification and foundation of the Christian religion, even if it is only in Christ that it becomes clear how the Old Testament had its foundation in him and how it pointed to him.⁸⁵ Pidel adds that only in relation to the One who

⁸³ Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 157. Robert Woźniak shows that in Ratzinger’s hermeneutics, not only the theological but also the metaphysical dimension of the word of God is important – cf. Robert J. Woźniak, “Mutuality of Scripture, Metaphysics and Dogmatics: A Basic Hermeneutical Insight in Pope Benedict XVI’s Jesus of Nazareth,” *Verbum Vitae* 42 (special issue 2024): 200, 212, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17657>.

⁸⁴ Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 157–58.

⁸⁵ Cf. Jared Wicks, “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus Before and During Vatican Council II,” *Gregorianum* 89, no. 2 (2008): 282–83; Voderholzer, “Revelation,” 88–89.

removes the veil from the face (cf. 2 Cor 3:12–18) do the individual parts of the Old Testament undergo a “Christological transformation.”⁸⁶

Ratzinger also recalled the conviction of the Church Fathers: “I can embrace the entire Old Testament without being bound to each letter because every word is a precursor of Christ, and naturally the precursor is surpassed yet is my own if I am with Christ himself.”⁸⁷ The abandonment of typological and sacramental categories in exegesis, according to Ratzinger, results in either the Old Testament being removed from the Christian canon or its literal sense being accepted. Alternatively, as Luther did, in understanding the relationship between the Law and the Gospel dialectically.⁸⁸ The Catholic approach emphasizes a specific relationship between the sacrament and Scripture, which should be read “with a view to its totality and unity, in the discrepancy and unity of promise and fulfillment.”⁸⁹

In Ratzinger’s view, the unity of both testaments must be maintained, while at the same time emphasizing the “leap” from the Old to the New Covenant if *historia salutis* is to be respected.

The fundamental form of unity through diversity of the Old and New Testaments certainly precludes any simple identification; however, it also excludes any discontinuity that breaks history down into a sum of isolated acts of God. . . . Therefore, on the one hand, the New Testament is indeed “new”; it is not a mere extrapolation of the sum of what was before, but is truly a new act of God. On the other hand, the “New” Testament contains the Old and proves to be the means by which everything that had been hitherto finds its proper place and sense.⁹⁰

Christological-Pneumatological Interpretation and the Incarnation

Benedict XVI recognizes that in recreating the interplay between the senses of Scripture it is essential to grasp the transition from the letter to the spirit. This passage is not automatic and spontaneous, “. . . the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text.” Transcending the letter “involves a progression and a process of understanding guided by the inner movement of the whole corpus, and hence it also has to become a vital process . . . , demanding

⁸⁶ See Pidel, “Joseph Ratzinger,” 315.

⁸⁷ Ratzinger, “O pojęciu sakramentu,” 216.

⁸⁸ See Ratzinger, 216–17.

⁸⁹ Ratzinger, 218. See also Ramage, *Dark Passages*, 62.

⁹⁰ Ratzinger, “Jedność wiary,” 158–59.

full engagement in the life of the Church, which is life ‘according to the Spirit’ (*Gal* 5:16)” (VD 38).⁹¹

Importantly, this process of rising from the letter to the spirit, accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit, is also connected with the freedom of the exegete. The Apostle Paul wrote that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (*2 Cor* 3:6)” and that “‘The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (*2 Cor* 3:17).” As Benedict XVI adds, “[t]he Spirit of freedom is not simply the exegete’s own idea, the exegete’s own vision. The Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the Lord who shows us the way” (VD 38).⁹²

As a theologian, Ratzinger emphasized the different forms of Revelation in the Old and New Covenants and the resulting different forms of Scripture in both covenants. The authors of the New Testament do not contrast the “Scriptures” of the Old Testament with the new writings, but with the event of Christ as the spirit interpreting these writings (Paul’s *gramma* and *pneuma*). It is the Lord as Spirit who is the sense and the true, living, and not merely literal, content of Scripture (cf. *2 Cor* 3:14–18).⁹³ As N. S. Heereman notes, this passage is the methodological foundation for Ratzinger’s Christological-pneumatological exegesis.⁹⁴

Ratzinger preferred the term Christological-pneumatological interpretation. Admittedly, it could be “called ‘allegorical’ from a historical-literary perspective,” but “on the other hand, it plainly illustrates the profound novelty and the clear motivation of the new Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.” In this kind of reading, “allegory is not a literary expedient so as to make the text applicable to new purposes but, rather, the expression of a historical transition that corresponds to the internal logic of the text.”⁹⁵ It is the coming of Christ and the sending of the Spirit, or, in other words, the presence of the Risen One

⁹¹ See also VD 29–30.

⁹² Cf. VD 29: “... Saint Thomas Aquinas, citing Saint Augustine, insists that ‘the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith’” (quoted in *ST*, Ia–IIae, q. 106, art. 2.). Cf. also Ratzinger, “Question of the Concept,” 53.

⁹³ Cf. Ratzinger, 54. Cf. also Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 106–7, 116; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 51–52. In *Verbum Domini* (no. 39), Benedict XVI recalls that in the New Testament, the “Scriptures” (cf. *Matt* 21:43; *John* 5:39; *Rom* 1:2; *2 Pet* 3:16) as a whole are treated as the sole word of God—it is Christ who gives unity to all the “Scriptures.”

⁹⁴ Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 106.

⁹⁵ Benedykt XVI, “Katolickie kapłaństwo,” trans. Robert Skrzypczak, in *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo?: Testament duchowy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Esprit, 2023), 154. Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, 183–85; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, 51–52; Heereman, “Joseph Ratzinger’s Christological-Pneumatological Exegesis,” 102.

in the Church through his Spirit, that makes it possible to read the Law and the Prophets in the light of God's final self-revelation.⁹⁶ Therefore, the Old Testament cannot be confined to literal exegesis,

but can only have a continuing existence within the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ, who remains with his own every day until the end of the world (Mt 28:20), who through his going away in and through the Cross has come again in the Holy Spirit (as John explains it) and, through the Spirit, reveals to the disciples what they would once have been unable to bear, when the Lord was still visibly dwelling among them (Jn 16:12f).⁹⁷

In Ratzinger's opinion, the "spiritualization" of the Old Testament (its spiritual universalization) refers to the Lord who is Spirit (= to the Risen One).⁹⁸ Ratzinger emphasizes that "the 'spiritualization' experienced by the Old Testament is at the same time an 'incarnation' – the subordination of everything to the Spirit who dwells in the flesh of Jesus." Freedom does not mean subordination to general reason, but reading the Old Testament "together with the One who, through the Father, opened it to its deepest foundation and thus revealed its full realism. The letter was not liberated without any reference, but in reference to Him."⁹⁹ Preserving this incarnational character of pneumatization is possible because the reminding work of the Spirit is accomplished in the faith of the Church.¹⁰⁰

The German theologian provides Martin Luther's rejection of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist as an example of a misunderstanding of the relationship between the two testaments, or more precisely, between historical events and the present reality of the Church.¹⁰¹ Ratzinger pointed out that the Paschal Mystery, in which the Jewish Passover received its new sense, although it occurred in history, at the same time transcends it and can therefore be present throughout history. Christ's sacrifice does not belong to the past; in the community of the Church, it is contemporary to believers.¹⁰² According to Ratzinger, problems

⁹⁶ Heereman, 117.

⁹⁷ Ratzinger, "The Question of the Concept," 56.

⁹⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, "Jedność wiary," 155.

⁹⁹ Ratzinger, 156. Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 98–99 (on Christ's freedom and at the same time fidelity to the letter of Scripture).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, "Jedność wiary," 155–56.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ratzinger, "Teologia liturgii," 607.

¹⁰² Cf. Ratzinger, 608–9, 616. Cf. also Joseph Ratzinger, "Duch liturgii," in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Góźdz and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 98–99.

with recognizing the priesthood also stem from erroneous assumptions: Luther's fundamental decisions (the dualism of Law and grace) and the characteristics of the historical-critical method constitute a barrier to recognizing the continuity between the two testaments. Only a Christological-pneumatological interpretation of the Old Testament, seeing it as a path to Christ, allows us to see the ministries in the Church in their connection with the ministries related to the Law of Moses (*episkopos* = high priest, *presbyteros* = priest, *diakonos* = Levite), and thus affirm their priestly character, according to Benedict XVI.¹⁰³

Interestingly, Ratzinger also sees in certain beliefs of Thomas Aquinas an expression of an incorrect understanding of the relationship between the testaments – he criticizes the one-sided spiritualization of the Old Testament. In his essay on church music, he noted that Aquinas, although he recognized that synagogue singing had been transferred to the Church by Jesus and the apostles, following tradition, opted for the exclusively vocal nature of church music, because, in his opinion, musical instruments would create the appearance of a return to Judaism. Ratzinger believed that a spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament came at the cost of denying the theological significance of the literal sense as having no value for Christians.¹⁰⁴ Ratzinger sees in this approach an echo of the Platonic opposition between what is sensual (music, especially instrumental) and spiritual (word).¹⁰⁵ According to Ratzinger, the source of the Church Fathers' hostile attitude towards music was primarily "a one-sidedly 'spiritual' understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, between law and gospel."¹⁰⁶

Ratzinger maintains that "to christianize the Old Testament is not simply to spiritualize it: it also implies incarnation."¹⁰⁷ Spiritualization must also include what has been created, including the human physicality and the sensual element. Christian spiritualization remains a striving to encounter the Lord, who is Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17; 1 Cor 15:45) as the One whose body was enveloped by the life-giving power of the Spirit.¹⁰⁸ The difference between the Christian and Platonic approaches is therefore determined by Christology, and "its background is the

¹⁰³ Cf. Benedict XVI, "Katolickie kapłaństwo," 145, 154–56.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Teologiczne fundamenty muzyki kościelnej," in *Teologia liturgii: Sakramentalne podstawy życia chrześcijańskiego*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona, Opera Omnia 11 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 473–76, 488; *ST* II–II, q. 91, a. 1–2 (esp. a. 1, ad. 2, and a. 2, ad. 4).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, 476–77.

¹⁰⁶ Ratzinger, "Teologiczne fundamenty," 477.

¹⁰⁷ Ratzinger, 478.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, 478–79, 487.

theology of creation, whose inner unity is not destroyed but ratified by Christology.”¹⁰⁹ The process of spiritualization of the Old Testament “is understood properly as bringing creation into the mode of being of the Holy Spirit and its consequent transformation, exemplified in the crucified and resurrected Christ.”¹¹⁰

Thomas Aquinas on Literal and Spiritual Senses

The Interrelation Between Spiritual Sense and Literal Sense

The division into literal and spiritual senses is determined by the manner of signifying, which the author of *the Summa* explains as follows:

The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things [*voces significant res*] belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal [*sensus historicus vel litteralis*]. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification [*res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant*] is called the spiritual sense [*sensus spiritualis*], which is based on the literal, and presupposes it [*qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit*].¹¹¹

The last sentence emphasizes that reaching the spiritual sense is conditioned by interpreting reality as a figure of another reality. In addition, the primacy of the literal sense is linked to its unambiguity, which better serves to reveal what is necessary for human salvation.¹¹² It is also important that “. . . St Thomas recognises as true senses, intended by God, the literal and the spiritual senses of Scripture . . .”¹¹³ It is not a question of two parallel paths of interpretation, but

¹⁰⁹ Ratzinger, 479.

¹¹⁰ Ratzinger, 487.

¹¹¹ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10, resp. Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones de quolibet*, VII, q. 6, a. 1, resp., Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 24.1–2 (Rome: Commissio Leonina; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996) (hereafter: *Quodl.*); Thomas de Aquino, “Super Epistolam ad Galatas lectura,” cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 254, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In Gal.*).

¹¹² Cf. Ignacio M. Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense and the Spiritual Understanding of Scripture According to St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 10, no. 3 (2017): 350, 369, <https://doi.org/10.12775/bpth.2017.018>.

¹¹³ Manresa Lamarca, 351.

of the literal sense developing into spiritual senses.¹¹⁴ *Sensus spiritualis* remains inseparably linked to the literal sense: “is always founded upon the literal and proceeds from it [*semper fundatur super litteralem et procedit ex eo*].”¹¹⁵

Aquinas justifies the spiritual sense with God’s authorship of the Holy Scriptures and God’s providence governing all matters and events towards an end.¹¹⁶ The divine Author of the Holy Scriptures causes that

the things running their course signify something else [*res cursum suum peragentes aliquid aliud significant*], which is understood through a spiritual sense. Yet to order things in their course [*ordinare res in cursu suo*] that from them such a signification can be understood belongs to him alone who by his providence governs things [*qui sua providentia res gubernat*], who alone is God.¹¹⁷

As Mary Healy put it, “whereas human beings write with words, God writes with history,” acting according to a pattern whereby “the persons, objects, institutions, and events of the old covenant, interpreted properly, point forward to and illuminate the culmination of his plan in Christ.”¹¹⁸

Jeremy Holmes lists the necessary factors that determine the existence of spiritual sense: “(1) one reality must bear a likeness to another; (2) the signifying reality must have its own proper functions and place in the flow of history aside from being a sign; (3) the likeness of the one reality to the other must

¹¹⁴ Cf. Piotr Roszak, “Aquinas in Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Cauriensia* 18 (2024): 354, <https://doi.org/10.17398/2340-4256.18.351>; Piotr Roszak, “Biblical Exegesis and Theology in Thomas Aquinas: Understanding the Background of Biblical Thomism,” *Studium: Filozofia y Teología* 24, no. 48 (2021): 18.

¹¹⁵ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1, ad. 1.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Quodl.* XII, q. 3, a. 1, resp. John Webster, referring to Thomas’s understanding of providence, maintained that God in his providence caused biblical texts to serve his self-revelation – cf. John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury – T & T Clark, 2012), 15.

¹¹⁷ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 3, resp. Cf. Leo J. Elders, “Aquinas on Holy Scripture as Medium of Divine Revelation,” in *La Doctrine de la révélation divine de saint Thomas d’Aquin: Actes du Symposium sur la pensée de saint Thomas d’Aquin, tenu à Rolduc, les 4 et 5 novembre 1989*, ed. Leo J. Elders, *Studi tomistici* 37 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 144–45; Thomas Prügl, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Joseph Wawrykow and Rik van Nieuwenhove (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 393–94.

¹¹⁸ Mary Healy, “Aquinas’s Use of the Old Testament in His Commentary on Romans,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 188.

be ordained by the divine will to signify the other.”¹¹⁹ *Magister in sacra pagina* emphasizes both the factuality of Old Testament stories (literal sense) and their signifying function (figurative sense).¹²⁰ In the commentary on 1 Cor 10:6, 11, Aquinas writes that all “*these things were done in a figure of us*, not invented, but truly done,”¹²¹ and “*happened to them in figure*, of us that is: for that was the time of figures.”¹²²

Aquinas’ approach assumes a different understanding of history; different from the modern one, but consistent with the biblical message. Matthew Levering writes about the linear and participatory dimensions of history, which has its share in God’s providence, understood both metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatologically.¹²³ And, importantly for understanding the relationship between literal and spiritual senses, “the participatory indwells the linear” and is incomprehensible outside of this linear dimension.¹²⁴ It is no coincidence that St Thomas writes that “Gregory says (*Moral.* xx, 1): *Holy Writ by the manner of its speech transcends every science, because in one and the same sentence, while it describes a fact, it reveals a mystery.*”¹²⁵

Understanding history in terms of participation, which was one of the distinguishing features of medieval hermeneutics, necessarily leads to a holistic reading of the Bible.¹²⁶ In his exegesis, *magister in sacra pagina* readily refers to other biblical passages (*exponere Bibliam biblice*) that are terminologically

¹¹⁹ Jeremy Holmes, “Participation and the Meaning of Scripture,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 107.

¹²⁰ Cf. *ST* I–II, q. 102, a. 2, sed contra.

¹²¹ Thomas de Aquino, “Super primam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura,” cap. 10, lect. 2, n. 523, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In I Cor.*).

¹²² *In I Cor.*, cap. 10, lect. 2, n. 530.

¹²³ Cf. Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation*, Reading the Scriptures (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 1–3, 14, 16–17; Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 232–33, 244.

¹²⁴ Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 13.

¹²⁵ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10, sed contra. Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 3, sed contra. Cf. also Elisabeth Reinhardt, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture in the Light of His Inauguration Lectures,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 81.

¹²⁶ Cf. Piotr Roszak, “Tomizm biblijny: metoda i perspektywy,” *Biblica et Patristica Thorunien-sia* 9, no. 3 (2017): 123, <https://doi.org/10.12775/bpth.2016.024>; Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen, “Introduction,” in *Towards a Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2018), 15.

or theologically close and shed new light on the text being explained.¹²⁷ This belief in a kind of self-explanation of the Bible (*Scriptura sui interpretes*) stems from Thomas Aquinas' serious treatment of the authorship of Scripture and the history of salvation guided by him.¹²⁸ As Christopher Seitz emphasizes, canonical reading is not a theological "violence" inflicted on historical sense in order to "appropriate" it for the Christian perspective.¹²⁹

If there is ongoing debate as to whether Aquinas allowed for multiple senses in the literal sense,¹³⁰ then surely the full depth of what God intended to convey in the written word of God can only be discovered through canonical reading. Aquinas' reading *per concordantiam*¹³¹ indicates that the human author could not have been aware of everything that can be read from a given passage. However, Aquinas expressed the conviction that "... nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense."¹³²

¹²⁷ Cf. Reinhardt, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter," 84; Piotr Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel: U podstaw chrystologii soteriologicznej św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle Super Psalmos* (Poznań: W drodze; Warszawa: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2020), 49.

¹²⁸ See Piotr Roszak, "Między analizą a syntezą: Reguły egzegetyczne w Super Psalmos św. Tomasza z Akwinu," in *Wykład Księgi Psalmów: Expositio in Psalmos Davidis*, by Tomasz z Akwinu, ed. Piotr Roszak, trans. Wiesław Dąbrowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2021), 18.

¹²⁹ Cf. Christopher R. Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 154.

¹³⁰ Opposed to this view are, among others, Elders ("Aquinas on Holy Scripture," 148–49), following Mark F. Johnson ("Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 [1992]: 118–41) and Stephen E. Fowl ("The Importance of Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam et al. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006], 35–50).

¹³¹ On this practice, see Piotr Roszak, "Między analizą a syntezą," 16–17.

¹³² *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10, ad. 1. Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1, ad. 3. This statement should be nuanced—Thomas himself often refers to several passages and draws conclusions from them—this is the case, for example, in the two-stage apology of the doctrine of purgatory – cf. Zatwardnicki, "Thomas Aquinas's Apology of the Doctrine of Purgatory," *passim* (esp. 343).

Dual Authorship of Scripture

The main author (*Auctor principalis*) of Holy Scripture is God, while man remains a secondary, instrumental author (*auctor instrumentalis*).¹³³ Although the instrumentality of the hagiographer “must be qualified so as to exclude overly passive notions of instrumental agency,”¹³⁴ the causalities are not competitive, as they belong to different levels.¹³⁵ Aquinas was aware that the mind of a prophet is a fallible instrument [*mens prophetae est instrumentum deficiens*], which is why even a true prophet does not know everything, and does not even always know what the Holy Spirit intended to convey through him.¹³⁶ From the fact that God is the principal author, it follows that all the senses of Scripture are intended by God.¹³⁷

Therefore, spiritual sense does not lie on the human side of Scripture interpretation, but on the side of divine intention. Spiritual senses, as St Thomas writes in one of his quodlibets, can be found “only in that Scripture of which the Holy Spirit is author, whereas man is only an instrument, according to that line of the Psalmist: *my tongue the reed-pen of a scribe* (Ps 45:1 [44:2]).”¹³⁸ In his lecture on Ps 45(44), *magister in sacra pagina* writes that the Psalmist “first puts forward the writing of the psalm [*proponit editionem psalmi*], second, its end, at *I speak*; third, the author, at *my tongue* [*designat autorem, ibi, lingua*].”¹³⁹

In his commentary on the words “My tongue is the pen of a nimble scribe” (v. 2c), Thomas explains that “[h]ere is described the author of the psalm, the tongue [*Hic ponitur auctor psalmi qui est lingua*].” It is as if the Psalmist were saying: “It should not be understood that I made this by myself, but by the help of the Holy Spirit, who used my tongue as a scribe uses a pen.” Therefore, “the principal author of this psalm is the Holy Spirit [*principalis auctor hujus*

¹³³ See Gilbert Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas: Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 47.

¹³⁴ Bernhard Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation in the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *Engaging Catholic Doctrine: Essays in Honor of Matthew Levering*, ed. Robert Barron, Scott W. Hahn, and James R. A. Merrick (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 82.

¹³⁵ Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciół*, 121.

¹³⁶ Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 173, a. 4, resp.

¹³⁷ Cf. Albert Marie Surmanski, “The Literal Sense of Scripture in Albert and Aquinas’s Eucharistic Theology,” *Studium: Filosofia y Teología* 24, no. 48 (2021):45, <https://doi.org/10.53439/stdfy48.24.2021.39-64>.

¹³⁸ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 3, resp.

¹³⁹ *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

psalmi est Spiritus Sanctus]" (cf. 2 Sam 23:2; 2 Pet 1:21), who speaks through the inspired author "as through an instrument [*quasi per instrumentum*]." ¹⁴⁰

The psalmist becomes the stylus "of *a scribe who writes swiftly*, the Holy Spirit who writes swiftly in the heart of man." Unlike people who seek partial wisdom through long study, "[t]hose who possess knowledge through divine revelation [*Illi qui habent scientiam per revelationem divinam*] are filled with wisdom immediately, like those who are immediately filled with the Holy Spirit" (cf. Acts 2:2; Ps 147[146]:15; Ps 148:5). ¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Thomas believes that the entire interpretation of the Psalm to date fits within the literal sense. ¹⁴²

The commentator also provides a spiritual interpretation, referring to Dionysius (actually Pseudo-Dionysius). According to Thomas, "[f]irst, his emanation is described; second, his virtue, at *I speak*, third, his work, at *tongue*." ¹⁴³ The psalmist would describe the procession of the Son from the Father as a kind of emanation out of the fullness of the divine nature (cf. John 3:35), as well as the manner of emanation – from the heart of the Father (cf. Ps 110[109]:3), that is, neither from nothing (*ex nullo = ex nihilo*), since the Son is not a creature, nor from another essence (*essentia*), because then the Son would be a God other than the Father. The psalmist would also point to the property of the one proceeding as the Word (cf. John 1:1) and his perfection as possessing the full goodness of the divinity (cf. Luke 18:19). ¹⁴⁴

References to Ps 45(44) and Ps 110(109) also appear in St Thomas' commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews. Commenting on Heb 1:5 (= Ps 2:7), Aquinas identifies the manner of origin of the Son, the uniqueness of his sonship, and its eternity. ¹⁴⁵ As for the manner of origin, the commentator explains that God, being spirit (cf. John 4:24), does "not engender in a carnal way, but in a spiritual and intellectual way [*spiritualiter et intellectualiter*]. But the intellect, when it speaks, engenders a word, which is its concept [*quod est conceptus eius*]." St Thomas believes that "[c]onsequently, for the Father's intellect to speak is to conceive the Word in his heart [*in corde verbum concipere*]" (cf. Ps 44:2; Job 33:14; Sir 24:5). ¹⁴⁶ The uniqueness of sonship has its source in the fact that "it

¹⁴⁰ *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁴¹ *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁴² Cf. *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁴³ *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Thomas de Aquino, "Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos lectura," cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953), 125–61 (hereafter: *In Heb.*).

¹⁴⁶ *In Heb.* cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49.

is his unique property to be the natural Son of God,” and those to whom the word of God was addressed are called sons of God (cf. John 10:35) only because “they partake of the word of God . . . ; but Christ is the Word itself [*Christus est ipsum verbum*].”¹⁴⁷ Discussing eternity, Thomas points out that the juxtaposition of the past (“have I begotten”) and the present (“today”) expresses both the perfection of begetting (is always complete) and the begotten Son, and the fact that engendering is always going on (cf. Mic 5:2; Ps 109:3).¹⁴⁸

Returning to Psalm 45(44), Aquinas believes that verse 2b (“I sing”) reveals the virtue of Christ, because it means that the Father does everything through his Word (cf. John 1:3). The Son would therefore be the tongue of the Father and the pen of the writer (v. 2c).¹⁴⁹ “The operation of a tongue is that through it the wisdom of the heart is passed on to others,” and “the pen signifies that wisdom which is in the heart is passed on into sensible material, like parchment.” God speaks, explains *magister in sacra pagina*, “when he pours his wisdom into rational minds” (cf. Ps 85[84]:9), and this is called the word, “since through it comes every illumination” (cf. John 1:4). In turn, God writes, because “since he imprints the judgments of his wisdom in rational creatures” (cf. Rom 1:20; Sir 1:10). Ultimately, “the pen is the Word of God.”¹⁵⁰

Aquinas seems to suggest here an analogy between the eternal Word of God and the inspired word of God associated with it. On the one hand, the Son is the language of the Father, and on the other hand, the words of the Psalmist are also the language in which God speaks.¹⁵¹ Both senses, literal and spiritual, are part of the participation of the word of God in the Word of God, and therefore have a Christological reference. This could explain why medieval thinker see the Christological meaning of the Old Testament even where they do not make a spiritual (figurative) reading of a given passage.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *In Heb.* cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49. Conversely, only God is truly Father – cf. Thomas de Aquino, “Super Epistolam ad Ephesios lectura,” cap. 3, lect. 4, n. 169, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *In Heb.* cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 49.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *In Ps.* 44, n. 451. Thomas defends the truth that the Father expressed himself and creation through the same Word in *Quodl.* IV, q. 4, a. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *In Ps.* 44, n. 451.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciół*, 117. Cf. also DV 13, which speaks of the analogy between the Incarnation and the expression of the word of God in human language.

Spiritual Things in the Form of Material Things

Biblical language must necessarily be analogical, as it refers to knowledge that exceeds the possibility of expression. The ultimate sense of Scripture will always be deeper and richer than any human author could comprehend (and express).¹⁵² On the other hand, it is precisely the poverty of human language that allows God to express himself through Scripture and draw to the revealed reality. Bernhard Blankenhorn points out that it is no coincidence that the thirteenth article of the twelfth question of *the Summa*, in which “Thomas’s primary concern . . . is the power and limits of biblical and theological language about God,” follows the discussion of the beatific vision and precedes the question concerning the names of God.¹⁵³ Earlier, Aquinas responded to the objection concerning the use of metaphors in Scripture that seem to be appropriate for the lowest (poetry) rather than the highest teaching (*sacra doctrina*).¹⁵⁴

Thomas believes that “[i]t is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things [*divina et spiritualia sub similitudine corporalium*]” or “under the likeness of material things [*sub metaphoris corporalium*],” because “all our knowledge originates from the senses.”¹⁵⁵ Not only is “[t]he ray of divine revelation [*radius divinae revelationis*] not extinguished by the sensible imagery wherewith it is veiled,” but in this way “raises them to the knowledge of truths; and through those to whom the revelation has been made others also may receive instruction in these matters.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² See Elders, “Aquinas on Holy Scripture,” 151.

¹⁵³ Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 65 (paraphrase), 68 (quote).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *ST I*, q. 1, a. 9, vid. quod. Theology and poetry, despite all their differences, have a certain common denominator, as pointed out by Dahan: they transcend the limits of human reason and therefore must go beyond rational language and use *modus poeticus*. This mode of expression includes metaphor, symbol, or what Thomas covers with the broader term *similitudo*—which, as the scholar points out, refers to comparison, analogy, or simply similarity—cf. Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas,” 64.

¹⁵⁵ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 9, resp. Cf. Per Erik Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 58; Mauricio Beuchot, “Hermeneutics in Medieval Thought,” trans. Juan Tubert-Oklander, in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (New York: Routledge, 2015), 30.

¹⁵⁶ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 2. Cf. *ST I–II*, q. 101, a. 2, resp. Thomas refers to Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, “De coelesti hierarchia,” I, 2, in *De coelesti hierarchia: De ecclesiastica hierarchia: De mystica theologia: Epistulae*, in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991).

Aquinas points out that “those things that are taught metaphorically in one part of Scripture, in other parts are taught more openly [*Unde ea quae in uno loco Scripturae traduntur sub metaphoris, in aliis locis expressius exponuntur*] . . .”¹⁵⁷ He also cites the arguments put forward by Dionysius (Pseudo-Dionysius), according to whom more common figures free the human mind from error in a more efficient way, better correspond to the knowledge of God in this life (we know rather what he is not than what he is), and also hide divine things from the unworthy.¹⁵⁸

The literal sense, as understood by Thomas, is not the literalist sense, but the sense signified by a particular “letter” of Scripture.¹⁵⁹ As the author of the *Summa* writes, “. . . the literal sense is that which the author intends [*quem auctor intendit*], and since the author of Holy Writ is God . . .”¹⁶⁰ The parabolic (figurative) sense was classified by Aquinas as literal sense, “for by words things are signified properly and figuratively [*per voces significatur aliquid proprie, et aliquid figurative*]”; in the latter case, it is not the figure, but what it represents that is the literal sense.¹⁶¹ The proper sense, adds Ignacio M. Manresa Lamarca, conveys the truth more clearly, but is abstract and less likely to inspire love, while figurative language is more touching, although it carries the risk of reducing the message to human proportions.¹⁶² *Modus parabolicus*, although it conveys the teaching in a form adapted to the recipient, requires further interpretation, which, although it concerns spiritual matters, will also be covered by the literal sense (Jesus explained the parables to his disciples in private).¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ ST I, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 2. Cf. also Jean-Pierre Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, vol. 1 of *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 58; Persson, *Sacra Doctrina*, 57; Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciół*, 44.

¹⁵⁸ ST I, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 3. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, “De coelesti hierarchia,” II, 2 and II, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Bruno John Clifton, “Discerning the Literal Sense: Bringing together Biblical Scholarship and Dogmatic Theology,” *Nova et vetera*, English Edition 19, no. 1 (2021): 253, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2021.0012>. Ratzinger believed that even today “. . . the exegetical maxim of Thomas Aquinas is very much to the point: ‘The task of the good interpreter is not to consider words, but sense’” – Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 26 (internal citation from: *In Mt*, cap. 27, lect. 1, n. 2321).

¹⁶⁰ ST I, q. 1, a. 10, resp.

¹⁶¹ ST I, q. 1, a. 10, ad. 3. Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Saint Thomas and His Sources,” trans. David L. Augustine, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4; Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas,” 61–62; Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciół*, 44; Beuchot, “Hermeneutics in Medieval Thought,” 30.

¹⁶² Cf. Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense,” 361.

¹⁶³ Cf. Dahan, “Thomas Aquinas,” 62–64; ST III, q. 42, a. 3, resp.: “Et sic Christus quaedam turbis loquebatur in occulto, parabolis utens ad annuntianda spiritualia mysteria, ad quae

As Olivier-Thomas Venard notes, for St Thomas there is no significant difference between designating with proper and figurative words, as both refer by way of a sign to the reality they denote, the mystery of which cannot be fully understood. Created reality itself carries a certain meaning and can become a figure of another reality. Because the cause transcends the effect it causes, Aquinas seeks more in the biblical word than the contemporary mentality allows.¹⁶⁴

Thomas believed that the natural way of knowing God is possible through negation, affirmation, and exaltation (*via negativa*, *via affirmativa*, *via eminentiae*).¹⁶⁵ Just as grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, so supernatural knowledge remains in continuity with natural knowledge and perfects it.¹⁶⁶ Knowledge through natural reason starts from images taken from sensually knowable objects and abstracted intellectual concepts. Revelation, thanks to grace, perfects both.¹⁶⁷ As Thomas writes, “the intellect’s natural light is strengthened by the infusion of gratuitous light,” and sometimes, e.g., in prophetic visions, “the images in the human imagination are divinely formed, so as to express divine things better than those do which we receive from sensible objects . . .”¹⁶⁸ Cognition intensified by grace offers a fuller knowledge of God; Aquinas assumes *triplex via* in supernatural cognition. One should also speak of an indirect nature in the case of revealed knowledge (Christ’s deeds as effects subject to the senses, Christ’s words giving knowledge of God through analogy and metaphor).¹⁶⁹

Holy Scripture and the Missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit

It is important to emphasize the connection between revelation (and therefore also Scripture) and the missions of the Divine Persons, which was significant

capienda non erant idonei vel digni. . . . Harum tamen parabolarum apertam et nudam veritatem dominus discipulis exponebat, per quos deveniret ad alios, qui essent idonei . . .”
¹⁶⁴ See Olivier-Thomas Venard, “Metaphor in Aquinas: Between *Necessitas* and *Delectatio*,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 222, 224–26.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Thomas de Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q. 7, a. 5, ad. 2, vol. 2 of *Quaestiones disputatae* (Taurini: Marietti, 1931); International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (2011), no. 97, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 65–66.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *ST I*, q. 12, a. 13, resp.

¹⁶⁸ *ST I*, q. 12, a. 13, resp.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 66–67.

for St Thomas. The Son and the Holy Spirit act *ad extra* in a way that reflects their eternal origin and personal identity in the life of the Trinity *ad intra*.¹⁷⁰ As Aquinas explains, the mission of the Divine Persons presupposes “the procession of origin from the sender” and “a new way of existing in another.”¹⁷¹ The ultimate goal of the mission of the Divine Persons is to reveal the Person through whom a given Divine Person was sent. In his commentary on the fourth Gospel, Thomas writes that “[i]t was appropriate for the one baptized, for as the Son, existing by the Father, manifests the Father . . . , so the Holy Spirit, existing by the Son, manifests the Son” (cf. John 17:6; 16:14).¹⁷²

The Holy Spirit will therefore, according to Sebastian Walshe, reveal the Truth that is the Word of the Father, for the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son (cf. John 14:26). As a result of the Holy Spirit’s action, the Incarnation takes place and inspired writings directing us to him are created.¹⁷³ Aquinas emphasized the connection between the written word of God and the living Word of God:

For the word of God leads to Christ, since Christ himself is the natural Word of God. But every word inspired by God [*a Deo inspiratum*] is a certain participated likeness of that Word. Therefore, since every participated likeness leads to its original [*principium*], it is clear that every word inspired by God leads to Christ.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Blankenhorn, 71–76. Thomas assumes a connection between economy (*oikonomia*) and theology (*theologia*, Latin *dispensatio*). The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit reveal the Holy Trinity, and the Son, as the Word of the Father, is the perfect expression of the Father, the “face of the Father” and the “doctrine of the Father” – cf. Gilles Emery, “Theologia and Dispensatio: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas’s Trinitarian Theology,” *The Thomist* 74, no. 4 (2010): 535, 539, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2010.0033>; Thomas de Aquino, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 101, ed. Raffaele Cai (Taurini: Marietti, 1972) (hereafter: *Super Ioann.*) (“... your Son, who is your face, by whom you are manifested [*Filii tui, qui est facies tua, qua manifestaris*]”); *Super Ioann.*, cap. 7, lect. 2, n. 1037 (“... the doctrine of the Father is the Son himself [*doctrina Patris sit ipse Filius*].”)

¹⁷¹ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 1, resp.

¹⁷² *Super Ioann.*, cap. 1, lect. 14, n. 268. Cf. Blankenhorn, “Locating a Theology of Revelation,” 75.

¹⁷³ Cf. Sebastian Walshe, “Trinitarian Principles of Biblical Inspiration,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 14, no. 3 (2016): 975–76. The order of the missions—first the Son, then the Holy Spirit—also explains why the visible mission of the Holy Spirit could not take place in the Old Testament – cf. *ST I*, q. 43, a. 7, ad. 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 5, lect. 6, n. 820. Cf. Walshe, “Trinitarian Principles,” 977–78; Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel*, 43.

In Aquinas' trinitarian theology, "the Son is the Word, not any sort of word, but one Who breathes forth Love." His mission must be analogous: "[t]hus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love . . ." ¹⁷⁵ Scripture inspired by the Spirit and useful for salvation should be understood in a way that gives rise to love and promotes mercy, in accordance with the conviction already expressed by St. Augustine. ¹⁷⁶ Manresa Lamarca distinguishes then three degrees of acceptance of the word of God: the transition from the letter of the text to its meaning; the transition from meaning to truth; and the transition from truth to beloved truth. Only *verbum spirans amorem* becomes the beginning of eternal life and the means to achieve it; it makes one like the Word of God and gives one to the Divine Persons. ¹⁷⁷ "Scripture itself," Walshe insists, "reflects the inner life of God and is, by that very fact, more able to lead those who meditate upon it back to that inner life of the Trinity that is the beatitude of every rational creature." ¹⁷⁸

The author of the fourth Gospel writes that in the Word of God "was life, and this life was the light of the human race, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4–5). According to Thomas, this statement can be explained "first, according to the influx of natural knowledge; second, according to the communication of grace." ¹⁷⁹ Even natural knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit and is a certain likeness of divine truth imprinted on the human mind (cf. Ps 4:7). ¹⁸⁰ All the more so in knowledge through grace, the Word is the light of believers. ¹⁸¹ The light of men is the life of the Word,

¹⁷⁵ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 5, ad. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Walshe, "Trinitarian Principles," 981; Aurelius Augustinus, "De doctrina christiana libri quatuor," I, XXXV, 39 – I, XXXVI, 41, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 34 (Paris: Migne, 1865).

¹⁷⁷ Manresa Lamarca, "The Literal Sense," 357.

¹⁷⁸ Walshe, "Trinitarian Principles," 982.

¹⁷⁹ *Super Ioann.*, chap. 1, lect. 3, n. 95.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Super Ioann.*, cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 101–3; *Quodl.* VIII, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, "General Audience *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (2)," June 16, 2010, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100616.html: "The trust with which St Thomas endows these two instruments of knowledge faith and reason may be traced back to the conviction that both stem from the one source of all truth, the divine *Logos*, which is active in both contexts, that of Creation and that of redemption." *Radical Orthodoxy* draws attention to the inseparability of knowledge through faith and reason, understood as participation in the divine mind; supporters of this movement emphasize that revelation is an intensification of human understanding – cf. Rupert Shortt, "Radical Orthodoxy: A Conversation," in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (New York: Routledge, 2009), 39; John Milbank, "Knowledge:

“[f]or the Son of God assumed flesh and came into the world to illumine all men with grace and truth” (cf. John 18:37; 9:5). According to Aquinas, “these two have come to us through Christ: life, through a participation in grace, ***grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*** (John 1:17); and light, through a knowledge of truth and wisdom.”¹⁸²

In knowing God and salvation, the Holy Scriptures (cf. 2 Tim 3:14–16), written under inspiration that intensifies human knowledge (cf. 2 Pet 1:21), play a unique role compared to other literature. As Thomas explained in his lecture on the Second Letter to Timothy, “it has a special place above all writings, because others are given through human reason [*aliae sunt traditae per rationem humanam*], while Sacred Scripture is divine [*sacra autem Scriptura est divina*]” (cf. 2 Pet 1:21; Job 32:8).¹⁸³ Through Scripture, God works in a unique way:

... God works in two ways: either immediately, as his own work, when he works miracles [*immediate, ut proprium opus, sicut miracula*]; or mediately, by using secondary causes, as in the works of nature [*mediantibus causis inferioribus, ut opera naturalia*]. . . . And so in man he instructs the intellect both immediately by the Sacred Writings [*immediate per sacras litteras*], and mediately by other writings [*mediate per alias scripturas*].¹⁸⁴

These holy Scriptures, as Thomas emphasized earlier, quoting the words of Jesus, bear witness to him (cf. John 5:39). Therefore, the inspired writings teach about salvation “only ***through the faith which is in Christ*** Jesus.”¹⁸⁵ This means that for the Angelic Doctor, a Christological reading of Scripture is what matters. As Ratzinger wrote, for Thomas, the principle of the comprehensibility of history and its unity is the action of God, or more precisely, the historical event of Christ. Therefore, the whole of history and the whole of Scripture should be seen in the light of Christ.¹⁸⁶ Holmes writes about “a complex unity of anticipatory participation in the mystery of Christ,” and even about “the

The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 2002), 24; John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (New York: Routledge, 2001), 19–59.

¹⁸² *Super Ioann.*, cap. 1, lect. 3, n. 104.

¹⁸³ Thomas de Aquino, “Super secundam Epistolam ad Timotheum lectura,” cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 125, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In II Tim.*).

¹⁸⁴ *In II Tim.* cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 126.

¹⁸⁵ *In II Tim.* cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 123.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation,” 24.

ontologically grounded likeness of biblical realities to the mysteries of Christ's first and second comings . . ."¹⁸⁷ Old Testament texts should be interpreted as pointing to Christ (literal non-Christological sense), or as speaking directly about him (literal Christological sense¹⁸⁸), or at least as capable of spiritual interpretation.

Shadow and Image Versus Glorious Reality

Blankenhorn states that "[f]or Aquinas, it is crucial to forge the right link between eschatology and revelation."¹⁸⁹ The author of the *Summa* begins with the ultimate form of knowing God in glory, and then moves on to lower forms.¹⁹⁰ If in heaven the minds are enlightened by the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*), then in this world God grants the gift of the Holy Spirit in the form of a special prophetic light (*lumen propheticum*),¹⁹¹ writes Nicholas Healy. Inner and mental light elevates the mind to the knowledge of things that the intellect cannot reach with its natural light.¹⁹² Thomas, referring to 1 Cor 13:8–10, considers

¹⁸⁷ Holmes, "Participation and the Meaning of Scripture," 113. On the anticipatory or "economical" participation of Old Covenant persons and events in the mystery of Christ, cf. Francis Martin, "Revelation and Understanding Scripture: Reflections on the Teaching of Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 13, no. 1 (2015): 253–72; Francis Martin, *Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006), 274.

¹⁸⁸ Aquinas, for example, includes the Christological interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23) – cf. Nicholas M. Healy, "Introduction," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark International, 2006), 16. Cf. also Timothy F. Bellamah, "The Interpretation of a Contemplative: Thomas' Commentary *Super Iohannem*," in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 250.

¹⁸⁹ Blankenhorn, "Locating a Theology of Revelation," 62.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Blankenhorn, 63.

¹⁹¹ Cf. N. M. Healy, "Introduction," 13. Cf. also Artur Andrzejuk, *Teologia trynitarna i chrystologia*, vol. 1 of *Tomasz z Akwinu jako teolog* (Warszawa: Naukowe Towarzystwo Tomistyczne, 2022), 41.

¹⁹² Cf. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, cap. 154, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita, 13–15 (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918–1930) (hereafter: *ScG*); Elders, "Aquinas on Holy Scripture," 132. Cf. also *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 1, resp.; *ST* II–II, q. 176, a. 2, resp. ("... donum prophetiae consistit in ipsa illuminatione mentis ad cognoscendum intelligibilem veritatem"); Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 12, a. 2, ad 11, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M.

prophecy to be partial, imperfect knowledge that will disappear when God's revelation reaches perfection in the heavenly homeland. In other words, the gift of prophetic revelation is an imperfect participation in glorious revelation.¹⁹³

This kind of revelation on earth, writes Leo Elders, has been given to prophets and apostles, who pass it on to others, which also takes place through the writing down of revelation (Scripture).¹⁹⁴ "For God reveals in order that it be announced to others" (cf. Jer 1:9).¹⁹⁵ Aquinian eschatology, as Blankenhorn notes, "helps to draw out the limits of the biblical word, while also seeing that word as a foretaste of glory."¹⁹⁶ Sacred Scripture, or more broadly *sacra doctrina*, is a partial participation in the beatific knowledge of the saints.¹⁹⁷ Aquinas writes explicitly about this: "... sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed."¹⁹⁸

The distinction between revelation in the future and present eon is of profound importance for understanding biblical senses. Aquinas writes:

Now this spiritual sense has a threefold division [*sensus spiritualis trifariam dividitur*]. For as the Apostle says (Heb 7:19), *the Old Law is a figure of the New Law* [*lex vetus figura est novae legis*], and Dionysius says (*Coel. Hier.* i) *the New Law itself is a figure of the future glory* [*est figura futurae gloriae*]. Again, in the New Law, whatever our Head has done is a type of what we ought to do.¹⁹⁹

The author of the *Summa* does not actually quote Heb 7:19, but Heb 10:1; in the commentary to this passage there is a reference to Heb 7:19 – both passages complement each other.

Edita, 22.1–3 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae; Editori di San Tommaso, 1970–1976) (hereafter: *De veritate*) ("... omnia illa quorum cognitio potest esse utilis ad salutem est materia prophetiae, sive sint praeterita, sive praesentia sive futura, sive etiam aeterna, sive necessaria, sive contingentia. And those things which cannot pertain to salvation are foreign to the matter of prophecy").

¹⁹³ Cf. *ST* II–II, q. 171, a. 4 ad 2; Elders, "Aquinas on Holy Scripture," 133.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Elders, 133.

¹⁹⁵ *In I Cor.*, cap. 14, lect. 1, n. 812.

¹⁹⁶ Blankenhorn, "Locating a Theology of Revelation," 64–65.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Blankenhorn, 58, 65. The author draws on his monograph: Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 296–99.

¹⁹⁸ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 2, resp.

¹⁹⁹ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10, resp. Cf. *In Gal.*, cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 254; *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, resp. and ad. 4; Torrell, "Saint Thomas and His Sources," 4; Reinhardt, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter," 30.

The Old Law relates to future (heavenly) goods “as a shadow to a body [*sicut umbra ad corpus*], but the new law as an image [*sicut imago*].” The New Law presents future goods more clearly, because, first, “express mention and a promise of good things to come are found in the words of the New Testament,” and second, “because the power of the New Testament consists in charity, which is the fulfillment of the law. And although this charity is imperfect by reason of the faith in which it inheres, it is, nevertheless, similar to the charity of heaven.” Therefore, the New Law is referred to as the law of love and “it is called an image [*imago*], because it has an expressed likeness to the goods to come [*similitudinem expressam bonorum futurorum*].” On the other hand, the Old Law, Aquinas continues, “represented it by carnal things; hence it is called a shadow [*umbra*] This therefore is the condition of the Old Testament, that it was but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities [*umbram futurorum, non rerum imaginem*].”²⁰⁰

As Thomas states, referring to Heb 7:19, “that perfection is reserved for the new law [*perfectio reservatur novae legi*] and consists in charity [*quae consistit in charitate*], which is the bond of perfection (Col:14).”²⁰¹ The law did not bring anyone to justice or to their homeland [*nec scilicet iustitiae, nec patriae*], and it became perfect through Christ [*perfecta fuit per Christum*].²⁰² People separated by sin may come closer to God thanks to the new priest who takes away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29; Rom 5:1–2).²⁰³

Also interesting is Thomas’ commentary on Col 2:17, in which the *magister in sacra pagina* explains that Christians cannot be condemned for not observing the precepts of the Law concerning eating, drinking, or celebrating holidays.

For these **are a shadow of things to come** [*umbrae futurorum*], that is, of Christ. And when the truth comes, the shadow should cease [*debet cessare umbra*], **but the body is of Christ**. When someone sees a shadow, he expects the body or substantial reality to follow. Now the legal observances of the law were the shadow going before Christ [*Legalia autem sunt umbra praecedens Christum*], and they signified his coming [*et eum figurabant venturum*]; and so Paul says, **the body**, that is, the truth of the thing, belongs to Christ, but the shadow belongs to the law [*veritas rei pertinet ad Christum; sed umbra ad legem*].²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ In *Heb.* cap. 10, lect. 1, n. 480.

²⁰¹ In *Heb.* cap. 10, lect. 1, n. 480.

²⁰² In *Heb.* cap. 7, lect. 3, n. 362.

²⁰³ In *Heb.* cap. 7, lect. 3, n. 363.

²⁰⁴ Thomas de Aquino, “Super Epistolam ad Colossenses lectura,” cap. 2, lect. 4, n. 121, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In Col.*).

In this commentary, the shadow appears directly as the shadow of the Body of Christ, and therefore the future events foretold by the commandments of the Law are the very Person of Christ. The New Law would therefore be an image of the final encounter with God in glory, which, however, already in this world, by virtue of the hypostatic union, is an encounter with the Word, in whom “dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily” (Col 2:9). Aquinas emphasizes that Christ, who dwelt in the Old Law in the manner of a shadow, in the New Law “dwells bodily, that is, really and truly [*inhabitabat corporaliter, id est realiter et secundum veritatem*].”²⁰⁵ God dwelt in the souls of the saints through love and knowledge, “but God dwells in Christ by assuming a man into the unity of his person,” and therefore “his flesh and mind are indwelt because both are united to the Word” (cf. John 1:14).²⁰⁶

In temporality, divine truth, as Thomas maintains following Dionysius, must be viewed in the form of figures accessible to the senses. However, the difference between the Old and New Laws is significant: in the Old Law, divine truth itself was not yet revealed, and the path leading to it had not yet been opened (cf. Heb 9:8). Therefore, the external worship of the Old Law remained a symbol not only of the truth that would be revealed in heaven, but also of Christ as the way leading to heavenly revelation. In the New Law, however, the way has already been revealed, and only the truth of glory needs to be symbolically foretold. According to the Universal Doctor, this is what the apostle had in mind when he wrote about the Law having a shadow and not the image of things.²⁰⁷

One can perceive, as David C. Steinmetz does, the three spiritual senses of Scripture in connection with theological virtues: the allegorical meaning would correspond to the virtue of faith, the tropological to the virtue of love, and the anagogical to the virtue of hope.²⁰⁸ The Holy Spirit given to believers as a guarantee (*arrabôn*, pignus) (cf. 2 Cor 5:5) offers the certainty of their future inheritance (cf. Eph 1:13–14), “because the Holy Spirit has as much value as heavenly glory.” The difference lies in the manner of possession: “now we have him as a surety of obtaining that glory; but in heaven we shall have him as something now possessed by us. For then we shall have him perfectly, but now imperfectly.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ *In Col.*, cap. 2, lect. 2, n. 97.

²⁰⁶ *In Col.*, cap. 2, lect. 2, n. 97.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *ST* I–II, q. 101, a. 2, resp.

²⁰⁸ Cf. David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *Ex Auditu* 1 (1985): 76.

²⁰⁹ Thomas de Aquino, “Super secundam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura,” cap. 5, lect. 2, n. 161, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953) (hereafter: *In II Cor.*).

Christological Origins of Spiritual Senses

The division into literal and spiritual senses is consistent with Scripture and even has its roots in Jesus' use of Scripture to make Christological interpretations of the Old Testament (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39), which was followed by the early Church.²¹⁰ Per Erik Persson argues that for Thomas, the binary division is fundamental, within which Thomas makes a further distinction:

... for Thomas scripture is to be interpreted in a twofold rather than a fourfold 'sense'. He refers constantly to a *significatio per voces* and a *significatio per res*, a distinction which corresponds in the conventional terminology to the *sensus historicus vel litteralis* on the one hand and the *sensus mysticus seu spiritualis* on the other. The other three current interpretations, *sensus allegoricus*, *sensus moralis*, and *sensus anagogicus*, are special instances of the spiritual sense.²¹¹

Based on Aquinas' work,²¹² the following classification of the senses of Scripture can be proposed:

1. Literal sense (when revelation is made through words).
2. Spiritual sense (when revelation is made through figures of things; the Old Law is here a figure of the New Law):
 - 2.1. When spiritual sense serves righteous action:
 - 2.1.1. Moral sense, also known as tropological sense (applies to situations in which the deeds performed by Christ and the things

²¹⁰ Cf. Surmanski, "The Literal Sense of Scripture," 41; Wilhelmus G. B. M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Publications of the Aquinas Instituut te Utrecht. New Series 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 80.

²¹¹ Persson, *Sacra Doctrina*, 54. As Valkenberg has shown, for Thomas as a commentator on Scripture (e.g., the Gospel of John), the most important thing is the difference between the literal and spiritual (or mystical) senses, which is why *the magister in sacra pagina* writes about the meaning *secundum litteram* and *secundum mysterium* – Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 171–72 (together with n. 96).

²¹² Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, resp. and ad. 4; *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10, resp.; Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, prol. 5, resp., ed. Pierre Mandonnet, vol. 1–4, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. Edita (Parisiis: P. Lethielleux, 1929–1947); *In Gal.*, cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 254. Cf. also *In II Tim.* cap. 3, lect. 3., n. 127: "Consequently, there are four effects of Sacred Scripture [*Sic ergo quadruplex est effectus sacrae Scripturae*], namely, to teach the truth, to reject falsity, as far as the speculative intellect is concerned; to snatch evil and induce to good, as far as the practical intellect is concerned."

that took place in Christ as the Head or that signified Christ are signs of what the members of Christ's Body should do).

2.2. When spiritual sense serves true faith:

- 2.2.1. allegorical sense, i.e., typological (in the case where the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament; things of the Old Testament are interpreted with Christ and the Church in mind)²¹³;
- 2.2.2. anagogical sense (in cases where both testaments signify the triumphant Church; the New Law is a figure of future glory; things that were accomplished in Christ or signified him signify those things that are in glory).²¹⁴

For Aquinas, Christ is "the center and summit of Sacred Scripture and ultimately the reason for its unity," writes Elisabeth Reinhardt.²¹⁵ And even, it should be added, of the entire history of salvation, including that "after Christ" (the time of the Church on its way to glory). As Blankenhorn notes, "Revelation means that Christ the teacher, by all that he said, did, and suffered, illumines his disciples on their eschatological end and the Christ-like virtues needed to obtain that end."²¹⁶ St Thomas, presenting the mysteries of the Savior (and Revealer), bases himself on the axiom: *Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*. However, the deeds themselves remain insufficient; they fulfill their epiphanic function only in connection with the words of Christ, which take precedence in Christ's revelation.²¹⁷

As Thomas Joseph White has shown, whose reflections are in line with the Christological principles articulated in the *Summa*, Christ's earthly life can reveal the Father because the prophetic knowledge in Christ's human consciousness remained connected with the beatific vision. Thanks to this, Jesus as a human being knew (and not only believed) at every moment who he was and what he wanted as the Son in unity with the Father (cf. John 5:18–19), and

²¹³ Interestingly, Aquinas justifies only this meaning with a biblical reference – cf. *In Gal.*, cap. 4, lect. 7, n. 247, 253–54.

²¹⁴ Following Dionysius, Thomas writes about the intermediate state of the Church – between the state of the Old Testament Synagogue and the state of the Church triumphant: "for the Old Testament was a figure of the New, and Old and New simultaneously are a figure of heavenly things" (allegorical sense) and "simultaneously signify the Church triumphant, and thus it is the anagogical sense" – *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, resp.

²¹⁵ Cf. Reinhardt, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter," 88; Thomas de Aquino, "Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura," cap. 1, lect. 2, n. 29, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. Raffaele Cai, vol. 1 (Taurini: Marietti, 1953): "Convenienter autem Filius Dei materia Sanctorum Scripturarum esse dicitur . . ."

²¹⁶ Blankenhorn, "Locating a Theology of Revelation," 57.

²¹⁷ Cf. Blankenhorn, 83–85. Cf. *ST III*, q. 40, a. 1, ad. 3: "... *actio Christi fuit nostra instructio*."

thus he could reveal the divine will. The grace of the beatific vision allowed the Incarnate One to understand his identity as the Son, and therefore did not bring awareness of the Trinity as separate from himself.²¹⁸ In this way, Christ's *gesta et verba* become a revelation of God and at the same time point to the full revelation available to people in glory.

Taking all this into account, we can recapitulate the three spiritual senses of the New Testament based on their relationship to Christ (and the Church he founded):

- Things concerning Christ as Head also concern the members of the Body of Christ, “because the true body of Christ itself, and those things which are in it, have been borne by figure of the mystical body and of those which are borne in it. From Christ himself we ought also to assume an example of living; in him also future glory is foreshadowed for us.” Therefore, “those things which according to the letter are told concerning Christ the head can be expounded allegorically as referring to his mystical body, and morally as referring to our acts which ought to be informed according to him, and anagogically inasmuch as the path of glory has been demonstrated for us in Christ himself.”²¹⁹ Thus, “so far as the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do, there is the moral sense. But so far as they signify what relates to eternal glory, there is the anagogical sense.”²²⁰ According to Aquinas, “just as the allegorical sense pertains to Christ according as he is head of the Church militant justifying her and infusing grace, so also the anagogical sense pertains to him according as he is head of the Church triumphant glorifying her.”²²¹
- What is said about the Church in the literal sense is not interpreted allegorically, but morally and anagogically.²²²
- What is moral in the literal sense is interpreted only anagogically.²²³
- „Whereas those which according to the literal sense pertain to the state of glory are accustomed to be expounded by no other sense, since they themselves are not a figure of other things, but are figured by all other things.”²²⁴

²¹⁸ Cf. Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 5 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 236–74.

²¹⁹ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

²²⁰ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 10, resp.

²²¹ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 4.

²²² Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

²²³ Cf. *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

²²⁴ *Quodl.* VII, q. 6, a. 2, ad. 5.

Only in cases where the New Testament speaks of glorious realities can one rely on the literal sense. In all other cases, one must seek the spiritual sense, and only now does the statement that the spiritual sense is based on the literal sense take on its full force. As Manresa Lamarca rightly emphasizes, “the literal sense of the New Testament is the sense that, above all, God wanted to communicate, as it contains the fullness of revelation and thus opens true understanding of the literal sense of all Scripture, and of its spiritual senses. Let us now look at this.”²²⁵

Sensus Carnalis Versus Sensus Spiritualis

As Benedict XVI recalled in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Thomas, following Augustine, “insists that ‘the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith’” (VD 29). Aquinas believed that the Law of the Gospel is primarily the grace of the Holy Spirit given to believers internally and justifying them. A secondary component of the New Law are the teachings of faith [*documenta fidei*] and the commandments which direct human affections and human actions, which cannot justify by themselves. *Magister in sacra pagina* interprets the words of the Apostle recorded in 2 Cor 3:6 as follows: the letter is what is written and exists outside of people (including the Gospel!), and the spirit is healing grace. God wrote the Old Law on stone tablets, and the New Law, through the Spirit of the living God, on the living tablets of hearts (cf. 2 Cor 3:3).²²⁶

This statement should be applied to the understanding of Scripture, especially the New Testament. The literal sense of the New Testament will refer to the fulfillment of figures. An example here can be “the relation between corporeal and spiritual food,” manna and the Eucharist (cf. John 6:27), which, according to Timothy F. Bellamah, “corresponds to the relation between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture.”²²⁷ The literal sense of the New Testament must be preserved, but the spiritual reality to which it refers should be understood in accordance with that spiritual reality. According to Thomas, Jesus’ words in John 6:63

²²⁵ Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense,” 351.

²²⁶ Cf. *ST* I–II, q. 106, art. 2, resp. and ad. 3. Cf. also *ST* III, q. 42, a. 4.

²²⁷ Cf. Bellamah, “Interpretation of a Contemplative,” 252.

can be understood in two senses [*secundum duplicem sensum*]: in a spiritual way, and in a material way [*secundum spiritualem et secundum corporalem*]. . . . What our Lord said about eating his flesh is interpreted in a material way [*carnaliter intelliguntur*] when it is understood in its superficial meaning [*secundum quod verba exterius sonant*], and as pertaining to the nature of flesh [*et ut natura carnis habet*]. . . . But our Lord said that he would give himself to them as spiritual food [*spiritualem cibum*], not as though the true flesh of Christ [*vera caro Christi*] is not present in this sacrament of the altar, but because it is eaten in a certain spiritual and divine way [*spirituali et divino modo manducatur*]. Thus, the correct meaning of these words is spiritual, not material [*sensus est non carnalis, sed spiritualis*].²²⁸

It follows that spiritual sense is one thing and the reading in a spiritual sense is another. As Reinhard Hütter notes, Aquinas retained the simple, literal sense of the Lord's words (cf. Luke 22:19), which, however, together with the Church, he understood "according to spiritual sense."²²⁹ Manresa Lamarca aptly concludes: ". . . as the literal sense of the New Testament is the fullness of revelation and the key that opens the rest of Scripture, the interpreter will achieve understanding of Scripture insofar as he achieves spiritual understanding of the literal sense of the New Testament."²³⁰ The transition from the "letter" to the "spirit" is possible thanks to the removal of the veil from the hearts (cf. 2 Cor 3:15) through faith in Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit.²³¹ Thomas emphasizes that the grace of revelation must also be matched by the grace of interpreting what has been revealed:

Next in rank to those who receive revelation from God immediately, another degree of grace is necessary. For, since God vouchsafes revelation to man not only for the present time, but also for the instruction of all in the time to come, it was necessary that the things revealed should be delivered not only by word

²²⁸ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 6, lect. 8, n. 992. Cf. Bellamah, "Interpretation of a Contemplative," 253.

²²⁹ Cf. Reinhard Hütter, "Transubstantiation Revisited: Sacra Doctrina, Dogma, and Metaphysics," in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.* Ed. Reinhard Hütter and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 27, 31 (with n. 19). Similarly, Trinitarian speculations about the begetting of the Son by the Father were an attempt to rationally penetrate the truth of faith expressed in the literal sense of the New Testament – cf., e.g., *ST I*, q. 41, a. 3, resp.

²³⁰ Manresa Lamarca, "The Literal Sense," 355.

²³¹ Cf. Manresa Lamarca, "The Literal Sense," 356–57, 360–63 (with n. 55 on pp. 363–64). Accepting as true what is revealed through the preachers of the faith (cf. Rom 10:15) takes place *per internam inspirationem* – cf. *ST II–II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp.; *De veritate* q. 18, a. 3, resp.

of mouth to the present generation, but also by the written word for the instruction of the future generation. Hence the need for someone to interpret these writings. And this must be a divine grace, even as revelation itself was made by the grace of God. Therefore, it is said: *Do not interpretations belong to God?* (Gen 40:8).²³²

In his commentary on 2 Cor 3:12–18, Thomas writes that the veil that is unveiled in Christ “was the dimness of the figures [*obscuritas figurarum*].”²³³ It was removed “by fulfilling in truth [*implendo in veritate*] what Moses delivered in figure [*tradidit in figura*], because all things happened to them in a figure [*quia omnia in figura contingebant illis*].” Through his death and by sending the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers, Christ made it possible that “they might understand spiritually [*intelligerent spiritualiter*] what the Jews understood carnally [*carnaliter intelligunt*]” (cf. Luke 24:45).²³⁴ The Jews still “believe the veil of God not as a figure but as truth [*sic velamen Dei, non figuram, sed veritatem credunt*] . . .”²³⁵

Those who believe in Christ gaze upon the Lord’s brightness with their faces unveiled, and “[b]y face is meant the heart or the mind [*cor, seu mens*], because just as a person sees bodily with the face, so spiritually with the mind.”²³⁶ According to Thomas, “[b]eholding, i.e., speculating [*speculantes*]” comes “from ‘mirror [*speculo*],’ i.e., knowing the glorious God himself by the mirror of reason [*per speculum rationis*], in which there is an image of God.” Considering that “all knowledge involves the knower’s being assimilated to the thing known [*assimilationem cognoscentis ad cognitum*], it is necessary that those who see be in some way transformed into God [*aliquo modo transformentur in Deum*].” Perfectly in heaven (cf. 1 John 3:2), and imperfectly in temporal conditions, when it is done through faith (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).²³⁷

Thomas provides additional explanations in his commentary on 1 Cor 2:10–16, in which it is important to contrast the sensual man with the spiritual man (vv. 14 and 15). People are described as sensual, the commentator says, in two ways:

²³² *ScG* III, cap. 154.

²³³ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 104.

²³⁴ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 105.

²³⁵ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 107.

²³⁶ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 113.

²³⁷ *In II Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 3, n. 114.

first, on the basis of the perceptive power, where a man is called sensual in perception, because he judges about God in terms of bodily images or the letter of the law or philosophical reasons [*de Deo iuxta corporum phantasiam vel legis litteram, vel rationem philosophicam iudicat*], all of which are interpreted in accordance with the sense-powers [*quae secundum vires sensitivas accipiuntur*]. Second, on the basis of the appetitive power, which is attracted only to things that appeal to the sense appetite.²³⁸

According to Aquinas, *animalis homo* (a sensual man) cannot comprehend matters that come from the Holy Spirit, as they transcend human senses and reason.²³⁹ Such a person “has his intellect darkened and his will disarranged, as far as spiritual goods are concerned.”²⁴⁰ As a result, “a sensual person understands spiritual words as proverbs [*verba spiritualia accipit ut proverbialia*],” even though they do not take the form of proverbs, “because the mind of such a person cannot rise above material things [*quia mens eius supra corporalia elevari non valens*]. . .”²⁴¹ A person is called spiritual “first, on the part of the intellect enlightened by the Spirit of God” and “[s]econd, on the part of the will enkindled by the Spirit of God.”²⁴² *Spiritualis homo* “understands spiritual words as spiritual.”²⁴³

In other words, the criterion for division is a way of life that is either natural or subject to the action of grace. Commenting on 1 Cor 3:3, Thomas argues that “carnal men [*homines carnales*] are said to **walk according to man**” because they act “according to human nature left to itself by the Spirit of God [*secundum naturam humanam sibi a Dei spiritu derelictam*] . . .” Only when “man’s spirit is raised above man by the Spirit of God [*spiritus hominis per spiritum Dei supra hominem elevetur*]” does man become spiritual.²⁴⁴ Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit can examine spiritual matters.²⁴⁵ It follows from the above that the spiritual reading of the inspired books is reading in the Holy Spirit.

²³⁸ *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 112. Cf. Manresa Lamarca, “The Literal Sense,” 364.

²³⁹ Cf. *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 113.

²⁴⁰ *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 118.

²⁴¹ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 16, lect. 7, n. 2152.

²⁴² *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 117.

²⁴³ *Super Ioann.*, cap. 16, lect. 7, n. 2152.

²⁴⁴ Cf. *In I Cor.*, cap. 3, lect. 1, n. 130.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *In I Cor.*, cap. 2, lect. 3, n. 115.

Conclusion

The research was admittedly limited to the methodological assumptions formulated by Ratzinger and Aquinas. It might be expected that an examination of the exegetical practice of both scholars would shed new light and, quite likely, would require a revision of some of the claims. Below, I recapitulate the main conclusions, arranging them in such a way as to highlight both the similarities between Ratzinger's and Aquinas' approaches and the significant differences between them.

1. Benedict XVI noted that in the patristic and medieval periods, attempts were made to start from the literal sense of Scripture, even though the philological and historical resources available today were not available then. The Pope pointed out that in the times of the Fathers and the Middle Ages, exegesis practiced in the spirit of faith did not necessarily distinguish between the literal and spiritual senses. On the other hand, Benedict XVI took the position that scientific research and faith, literal sense and spiritual sense, cannot be separated. Referring to the classic couplet about the senses of Scripture, the Pope emphasized the unity and connection between literal and spiritual sense. The Pope more clearly emphasized both the difference between the literal and spiritual senses and the harmony between them. He opposed spiritual interpretations not based on the foundation of the literal sense, and at the same time he perceived the literal sense itself as impossible to identify outside of faith.

The enduring significance of the Church Fathers is expressed, according to Ratzinger, in the unity of the Bible, liturgy, and theology the Fathers developed. The rational responsibility of faith compels Ratzinger to appreciate the function of scientific methods in exegesis. In his view, the retrieving of the traditional doctrine of the four senses involves taking into account the contribution of the historical-critical method, provided that this method should become a theological discipline without losing its historical character. The use of the historical-critical method should take place in the spirit of the hermeneutics of faith, which would also involve a reform of the understanding of rationality ("better philosophy," more in line with the biblical text). The two levels of Bible study are united "without confusion and without separation" in the spirit of Chalcedonian Creed.

Aquinas took the position that the distinction between literal and spiritual senses is related to different ways of signifying: when words signify things, we speak of historical or literal sense; when the things signified by words signify other things, we speak of spiritual sense. The spiritual sense has its foundation in the literal sense and presupposes it, and even, according to Aquinas,

derives from it. *Magister in sacra pagina* takes the position that the spiritual sense cannot convey something necessary for faith that would not be revealed elsewhere in the literal sense. It is the literal sense, due to its unambiguity, that forms the basis of argumentation in *sacra doctrina*. The most important thing for Aquinas is, of course, the literal sense of the New Testament, because it contains the fullness of Revelation, and it is this sense that makes it possible to search for spiritual senses throughout Scripture.

2. Ratzinger emphasized that Scripture testifies to the coherent history of the People of God in which God acted. The dyadic concept (divine author vs. human author) was transformed by Ratzinger into triple authorship: (i) a single author (group of authors); (ii) on a deeper level, the People of God to which they belong; (iii) God, who leads the People of God and speaks to them through people. The historical *intentio auctoris* was thus relativized; in Ratzinger's concept, it is the People of God who are the subject of Scripture, and therefore he ultimately shifts the focus from the single author to the overarching intentionality of the entire Bible. In this claim, one can find a different division between literal and spiritual senses than that of Aquinas – the future history of the community of faith illuminates the individual stages of the common path not only when some things become signs of others. The emphasis is on the multidimensionality of the word, which, in connection with God's action in the history of salvation, opens up the possibility of searching for multiple senses of the biblical word.

Doctor Angelicus assumes the dual authorship of Scripture, with God remaining the principal Author (*Auctor principalis*) and man being the instrumental author (*auctor instrumentalis*). The Holy Spirit uses the language of the hagiographer as a writer uses a stylus. The Spirit writes quickly in the heart of the inspired author, which means that the Spirit immediately fills the human author with wisdom through divine revelation. Aquinas seems to suggest an analogy between the eternal Word of God and the written word of God. On the one hand, the Son is the language of the Father, and on the other hand, God speaks through the holy writers. Perhaps this is why Aquinas sees the Christological meaning of the Old Testament also in a literal sense. However, even in Aquinas' system, there is considerable flexibility in finding literal sense, since, first of all, all words are the words of the Son, and secondly, the hagiographer is an fallible tool and does not know everything that God wanted to say through him.

3. Ratzinger argued that in the words of the People of God, which matured in the history of faith and were recorded at a specific time, there is always an added value related to the future path of the community of faith. He also pointed

out that the words of Scripture, as an expression of revelation transcending the hagiographer's experience, always contain a meaning "exceeding" the historical *locus* of the text. It is God, who, guiding the People of God, determines the multiple senses of Scripture, using the multidimensionality of human speech for this purpose. In subsequent stages of salvation history, words reveal their inner potentialities. In this way, God can use human words to give a sense that transcends the given moment and thus ensure the unity of the entire *historia salutis*. Ratzinger's approach allows him to reinterpret the traditional doctrine of the four senses: these are not parallel senses, but rather dimensions of the word.

Doctor Communis justifies the spiritual sense with God's authorship and providence. It is God who arranges all things in their course so that they may convey the sense intended by him. God is the author of both senses, literal and spiritual. In Aquinas' system, an understanding of history in terms of participation, different from the modern one, plays an important role. Scripture, in recounting the events of salvation history, simultaneously reveals the mystery. In this case, too, we can speak of a "surplus" of meaning hidden in human words, connected with the expression of prophetic revelation in human words. Ultimately, it is God alone who can reveal the fuller sense of Scripture, "writing" the history of salvation and speaking through an inspired author who expresses what cannot be expressed in writing.

This means that biblical language is an analogical language. Aquinas maintains that Scripture conveys divine and spiritual things through the likeness of material things. The literal sense, which is not identical with what is literalistic, is the meaning intended by God as the author of Scripture. Aquinas also includes the parabolic sense in the literal sense, since words can be signified either literally or figuratively – the literal sense in this case is what the figure represents. Both natural and supernatural knowledge of God is achieved through negation, affirmation, and exaltation (*triplex via*). Aquinas assumes the indirect nature of revealed knowledge, even in the case of Christ's words and deeds. On the other hand, he emphasizes that *sacra Scriptura est divina*, and God shapes the human mind directly through the Holy Scriptures and indirectly through other literature that has its source in human reason.

4. Ratzinger insists that canonical exegesis can be an organic continuation of the historical-critical method. What matters is not primarily the historical literal sense, but what God intended to say throughout the history of salvation through Scripture as a whole. Biblical texts should first be interpreted in their historical context, but assuming a divine factor at work in history, and then read in the light of the entire historical movement with the "event of Christ" at its center. For Ratzinger, Christological hermeneutics, which makes it possible

to see the unity of Scripture, cannot deprive the individual stages of salvation history of their historical originality. In Ratzinger's opinion, the Church Fathers lacked the first step, and scientific exegesis lacked the second. Ratzinger emphasizes the importance of the historical-critical method at the stage of the first step, but on the other hand, he does not equate the literal sense with the meaning discovered by the historical-critical method, unless it has become a theological method.

With Aquinas' understanding of history and divine authorship and providence the holistic reading of the Bible is also connected. The depth of what God intended to reveal can only be discovered in canonical interpretation. Importantly, Aquinas, assuming that we are dealing with figures in the Old Testament, takes the literal sense of the Old Testament seriously.

5. An important theme in Ratzinger's work is the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, which, in accordance with the heritage of the Church Fathers, he identified with typological interpretation. Scripture as a whole becomes *sacramentum*, everything in it is a prefiguration of Christ. Ratzinger drew attention to the connection between the word and the sacrament, which reflects the transition between the Old and New Covenants. The realities of the New Testament are no longer *sacramenta futuri*; the New Testament writings testify to a reality that is already present. It is precisely the sacrament that points to what has already been given with Christ and his Passover. Spiritual sense, therefore, is the sense expressed by biblical texts when they are read in the Holy Spirit in the context of the Paschal mystery and new life. Exegesis is inextricably linked to church life.

Ratzinger opted for maintaining the "unity through diversity" of the Old and New Testaments. This unity, full of tension, is decisive for understanding the senses of Scripture. Ratzinger firmly rejects what he calls a naive and direct Christological interpretation of the Old Testament. Unlike Aquinas, he does not find Christ in the literal sense of the Old Testament. Only when incorporated into the life or death of Christ do words reveal their Christological sense (cf. e.g., Ps 22). Applying Christology to the Old Testament misses the reality of history and the dynamics of faith that transcends the letter. Scripture should be read taking into account both the difference and the unity between a promise and its fulfillment. The apostolic witness to Christ can only be preserved in the connection between the letter and the spirit.

To understand Aquinas' approach to the senses of Scripture, it is important to consider the connection between eschatology and revelation. If in heaven one can attain the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*), then in this world God grants prophetic light (*lumen propheticum*). Scripture (and the entire *sacra doctrina*

in general) is an imperfect, partial participation in the knowledge of God and the saints in heaven. The distinction between glorious and earthly revelation is essential to understanding Aquinas' approach of biblical senses. Aquinas derives the spiritual sense from the fact that the Old Law is a figure of the New, and the New is a figure of future glory.

From this Christological-eschatological perspective, we can recapitulate Aquinas' classification of biblical senses. Things concerning Christ as Head refer figuratively to the members of the Body of Christ. What is said about Christ in a literal sense, and those things that signify Christ, are interpreted allegorically, tropologically, and anagogically in relation to the mystical Body and individual Christians. What the literal sense expresses about the Church is still subject to moral and anagogical interpretation. If matters of morality are already found in the literal sense, one can still seek the anagogical sense. However, according to the *magister in sacra pagina*, what is said in the literal sense about the glorious reality is not interpreted in any other sense.

6. Ratzinger departed from defining Christian interpretation as allegorical and preferred the term Christological-pneumatological interpretation. If allegory is associated with a literary expedient, Christological-pneumatological interpretation expresses the historical transition associated with the advent of the New Covenant (the coming of Christ and the sending of the Spirit). The presence of the Risen One in the Church through his Spirit makes it possible to read the Law and the Prophets in the light of God's final self-revelation.

Reading the Old Testament as oriented towards the Risen One means the pneumatization (spiritualization) of the Old Testament. Ratzinger strongly accentuates that it is also an "incarnation" because the Holy Spirit dwells in the Body of Jesus. The letter has been liberated in relation to Christ, and the reminding work of the Spirit is accomplished in the Church. Ratzinger saw in certain statements by Thomas Aquinas concerning church music a kind of spiritualization of the Old Testament that was not adequately matched by consideration of the dimension of the Incarnation. As a result, Ratzinger judged that Aquinas did not recognize the theological significance of the literal sense of the Old Testament and considered it worthless for Christians. Ratzinger emphasizes that Christian spiritualization is a striving to encounter the Lord, who is Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17), in such a way that his Body is embraced by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

Aquinas' assumption is that the Old Law is to heavenly goods as a shadow is to the body, and the New Law is as an image. Believers already possess the Holy Spirit who imparts love, but not yet perfectly. According to Aquinas, the Old Law is also a shadow of the body of Christ, preceding and foreshadowing

the Incarnate Word. The New Law is therefore an image of the final encounter with God in glory, which, however, is already available now, by virtue of the hypostatic union, in the Person of the Incarnate One. The worship of the Old Law was a symbol not only of truth, but also of Christ as the way leading to glorious revelation, while in the New Law the way has already been revealed and it is only the truth of glory that is symbolically announced. Christ is therefore the center not only of Scripture, but of the entire history of salvation (the time of the Church on its way to glory). Aquinas, accepting the axiom *Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*, assumes that Christ enlightens his disciples as to the eschatological goal and the way to achieve it.

The inspired scriptures teach “wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Scripture maintains a connection with the missions of the Divine Persons. Since the Divine Persons act in a manner that reflects their eternal origins, the Son reveals the Father, and the Holy Spirit reveals the Son. The Spirit is the cause of both the Incarnation and the origin of Scripture. Aquinas emphasizes the connection between the written word of God and the living Word of God. If Christ is the Son of God, then the word that comes from him is partly his likeness and therefore leads to Christ. In the Trinitarian reflection of the Universal Doctor, the Son is the Word that breathes Love. The Son’s message instructs the intellect and moves the heart. In this way, Scripture not only reflects the inner life of God, but also leads to that life.

7. According to Benedict XVI, the decisive factor in reconstructing the connections between the senses of Scripture is the transition from the letter to the spirit. Going beyond the letter presupposes taking into account the internal dynamics of the entire Bible and participating in the life of the Church as a life “by the spirit” (Gal 5:16). This process, which takes place in the power of the Holy Spirit, is connected with the freedom of the exegete (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, 17). Ratzinger emphasized the different nature of Scripture in the Old and New Covenants. It is not so much the new writings as the event of Christ interpreting the Old Testament writings that is decisive for the New Covenant (*gramma vs. pneuma*). The true content of Scripture is the Lord as Spirit; the Old Testament cannot remain confined to “literal exegesis,” but continues in the spiritual reality of Christ present in the Church in the Spirit.

Benedict XVI referred to Aquinas’ assertion that the letter of the Gospel without the grace of faith would bring death. Aquinas believes that the letter is what is written and external (including the Gospel), and the spirit is the healing grace – the New Law, unlike the Old, was written on the hearts of believers (2 Cor 3:3). It follows that, in Aquinas’ view, even more important than the distinction between the literal and spiritual senses is the distinction between

understanding Scripture according to its spiritual sense (*secundum spiritualem*) and its bodily sense (*secundum corporalem*). Even for the words of Christ, the appropriate sense is not the carnal (*carnalis*) but spiritual (*spiritualis*). Since we are dealing with the fullest Revelation in the New Covenant, the prerequisite for understanding Scripture is a spiritual understanding of the literal sense of the New Testament.

The transition from the letter to the spirit of scriptures is possible thanks to faith in Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:15). Aquinas claims that the veil resting on hearts is the dimness of the figures (*obscuritas figurarum*). Only Christians can understand spiritually what Jews understood physically, identifying figures with truth and treating words as proverbs. The medieval scholar points to the difference between the sensual and spiritual man. The former, in terms of cognitive power, judges God on the basis of bodily images, the letter of the law, or philosophical reasoning. When it comes to the appetitive power, he is attracted to things that appeal to sensual desire. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has the intellect enlightened and the will enkindled by the Spirit of God. In other words, *animalis homo* acts according to nature, and the nature of *spiritualis homo* has been elevated by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual reading of Scripture is realized only in the Holy Spirit.

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Las divisiones semántico estructurales del ente en santo Tomás de Aquino: su empleo para la investigación y para el motor de búsqueda del *Index Thomisticus*

The Structural-Semantic Divisions of Being
in Saint Thomas Aquinas: Their Use for Research,
and for the Development of the *Index Thomisticus*'s Query Engine

Semantyczno-strukturalne kategoryzacje bytu
u św. Tomasza z Akwinu: ich wykorzystanie w badaniach naukowych
oraz w rozwoju wyszukiwarki bazy *Index Thomisticus*

ABSTRACT: This article aims to demonstrate the usefulness of Eugen Coşeriu's Structural Semantics for research into the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The first part explains the stages of development of the *Index Thomisticus*, up to its semantic annotation. The second part sets out the requirements for this annotation, proposing to use the divisions of being expounded by Aquinas. The third part presents the proposal to analyze these divisions by applying Eugen Coşeriu's Structural Semantics. The fourth part demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy by analyzing the distinction between the transcendentals of being in *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1. The fifth part proposes a method to use structural semantic analysis for the development of the *Index Thomisticus* database. The sixth part presents an example of its possible use in its query engine's user interface. Finally, the conclusions summarize the main theses, arguments, and proposals of the article.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas, Eugen Coşeriu, *Index Thomisticus*, text query engines, semantic annotation of databases

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wykazanie przydatności semantyki strukturalnej Eugena Coşeriu w badaniach nad myślą św. Tomasza z Akwinu. W pierwszej części wyjaśniono poszczególne etapy rozwoju *Index Thomisticus* wraz z opisem

anotacji semantycznej. W drugiej części przedstawiono wymagania dotyczące tej anotacji z wykorzystaniem kategoryzacji bytu zaproponowanej przez Akwinatę. Część trzecia zawiera analizę takiej kategoryzacji z uwzględnieniem semantyki strukturalnej Eugena Coşeriu. W czwartej części wykazano skuteczność tej strategii na podstawie rozróżnienia między transcendentiami bytu w *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1. W części piątej zaproponowano sposób wykorzystania analizy semantyki strukturalnej do rozwoju bazy danych *Index Thomisticus*. W części szóstej przedstawiono przykład możliwego wykorzystania bazy w kwerendach. Artykuł kończy podsumowanie, w którym zestawiono główne tezy, argumenty i propozycje.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, Eugen Coşeriu, *Index Thomisticus*, kwerendy, anotacje semantyczne baz danych

Introducción

En estas páginas pretendo mostrar la utilidad de la Semántica Estructural de Eugen Coşeriu¹ para la investigación del pensamiento de santo Tomás de Aquino. Paralelamente, explicaré una estrategia para aplicar los resultados al motor de búsqueda de la base de datos en línea *Index Thomisticus*², de tal modo que haga posible encontrar, no solo expresiones literales, sino también aquellas otras que incluyan sus sinónimos, antónimos, análogos e incluso temas no explicitados. Comenzaré con una breve introducción histórica sobre las etapas en el desarrollo del *Index Thomisticus*, para contextualizar debidamente el interés de la semántica para el progreso de los estudios tomistas.

Las etapas de desarrollo del *Index Thomisticus*: una breve presentación

La investigación en el ámbito humanístico está cambiando aceleradamente gracias a la informática³. En el campo de los estudios tomistas somos especialmente afortunados a este respecto, porque las Humanidades Digitales nacieron

¹ Vid. Johannes Kabatek, *Eugenio Coseriu: Beyond Structuralism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

² Roberto Busa, *Index Thomisticus*, 2nd ed., Corpus Thomisticum (2025), accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/>.

³ Vid. Susan Schreibman, Raymond George Siemens, and John Unsworth, eds., *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 26 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

justamente con el *Index Thomisticus* del padre jesuita Roberto Busa⁴. Su proyecto, iniciado en 1948, fue evolucionando junto con las tecnologías informáticas, y continúa progresando en el presente, abriendo nuevas posibilidades a los estudiosos de santo Tomás.

Inicialmente, el *Index Thomisticus* era un instrumento de investigación manejable sólo a través de ordenadores *mainframe*, inaccesibles para el público general⁵. De ahí que su primera publicación no fuera digital, sino impresa⁶: una obra monumental, disponible solo en grandes bibliotecas. El avance de la tecnología permitió que, desde 1992, estuviese disponible en CDROM⁷; y que más tarde, desde el año 2005, pudiese ser consultado gratuitamente en Internet⁸.

Además de estos desarrollos del medio, también se han ido perfeccionando los contenidos de la base de datos. La idea inicial del padre R. Busa⁹ fue diseñarla para estudiar exhaustivamente la terminología de santo Tomás. Por eso, el *Index Thomisticus* original contiene, sobre todo, información sobre cada una de las palabras que componen el entero corpus tomista. Para ello, se transcribió la práctica totalidad de las *opera omnia*; se hizo un elenco de los términos o *lemas* que en él ocurrían, se les asignó un código distinto a cada uno, y además otros códigos según cada caso de su conjugación o declinación, género, número, etc. A partir de esta clasificación general, se fue adscribiendo a cada una de las ocurrencias de cada palabra los códigos léxicos correspondientes, junto con algunas otras anotaciones complementarias. De este modo, la primera etapa en la edición del *Index Thomisticus*, diseñada y dirigida por el padre Busa, estuvo centrada en las palabras del corpus tomista, analizadas mediante dichos códigos generales. Este trabajo inmenso fue el que hizo posible, años después, el sofisticado sistema de búsqueda en las *opera omnia* de santo Tomás disponible actualmente a través del sitio web *Corpus Thomisticum*.

La segunda etapa en el desarrollo del *Index Thomisticus* se está desarrollando en el Centro de Investigación CIRCSE de la Universidad Católica de Milán,

⁴ Vid. Steven E. Jones, *Roberto Busa, S. J., and the Emergence of Humanities Computing: The Priest and the Punched Cards* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁵ Roberto Busa and Alessandro Biscaldi, *Technical Report on the Text with Hypertexts plus the Lexicological System of the Index Thomisticus on Tapes* (Gallarate: CAEL-Aloisianum, 1992).

⁶ Roberto Busa, *Index Thomisticus: Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Operum omnium Indices et concordantiae...*, 49+7 vols. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974-1980).

⁷ Roberto Busa, ed., *Thomae Aquinatis opera omnia cum hypertextibus in CD-ROM* (Milano: Editoria Elettronica Editel, 1992).

⁸ Cfr. nota 2.

⁹ Roberto Busa, "L'Index Thomisticus. Contenuto, finalità, prospettive," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 125 (1974): 250-57.

bajo la dirección de Marco Passarotti: es el *Index Thomisticus Treebank* (ITT)¹⁰. De nuevo, comienza por una clasificación general que, en este caso, obedece a la función de cada término en la sintaxis de la oración completa. El modelo adoptado es el *Prague Dependency Treebank*, un sistema de anotación desarrollado en la Universidad Karolinska de Praga que aporta, sobre todo, información sintáctica. Desarrollado con un interés principalmente filológico, abre posibilidades de gran valor también para el estudio filosófico y teológico de santo Tomás¹¹. Actualmente, se ha anotado ya la mayor parte de *Contra Gentiles* y se ha comenzado el análisis de *Super Sententiis*.

Una tercera etapa en el desarrollo del *Index Thomisticus* corresponde al análisis semántico de los textos de santo Tomás. Tanto la base de datos original como el ITT incluyen ya ciertas anotaciones de este género, pero muy someras. Conviene considerar, a este respecto, que el ámbito del significado de los textos es universal, porque expresan el pensamiento humano, cuyo objeto abarca la entera realidad¹². Por eso, la clasificación semántica que se requiere para el *Index Thomisticus* exige un análisis donde converjan la filosofía y la filología. Mi propósito, en este artículo, es exponer el alcance y límites de una estrategia que vehicula tal confluencia.

Requisitos de la anotación semántica

Al explicar arriba, muy brevemente, el análisis léxico y el sintáctico desarrollado en las dos primeras etapas del *Index Thomisticus*, he señalado que, en ambos casos, se comienza por una clasificación o tipología general. Y que, después, se asigna a cada parte del texto el código correspondiente. Por ejemplo, distinguir el lema *canus* (adjetivo) del lema *canere* (verbo) permite anotar después, en cada ocurrencia de la forma *cano*, si pertenece a uno o a otro lema, y si es dativo,

¹⁰ Vid. Marco Passarotti, ed., *Index Thomisticus Treebank*, CIRCSE Research Center (2015), accessed June 29, 2025, <https://itreebank.marginalia.it/>.

¹¹ Marco Passarotti, "What You Can Do with Linguistically Annotated Data: From the *Index Thomisticus* to the *Index Thomisticus Treebank*," in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen, *Textes et études du Moyen Âge* 80 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 3–44.

¹² Jan A. Aertsen, "Truth as Transcendental in Thomas Aquinas," *Topoi* 11, no. 2 (1992): 159–71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00774421>.

ablativo o presente de indicativo. Así, en resumen, se fueron anotando cada una de las ocurrencias de todas las palabras en las *opera omnia* de santo Tomás¹³.

En el caso de una anotación semántica, hay que proceder de manera análoga, comenzando por una clasificación general aplicable a cada parte del texto: primero a las más simples, las palabras; y después a las partes complejas, las oraciones.

Ahora bien, ¿dónde encontrar una clasificación general de las partes del lenguaje? La clave para responder a tal cuestión es que, como vehículo del pensamiento, el lenguaje puede referirse a la entera realidad. Por eso, la clasificación general del objeto significado por el lenguaje se encuentra en la división del ente. Me centraré aquí en esta consideración, dejando para otro estudio la consideración de las partes del lenguajes no referidas a su objeto, como es el caso de aquellas con función meramente gramatical.

Tratándose de la base de datos *Index Thomisticus* y, por tanto, de la anotación semántica de los textos de Tomás de Aquino, parece lógico atenerse primero a las divisiones del ente que él mismo expuso en sus escritos. Esta estrategia es preliminar, ya que tiene limitaciones. Aunque santo Tomás adopta y desarrolla varias divisiones del ente, nunca hizo un análisis extendido. Por otra parte, su enfoque es metafísico y, como antes señalé, el análisis textual debe incorporar las peculiaridades del lenguaje: no es la misma la estructura de las sustancias, la de los conocimientos y la de los lenguajes. De ahí la necesidad de una confluencia entre el análisis filosófico y el filológico. Con este propósito, ordenado a una anotación semántica preliminar del *Index Thomisticus*, me propongo exponer y ejemplificar seguidamente la eficacia de una estrategia práctica, a saber: aplicar la Semántica Estructural de Eugen Coşeriu a la doctrina tomista sobre las divisiones del ente.

La Semántica Estructural de Eugen Coşeriu: una breve presentación

Eugen Coşeriu (1921–2002), profesor de la Universidad de Tubinga, es uno de los filólogos más destacados del siglo XX¹⁴. El desarrollo de la Semántica Estructural¹⁵ fue su máxima aportación. Atendiendo a la relación entre el significado de cada palabra y su uso efectivo, este enfoque distingue tres tipos de términos:

¹³ Vid. Roberto Busa, "Complete *index verborum* of Works of St Thomas," *Speculum* 25 (1950): 424–25.

¹⁴ Cfr. nota 1.

¹⁵ Sobre esta materia, vid. Eugenio Coseriu, *Principios de semántica estructural*, 2. ed, Biblioteca románica hispánica 259 (Madrid: Gredos, 1981), 11–86: "Para una semántica diacrónica estructural".

- a) las palabras del lenguaje natural (en sentido filológico) son aquellas que se refieren a lo que significan de suyo: por ejemplo, usamos “silla” para referirnos a aquello que corresponde a su definición;
- b) las terminologías o nomenclaturas se usan conforme a un significado aprobado por la convención de los hablantes, incluso si no coincide con el significado propio de la palabra en el lenguaje natural: por ejemplo, desde hace siglos, el mes “october”, “octubre”, ya no es el octavo, sino el décimo;
- c) finalmente, los nombres propios son aquellos que se pueden emplear con independencia del significado de la palabra: así, si leemos “Asunción” en un listado de términos, no sabremos si se refiere a una mujer, una ciudad, una fiesta litúrgica, etc.

Pues bien, Coşeriu señala que, en el primer caso –el más habitual con diferencia– el significado de cada término del “lenguaje natural” (en el sentido filológico de dicha expresión) está delimitado por el de aquellas otras palabras cuyo significado es similar, pero no idéntico. Por ejemplo, para un niño pequeño, que carece de vocabulario, “silla” puede significar un taburete, un sillón, o incluso un sofá. En cambio, para un hablante adulto, no es así: si pide un taburete y le traen un sillón pensará que no le han entendido. Su vocabulario es más rico y, por lo mismo, el significado de cada palabra está delimitado por más alternativas.

El motivo de esta mutua delimitación en la semántica de los términos estriba, según Coşeriu, en la estructura semántica de toda palabra en el lenguaje natural: cada significado se puede descomponer en una serie de rasgos significativos mínimos o “semas”. Por ejemplo, la diferencia entre “taburete”, “silla”, “sillón” y “sofá” sería la siguiente:

	taburete	silla	sillón	sofá
instrumento	sí	sí	sí	sí
para sentarse	sí	sí	sí	sí
para una persona	sí	sí	sí	no
con respaldo	no	sí	sí	sí
con brazos	no	no	sí	sí

A mayor coincidencia de “semas”, mayor cercanía y pertenencia al mismo “campo semántico”, es decir, mayor analogía del significado.

Apliquemos ahora este análisis estructural de la semántica de los términos a una de las divisiones del ente en Tomás de Aquino: aquella que distingue sus nociones implícitas, los transcendentales.

Análisis semántico-estructural de la división del ente en *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1 co.

En su famoso primer artículo de las *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, santo Tomás señala dos tipos de divisiones de ente, una según modos especiales –la categorial– y otra según modos generales –los distintos trascendentales. Este texto nos servirá como un primer caso de valoración del análisis semántico-estructural (descrito por Coşeriu) como posible herramienta de anotación semántica del *Index Thomisticus*.

Escribe Tomás de Aquino¹⁶:

illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens [...]; unde oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens. Sed enti non possunt addi aliqua quasi extranea per modum quo differentia additur generi, vel accidens subiecto, quia quaelibet natura est essentialiter ens; unde [...] ens non potest esse genus; sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere super ens in quantum exprimunt modum ipsius entis qui nomine entis non exprimitur, quod dupliciter contingit. Uno modo ut modus expressus sit aliquis specialis modus entis; sunt enim diversi gradus entitatis, secundum quos accipiuntur diversi modi essendi et iuxta hos modos accipiuntur diversa rerum genera: substantia enim non addit super ens aliquam differentiam quae designet aliquam naturam superadditam enti sed nomine substantiae exprimitur specialis quidam modus essendi, scilicet per se ens, et ita est in aliis generibus. Alio modo ita quod modus expressus sit modus generalis consequens omne ens, et hic modus dupliciter accipi potest: uno modo secundum quod consequitur unumquodque ens in se, alio modo secundum quod consequitur unum ens in ordine ad aliud. Si primo modo, hoc est dupliciter quia vel exprimitur in ente aliquid affirmative vel negative; non autem invenitur aliquid affirmative dictum absolute quod possit accipi in omni ente nisi essentia eius secundum quam esse dicitur, et sic imponitur hoc nomen res, quod in hoc differt ab ente [...] quod ens sumitur ab actu essendi sed nomen rei exprimit quiditatem vel essentiam entis; negatio autem consequens omne ens absolute est divisio, et hanc exprimit hoc nomen unum: nihil aliud enim est unum quam ens indivisum. Si autem modus entis accipiat secundum modo, scilicet secundum ordinem unius ad alterum, hoc potest esse dupliciter. Uno modo secundum divisionem unius ab altero et hoc exprimit hoc nomen

¹⁶ Thomas de Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. *Quaestiones 1–7*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, 22/1.2 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1970), 4–6.

aliquid: dicitur enim aliquid quasi aliud quid, unde sicut ens dicitur unum in quantum est indivisum in se ita dicitur aliquid in quantum est ab aliis divisum. Alio modo secundum convenientiam unius entis ad aliud, et hoc quidem non potest esse nisi accipiatur aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omni ente; hoc autem est anima, quae “quodam modo est omnia” [...]: in anima autem est vis cognitiva et appetitiva; convenientiam ergo entis ad appetitum exprimit hoc nomen bonum, [...] convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum.

Tomando estos criterios, podemos estructurarlos conforme al siguiente campo semántico propio de “ente”:

Modus dictus entis:	<i>ens</i>	<i>res</i>	<i>unum</i>	<i>aliquid</i>	<i>verum</i>	<i>bonum</i>	substantia [vel accidens]
specialis	non	non	non	non	non	non	sic
generalis	sic	sic	sic	sic	sic	sic	non
affirmative	sic	sic	non	non	sic	sic	non
negative	non	non	sic	sic	non	non	non
absolute	sic	sic	sic	non	sic	sic	non
relative	non	non	non	sic	sic	sic	non

El cuadro ilustra cómo la división de los modos del ente descritos por santo Tomás obedece a una estructura del significado de los términos analizable conforme a rasgos elementales, a saber, lo que Coşeriu denomina “semas”.

No solo eso. La coincidencia de todos los semas indica que dos términos pertenecen al mismo campo semántico, el cual puede denominarse con una palabra común, exista ésta o no exista, se emplee en el texto o no se emplee. Por ejemplo, al campo semántico común de “taburete”, “silla”, “sillón” y “sofá” se le puede denominar con la palabra “asiento” (“instrumento para sentarse”). Del mismo modo, a todos los modos especiales del ente (como, por ejemplo, “sustancia”) que coinciden en sus semas, se les puede dar un nombre común, por más que santo Tomás no lo exprese: en este caso, “ens praedicamentalis”. Cualquier *ens per se acceptum* es un ente predicamental, es sustancia o accidente. Aunque cada predicamento sea un grado especial de entidad, todo ente tiene un grado de entidad y, por tanto, pertenece a una categoría, a un predicamento. En este sentido, del análisis semántico estructural del texto de santo Tomás se infiere que “ens praedicamentalis seu categorialis” es, paradójicamente, otro trascendental, otro modo general del ente.

Un segundo caso de coincidencia de todos los “semas” es el de *verum* y *bonum*. Pertenecen al mismo campo semántico, el de lo “*conveniens animae*”, sea a su conocimiento o a su voluntad. Es lo que llamamos actualmente “objeto” [potencial de las facultades humanas] de conocimiento y de voluntad. Aunque el texto de santo Tomás no exprese un nombre común a *verum* y *bonum*, la coincidencia de sus “semas” muestra que son susceptibles de una denominación común; la cual, de hecho, es empleada comúnmente en filosofía: todo ente es un objeto, en tanto que susceptible de conocimiento y de volición. En este sentido, “objeto” es un transcendental del ente conforme a santo Tomás, por más que él no lo afirme expresamente.

Otro caso de coincidencia de todos los “semas” es el de *ens* y *res*. En efecto: *ens* y *res* son, ambos, modos generales afirmables del ente tomado en absoluto, sin ser unívocos, ya que *ens* expresa lo que tiene acto de ser, mientras que *res* significa lo que tiene esencia. No obstante esta diferencia, sus coincidencias semánticas les sitúan en un mismo campo semántico, susceptible de una denominación común para todo lo situado en él. En este caso, el problema no es que ese nombre exista pero no esté expresado en el texto, como “objeto”. El problema, aquí, es que (salvo error por mi parte) no hay tal nombre en el vocabulario de santo Tomás. Eso no significa, sin embargo, que no lo haya en nuestro lenguaje: el término común que hoy usamos, referente a una esencia con ser en acto, es “realidad”, por oposición a “posibilidad” (que sería, para la mentalidad contemporánea, una “cosa”, una *res*, con acto de ser o sin él). De este modo, el análisis semántico estructural conduce a otro modo general afirmable del ente tomado en absoluto: el ente es “realidad”.

Otro modo de obtener un elenco más completo de los trascendentales a partir de este análisis es recombinando los criterios de subdivisión dentro de un mismo campo semántico. Tomemos, por ejemplo, el campo *obiectum [animae]*, cuya subdivisión es *verum* y *bonum*. Su cuadro de análisis semántico estructural, conforme al texto de santo Tomás que comentamos, sería así:

Modi generali entis dicti affirmative ac relative per convenientiam vi animae		verum	bonum	[pulchrum]
	cognoscitivae	sic	non	sic
	appetitivae	non	sic	sic

Es obvio que, en el texto de santo Tomás que comentamos, el “sema” (o rasgo semántico mínimo) que le permite distinguir entre *verum* y *bonum* abre una tercera posibilidad de conveniencia al ánimo: cuando tal adecuación no se da solo respecto a la capacidad cognoscitiva o solo respecto a la apetitiva, sino con

respecto a ambas. Y, en el pensamiento clásico, incluyendo el tomista, este es el caso del trascendental *pulchrum*. Como escribe Tomás¹⁷: “*Quamvis autem pulchrum et bonum sint idem subiecto, [...] tamen ratione differunt: nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam [...]*”.

Lo expuesto muestra las capacidades del análisis semántico estructural para completar el elenco de divisiones –y consiguiente vocabulario– en cualquier campo semántico del “lenguaje natural” (siempre en el sentido filológico de esta expresión) y, por tanto, en el entero ámbito de lo expresable por el lenguaje. El requisito es disponer de los “semas”, a saber, de los criterios elementales de significado y división. Y es ahí donde la filosofía, la teología u otros saberes confluyen con la semántica, aportándole tales criterios de división, como es patente en el texto recién analizado.

Aplicación del análisis semántico estructural a la base de datos *Index Thomisticus*

Aplicado al *Index Thomisticus*, el análisis semántico estructural del vocabulario de santo Tomás puede servir para incluir en la base de datos los “semas” de cada palabra, afirmativos, negativos o neutros. Sería un proceso largo, pero debe tenerse en cuenta que los términos más importantes también suelen ser los más frecuentes¹⁸. Por eso, conviene ordenar el proceso de anotación semántica teniendo en cuenta, por una parte, la frecuencia de aparición de cada término y, por otra, la selección del vocabulario tomista contenida en diccionarios clásicos, como el *Thomas-Lexikon* de Ludwig Schütz¹⁹ y la *Tabula aurea* de Pedro de Bérnago²⁰.

Una dificultad a tener en cuenta es la diversidad de acepciones de las palabras en los textos. Tomemos el caso del vocabulario de los trascendentales arriba comentado. Cada término puede ser usado, o bien conforme a una consideración universal, propia de cualquier ente; o bien según una consideración particular, susceptible de ser afirmada o negada según los casos. Así, en cierto sentido, todo es ente porque es; pero, desde otra consideración, los entes de razón no son entes porque su acto no es propio, sino de quien los considera. Esta diversidad

¹⁷ *In De divinis nominibus* cap. 4, l. 5, in Thomas de Aquino, *Opera omnia*, Corpus Thomisticum (2019), accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/cdno4.html#84848>.

¹⁸ Por otra parte, el desarrollo de la inteligencia artificial podría facilitar mucho esta tarea.

¹⁹ Ludwig Schütz, *Thomas-Lexikon*, Corpus Thomisticum (2006), accessed June 29, 2025, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/tl.html>.

²⁰ Petrus de Bergomo, *In opera sancti Thomae Aquinatis index seu Tabula aurea* (Alba: Editiones Paulinae, 1960).

se da así mismo en los demás trascendentales: la unidad trascendental difiere de la unidad cuantitativa; la verdad trascendental no es la verdad contingente de los juicios apofánticos; etc. De ahí que, para la anotación semántica de una base de datos, sea práctico comenzar por lo que esas diversas acepciones tienen de común: por ejemplo, la indivisión en el caso de la unidad, o la adecuación entre conocimiento y realidad en el caso de la verdad. Posteriormente, en una segunda etapa, pueden añadirse otros semas que distingan unas y otras acepciones, aunque esto comportará la tarea, muy considerable, de registrar los correspondientes códigos de diferenciación en todas las ocurrencias del término en la base de datos; tarea, por lo demás, en que podría ayudar mucho un futuro desarrollo de la inteligencia artificial.

El uso del análisis semántico estructural en el interfaz de usuario de la base de datos

Expondré a continuación cómo la inclusión de tales informaciones semánticas en el *Index Thomisticus* haría posible una gran mejora en las capacidades de búsqueda en las *opera omnia* de santo Tomás de Aquino. A este respecto, la clave es un diseño adecuado de la interfaz de usuario, cuya arquitectura y empleo podría ser, por ejemplo, como sigue.

En el caso más simple, el usuario comenzaría introduciendo el término que busca. El sistema mostraría entonces los “semas” correspondientes, separados, en su caso, según los distintos significados de dicho término, sean equívocos o análogos. El usuario marcaría entonces la selección, deselección o exclusión de “semas” que le interesan. Y el programa mostraría seguidamente el listado de todos los términos que contienen dichos “semas”, ordenados según su mayor o menor coincidencia. El usuario seleccionaría después los términos de su interés. Y, finalmente, el programa mostraría las correspondientes concordancias, a saber: todos los textos donde figuran esos mismos términos.

Tal procedimiento, que incluyo aquí sólo como muestra posible, permitiría ampliar en mucho las capacidades de búsqueda de la base de datos, ya que no se limitaría a encontrar lo que aparece literalmente en el texto, sino todas las ocurrencias de todos los términos que componen el entero campo semántico seleccionado por el usuario. Y esto, como hemos visto antes, incluiría no sólo los términos efectivamente mencionados en los textos, sino también los implícitos, ya sea por omisión –como vimos arriba en el caso de *pulchrum*– o bien porque no forman parte del vocabulario de santo Tomás, como es el caso de *obiectum* y de *realitas* en las acepciones arriba empleadas.

El procedimiento, en suma, amplía las capacidades de búsqueda a sinónimos, antónimos, análogos e incluso temas no explicitados, como en los ejemplos recién mencionados. Y, naturalmente, su aplicación está abierta a cualquier base de datos textual y a la elaboración de ontologías de objetos en informática.

Conclusión

En este artículo he pretendido mostrar la utilidad de la Semántica Estructural de Eugen Coşeriu para la investigación del pensamiento de santo Tomás de Aquino. Como hemos visto, dicho planteamiento analiza el significado de cada término conforme a rasgos significativos mínimos llamados *semas*. Los distintos términos que comparten “semas” forman un campo semántico, mayor o menor según su grado de coincidencia. Se ha mostrado cómo, al analizar un texto a la luz de la semántica estructural, se pueden encontrar los temas implícitos y elaborar un elenco del vocabulario respectivo. La eficacia de este procedimiento se ha ejemplificado analizando el texto de santo Tomás sobre la división de las nociones trascendentales del ente en el primer artículo de las *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. Se ha mostrado así cómo el resultado del análisis clarifica el planteamiento subyacente al texto, hace aflorar sus elementos tácitos y permite completar el catálogo de los elementos enumerados en el texto, añadiendo al elenco explícitamente propuesto aquellos otros componentes omitidos, pero implícitos. Sobre la base de esta metodología de análisis semántico estructural, este artículo ha propuesto una estrategia para su aplicación al motor de búsqueda de la base de datos *Index Thomisticus*, de tal modo que haga posible encontrar, no solo expresiones literales, sino también aquella otras que incluyan sus sinónimos, antónimos, análogos e incluso temas no explicitados. Con tal fin, se han mostrado las sucesivas etapas de desarrollo del *Index Thomisticus*, y la conveniencia de avanzar en su anotación a la luz del planteamiento semántico estructural.

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Why Study Aquinas Today?

Po co studiować św. Tomasza z Akwinu w obecnych czasach?

ABSTRACT: This essay offers an evaluation about the future of Catholic theology. It argues that those interested in approaching the study of theology will benefit from a close reading and study of the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Appropriate help also comes from consultation of the Thomist Commentatorial Tradition. The author lists five reasons that should persuade the attentive reader to the rightness of the article's central thesis. Aquinas is then presented as the Safeguard of Catholic Orthodoxy, Defender of Cognitive and Ontological Realism, Integrator combining faith and reason and presenting a coherent synthesis of the entire *depositum fidei*, Spiritual Master, and Guide for the Theologian Today. The opportuneness of this essay becomes evident when one considers how much Catholic theology, worldwide, has become diversified in the period that followed the close of the Second Vatican Council (1965). In the majority of places where theology is taught, especially the major universities, the study of theology has, in fact, become a survey of what different theologians, both Catholic and others, have said or written. Aquinas, on the other hand, sees Catholic theology as a science, mainly speculative, that develops from God's own knowledge of himself. The Church's repeated commendation of Aquinas as a sure guide for doing Catholic theology, including in the post-conciliar period, provides the best grounds for choosing Aquinas's works over those of other authors, both medieval and modern. Indeed, Popes have praised Aquinas as a Doctor of the Church (the first after the patristic period to be so identified) who enjoys a certain preeminence over the other learned men and women who also enjoy the same designation.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas, *Aeterni Patris*, theology today, Catholic theology, Catholic orthodoxy, spirituality, cognitive realism, ontological realism, science (Aristotelian)

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy esej jest próbą oceny przyszłości teologii katolickiej. Autor zachęca osoby zainteresowane studiowaniem teologii do uważnej lektury i badania dzieł św. Tomasza z Akwinu (zm. 1274) oraz zapoznania się z tomistyczną tradycją komentatorską. Wymienia pięć powodów, które mają przekonać czytelnika do słuszności głównej tezy artykułu. Święty Tomasz ukazany zostaje kolejno jako apologeta

katolickiej ortodoksji, obrońca poznawczego i ontologicznego realizmu, łączący wiarę i rozum twórca spójnej syntezy całego *depositum fidei*, duchowy mistrz oraz przewodnik współczesnego teologa. Stosowność tego eseju staje się oczywista, gdy weźmie się pod uwagę narastające zróżnicowanie teologii katolickiej na całym świecie po zakończeniu Soboru Watykańskiego II (1965). Na większości uczelni, gdzie wykłada się teologię, zwłaszcza na głównych uniwersytetach, studium teologii stało się w rzeczywistości przeglądem prac teologów, nie tylko katolickich. Natomiast Akwinata postrzega teologię katolicką jako naukę głównie spekulatywną, budowaną na wiedzy Boga o sobie samym. Docenienie Akwinaty przez Kościół jako wiarygodnego przewodnika w uprawianiu teologii katolickiej, również w okresie posoborowym, stanowi najlepszą rekomendację wyboru jego dzieł w miejsce prac innych autorów, zarówno średniowiecznych, jak i współczesnych. Uznany przez papieża jako doktor Kościoła (pierwszy teolog po okresie patrystycznym, który otrzymał taki tytuł), św. Tomasz cieszy się autorytetem zdecydowanie większym niż inni mężczyźni i kobiety obdarzeni tym samym tytułem.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, *Aeterni Patris*, współczesna teologia, teologia katolicka, ortodoksja katolicka, duchowość, realizm poznawczy, realizm ontologiczny, nauka (arystotelesowska)

Blessed Ceslaus Odrowaz died on July 15, 1242, in Wrocław, Poland, of natural causes. He was interred in the church of Saint Adalbert, where his grave remains to this day. While he and other Polish priests were visiting Rome, Ceslaus received the religious habit from Saint Dominic himself. Among the companions of Ceslaus was a relative, possibly a brother, who became better known than he. Saint Hyacinth (d. 1257) receives recognition for his wide scale evangelization of Northern Europe.¹ As an American Dominican, I was fortunate to visit Blessed Ceslaus's sanctuary in Wrocław during a visit to Poland in the late twentieth century. The Church in Wrocław must wait a few more years before she can celebrate the 800th anniversary of this saintly Dominican priest's death. However, the Church worldwide honors another early Dominican, one born after the death in 1221 of Saint Dominic, namely, Thomas Aquinas. The year 1225 brings then a celebration of the 800th anniversary of his birth.

One may justly opine that Thomas Aquinas has gained greater recognition than all other members of the Order of Preachers, including the Founder, Saint Dominic Guzman. The reason for the popularity of the Angelic Doctor flows from his enormous contribution to the stabilization of Catholic theology. He accomplished this goal by his many writings, but especially by his well-known

¹ Mary Jean Dorcy, *St. Dominic's Family: The Lives of Over 300 Famous Dominicans* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1983), 34, 35, 56, 57.

Summa Theologiae.² His status as the Common Doctor of the Catholic Church also arises from the attention that Popes and others have paid to the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Nonetheless, today Aquinas's position among Catholic theologians has been questioned as a result of a welter of new proposals, which mostly appeared after the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. These alternative proposals purport, among other objectives, to serve better the purposes of Catholic evangelization.³

In order to respond to some of the proposals that have been made to renew Catholic theology apart from the legacy of Thomas Aquinas, I propose here below to raise some issues that may help perplexed young students of every land to avoid some of the dead-ends that an overly anxious pursuit of innovation may lead unwary students to encounter. In short, it is my intention to set forth five reasons that, in my judgment, should urge interested students of all chronological ages to apply themselves to the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas.⁴ I have chosen five reasons that, again in my judgment, also address some of the present issues in Catholic theology that require some clarification. Of course, each of these reasons assumes that the students' interest in philosophy and theology finds at least some motivation in their desire to possess the truth. For, as Aquinas says, "Truth is a divine thing, a friend more excellent than any human friend."⁵

Of course, those who have been baptized already possess the gift of supernatural Truth. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes the *Apology* of Justin Martyr, a second-century Christian philosopher: "This bath," he writes, "is called enlightenment, because those who receive this [catechetical] instruction are enlightened in their understanding. . . ."⁶ Baptism then brings

² For a general introduction to this work, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception* (Washington, DC: The CUA Press, 2005).

³ Some of the proposals came from theologians who espoused causes that fell far short of Catholic social teaching. For example, see the very interesting article, Lucia Scherzberg, "Catholic Systematic Theology and National Socialism," *theologie.geschichte. Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kulturgeschichte* 2 (2007), 13–33, <https://doi.org/10.48603/tg-2007-art-1>. The author shows how certain German theologians who either influenced or served at the Second Vatican Council were also supporters of National Socialism in Germany.

⁴ The standard reference work in English for the life and work of Saint Thomas Aquinas remains Jean-Pierre Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, vol. 1 of *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Revised edition (Washington, DC: The CUA Press, 2023).

⁵ *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 1, lect. 6. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Philosophical Texts*, ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1982), 36, no. 96.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), <https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM> (hereafter: CCC), no. 1216, quoting *Apologiae* 1, 61, 12 (PG 6, 421).

enlightenment. Only truth enlightens our understanding. Revealed truth raises our understanding to matters “above reason.”⁷ As Pope John Paul II affirmed at the start of his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Exod 33:18; Ps 27:8–9; 63:2–3; John 14:8; 1 John 3:2).”⁸

Aquinas, Safeguard of Catholic Orthodoxy

So the first answer to the question, “Why Study Aquinas Today,” exposes, as Pope Paul VI (d. 1978) once put it, how the Common Doctor supplies effective means for “safeguarding the foundations of the faith.”⁹ Or, why Catholics everywhere, especially those involved in education, should study Aquinas to ensure their personal hold on Catholic orthodoxy.

In its index of Ecclesiastical Writers, the *Catechism* lists some sixty-one references to the works of Aquinas. This statistic suggests the Catholic Church’s reliance on the teachings of the Angelic Doctor when it comes to her making “a statement of the Church’s faith and of Catholic doctrine.”¹⁰ Only Saint Au-

⁷ CCC no. 159: “Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason.” For a discussion of Aquinas’s teaching on the theological virtue of faith, see Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html, “Introduction.” See also, Romanus Cessario, “The Reason for Reason: *Fides et Ratio*,” *Crisis Magazine* 17 (January 1999), 16–19 and Romanus Cessario, “*Fides et ratio*. Un appel à la vérité et à la réconciliation,” *Pierre d’angle* 5 (1999), 32–38, <https://doi.org/10.5840/pda199953>.

⁹ Paulus VI, Epistula apostolica *Lumen Ecclesiae* (November 20, 1974), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19741205_lumen-ecclesiae_lt.html, no. 24. English translation: Paul VI, “Thomas Aquinas, Angelic Doctor for Our Age,” trans. Matthew O’Connell, *The Pope Speaks: The Church Documents Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1975), 287–307.

¹⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum* (October 11, 1992), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jpii_apc_19921011_fidei-depositum.html, no. 3. For a general overview of the *Catechism*, see Romanus Cessario et al., *A Love That Never Ends: A Key to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996).

gustine appears more frequently. No need to accept my word for this evaluation of Aquinas's presence in the Church's universal *Catechism*. We possess a far more weighty and prestigious authority that supports the claim that Thomas Aquinas provides a sure safeguard for Catholic orthodoxy. On 20 November 1974, the abovementioned Pope Paul VI wrote a Letter to the then Master of the Dominican Order, Vincent de Couesnongle, to mark the seventh centenary of the death of Saint Thomas Aquinas. This Letter, whose Latin title is *Lumen Ecclesiae*, asserts emphatically:

Over the centuries the Church has recognized the perennial value and importance of Thomistic teaching; it has done so especially at certain solemn moments, such as the Ecumenical Councils of Florence, Trent and Vatican I, the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law and in Vatican Council III. . . .¹¹

Note one key word in this text, "perennial." What enjoys perennial value never loses its importance. The Pope goes on to recall how both his predecessors and he himself "have frequently confirmed the authority of St. Thomas."¹² He further assures us that this long history of papal endorsements did not result from papal ignorance about historical development in dogmatic formulation nor from a servile fear of progress in Catholic thought. No. The papal endorsements of Aquinas's work have been, the Pope insists, "based on objective considerations that are intrinsic to the philosophy and theology of Aquinas."¹³ This papal endorsement of Aquinas now stands, it is true, a little more than a half century in the past. Do not let the passage of time, however, distract you. As will become apparent, these ecclesial endorsements of Aquinas have not diminished, not grown fifty-years stale.

Some may recall that the year 1978 was hailed as the "Year of Three Popes." Pope Paul VI died in August of that year. Pope John Paul I's papacy lasted about a month. (He died at the end of the following September.) Then, Pope John Paul II was elected in October of the same year, 1978. Throughout his papacy, he kept emphasizing the importance of Aquinas for Catholic thought and life. Admittedly, various special interest groups have claimed several modern philosophical influences on the writings of this philosophically and literarily gifted Pope. However, the English translation of his Lublin Lectures, delivered at the Catholic University of Lublin in the mid-1950s, leave no doubt about

¹¹ Paulus VI, *Lumen Ecclesiae*, no. 14.

¹² Paulus VI, no. 14.

¹³ Paulus VI, no. 14.

Karol Wojtyła's fundamental Aristotelian orientation.¹⁴ Additionally, one only has to recall, for instance, the important references to the work of Aquinas in two of the major doctrinal encyclicals of Pope John Paul II's reign, namely, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Fides et Ratio* (1998). To cite only two emblematic instances of the Pope's reliance on the thought of Thomas Aquinas, consider the decisive judgment made by the Pope in the 1993 encyclical on moral theory. This encyclical deals, as the Pope says, "with certain fundamental questions regarding the Church's moral teaching."¹⁵ In treating these questions, we find that Pope John Paul II invokes Aquinas's action theory. He says so explicitly when he writes: "The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the 'object' rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the insightful analysis, still valid today, made by Saint Thomas."¹⁶ Or, again, in 1995 when he writes on faith and reason, Pope John Paul II says:

This is why the Church has been justified in consistently proposing Saint Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology. In this connection, I would recall what my Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, wrote on the occasion of the seventh centenary of the death of the Angelic Doctor: "Without doubt, Thomas possessed supremely the courage of the truth, a freedom of spirit in confronting new problems, the intellectual honesty of those who allow Christianity to be contaminated neither by secular philosophy nor by a prejudiced rejection of it."¹⁷

¹⁴ For a discussion of the influence that Aquinas held on the young Polish professor, see Jarosław Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000). Also see Karol Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler: The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

¹⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html, no. 5. For further discussion, see Romanus Cessario and J. Augustine DiNoia, eds., *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology: Studies by Ten Outstanding Scholars* (Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 1999).

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 78. For further discussion, see Romanus Cessario, "The Light of Tabor: Christian Personalism and Adoptive Friendship," *Nova et Vetera: English Edition* 2, no. 2 (2004), 237–47.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 43. For further discussion, see Romanus Cessario, "Duplex Ordo Cognitionis" in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 327–38.

Note well that the above text falls under a general heading in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* that both affirms and expounds on “the enduring originality of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas.”¹⁸

What may one conclude from this sampling of both papal endorsements of and citations from the works of Thomas Aquinas? At the very least, the Church perennially relies on the works of the Angelic Doctor, especially when it comes to clarifying doctrinal pronouncements that have arisen throughout the Church’s history.¹⁹ It hardly needs to be mentioned that the few examples that I have given above do not exhaust the contributions, both direct and indirect, that Aquinas has made to the safeguarding of Catholic orthodoxy. A complete account would also have to include how Aquinas’s thought helps us to better understand pronouncements made centuries both before and closer to his birth. The best example of the latter appears in the use of the word “transubstantiation” to describe the Eucharistic conversion that the Fourth Lateran Council employed in 1215.²⁰ Who better than Aquinas explains transubstantiation? At the same time, Pope John Paul II’s two encyclicals illustrate Aquinas’s usefulness for two very important discussions that occupy the Church today, namely, the right way to evaluate morally a human action and the right way to understand how human reason can support the givens of faith.

Aquinas, Defender of Cognitive and Ontological Realism

The second reason that should prompt today’s Catholic students to study Aquinas arises from the realization that his works always betray what scholars have called both a cognitive and ontological realism.²¹ One may also refer to Aquinas’s

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, before no. 43.

¹⁹ For discussion of the commentatorial tradition that has drawn on the thought of Aquinas throughout the centuries since his death, see an early work by the author: Romanus Cessario, *Le thomisme et les thomistes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999) and the English translation, Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). Also, Romanus Cessario and Cajetan Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists: The Achievement of Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

²⁰ See DS 802. For further discussion, see Romanus Cessario, *The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023); Colman E. O’Neill, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, revised by Romanus Cessario (New York: Alba House, 1991).

²¹ For one of the best studies on this achievement of Aquinas, see Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco, 1986).

critical realism. In the early twentieth century, Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) made this point when he addressed Italian university students.

In Thomism we have what might be called a natural Gospel and a very solid basis and framework for the whole doctrinal structure. For it is characteristic of Thomism to be concerned first and foremost with the objective order. The intellectual structures it builds are not pure abstractions but follow the lead given by reality itself. . . . Thomist teaching will never lose its superiority and power, for that could happen only if reality itself were to lose its superiority and power.²²

Such straightforward papal remarks provide fairly strong support for the cognitive and ontological realism that permeates Aquinas's works. Why is this critical realism important? Consider one alternative: Transcendental philosophy.

The overarching outlook that guides Catholic theology today cannot be said to depend muchly on the work of the Belgian Jesuit thinker, Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944), a twentieth-century promoter of what has become known as transcendental Thomism.²³ Maréchal represents one of several efforts from the nineteenth century on to present the thought of Aquinas as compatible with that of Immanuel Kant. Students of Catholic theology, however, should loathe to pin their thinking on skyhooks. At least, I hope they see that versions of Kantianism support poorly Catholic thought. Those with even a basic understanding of Kantian philosophy recognize that the German Enlightenment thinker favored neither cognitive nor ontological realism. Instead, many Catholic students owe a great deal to the work of another Belgian philosopher who worked most of his life in Quebec, Canada. He, of course, enjoys a solid reputation as a down-to-earth Thomist. I refer to Charles De Koninck (1906–1965).²⁴ The two-volume edition of *The Writings of Charles De Koninck* published by the late Ralph McInerny make the philosophical and theological genius of De Koninck accessible to an English-speaking readership. De Koninck was less concerned with fighting continental transcendentalism and more concerned with addressing the monistic materialism that modern science implicitly or not so implicitly adopts.

²² See Domenico Bertetto, ed., *Discorsi di Pio XI*, vol. 1 (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1960), 668–69.

²³ See for instance, John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

²⁴ See Ralph M. McInerny, "Charles De Koninck: A Philosopher of Order," *New Scholasticism* 39, no. 4 (1965), 491–516, <https://doi.org/10.5840/newscholas19653944>.

It remains remarkably difficult to summarize genius in a phrase or a single citation. However, one quotation from an early work of De Koninck, *The Cosmos*, exhibits how he was able to put Aquinas's cognitive and ontological realism up against the findings of the most acclaimed modern scientific theorists. As the title suggests, De Koninck used his Thomist principles to safeguard a view of the universe—*The Cosmos*—one, moreover, that does not force Christians to adopt either monist or pantheist theories. Monism, on De Koninck's account, "wants to take everything back to homogeneous unity. Pantheism . . . pretends that God and the world are one."²⁵ De Koninck's rebuttal: "There is absolute unity in God alone: in His very unity He is absolutely distinct from every creature. But metaphysics also teaches us that by His immensity, God is more intimately in creatures than creatures are in themselves."²⁶ De Koninck concludes by pointing out that without a proper understanding of the God-world relationship, "things too would be deprived of their most intimate link, since God, their most profound principle of coherence, would be dispersed among them. The world would be like an army in disorder without a leader."²⁷ That was written in 1936! Think today of the issues that divide the citizens of the world. Was De Koninck a prophet?

It is well known that, especially after Descartes, many books on the history of philosophy recount diverse challenges to the cognitive and ontological realism that Saint Thomas upholds.²⁸ Today then, Catholic students worldwide enjoy an awesome responsibility. In a world that looks all too much like an army in disorder and without a leader, Catholic students must discover the arguments that put order back into both philosophy and theology. Ideologies, such as those embedded in the once popular (in the USA, at least) diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, abet disorder in human society. Sound philosophy, on the contrary, begins when the human person achieves cognitive contact with the real and upon reflection embraces wisely the real goods of nature and supernature. How does a person know that what he or she embraces brings wisdom? In a small treatise that he composed on the Blessed Virgin Mary, De Koninck gives one answer to this question. In this 1943 publication, "Ego Sapientia: The Wisdom That Is Mary," De Koninck gives us a guideline for identifying wise loves. He says:

²⁵ *The Writings of Charles De Koninck*, vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 320.

²⁶ *Writings*, 321.

²⁷ *Writings*, 321.

²⁸ For a brief study, see Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (Providence, RI, 2020).

Wisdom may be predicated substantially only of a thing which in its being and operation is of the nature of the first principle from which all things proceed by way of origination. It would not suffice for it to attain the primary root solely according to knowledge because then it would be wise only, but it must substantially possess the nature of the first principle, and know itself as such.²⁹

De Koninck goes on to explain how this definition allows us to call Our Blessed Lady, Wisdom. His argument exhibits a daringly bold approach to Marian spirituality, one however that finds spiritual inspiration in saints such as the seventeenth-century preacher, Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (d. 1716). De Koninck wants to show that Wisdom belongs rightly to Mary on account of the fact that she embodies the kind of first principle that ensures wisdom. He says:

To be truly a first principle would not Mary have to be such a first principle even in her relation to God, would she not have to be so close to God that she would somehow participate even in His nature of first principle, be as the root of the universal order, even, in a way, that from which God Himself proceeds in a certain manner, the origin and genetrix of God?³⁰

It would be difficult to imagine a more robust statement in defense of ontological realism or a better example of reason supporting faith. The mystical Baroque metaphors that one finds throughout the writings of Louis de Montfort escape many people. De Koninck, on the other hand, in a few pages uncovers the philosophical groundwork of de Montfort's Marian spirituality. He also makes a penetrating comment on reality itself. One, accordingly, sees why Pope John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical on faith and reason, ends with this sentiment drawn from the Pope's reading of certain holy monks from Christian antiquity: "In her [Mary] they [the monks] saw a lucid image of true philosophy and they were convinced of the need to *philosophari in Maria*."³¹

²⁹ *The Writings of Charles De Koninck*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 6.

³⁰ *Writings*, vol. 2, p. 7.

³¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 108.

Thomas Aquinas as Integrator

A third reason that should persuade Catholic students to study Aquinas stems from the creative way in which he sets out the whole of Catholic teaching, the *depositum fidei*. During the period after the issuance of *Aeterni Patris* in 1879, it was common for scholars to speak about a Thomistic synthesis.³² From a material consideration, this meant that Thomist scholars produced books that contained the elements of Thomist thought, the characteristic features of Thomist thought, and the Thomist resolutions of well-known disputes in both philosophy and theology.³³ Some eager thinkers, however, moved from consulting material collections of Thomist positions to envisaging the same as a self-contained system of thought. Josef Pieper addressed the wrongheadedness of one's presenting Aquinas, especially in his *Summa*, as the creator of a closed system. Pieper explains as follows: It is a misunderstanding to assume "that the *summam* are the most pretentious form of closed system—the closed system in the sense of Hegel."³⁴ In other words, the *Summa Theologiae* is not to be treated as a kind of Enlightenment encyclopedia, only one that may not need updating. Not every Thomist scholar made the "encyclopedic mistake." For instance, consider the Swiss Dominican, Gallus Manser's book, *Das Wesen des Thomismus*.³⁵ This text represents an effort to show that one best approaches Aquinas with an eye for the first principles that govern his work.³⁶ Aquinas can rightly be considered as an integrator. It remains, nonetheless, important to grasp how he proceeds to bring things together by appealing to the first principles of both faith and reason.

I hope that some of you are already familiar with a recently (2023) published work, *The Thomistic Response to the Nouvelle Théologie: Concerning the Truth of Dogma and the Nature of Theology*.³⁷ This impressive volume supplies just what

³² For further information about *Aeterni Patris*, see Victor B. Brezik, ed., *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards: A Symposium* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, 1981).

³³ To cite one example, see Joseph Gredt, *Elementa philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*, 2 vols. (Rome: Desclée, 1899–1901).

³⁴ Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 157, 158.

³⁵ Gallus M. Manser, *Das Wesen des Thomismus* (Freiburg: Rüttschi, 1935).

³⁶ See the remark by Jörgen Vijgen, "What is a Thomist? The Contribution of John of St. Thomas," December 10, 2018, accessed January 6, 2025, https://thomistica.net/essays/2018/12/10/what-is-a-thomist-the-contribution-of-john-of-st-thomas#_ftn4.

³⁷ Jon Kirwan, ed., *The Thomistic Response to the Nouvelle Théologie: Concerning the Truth of Dogma and the Nature of Theology*, trans. Matthew K. Miner (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

the title says. These documents translated for the first time into English may be judged as long overdue, especially for students who recognize the value of Saint Thomas as both philosopher and theologian. From the time that reporters and other observers of the Second Vatican Council began to introduce two theretofore unfamiliar words to Catholics worldwide—one Italian and the other French, *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*—many Catholics and others have been persuaded that the Second Vatican Council ordained dramatic changes in the life of the Catholic Church. These changes included a movement away from Leonine Thomism, a singular renewal of Thomist thought that had guided the Church's teaching office since 1879. Instead, *ressourcement* theologians sought to establish a new theological approach based on the retrieval of texts, that is, sources, found among the writings of early Christian authors. The initial volume that announced this new approach may be identified with the 1946 publication of Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses* in the Collection, Sources chrétiennes.³⁸ Note well that this movement did not represent merely a renewed interest in patrology. No. The advocates of *ressourcement*, mainly Jesuits at the start, consciously sought to establish a new paradigm for doing Catholic theology.

As the 395 pages of carefully translated and edited documents indicate, *Thomistic Response* exposes what certain mid-twentieth century scholars considered questionable about this bold project. In a word, French Dominican Thomists, mainly centered in Toulouse, raised serious objections to the Jesuits—again Frenchmen, mostly centered in Lyon, France—and their proposal to transform the dominant theological model that had governed the presentation of official Catholic thought from at least the sixteenth century, if not before. This lecture does not allow even a brief exposé of the multi-faceted *ressourcement* debate that continues to this day. Suffice it to remark that the multiplication of sources, mainly authors from Christian antiquity, can easily distract the student of theology from what Pope Paul VI has called “a magnificent, carefully organized edifice of doctrine which is universally valid and makes him [Aquinas] a teacher even for our time [late 1970s].”³⁹

Scholars have observed that whereas the early and medieval theologians valued metaphysics as a paradigm for their doctrinal developments, modern

³⁸ Grégoire de Nyse, *La vie de Moïse; ou Traité de la perfection en matière de vertu*, 2. éd., rev. et augm. du text critique, trans. Jean Daniélou, Sources chrétiennes, 1 bis (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007; réim pr. de la 2e éd. rev. et corr., 1955; 1re éd., 1942). The advertisement explains the purpose of the collection: La collection Sources chrétiennes présente les textes des premiers siècles du christianisme, en y joignant tous les éléments (introductions, notes, index, etc.) qui peuvent en faciliter l'intelligence ou l'étude.

³⁹ Paulus VI, *Lumen Ecclesiae*, no. 19.

theologians have chosen instead to make history and historical investigation the paradigm for theological work.⁴⁰ The problem with this modern turn of events recalls an issue that Aquinas dealt with at the very start of his *Summa Theologiae*. In the very first question, Aquinas responds to someone who wants to make biblical history disqualify Christian theology as a science. The objector argues that the *sacra doctrina* cannot be a science, since sciences do not treat individual events, for instance, “the doings of Abraham, Issac, Jacob and the like.”⁴¹ Fair enough. However, Aquinas recognizes another origin for the *sacra doctrina*. So he replies

Sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*) sets out individual cases, not as being preoccupied with them, but in order to introduce them as examples for our own lives . . . and to proclaim the authority of the men through whom divine revelation has come down to us, which revelation is the basis of sacred Scripture or doctrine.⁴²

In other words, the *sacra doctrina* attains its scientific character not from the historical narratives found in the Bible, but from its subordination to a “higher science, namely God’s very own which he shares with the blessed.”⁴³ Something similar can be said about the 623 volumes of ancient sources now translated into French by the editors of Sources chrétiennes. [Cerf advertised a 50% discount for the whole series, an offer that ended in early 2025.] Sound theology always harkens back to God’s knowledge of himself that He shares with the blessed, and not to the endless flow of historical documents that have tried, sometimes successfully, to capture pieces of it.

To say that Aquinas brings integration to the theological discipline means that one can expect to discover not only premises for theological thinking but also conclusions. Given the human mind’s preference for truth, these conclusions prove very useful for the student of Catholic thought. Think of catechetical instruction. Think of priests’ preaching. Think of your own moral

⁴⁰ See Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), xi: “When I began the preparatory work for this study in the fall of 1953, one of the questions which stood in the foreground of concern within German-speaking, Catholic theological circles were the question of the relation of salvation–history to metaphysics. This was a problem which arose above all from contacts with Protestant theology which, since the time of Luther, has tended to see in metaphysical thought a departure from the specific claim of the Christian faith which directs man not simply to the Eternal but to the God who acts in time and history.”

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I^a q. 1, art. 2, arg. 2.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, ad 2.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *respondeo*.

lives. As edifying as each of the 623 volumes of *Sources chrétiennes* may be, one may be excused for wondering to what extent they satisfy the human desire to embrace divine truth integrally. One is reminded even of the skilled librarian who knows the location of every book in his library but remains ignorant of what the books contain.

Thomas Aquinas as Spiritual Master

So far we have considered three reasons for studying Aquinas: orthodoxy, realism, and integration. The fourth reason that should urge students to follow the thought of Saint Thomas may be placed under the heading of spiritual guide. Of course, his being a guide to one's Catholic life would require that he upholds Catholic orthodoxy. It would hardly do to follow someone who departed from the truth. It should also be someone who recognizes the place that God holds with relation to our whole human beingness. To choose a spiritual guide whose only concern is from the neck up, so to speak, that is, one who thinks that Christian life remains circumscribed by one's mental activity, would leave a person open to all kinds of uncertainties. Conservative uncertainties, such as scruples, and liberal uncertainties, well, such as grave misunderstandings about both the Church and the moral life. Further, a spiritual guide should possess a comprehensive grasp of what the Church holds. Most heresies arise from a person's attaching exaggerated importance to one aspect of the Christian faith. In the United States, New England Unitarianism provides a good example for those familiar with the history of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Charismatic extremism that looks for divine approval almost exclusively outside of the ordinary ways in which God makes his holy will known may be another. Think of those people everywhere who consider internal psychological movements the ultimate arbiter of their religious experiences.

The suggestion that Saint Thomas Aquinas provides sound guidance for living a proper Catholic life is not new. Many continental authors have written extensively on the topic.⁴⁴ I myself once published a brief article on the subject

⁴⁴ For example, see Josef Pieper, *Philosophia negativa: Zwei Versuche über Thomas von Aquin* (München: Kösel, 1953); Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "La contemplation dans l'école dominicaine," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 2 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953), 2067–80; Walter H. Principe, *Thomas Aquinas's Spirituality* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984); Jean-Pierre Torrell, "Thomas D'Aquin," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 15 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1991), 718–73; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris – Fribourg, 1993); Guy Bedouelle, *Ad immagine di Santo Domenico*

that drew from some of these earlier sources.⁴⁵ There, I argued that the generative matrix of Aquinas's own mystical experiences lies in the some thirty years of Dominican ministry and community life that this Neapolitan nobleman began in 1244. Aquinas's words before receiving the blessed Eucharist for the last time reveal his deep personal love for Jesus Christ: "I now receive you who art the price of my soul's redemption, I receive you who art the food for my final journey, and for the love of whom I have studied, kept vigil, and struggled; indeed, it was you, Jesus, that I preached and you that I taught."⁴⁶ For a speculative thinker of the thirteenth century, both Aquinas's philosophical and theological treatises provide rich sources of insight about the human experience of transcendence and our a-conceptual bond with God.

Three strains of connatural knowledge appear in the works of Thomas Aquinas. One may identify them as Being-mysticism, Bridal-mysticism, and Knowledge-mysticism. One note of caution: Catholics should approach words like mysticism and spirituality with discrimination. The category of mysticism, for example, enters the Thomist commentatorial tradition somewhat later than 1274 when Aquinas died. One significant figure of this innovation appears in the seventeenth-century Thomist, Thomas de Vallgornera (1595–1665), a Spanish Dominican, who published in 1662 his *Mystica theologia divi Thomae: Utriusque theologiae scholasticae et mysticae principis*. In the prologue, the author wrote: "The mystical doctrine of St. Thomas is of such great authority, precisely because it is founded on Scholastic doctrine, that it can scarcely be expressed in words."⁴⁷ In other words, Aquinas did not consider mysticism as something that could trump scholastic thought.

First, Being-mysticism. The twentieth-century German theologian Josef Pieper once suggested that Aquinas should have been called Friar Thomas of the Creation (*Thomas a Creatore*).⁴⁸ For while Saint Thomas, as he himself

(Milan: Jaca Book, 1994). English translations of many of the above materials have become available since their original publication.

⁴⁵ A version of what follows in this section has appeared in Luigi Borriello and et al., eds., *Dizionario di Mistica* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), s.v. "Tommaso D'Aquino (santo)." See also, Romanus Cessario, "The Spirituality of Saint Thomas Aquinas," *Crisis Magazine* 14 (July/August 1996), 14–16.

⁴⁶ Kenelm Foster, ed. and trans., "From the First Canonisation Enquiry (Naples, At the Archbishop's Palace; 21 July to 18 September 1319)," in *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London: Longmans, Green, 1959), 110.

⁴⁷ See Tomás de Vallgornera, *Mystica theologia divi Thomae: utriusque theologiae scholasticae et mysticae principis*, ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier (Turin: Marietti, 1911), Prologue.

⁴⁸ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of Saint Thomas*, trans. John Murray and Daniel O'Connor (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), 32.

testifies, did everything out of an unstinting love for the incarnate Son of God, the surpassing riches of Christ never kept him from drawing the full theological implications of Saint Paul's words to the Romans: "Ever since the creation of the world God's invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20). Since the Catholic faith teaches that the created order witnesses to the existence of a God who entirely surpasses every form of finiteness and contingency, Aquinas can argue that the human experience of transcendence is founded on the causal relationships that bind the created person with the Creator.⁴⁹ By appeal to the real distinction in created beings between their specific identity ("*essentia*") and their actual existence ("*esse*"), Aquinas unequivocally excludes all forms of pantheism or panentheism. Rather, he describes an ordering that obtains between intellectual creatures and God and which establishes the basis for a certain kind of justice: Reverence for and submission to an utterly transcendent God fall among the dispositions that religion requires of the human person. Of course, to acknowledge an acquired virtue of religion in no way prejudices the fact that the only perfect worship of God remains that which is revealed by Jesus Christ and is practiced in the Church of faith and Sacraments. Aquinas's appreciation for creation as providing the basis for an analogical knowledge of the supernatural order lies at the heart of his Being-mysticism.

Second, Bridal-mysticism. Aquinas would also have merited the title Friar Thomas of the Incarnation. For as commentary on the magisterial documents that affirm the divinity of Jesus Christ, Aquinas's discussion of the metaphysics of the Incarnation ranks among the best in this genre of Christian literature.⁵⁰ Aquinas locates the supreme moment of alliance between mankind and God in the hypostatic union.⁵¹ In the person of the Logos-Son, a human nature comes together with the divine nature, without either one thereby suffering division or mixture. As the primordial wedding between God and mankind, the Incarnation makes a personal relationship between God and human persons possible. Indeed, each member of the human family becomes an adopted son or daughter of God only in the one incarnate Son. Aquinas's Bridal-mysticism emphasizes the intimate communication with God that Christ's mission opens up for all persons. So while the human person can approach the Creator in

⁴⁹ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, no. 3.

⁵⁰ For further discussion, see Romanus Cessario, "God the Son: Trinitarian Christology: Markers in the Thomist Tradition," *Nova et Vetera: English Edition* 12 (2014), 1233–55.

⁵¹ For further discussion, see Cessario, "The Light of Tabor," 237–47.

a spirit of reverence and submission, only those who are sons or daughters in Christ dare to address God using the familiar name, “Abba, Father.” Aquinas’s explanations about the person and life of Christ, especially his salvific death, his Virgin Mother, his Mystical Body, which is the Church, and the Sacraments all serve to explain how this privileged form of personal communion with God begins and develops in the Christian believer. As Aquinas’s own deathbed prayer witnesses, the blessed Eucharist preeminently realizes his Incarnation-centered mysticism. Why? At the moment of Holy Communion the Christian believer finds union with the person of Christ as present under the sacramental signs of bread and wine. The Sienese Dominican Catherine Benincasa (1347–1380), who, while herself communicating, received a mystical ring as a symbol of her extraordinary spiritual union with Christ, represents Aquinas’s Bridal-mysticism.⁵² Her indefatigable defense of both Christ’s Church and the papacy points up, moreover, the ecclesial aspect of *communio* that Aquinas assumes as the foundation for all *bona fide* Christian mysticism.

Third, Knowledge-mysticism. On Aquinas’s account, the theological virtue of faith perfects the human mind. Under the impulse of divine grace, God moves the human will to assent to truths that surpass reason’s grasp and for which God therefore serves as the only Source and Guarantor. At the same time, theological faith also effects a marriage between the human person and God. In one of his short works, an Exposition addressed to the Archdeacon of Todi, Aquinas cites the Vulgate text, “I will espouse thee to me in faith” (Hos 2:20), in order to emphasize the mystical dimension of Christian belief.⁵³ Thus, Aquinas teaches that this virtue leads the human person not only to a cognitive grasp of revealed truth, but also to an authentic embrace of the divine Persons that such truths represent.⁵⁴ The transformation of the human intellect that faith achieves in the believer remains the beginning of the new life that charity establishes in the believer. By the gracious regard of the divine Goodness, charity makes the human person a lover of God, and this love reaches its earthly perfection in the affective beholding of God that Aquinas calls contemplation.

⁵² The event provided a popular theme for artists of the fifteenth century and beyond. See for example, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena*, by Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia, a Siennese artist of the fifteenth century.

⁵³ The Vulgate text runs “et sponsabo te mihi in fide.” See *Expositio primae decretalis ad Archidiaconum Tudertinum*.

⁵⁴ For a full discussion of Aquinas’s teaching on theological faith, see Cessario, *Christian Faith*.

For Aquinas, contemplative prayer forms part of the ordinary dynamic of Christian mysticism.⁵⁵ The spiritual elitism that characterizes certain European mystics of the seventeenth century, such as the Spanish priest Miguel Molinos (c. 1640–1697) and the French clairvoyant Madame Guyon (1648–1717), finds no support in the works of Thomas Aquinas. On the contrary, as his teaching about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit makes plainly evident, the theological life of faith and charity develops into a form of habitual connaturality that makes the felt experience of God a swift matter of ease and joy.⁵⁶ Aquinas himself provides a peerless illustration of this Knowledge-mysticism. In 1273, shortly before his death, Aquinas experienced the utter nothingness of his vast literary output. “I can write no more,” he told his secretary, “for all that I have written seems like straw in comparison to what I have seen.”⁵⁷ Perhaps Aquinas’s own biography more forcefully demonstrates how he conceived the immediacy of the mystical experience than do his unsurpassed writings on the Christian life. Or as Thomas de Vallgornera expressed it, words do not suffice.

Trusted Guide for the Theologian Today

It would be difficult to affirm that everything Pope Paul VI said about Aquinas and his teaching has taken hold of the Catholic theological community or of Catholic education. Educational institutions that revere Aquinas as a model for theological instruction occupy but a small position on the landscape of Catholic theological and philosophical studies. So the five reasons that I propose for studying Aquinas today aim to augment the number of students and scholars who regard Aquinas as a *Lumen Ecclesiae*. True enough, in the better schools, Aquinas receives attention for his place in the history of philosophy and theology. Pope Paul VI, however, recalled a more ample place for Aquinas when he wrote: “To put the matter briefly: the Church officially approves the teaching of the Angelic Doctor and uses it as an instrument superbly adapted

⁵⁵ Romanus Cessario, *Dominican Contemplative Life: Inside the Cloister* (New Hope, KY: St Martin de Porres Community, 2024).

⁵⁶ For further discussion, Romanus Cessario, “A Thomist Interpretation of Faith: The Gifts of Understanding and Knowledge,” in *Novitas et Veritas Vitae. Aux Sources du Renouveau de la Morale Chrétienne. Mélanges offerts au Professeur Servais Pinckaers à l’occasion de son 65e anniversaire*, ed. Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1991), 67–102.

⁵⁷ Foster, “From the First Canonisation Enquiry,” 109–10, no. 79.

to her purposes, thus casting the mantle of her own magisterial authority over Aquinas, as she does (even if in lesser degree) over her other great doctors.”⁵⁸

To summarize the main points made in this article, allow me to enumerate the following conclusions. (1) Catholic theology today exhibits a pluralism that contrary to some assertions may not serve well what Aquinas calls the *sacra doctrina*, that is, God’s own knowledge of himself that He shares with the blessed. (2) Since the close of the Second Vatican Council, though not by reason of any warrant that appears in the official proceedings of the Council, Catholic theologians have engaged in dialogue with Christian teachings that have developed from within the ecclesial communions that have developed in the West since the sixteenth century. To a lesser extent, Catholic theologians have engaged with the religious teachings and sacred literature of world religions other than Christian. While the engagement itself may be found legitimate in many cases, the impression that the engagement has created can, in several instances, at least, lead to syncretistic distortions of Catholic truth.⁵⁹ (3) Aquinas and his conception of the theological project reminds students of theology that the task of theology is to expound on and defend the truths of the Catholic faith. No warrant is found for changing the truths of the Catholic religion. Popes have praised Aquinas for his modeling of this kind of theological activity. (4) Pope John Paul II, especially in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, set forth the way that faith and reason lead the human inquirer to the truth about God and creation. Aquinas offers an introduction to the proper use of philosophy in theology. Philosophical realism best serves Catholic theology which must defend such doctrines as those that concern creation of the universe, the nature of the human person, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and many other features of Catholic life. Catholic believers are assured of a contact with the real and not only with correct thoughts about the real. (5) The Catholic theologian finds in Aquinas a guide as how to ensure that one’s theological efforts remain part of a single science. Theology has not generated stepchildren. The modern penchant to make theological specialties self-standing enterprises that balkanize theology finds no warrant in Catholic or Thomist teaching. As the *Summa Theologiae* makes plain, Aquinas integrates the several topics that theologians consider under one formal object, namely, the truth about God and his Christ. (6) Finally, Catholic theology belongs more in a classical monastery than in a modern university. Theological learning gives way to theological practice,

⁵⁸ Paulus VI, *Lumen Ecclesiae*, no. 22.

⁵⁹ For discussion, see Romanus Cessario, “Miscere colloquia: On the Authentic Renewal of Catholic Spirituality,” *Nova et Vetera: English Edition* 11 (2013), 627–47.

such that distinctive specializations such as spirituality or, still less, mysticism, require no formal distinction from speculative thought. Those who study the truth are drawn to love the truth.

Those who study under the shadow of Blessed Ceslaus, Dominican missionary and teacher, should be proud of the heritage that his Order generated after the death of Aquinas.⁶⁰ Catholic students today can regain their footing by attending to the teaching of the Angelic Doctor. Even when theology entertains topics that were not part of Aquinas's world view, sound Thomists will discover that the principles that Aquinas upholds will help them make right judgment about questions that thirteenth-century theologians did not face. How may one conclude? With a burst of praise for the gift that Aquinas remains for the Church and with an expression of gratitude for this issue of the Wroclaw journal, I say, *Felix*, Happy, Wroclaw. Her theological journal exhibits so much devotion to the teachings of the Common Doctor.

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⁶⁰ For one example of the Thomist contribution to contemporary Catholic thought, see Romanus Cessario, "Sonship, Sacrifice, and Satisfaction: The Divine Friendship in Aquinas and the Renewal of Christian Anthropology," *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007), 71–93.

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Theology in Praise: Aquinas on the Psalms

Teologia w uwielbieniu: Akwinata o Psalmach

ABSTRACT: The author discusses the reasons for his interest in the role of Scripture in the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, even if his academic teaching and research in different contexts led him to focus on different topics. He shows the relevance of this Scriptural and Thomistic theology. The author demonstrates how Aquinas's focus on the mysteries of the life of Christ enabled him to teach a course that analyses musical and theological interpretations of these mysteries, even by non-Christian artists. Another course on theological interpretations of Scripture brought together theological and exegetical viewpoints in order to highlight the unity of Catholic theology with Scripture as its soul. Finally, the author gives an analysis of the Christological interpretation of the Psalms, and argues that how Aquinas in his commentary on the Psalms juxtaposes different forms of interpretation in order to show the fullness of the Word of God inspired by the Spirit that encompasses the different mysteries of the Christian faith.

KEY WORDS: Thomas Aquinas, Scripture, mysteries of the life of Christ, theological interpretation, Christological interpretation, Psalms, theology and music, theology in praise

ABSTRAKT: W niniejszym artykule autor omawia powody swojego zainteresowania rolą Pisma Świętego w teologii św. Tomasza z Akwinu, mimo że jego działalność naukowo-badawcza była zorientowana na inne zagadnienia. W pierwszej części ukazano znaczenie tomistycznej teologii opartej na Piśmie Świętym. W dalszej części pokazano, w jaki sposób nauczanie św. Tomasza o tajemnicach życia Chrystusa umożliwiło autorowi prowadzenie wykładu analizującego muzyczne i teologiczne interpretacje tych tajemnic, nawet przez artystów niechrześcijańskich. Inny wykład św. Tomasza, poświęcony teologicznym interpretacjom Pisma Świętego, łączył teologiczne i egzegetyczne perspektywy w celu podkreślenia jedności teologii katolickiej z Pismem Świętym jako jej duszą. Na koniec przedstawiono analizę chrystologicznej interpretacji Psalmów, argumentując, że Tomasz z Akwinu w swoim komentarzu do Psalmów zestawia różne formy interpretacji, aby pokazać pełnię słowa Bożego natchnionego przez Ducha, które obejmuje różne tajemnice wiary chrześcijańskiej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, Pismo Święte, tajemnice życia Chrystusa, interpretacja teologiczna, interpretacja chrystologiczna, Psalmy, teologia i muzyka, teologia w uwielbieniu

In this contribution to the 800th commemoration of the birth of St. Thomas Aquinas, I want to show how the engagement with the theology of Thomas Aquinas has been formative for my work as a theologian engaged in interreligious dialogue and comparative theology with Muslims. Working on the boundaries between theology and religious studies, I have always been aware how Aquinas has helped me to focus on the specific nature of Catholic theology and its sources. Looking back on forty years of teaching and research, I hope to show how Aquinas has accompanied me in teaching about theological interpretations of Scripture as a way to honor the commendation in *Dei Verbum* that “the study of the Sacred Page is as it were the soul of Sacred Theology.”¹ In the main part of my contribution, I want to look at Aquinas’s own practice in the classroom by considering the ways in which he speaks about Christ in his commentary on the Psalms.

Words of the Living God Revisited

It is now more than forty years ago since I started the research that was completed by the public defense of my dissertation in 1990. When I started to study theology and religious studies in the Netherlands in 1972, there was among students hardly any interest in the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, let alone in the biblical sources of his theology. Yet, one of the professors, Ferdinand de Grijis (1931–2011), convinced some of us that the opinion that Thomas Aquinas would no longer be relevant for modern theology is a misconception that should be corrected.² He also remarked that many theologians only write about the

¹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965), no. 23.

² The Flemish theologian Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. is sometimes quoted as saying that after the Second Vatican Council his way of doing theology changed to such an extent that Thomas Aquinas no longer is an eminent source of inspiration. However, I think that he underestimates the influence of Thomas Aquinas on his later theology, see Pim Valkenberg, “The Thomistic Roots of Schillebeeckx’s Theology,” in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Stephan van Erp and Daniel Minch (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 19–28.

way in which other theologians talk about God (*oratio obliqua*), thereby avoiding to speak about God themselves (*oratio recta*). Even though I was certainly interested in contemporary forms of contextual theology and wrote my MA thesis on Mary Daly, I decided to join the newly constituted research group on Thomas Aquinas in 1981.³ In our research we wanted to stress the theological elements in Aquinas's work, and my PhD project on the Scriptural resources of Aquinas's theology was one of the first products of this explicitly theological approach. The ecumenical context of our work, a relatively small group of Catholic theologians working alongside and sometimes together with a much larger group of Reformed theologians, certainly was an important motive that urged us to show that it would be a grave misunderstanding to characterize Aquinas's theology as "philosophical" as opposed to "biblical." More specifically, we wanted to show the Scriptural nature of Aquinas's theology as a contribution to the history of exegesis and ecumenical relationships, including the relationship with Judaism.⁴ At that time, systematic theology and biblical exegesis constituted two rather different approaches in the study of theology that were often separated by thick walls, even though some theologians tried to overcome these barriers.⁵ Much later, when I started to work as a Catholic systematic theologian in the United States, I was pleasantly surprised that the collaboration with exegetes was much more fruitful in the context of American Catholic colleges and universities.⁶ I will come back to this context and to my own attempt to build

³ About the history of the Werkgroep Thomas van Aquino, later Thomas Instituut te Utrecht (at Tilburg University), see the website of the Thomas Instituut: http://www.thomasinstituut.org/index.php?info_id=33 (accessed May 28, 2025). The theological backgrounds are discussed in Herwi Rikhof, "Thomas at Utrecht," in *Contemplating Aquinas. On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. Fergus Kerr (London: SCM Press, 2003), 103–36. Along the same lines, Pim Valkenberg, "Thomas Aquinas and the Hidden Presence of God," in *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership*, Currents of Encounter 26 (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2006), 213–19; Pim Valkenberg, "Everything Related to God," in *The Enduring Significance of Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Honor of Henk Schoot and Rudi te Velde*, ed. Anton ten Klooster, Harm Goris, and Marcel Sarot, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, NS 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 193–201.

⁴ Ferdinand de Grijns regularly told me about the many theological conversations that he had with his colleague Rabbi Yehuda Aschkenasy, Professor of Talmudic Studies at the Catholic Theological Universities of Amsterdam and Utrecht.

⁵ The book *Jezus, het verhaal van een levende* (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1974) by E. Schillebeeckx is often mentioned as an attempt to overcome these barriers. The three books about Jesus by Joseph Ratzinger written between 2007 and 2012 while he was Pope Benedict XVI are great examples of such an attempt.

⁶ I wrote about this in my contribution to a book about the Jesus-books by Pope Benedict mentioned in the previous footnote. See Pim Valkenberg, "Die Schrift mit der Kirche

courses based on a theological reading of Scripture. But first I want to come back to the reason why I never gave up my study of Thomas Aquinas and his focus on God as central topic of *sacra doctrina*, even when circumstances led me to different contexts and methods of studying religion. Soon after I defended my dissertation in 1990, I was asked to prepare a new curriculum of studies at the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. The administration wanted to focus on interreligious dialogue according to the document *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent magisterial documents. The two most relevant dialogue partners in the context of the Netherlands were Jews and Muslims, and while I had become acquainted with Hebrew and some Jewish exegesis in my own education, I did not know Arabic and could therefore not get access to the sources of a growing Muslim population in the Netherlands.⁷ While I started studying Arabic and later Qur'an and Hadith at the Department of Eastern Languages and Cultures in Nijmegen, I met David Burrell C.S.C. (1933–2023) from the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, and discovered that he was a scholar who studied Thomas Aquinas with a view to relationships with Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages. He was a friend of F. de Grijns and an associate of our research group. A well-known scholar of Thomas Aquinas, he argued that it is important to pay attention to the specific language that Aquinas uses when talking about God. He stresses that Aquinas in his God-talk reflects on the nature and the limits of human language and knowledge. This “linguistic” approach to Aquinas influenced the members of the Utrecht research group to stress the “hidden presence of God” in Aquinas, which resonated with D. Burrell’s book on *Knowing the Unknowable God*, where he researched the influence of Ibn Sina and Maimonides on Aquinas’s God-talk.⁸ Quite shortly

lesen’: Joseph Ratzinger, die Tradition der Geheimnisse des Lebens Jesu und ‘theologische Exegese’ in Amerika,” in *Der Jesus des Papstes: Passion, Tod und Auferstehung im Disput*, ed. Hermann Häring (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2011), 37–54.

⁷ In the research for my dissertation, I discovered the relevance of some of the Jewish interpretations for my understanding of what Thomas Aquinas writes about the resurrection “on the third day” (Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, ed. Maria Fabianus Moos, vol. 3 [Parisiis: P. Lethielleux, 1956], d. 21, q. 2, a. 2 and Thomas Aquinas, *Tertia pars Summae theologiae*, vol. 11–12, Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita [Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1863], q. 53, a. 2 [hereafter *STh III*]). See Wilhelmus G. B. M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Publications of the Aquinas Instituut te Utrecht, NS 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 61, 85–86.

⁸ David B. Burrell, *Aquinas, God and Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979); David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides,*

after I defended my dissertation, Burrell gave a lecture in Utrecht about his ongoing research on divine creation and human freedom, and his lecture was published in the Yearbook of the Thomas Instituut.⁹ I started studying his work on this topic and met him again when I was invited, together with my colleague Carlo Leget, by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering to attend a conference on “Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas” in Michigan in 2001.¹⁰ David took me and another friend and Aquinas scholar, Frederick (“Fritz”) Bauerschmidt to a Middle Eastern restaurant in Dearborn to discuss possibilities of further collaboration on Aquinas and other religions between the three of us, and this encounter would soon bear fruit, first in a special issue on “Thomas Aquinas in Dialogue,” edited by F. Bauerschmidt together with Jim Fodor, in which D. Burrell wrote about “Thomas Aquinas and Islam,” while I wrote, together with my colleague Henk Schoot from the Utrecht research group, about “Thomas Aquinas and Judaism.”¹¹

The second fruit of this encounter was my visiting the two scholars in their academic environments, first Burrell at the University of Notre Dame during my sabbatical leave in the Fall of 2004, and next Bauerschmidt and his colleagues at Loyola University Maryland during the academic year 2006/2007.

When the chair of the department, Prof. Stephen Fowl, called me to ask whether I would be available as a visiting scholar of Christian theology with specialization in theological relations with Muslims, I was happy to respond because I had used Fowl’s work in my dissertation to establish a reflection about a contemporary parallel with Aquinas’s theological exegesis.¹²

Aquinas (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). For the Utrecht research group, see footnote 2.

⁹ David B. Burrell, “Freedom of Creatures of a Free Creator,” *Jaarboek 1990 Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*, 1991, 5–23. More backgrounds in three of Burrell’s books: David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Chichester: Wiley, 2011).

¹⁰ Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, eds., *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). My contribution (pages 277–89) was on the influence of the *Lectura super Ioannem 20–21* on the *Summa Theologiae*.

¹¹ David B. Burrell, “Thomas Aquinas and Islam,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 1 (2004): 71–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2004.00243.x>; Henk Schoot and Pim Valkenberg, “Thomas Aquinas and Judaism,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 1 (2004): 51–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2004.00242.x>.

¹² See Stephen E. Fowl, *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997);

Theological Interpretations of Scripture

During my five years of teaching at Loyola University Maryland, I was able to participate in a few endeavors to reconnect Catholic theology with its biblical and patristic sources. One of them was the theological reading of Scripture, another the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, originally developed by Jewish scholars who wanted to reconnect contemporary philosophical traditions with the Talmudic resources of Jewish exegesis. Reading Scriptures together in a slow and careful way was the key to theological and interreligious conversations grounded in respectful analysis of the Word of God. Even though I started to focus my research more and more on Christian – Muslim relations, I still identified as a systematic theologian educated in the Thomistic tradition. While the majority of scholars who engage with Islam wish to do so while bracketing any theological presuppositions, it was my conviction that my theological background helped me to understand the religion of Muslims better because the God-centeredness of Aquinas's theology enabled me to glimpse a bit of what Islam as God-aligned life is about.¹³ More specifically, the method of comparative theology helped me to find resonances in my own Christian tradition to what the *Qur'an* has to say about Jews and Christians as People of Scripture.¹⁴

While teaching in the United States of America between 2006 and 2023 I used Thomas Aquinas and his theology about God the Savior in two different courses. The first started as a course in the general education program of undergraduate students with a focus on the relations between theology and music. The course focused on the notion of the mysteries of the life of Christ, as expressed by Aquinas in *STh III* q. 27 to 59, diversified into the entrance of Christ into this life, the progress of his life, the end of his life and the exaltation after this life. I taught this course always in the spring semester so that it could follow the liturgical cycle from Christmas and Epiphany to Easter and Pentecost. Alongside theological texts (by Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius Loyola,

Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998). See also Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 5–7, 221–27.

¹³ See Pim Valkenberg, *Renewing Islam by Service: A Christian View of Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017); Pim Valkenberg, "A Faithful Christian Interpretation of Islam," in *Faithful Interpretations: Truth and Islam in Catholic Theology of Religions*, ed. Philip Geister and Gösta Hallonsten (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 165–82.

¹⁴ Pim Valkenberg, *No Power over God's Bounty: A Christian Commentary on the "People of Scripture" in the Qur'an* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021).

among others) I gave musical examples, starting with the *Messiah* by Georg Friedrich Händel (1685–1759) and ending with the *Matthäuspasion* by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). But I included modern Christian composers such as Arvo Pärt (born 1935) and Sir James MacMillan (born 1959) as well. Apart from these Christian resources, I enjoyed analyzing the works of two Jewish composers who gave musical interpretations of the Christian tradition: the *Mass* (1971) by Leonard Bernstein, and *la Pasión según San Marcos* (2010) by Osvaldo Golijov. In this analysis, a basic theological idea expressed by Aquinas in his commentary on the Psalms – but by Church fathers such as Augustine before him as well – that the Christological interpretation of Scripture refers not to Christ as an individual, but to head and body, that is Christ and the members of the Church, opened my eyes to some aspects of the communal understanding expressed by Bernstein and Golijov (in different manners) in their interpretations of the mysteries of the life of Christ.¹⁵

While the course about the mysteries of the life of Christ was an expansion of the contents discussed in my dissertation, the course on theological interpretations of Scripture was an expansion of the method in the dissertation. At the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C., doctoral students in the area of Historical and Systematic Theology requested a course to be added to their regular program that would integrate approaches to Scripture from exegetical and systematic theological perspectives. Even though I taught most of my courses in the area of Religion and Culture where interreligious dialogue and the relations between Christianity and Islam were my main focus, I was a member of the area of Historical and Systematic Theology as well. Together with my colleague Ian Boxall, professor of New Testament, I was able to schedule a course on theological interpretations of the Gospel according to Matthew in the fall semester of 2019. We started with a theoretical introduction, centered on the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* (1965) by the Second Vatican Council, and the document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.¹⁶ We also discussed modern theological approaches to Scriptures in interreligious perspective.¹⁷ But the main part of the course was

¹⁵ See Pim Valkenberg, “How Easily Things Get Broken”: Leonard Bernstein and Osvaldo Golijov on the Body and Blood of Christ,” *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 41 (March 2024): 20–26.

¹⁶ We used Ronald D. Witherup, *Scripture: Dei Verbum*, Rediscovering Vatican II (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), and J. L. Houlden, ed., *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1995).

¹⁷ David F. Ford and Frances Clemson, eds., in “Interreligious Reading After Vatican II: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism,” *Modern Theology* 29, no. 4 (2013): 1–229. For publications by Stephen Fowl, see footnote 12.

devoted to Scriptural interpretations of lectures from the Gospel according to Matthew. For an exegetical approach that focuses on the history of interpretation (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of Matthew, we used I. Boxall's recent commentary, while we used The Church's Bible series for Patristic commentaries, and Aquinas for a Medieval interpretation.¹⁸ While the students read these sources, I took the opportunity to read the *Catena Aurea* as well, to see how Aquinas's selection of Patristic sources related to his own commentary on Matthew.¹⁹

The students asked for this course to be reiterated in 2021 and 2023, but this time no exegete was available to co-teach the course with me, so I decided to fulfill my old wish to teach on the Psalms. In the meantime, my study of the Qur'an, and a number of discussions with my colleague Robert D. Miller II, O.F.S. (1966–2023) had convinced me that the study of the Psalms was a fruitful way not only to discuss the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament with the students, but also to include my Muslim students in this course.²⁰ In this article, I cannot discuss this extensively, so I need to limit myself to three short references. The German scholar Angelika Neuwirth stresses the importance of the Psalms as a text that often offers the strongest resonance to the language of the Qur'an.²¹ Peter Ho has studied the first Psalms

¹⁸ Ian Boxall, *Matthew Through the Centuries*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Chichester: Wiley, 2019); Daniel H. Williams, ed. and trans., *Matthew: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018); Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 1–12*; chs. 13–28, trans. Jeremy Holmes and Beth Mortensen, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, 33–34 (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013).

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Gospel of St. Matthew*, vol. 1 of *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, ed. John Henry Newman (London: John Henry Parker, 1841), Reprint (London: Aeterna Press, 2014).

²⁰ In 2022, Bob Miller discussed with me the plans for his sabbatical leave in South Africa during the academic year 2023/2024, focused on the reading of the Psalms in five religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Rastafari, Baha'i). Due to his untimely death, he was never able to follow up on these plans. Among Miller's books touching upon the topic of the theological reading of Scripture, are: Robert D. Miller, *The Psalms as Israel's Prayer and Our Own*, Christian Heritage Rediscovered 2 (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2013); Robert D. Miller, *Many Roads Lead Eastward: Overtures to Catholic Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).

²¹ See, among other works, Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010); Angelika Neuwirth, *Early Meccan Suras: Poetic Prophecy*, vol. 1 of *The Qur'an, Text and Commentary*, trans. Samuel Wilder (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022).

in comparison to the first chapters of the Qur'an in some detail.²² Since both the Psalms and the Qur'an are texts that are used in prayer, Emilio Platti points out that the Dominicans, when praying in Arabic, often use prayer formulas from the Psalms that are very much reminiscent of the prayer formulas from the Qur'an. He points out that Psalms and Qur'an have a common spiritual foundation in their vision of God and humankind.²³

Since a Christian understanding of the Psalms should include their historical setting as the book of praise (*sefer ha-tehillim*) of the Jewish faith communities, I used the translation by Robert Alter and the Jewish Study Bible to get access to Jewish readings and interpretations of the Psalms.²⁴ For the exegetical interpretations, we used works by Walter Brueggemann and Susan Gillingham, while we used works by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas for the theological interpretations.²⁵ A fascinating aspect of these courses in 2021 and 2023 was the different ways in which the students – in majority, priests, religious of several orders and congregations, and some students with Eastern Christian, Jewish and Muslim backgrounds – were able to relate the classical theological interpretations with their own spiritual life and preaching.

²² Peter Ho, "The Successful Life: Comparing the Opening Chapters of the Psalms and the Qur'an," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 33 (2 2023): 203–20, <https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.33.2.3292475>.

²³ Emilio Platti, *Islam, van nature een vijand?*, 2nd ed., Christenen in dialoog (Averbode: Altiora, 2007), 25–27. When visiting and praying with the Dominican community at the Institut dominicain d'études orientales in Cairo in September 2024, I noticed this spiritual resonance as well. The community in Cairo was the spiritual home of Emilio Platti, O.P. (1943–2021).

²⁴ Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985); Susan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2012); Susan Gillingham, *A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1–72*, vol. 2 of *Psalms Through the Centuries* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2020). Saint Augustine, *Essential Expositions of the Psalms*, ed., with an introduction, by Michael Cameron, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2015); Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007); Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms: Rigans Montes: Hic Est Liber*, trans. Albert Marie Surmanski, Maria Veritas Marks, and John R. Gilhooly, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas 29 (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute; Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021).

Aquinas and the Christological Interpretation of the Psalms

Thomas Aquinas's commentary on the Psalms shows similar relationships between teaching, praying, and preaching. One of the most significant prayers in the life of the Church is Ps 50, *Miserere mei, Deus*, arguably the most famous of the penitential Psalms.²⁶ In one of its first publications, the Utrecht research group on Thomas Aquinas gave a wide-ranging analysis of guilt and forgiveness in the theology of Aquinas, in the context of which I published my first impressions of his commentary on Ps 50.²⁷

At this place, however, I want to come back to an issue that has always puzzled me: the status of the so-called Christological interpretation of the Psalms in Aquinas's commentary. In an article on Thomas Aquinas and Judaism, mentioned above, H. Schoot and I wrote:

the Spirit as the author of Scripture has ordered the words of the Psalms in such a way that some of these words have as their principal meaning that they are signs of things to come. Some words refer to historical facts in the life of David, the human author of the Psalms, and may be interpreted as referring to Christ as well; but some other words refer mainly to Christ. This gives a certain inconsistency to Aquinas's interpretation of the Psalms: in some cases, the Christological interpretation belongs to the literal sense of the Psalm; in other cases, it belongs to the spiritual sense. This inconsistency is caused by the fact that Aquinas takes seriously the Jewish way of interpreting Scripture by applying it to new situations, as the first followers of Jesus did in their testimonies.²⁸

²⁶ Psalm 51 according to the Hebrew, Ps 50 according to the *Vulgata* numbering. Since Aquinas reads the Psalms in the *Vulgata* version, although he notices the different translations by St. Jerome in the prologue (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 24–25), I use the *Vulgata* numbering in this article. In my class on the mystery of the life of Christ in theology and music, I discussed Gregorio Allegri's famous setting of this Psalm, composed around 1638 for exclusive use in the Sistine Chapel and the two myths connected to this setting. The first myth was that this setting was only handed down orally without ever being written down until – second myth – young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart heard the music in 1770 and wrote down the entire setting. Both myths point to the special place of the *Miserere* in the liturgy of Holy Week.

²⁷ Henk J. M. Schoot, ed., *Tibi Soli Peccavi: Thomas Aquinas on Guilt and Forgiveness: A Collection of Studies Presented at the First Congress of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, NS 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996).

²⁸ Henk Schoot and Pim Valkenberg, "Thomas Aquinas and Judaism," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 1 (2004): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2004.00242.x>.

I would still agree with what we wrote twenty years ago, yet at the same time add that Aquinas's interpretation of the Psalms is determined by the Jewish authors of the New Testament, first and foremost Jesus praying the Psalms during his life and on the cross. Aquinas explains the Psalms as a Dominican friar for whom the idea of living according to the Gospel (*vita evangelica*) is the foundation for his religious call. Moreover, he teaches the Psalms to his students as a way to lead a Christ-like life.²⁹ As Bauerschmidt writes:

The obvious answer to the question of why Thomas became a Dominican is that Thomas wanted to do what Dominicans were in fact founded to do: to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to care for souls, primarily through hearing confessions . . . Thomas, as a preaching friar, is oriented primarily toward communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that his hearers are disposed to the inner movement of grace.³⁰

This explains why, in my opinion, Aquinas explains Scripture first and foremost by Scripture, focused on the Gospel.

With reference to the quotation from 2004 above, I would also specify "Christological interpretation" as an interpretation that takes as its point of departure the work of God the Savior (*de Deo Salvatore*) in the person of the Son united with the praying human being Jesus of Nazareth, and the members of the Church united with Christ as their head. In his monograph *Redeemer and Friend: Towards Soteriological Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas in the light of Super Psalms*, the Polish scholar Piotr Roszak points out that such a soteriological Christology is the central focus of Aquinas's interpretation of the Psalms.³¹ He notices that the Psalms speak of Christ in three different ways.³² Some of the Psalms refer to Christ; this is most clearly the case where Christ prays the Psalm, and therefore it refers to Christ.³³ The best example here is Ps 21. At the beginning of his interpretation of this Psalm, Aquinas writes:

²⁹ See Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, Studies in Spirituality and Theology 6 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 146.

³⁰ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 175.

³¹ See Piotr Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel: U podstaw chrystologii soteriologicznej św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle Super psalmos*, Biblioteka Instytutu Tomistycznego. Teksty i Studia 12 (Poznań: Wydawnictwo W Drodze; Warszawa: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2020), 169–92. I'm grateful to Dr. Sławomir Zatwardnicki for making this publication accessible to me.

³² Roszak, 159–68.

³³ Roszak, 219.

As was said above, just as in the other prophets, so certain things present then are treated here insofar as they are figures of Christ, and some are treated which belong to prophecy itself. And so, sometimes certain things that refer to Christ are mentioned which surpass, as it were, the scope of the history. And among these particularly is found this psalm, which treats the Passion of Christ, which is its literal sense. This is why he spoke this psalm in particular during his Passion when he cried out, *Eli Eli lama sabachthani*, which is the same as, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matt. 27:46), which begins this psalm. And so, although this psalm is spoken figuratively about David, nevertheless it is particularly referred to Christ according to the literal sense. And at the Synod of Toledo, Theodore of Mopsuestia, who explained this as being about David in the literal sense, was condemned, both for this and many other things, and so it must be explained as about Christ.³⁴

In mentioning the error of Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428) and the condemnation of the Third Synod of Toledo (589), which took over the condemnation by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, Aquinas refers back to what he said about the Psalms and their interpretation in the prologue to his commentary, where he gives a similar reasoning about the necessity to explain some Psalms as literally referring to Christ. Even though Aquinas here seems to use a Christological doctrine as decisive criterion for a Christological reading of the Psalms, I never get the impression that Aquinas reads the Psalms through such a theoretical lens.³⁵ The lens that he uses is no other than the way in which the Church prays the Psalms frequently, since they seem to contain the entirety of Scripture.³⁶ This entirety of Scripture refers to Christ and his Church, either explicitly or figuratively, which is a rule of interpretation that Aquinas derives from St. Jerome.³⁷ As we will see, this rule implies quite some

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In psalmos Davidis expositio*, vol. 14 of *Opera omnia* (Parmae: Typis Petri Fiacadori, 1863), *Ps 21*, no. 176 (hereafter *In Ps.*). English translation: Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 254 (slightly modified). Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel*, 161, gives a somewhat shorter quote of the same text.

³⁵ *In Ps.*, prol.: "... evitare debemus unum errorem damnatum in quinta synodo. Theodorus enim Mopsuestenus dixit, quod in sacra Scriptura et prophetiis nihil expresse dicitur de Christo, sed de quibusdam aliis rebus, sed adaptaverunt Christo." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 25.

³⁶ *In Ps.*, prol.: "magis frequentatur Psalterium in Ecclesia, quia continent totam Scripturam." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 21.

³⁷ *In Ps.*, prol.: "Beatus ergo Hieronymus super Ezech. tradidit nobis unam regulam quam servabimus in psalmis: scilicet quod sic sunt exponendi de rebus gestis, ut figurantibus aliquid de Christo vel ecclesia." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 25.

flexibility, which is necessary because there is no fixed relationship between the text of the Psalms and the prophecy concerning Christ by David.³⁸ The only fixed rule is that the Psalms, when read by a Christian, are related to our salvation in Christ. This salvation is prophesied in the Old Testament and testified in the New Testament, beginning with God the Savior who, as a human being, prayed the Psalms according to the witnesses of the New Testament. Therefore, in the text quoted above, the word *unde* ('this is why') in the argument seems to imply that Christ, praying the Psalm, confirms the theory ("ideo hic est eius sensus literalis. Unde specialiter hunc psalmum in passione dicit"), but in fact it is the other way around: Christ's praying is the foundation for the literal Christological interpretation. As I observed in my dissertation, what seems to be a confirmative quotation from Scripture is in fact a reminder of what was, in fact, the premise of the entire argument.³⁹ In a similar manner, the words "excedunt quasi virtutem historiarum" ('surpass, as it were, the scope of the history') seem to suggest that Aquinas first looks for a historical meaning in the events that happened at the time of the Prophet, and only starts to notice the insufficiency of such an interpretation when he observes things that exceed such a meaning. Again, Aquinas says something similar in the prologue: since they are a prophecy, the Psalms sometimes discuss matters that refer to what happened at the time of David and Solomon, but mainly in as far as they prefigure something of the future. For that reason, the Holy Spirit inserted some things that exceeded the historical facts, so that the mind is elevated to what is prefigured.⁴⁰ I would like to stress words like "sometimes" and "some things," indicating that in interpreting the Psalms, one needs to start with the text that may refer to our salvation in different ways. Maybe the best rule is to read and the pray the Psalms like a Gospel that contains what belongs to the faith in God incarnate.⁴¹ Aquinas employs

³⁸ *In Ps.*, prol.: "incipit liber hymnorum, seu soliloquiorum prophetae David de Christo." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 22. See also Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 109. Ryan notes that Aquinas applies multiple strategies with respect to the Christological interpretation of different Psalms.

³⁹ Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 138, 208.

⁴⁰ *In Ps.*, prol.: "Prophetiae autem aliquando dicuntur de rebus quae tunc temporis erant, sed non principaliter dicuntur de eis, sed in quantum figura sunt futurorum: et ideo Spiritus Sanctus ordinavit quod quando talia dicuntur, inserantur quaedam quae excedunt conditionem illius rei gestae, ut animus eleveatur ad figuratum." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 25.

⁴¹ *In Ps.*, prol.: "Omnia enim quae ad fidem incarnationis pertinent, sic dilucide traduntur in hoc opera, ut fere videatur evangelium, et non prophetia." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 21.

what we would call a “Christological interpretation” of the Psalms, but almost always it is one of several possible interpretations, and, moreover, it is employed in many different ways. As I hope to show below, it is always the Gospel that guides Aquinas in his preference for one of these interpretations. Yet, in any case, the point of departure is not a Christological theory, but the reality of God the Savior who became incarnate and as a human being prayed and lived the Psalms throughout his life.

Therefore, as Roszak notices, some Psalms should be interpreted as referring literally to Christ because of the Gospel witnesses.⁴² Other Psalms contain elements that speak truly and properly about Christ, because a historical interpretation of the Psalm would be too weak. Roszak considers Aquinas’s interpretation of Ps 19 as a good example, since Aquinas writes “although according to the literal sense, those things which are said do apply to David to some extent, nevertheless they properly and truly pertain to Christ.”⁴³ A close reading of the commentary shows different ways in which interpretations referring to David, or to Christ, are juxtaposed.

The third category that Roszak distinguishes is that of figuration. He writes that the concept of “figure” is not an arbitrary judgment or a simple association, but rather shows an implicit and constitutive reference to Christ.⁴⁴ He states that these figures are somehow hidden under the surface of the direct content, but can be unearthed following the guideline by Christ in Luke 24 that the Scriptures speak of him.

While the third category distinguished by Roszak, texts from the Psalms that refer to Christ *in figura*, opens the possibility for manifold interpretations that are often juxtaposed by Aquinas, connected with *vel potest* (‘or we can . . .’), there is space for such a plurality of interpretations in Psalms that refer to Christ literally. This shows that there is no neat distinction between the three categories (literally, truthfully, figuratively), nor do the categories coincide with the schematic three- or fourfold sense of Scripture. Moreover, since we are dealing with prayer texts that often shift perspectives, even a Psalm that is said to refer to Christ literally turns out to give rise to a plethora of different strategies of interpretation. One of these strategies is the famous Augustinian rule of *totus Christus, caput et membra*, according to which texts may refer to, or be said by, either Christ as head of the body of the Church, or the members

⁴² In his commentary on Ps 21, Aquinas states that this is one of five Psalms that treat the passion of Christ in some detail. The other Psalms are 34, 54, 68 and 108. Other Psalms touch upon the passion of Christ more briefly. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 254.

⁴³ *In Ps. 19* (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 237).

⁴⁴ Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel*, 164.

of the Church, or both.⁴⁵ Another strategy that we will see in the commentary on Ps 29, is a three- or fourfold juxtaposition, according to which the text may refer to David, to Christ, to the members of the body of Christ, or to human beings in general. Sometimes, there is real juxtaposition, sometimes there is a certain preference: it is better to explain this specific text as referring to Christ.

A Christological Reading in Practice: Ps 29

I want to give an example of the oscillating nature of Aquinas's interpretation of a Psalm, even if it is mainly seen as literally referring to Christ.⁴⁶ I have a specific reason to come back to his interpretation of Ps 29. At the time of the research for my dissertation, I did read Aquinas's commentary on Ps 29, but I did not include it in the chapter on the sources for Aquinas's discussion of the resurrection of Christ in the *Summa theologiae*.⁴⁷ It makes sense, therefore, to go back and read the commentary on Ps 29 again as an example of the role of Christological exegesis. I deliberately follow the order of verses instead of making a systematic survey, since this is how Aquinas reads in the rhythm of the Psalms.

Just like Augustine in his *Enarrationes*, Aquinas often pays quite some attention to the titles of the Psalms, and discusses them as giving guidelines for interpretation.⁴⁸ In this case, the title is: *Psalmus cantici, in dedicatione domus David*. Historically speaking, David did not dedicate the House of the Lord, since he was not allowed to do so by prophet Nathan.⁴⁹ He did, however, start to build Jerusalem and therefore we can speak about the house of David. It is better (*melius*), however, to understand the Psalm as referring to the house of David, that is: Christ, who is the head and body of the Church.⁵⁰ At this point, Aquinas refers to the previous Psalm, where the title reads *in consummatione*

⁴⁵ See also Roszak, 180.

⁴⁶ Roszak, 160–62.

⁴⁷ See Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 182–86. I did discuss the commentary on Ps 29 in the context of *STh III* q. 56, a. 2 s.c. (126).

⁴⁸ The contemporary exegete S. Gillingham (*Psalms Through the Centuries*, 7; see n. 25) remarks that the titles are added later to the text of the Psalms, so that they can be seen as a first attempt at interpreting the text.

⁴⁹ This refers to the 2 Sam 7. *In Ps. 29*, no. 249 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 345).

⁵⁰ *In Ps. 29*, no. 1: “tamen melius intelligitur quod referatur ad mysterium domus David, id est Christi, qui est Ecclesiae caput et corpus.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 346.

tabernaculi (“at the finishing of the tabernacle”). The sequence of the two psalms has an ecclesiological meaning: a tabernacle indicates a place for those who fight, and therefore it refers to the place of the *ecclesia militans*. Aquinas adduces a text, Rev 21:3, “See the tabernacle of God with the people,” that uses the same word, even if its context at the end of the book of Revelation does not fit with the situation of the *ecclesia militans*. In contrast, the word *domus* (‘house’) indicates a place of rest, as in “Let us go to the House of the Lord” (Ps 121:1). Similarly, the Church expects the rest of the heavenly kingdom. After this first ecclesiological interpretation, Aquinas adds a soteriological interpretation, focusing on the phases of building a tabernacle or house: first, it is constructed, and this corresponds to the arrangement of the incarnation, and next it is dedicated, which corresponds to the resurrection, when the body of Christ is clothed in the glory of immortality. A second ecclesiological interpretation follows: the body of Christ is continually constructed and will be dedicated by the conversion of the faithful when it will be in glory.

The first words of the Psalm, “I will extol you, Lord, because you have received me” (Ps 29:2a) are explained in different ways. There is a historical interpretation, since God has received David in his protection, as is written in 1 Sam 16. Or it can be interpreted as God receiving the just people, uniting with himself those who attach themselves to him by the unity of love. The third, Christological interpretation is introduced by *sed* (‘but’): but Christ has united the human being with himself by receiving it in perfect unity. This is confirmed with a reference to Ps 3:4 “You, o Lord, are my protector (*susceptor*).”⁵¹ The next few words, “you have not made my enemies to rejoice over me” (Ps 29:2b) seem to create a problem: even though it is true of David, it does not seem to be true of Christ, since his enemies mocked him (see Matt 27:40) and the same is true for the just whom evil people insult (Job 30). Aquinas answers (*sed dicendum*) that the joy of the enemies (here: *Judaei*) lasted but for a while, but not in the end, since the name of Christ grew stronger because of his resurrection. Again, we see a reference to the resurrection of Christ here, confirmed by a significant quotation: “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy, because I fell; I will arise” (from Mic 7:8).⁵² These frequent references to the resurrection of Christ will come into focus with verse 4 of the Psalm; in between there is verse 3, “Lord, my God, I have cried to you and you have healed me.” Again, Aquinas compares

⁵¹ In Aquinas’s commentary on Ps 3:4 we find the same possibility of referring to Christ in an interpretation that mentions both the incarnation and the resurrection: *In Ps. 47*, no. 15.

⁵² *In Ps. 29*, no. 264 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 347).

the situation of David with the situation of Christ. Verse 3 addresses healing of internal evil, which can be bodily or spiritual. In the case of David or us, both evils can be present, but in the case of Christ only bodily evil. “I have cried to you” can be interpreted both of David (see Ps 119:1) and of Christ (see Heb 5:7), yet the healing refers to both body and soul in David, but to body only in Christ.

Verse 4 addresses healing of external evil: “you have brought forth my soul from hell.” This time Aquinas wants to be clear on the difference between David and Christ: these words cannot refer literally (*ad litteram*) to David, since his soul was not brought forth from hell when he made this Psalm; however, it can be said of him metaphorically (*secundum metaphoram*) as if he was liberated from mortal sin. However, these words are understood literally of Christ (*ad litteram intelligitur de Christo*), whose soul was brought forth from hell by God. At this place, another place from the Psalms is quoted as confirmation: “you will not leave my soul in hell” (Ps 15:10).⁵³ Aquinas adds that the words “you have brought forth my soul from hell” also fit those whom Christ resurrected. As confirmation he adds a text from Zachariah (9:11) that uses the same word *eduxisti* (‘you have brought out’): “you have led out your prisoners from the pit without water.” This quotation has a double concordant relation with Ps 15:4, since it contains the word *lacus* (‘lake, cistern, pit’) as well. Aquinas comments on this word in the second half of the verse (“you have saved me from those who go down into the pit”) as follows: literally, it means a hollow place or a cave, since this was where the dead were buried in antiquity. Yet, he prefers an interpretation referring to God the Savior here (*de Christo exponitur optime*), according to which “pit” means eternal damnation, and Christ descended into hell in order to liberate those who were in the pit. Or, rather a Christological interpretation in which “pit” means ‘sin’: Christ was immune from sin.⁵⁴

The text of Ps 29:6 is: “For wrath is in his indignation; and life in his good will. In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness.” In Aquinas’s discussion of the relation between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of our souls, he states that this refers to our justification (Rom 4:25), according to a gloss on this verse from Ps 29 that says: “resurrectio

⁵³ In Ps 29, no. 265 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 347). In his commentary on Ps 15:10, Aquinas discusses resurrection as a union of body and soul, and the necessity for the soul to remain separated from the body for some time, in order to prove the reality of the human flesh. It is thus a parallel for *STh III* q. 53, a. 4 and indicated as such in editions of the *Summa*. This is the reason why I discussed the commentary on Ps 15 – unlike Ps 29 – in my dissertation.

⁵⁴ In Ps. 29, no. 265.

Christi causa est resurrectionis nostrae et animae in presenti, et corporis in futuro,” thus asserting a twofold relation between the resurrection of Christ and us: his resurrection causes the resurrection of our souls (justification) in the present, and the resurrection of our bodies in the future.⁵⁵ In fact, this gloss contains in a nutshell the entire discussion of *quaestio* 56 of the *tertia pars*. Yet the gloss is not quoted in Aquinas’s commentary on the verse, and therefore the commentary on this Psalm is not mentioned as a parallel text for *STh III* q. 56. Instead, Aquinas begins by saying that “in the evening weeping shall remain” literally (*ad litteram*) is a sign of God’s clemency and mercy, since it says that the Lord leads from sorrow to consolation in a short time. Next, Thomas gives three reasons why weeping belongs to evening, and joy to morning.⁵⁶ The first reason refers to the external disposition: the evening is the beginning of darkness that makes one sad, whereas morning is the beginning of light. Aquinas adds the experience of a blind man who sits in darkness according to the book of Tobit (5:12): “What manner of joy shall be to me, who sits in darkness, and shall not see the light of heaven?” The second reason refers to the internal disposition, and Aquinas uses the science of medicine at his time: the morning is related to blood, which makes one happy, while the evening is related to black bile (*melancholia*), which makes one sad. The third reason refers to the nature of sleep, which is rest of souls, and therefore sorrow is quieted by sleep. After this explanation of the literal meaning, Aquinas adds that the text is clear according to a mystical interpretation (*Mystice littera est plana*), which is a good example of the second category distinguished by Roszak (texts that speak truly and properly – albeit not literally – about Christ). In the evening, at the burial of the Lord, there was sadness because the faithful bewailed the death of Christ; however, in the morning, there was joy because of the announcement of the resurrection. This interpretation directly refers to the text of the Gospel stories; Aquinas adds, however, two more interpretations as possibilities, introduced by *si referatur*. If the text refers to the entire human race, the sadness of the evening stands for the sin of the first human beings, since Gen 3 indicates that this happened after noon. Aquinas adds that this sadness cannot be qualified as short, since even after the restoration of grace, remnants of sin remained. This short reflection might be seen as an interpretation of the word *demorabitur* (‘shall remain’), since it is derived from a root, *morari*, with the meaning ‘to delay, to detain’. It introduces a tension, however, with the interpretation above, according to which the Lord “leads from sadness to consolation in a short time.” That short

⁵⁵ *STh III* q. 56, a. 2 s.c.

⁵⁶ *In Ps. 29*, no. 267 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 349).

time fits with the interpretation that refers to the short period that Christ was in the grave, whereas this interpretation has a much longer salvation historical arc: from the sin of the first parents to Christ who is the morning itself (“sed in matutino, it est in Christo, laetitia”). Here we encounter traditional motifs from the Easter liturgy and the typology that contrasts Adam with Christ, as for instance in Rom 5. Aquinas adds one more interpretation, this time tropological (pertaining to spiritual and moral life of human beings): the evening is when the spiritual light begins to fade in human beings, and therefore there is weeping; but when it start to light again, there is joy. Here, Aquinas adds a final corroboration from Ps 5: “in the morning I will stand before you, and I will see.” In his commentary on that verse, Aquinas adds the verse from Ps 29 as confirmation of one of the four possible interpretations of the verse “in the morning I will stand before you,” adding that “morning” can refer to eternity; according to this interpretation, *ad vesperam demorabitur fletus* can refer to the present life, while *ad matutinum laetitia* can refer to eternity. This is an anagogical interpretation that can be added to the many interpretations that can be given of these words.⁵⁷

The next verse (Ps 29:7), “I have said in my abundance, ‘I will not be moved in eternity,’” has a gloss that says that this should be understood twofold: about Christ and about every human being (“secundum glossam prima intelliguntur de Christo, et de quolibet homine”). This time, Aquinas first and foremost discusses the presumptuous situation of human beings who assert that they have plenty and will not be moved. With reference to Christ, however (“Sed si exponatur de Christo”), there is no presumption but certainty of knowledge. This is a Christological interpretation, focused on the knowledge of Christ,⁵⁸ confirmed with a quotation from the prologue of the Gospel according to John “We have seen his glory, a glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). The words, “I will not be moved,” are glossed as: “from the will of God,” and this is confirmed by another quotation from John: “what pleases Him, I always do.” The reason is that “you gave strength to my beauty” (Ps 29:8a), namely by performing miracles and resisting adversaries (confirmed by a quotation from Rom 1:4). Aquinas ends this *lectio* by explaining the difficult last part of verse 8: “You turned away your face from me, and I became troubled,” quoting Ps 21 (“God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) as confirmation. So when God turned away from him in his passion, he became troubled in senses yet not in reason (John 12:27 “now my soul is troubled”). It is clear that Aquinas here

⁵⁷ In Ps. 5, no. 27 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 62).

⁵⁸ See *STh III* q. 9ff.

refers to the story of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, explaining that he felt separation from God in the sensual part of his soul, but not in the reasonable part of his soul. Aquinas discusses these matters in the *Summa theologiae* both in a Christological context (the defects of the soul, *STh III* q. 15) and a soteriological context (the suffering of Christ, *STh III* q. 46).⁵⁹

The next verse, “to you, O Lord, will I cry, and I will make supplication to my God,” (Ps 29:9) receives a short threefold interpretation. The first interpretation refers to Christ, presumably under the influence of the parallel of Ps 29:8 with Ps 21:2 just quoted.⁶⁰ The second interpretation refers to the sinner, and the third to any human being. The word *clamabo* (‘I will cry’) needs to be understood as a prayer that removes evil. In Christ, this refers to his passion; in the sinner, to sin; in the human being, to adversity. The word *deprecabor* (‘I will make supplication’) refers to something good to be given. In the case of Christ, it is glory, in the sinner it is grace, and in an afflicted human being it is prosperity. Yet another interpretation is proposed, introduced by *vel* (‘or’): *clamor* may refer to affliction of heart, and *deprecatio* to constancy in prayer. This is confirmed by a quotation from the letter of James (5:16), “The continual prayer of a just man avails much.”

This very short *lectio* sets the tone for the interpretations of the final verses. In each case, it is possible to interpret them concerning Christ (*si de Christo exponatur*) or to interpret them concerning any human being (*si exponatur de homine*). With reference to Christ, the words “what profit is there in my blood, while I go down into corruption?” (Ps 29:10a) are explained as follows: there is much profit in the blood of Christ, since “it will be shed for many unto remission of sins” (Matt 26:28). Yet, there would not have been any profit if Christ would not have been revived quickly, but his resurrection would have been delayed until the end of the world, or if his body had been totally putrefied. There is a parallel here with the question about the necessity of the resurrection of Christ, where the words of this verse are quoted.⁶¹ At this point, a theological question (*sed numquid*) arises: was the passion (of Christ) not sufficient for our salvation? The answer is: yes (*sic*). But if Christ would not have quickly risen, his divinity would not have been believed, and so there would not have been any profit. Again, there is a parallel here with the discussion about the necessity of the resurrection in the *Summa theologiae*.⁶²

⁵⁹ In Ps. 29, no. 268 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 350–51).

⁶⁰ In Ps. 29, no. 269 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 351).

⁶¹ See *STh III* q. 53, a. 1, resp.; a. 2, arg. 2.

⁶² See *STh III* q. 53, a. 1, arg. 3.

The final two verses, “you have turned my mourning into joy for me; you have cut my sackcloth and have surrounded me with gladness” (Ps 29:12) and “so that my glory may sing to you, and I may not regret” (Ps 29:13a) again can be explained as referring to Christ (*secundum quod loquitur de Christo*) and to any just human being (*vel de quolibet justo*).⁶³ If it refers to Christ, “you have turned my mourning into joy,” can refer to the inner mourning that Christ had (*in se*) during his passion (“My soul is sorrowful,” Matt 26:38 is quoted), but it can also refer to the mourning of his followers (*in suis*), “you shall lament and weep” (John 16:20). This mourning “is turned into joy,” the joy of resurrection. Again, there is a *totus Christus* interpretation here: in Christ (*quantum ad se*), it means “Lord, in your power the king will rejoice” (Ps 20:2); in his followers (*quantum ad suos*), it means “the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). “You have cut my sackcloth and surrounded me with gladness” refers to an external change from evil to good things. Aquinas explains *saccus* (‘sackcloth’) as a cloth that one wears in times of austerity, made from the hair of goats. First, there is a Christological meaning: in Christ, the sackcloth refers to his flesh, according to which he has a “likeness of sinful flesh” (implicit quotation of Rom 8:3). As the gloss on this verse says, goats and their kids mean sins, since they are offered for sins. “You have cut my sackcloth” refers to the passion of Christ, when he was pierced with nails and a lance; yet, he was restored to immortality: “surrounded with gladness.” After this long Christological interpretation, a very short moral interpretation follows: the words can be explained of any just person, meaning that their mourning is changed into joy (John 16:20 and Tob 3:22). The final words of the Psalm, “so that my glory may sing to you and I may not regret,” again receive a dual interpretation. The first refers to the resurrection of Christ: it is the glory given him in the resurrection. The second refers to the saints: the glory that will be given to them in heaven. In this way, the resurrection of Christ is connected to the resurrection of the saints in the future.

Conclusion

After this long series of Christological and soteriological reflections on Ps 29 by Aquinas, my conclusion will be relatively short. As I stated before, what strikes me most is that Aquinas follows the flow of the text while analyzing it carefully in his countless divisions of the text. He seems to be ready to read any Psalm

⁶³ In Ps. 29, nos. 271–72 (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Psalms*, 353).

in a Christological fashion whenever possible, but never makes the impression of forcing such a reading – except in cases where the Gospel suggests it.⁶⁴ His reading of the Psalms seems to juxtapose several possible readings instead of selecting only one reading; it is as if he enjoys the multiplicity of the possible readings suggested by the Spirit.⁶⁵ One can imagine how such a juxtaposition of possible interpretations is connected with the life of a Dominican friar: the *vita apostolica* is nourished by a life of praying the Psalms, and turned to the sanctification of souls by preaching to the people. But theologically such juxtapositions serve to highlight the *nexus mysteriorum*, the connection between the different aspects of the Christian faith. While Aquinas's systematic theological works focus on an insightful ordering of the different aspects of the Christian faith, his exegetical works juxtapose these different aspects in dazzling short suggestions that help us to understand that Christ is the center and the way to return to God, yet the world around us is full of signs and persons and events that refer in different ways to the Triune God as the goal and the origin of our existence. This is what a renewed reading of Aquinas's theological exegesis of the Psalms has made clear to me.

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⁶⁵ See Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 188.

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Book review: Luke Wilgenbusch. *Saved as Through Fire: A Thomistic Account of Purgatory, Temporal Punishment, and Satisfaction*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2024. Pp. 157*

L uke Wilgenbusch¹ opens his publication by pointing to the need to address the issue of the *reatus poenae*, which traditionally refers to the debt of punishment that man owes to divine justice for his sins. The author's intention is to make this concept accessible in a contemporary context. He disagrees with the reduction of purgatory solely to the process of the soul's interior transformation, therefore he set himself the task to establish correlations between the categories of punishment (related to divine justice) and healing (moral transformation) encompassing the overcoming of evil dispositions. Emphasizing the fundamental importance of the *reatus poenae*, Wilgenbusch adds the medicinal or transformative element of purgatory, which, in his opinion, has wrought its way with difficulty to its rightful place in traditional Catholic theology. However, he notes that, unlike non-Catholic doctrines of purgatory, "even when we describe the punishment of purgatory in medicinal and transformative terms, we must be able to identify and account for the indispensable punitive element. Any Catholic theology of purgatory must acknowledge the need for a personal share in satisfaction" (p. 143).

The publication comprises six chapters of fairly equal length (14–31 pages): the first four deal directly with the issue of purgatory, while the ensuing two revolve around the topic-related issues following the principles outlined in the

* An abridged version of this review will be published in *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 42 (2025) or 43 (2026). This review is published by permission of EJSTA' editors.

¹ Luke Wilgenbusch (STL, Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas) is a priest of the Diocese of Nashville, where he currently serves as director of vocations.

first four chapters (satisfaction and indulgences). The whole is made complete with an introduction, appendix, conclusion, bibliography (rather modest, 5 pages) and index (3 pages).

Personally, I am rather accustomed to having Thomas Aquinas's thoughts analyzed with the reader, when the author quotes him extensively, comments and only then continues the argument. In this case, the reader must believe that Wilgenbusch has drawn the right conclusions from Aquinas's writings which he presents to the reader. However, Wilgenbusch's approach gives us a monograph of modest length (less than 150 pages), in which the author, I need to emphasize, demonstrates an extraordinary ability to present his findings synthetically. Moreover, he often attempts to transpose difficult content into more digestible statements ("To put it simply" is probably the most frequently used phrase).

In the introduction, we are given a clear explanation of the terms used: the *reatus culpae* (debt of guilt), the *reatus poenae* (debt of punishment), evil dispositions (the habitual weakening of the faculties), and self-imposed consequences (remorse, grief, etc.). The *reatus poenae*, as the author explains, "is the primary extrinsic consequence of sin and is usually translated as 'debt of punishment.' This term [...] refers to a man's indebtedness to divine justice after having committed a sin." Therefore "the sinner must suffer an adequate punishment before God for his fault. The debt of punishment is resolved when justice is restored through the undergoing of a sufficient punishment" (p. 3). The word "punishment" also needs to be clarified as it refers to the broadest possible meaning of the term, so that it may include, in Wilgenbusch's intention, anything that the rational creature suffers against his will. In contrast to this externally imposed evil, punishment is called satisfaction when that which is against one's will is voluntarily accepted as a means of restoring justice.

As the subtitle of the monograph indicates, Wilgenbusch offers the reader a Thomistic account of purgatory. The main source will be the *Commentary on the Sentences*, but the author will also draw on more mature works of the scholastic. However, Wilgenbusch is not concerned with synthesizing the thought of Thomas, who left no systematic treatise on purgatory, but with drawing conclusions from Thomas' principles that are important for contemporary interpretation of purgatory, also in an ecumenical context (dialogue with Orthodox doctrine and Protestant beliefs). Aquinas' "conceptual rigor is both stable enough to incorporate subsequent developments. In just this way, he provided the essential tools for the simultaneously punitive and medicinal purgatory that I present in this book" (p. 6).

Purgatory is a place where the souls of the righteous are purified after death of obstacles preventing communion with God. These obstacles include:

remaining venial sins, residual evil dispositions, and any debt of punishment which has not been completed through earthly penance. Wilgenbusch argues that venial sins are forgiven immediately after death when the soul, in the light of the illumination of the particular judgment, performs a perfect act of love and repentance for past sins. Then the soul's postmortem transformation begins. As divine light pours into the soul, it repeats acts of love directed against the interior wounds of past sins, painfully recalls and laments its failings. In this way, the soul is purified, and its attachment to sin is slowly eroded until it is ready to see God's face in heaven.

As Wilgenbusch shows, even the Orthodox and Protestant positions, which are closest to the Catholic view, do not take into account the distinction introduced by Aquinas: temporal punishment in a broad sense "must include both the punishments from the order of reason and the punishments due to divine justice." The former include the residual evil dispositions, but only in the case of a debt owed to divine justice can we speak of temporal punishment in a narrower sense. "To put it simply, the basic claim of Aquinas is that there is a logical, if not often real, distinction between the particular immanent consequences of sin and the punishment before God that the sinner must endure" (p. 25).

The author derives this conviction from the tenet developed by Thomas: an adequate punishment is an essential element of the restoration of justice. In Aquinas's thought, such punishment includes both *poena damni* (temporary delay of the beatific vision) and *poena sensus* (binding to material fire). According to Wilgenbusch, Thomas's system also includes the transformative illumination, so that ultimately purgatory is about punitive healing: "the transformative dimension of purgatory actually provides the interior and subjective ground for a just and fitting punishment – one that accords best with God's surpassing justice, goodness, and wisdom. The most fitting punishment, in other words, is the one that transforms us" (p. 76).² This kind of punishment expresses the beauty and wisdom that characterize God's work: "it is not the justice of a cold and exacting despot but of a loving and tender Father" (p. 102).

* * *

In the first chapter of his monograph ("Obstacles to the Beatific Vision in Purgatory"), Wilgenbusch clarifies, drawing on Thomas's anthropology, three obstacles

² Cf. pp. 67 ("we will see the way that God in his wisdom masterfully interweaves the retributive, transformative, and meritorious dimensions of our purification") and 143 ("Justice in the universal community governed by God must be restored by the imposition of an adequate punishment. The wisdom and goodness of God is shown by the fact that this punishment is also medicinal").

to the beatific vision immediately after death: the *reatus culpae* (guilt of venial sins not yet forgiven); residual (remaining) evil dispositions; the *reatus poenae* (debt of temporal punishment before divine justice). "It is for these three reasons that some holy souls are delayed in their possession of full beatitude" (p. 8).

Sin consists in turning away from God (*aversio a Deo*) towards creatures (*conversio ad creaturam*). When sin is conscious and voluntary, then we are dealing with mortal sin. In such a case, the gift of grace is needed to return to God (the infusion of love and conversion). In the case of venial sin, charity remains in the soul, but *conversio ad creaturam* has taken place; though the end may not be changed, there has been an inordinate use of the means to achieve it. Therefore, for the forgiveness of this kind of sin, internal repentance is sufficient thanks to charity once obtained.

Evil dispositions, although they are consequences of original sin, become more understandable in the context of actual sins. Original justice was lost through original sin, and although the goodness of nature itself was preserved, the natural inclination toward virtue was diminished. With each sin, the inclination toward sinful acts increases. In the worst case, a habit is formed, which is called a vice. It causes disorder in the powers of the soul and diminishes the virtues of the soul. "What began as a wound from original sin becomes a debilitating disease as long as a life of sin is tolerated" (p. 21).

Charity fights against these disorders, but even when God grants grace to the soul, restoring its orientation toward Himself, some conflict remains in the soul, which often causes minor deviations (the nature of venial sins). These inclinations persisting in the soul (after the mortal sin has been forgiven or as a result of venial sin) are not so much habits or vices, rather something "after the manner of dispositions." They are referred to as "remnants of sin," stemming from original sin and decreasing or increasing depending on how the soul fights them. "However, if they are not completely overcome in this life, then they must be healed (at least in the spiritual faculties) after death before the soul can truly be fit to enter into its eternal reward" (p. 22).

Returning to the distinction between the loss of original justice (which is a supernatural gift of harmony between reason and the lower elements of human nature) and the diminishing of natural inclinations toward virtue, it is decisive in that, in the present state, the believer will not experience perfect harmony between the body, the lower powers, and reason. In the earthly eon, there always remains a residual internal conflict, in the midst of which, however, there is the possibility of perfecting oneself in virtue. Thus, "if the spiritual powers of the soul are not thus perfected by virtue in this life, their residual evil dispositions will have to be overcome in purgatory" (p. 23).

Another consequence requiring being remedied after the present life is the *reatus poenae*, or the debt of punishment. Thomas is of the opinion that “after guilt is effaced through contrition, the debt of punishment [the *reatus poenae*] is not entirely taken away.” This debt is the sinner’s obligation to God’s justice, which “requires that sin be ordered by due punishment, a person who dies after contrition and absolution for sin but before making due satisfaction must be punished after this life” (p. 24, quoted from *Commentary on the Sentences*).

However, to contemporary readers, such a statement, if true, is of significant importance for the doctrine of purgatory. When punishment is not sufficiently borne during the earthly life, it must be completed after death. Thus, there are three objects of purgatorial purification: in addition to the unforgiven guilt for venial sins and evil dispositions persisting in the soul, there is also a debt of punishment to be satisfied or expiated.

In the second chapter (“Objections to the Three Objects of Purgatorial Purification”), Wilgenbusch deals with objections to the three objects of purification in purgatory. The author first shows the difference between the Catholic position on the one hand and the Orthodox and Protestant positions on the other. However, he did not overlook the discrepancies in the reflections of the Catholic theologians. The conclusion is that it is the concepts of punishment and the *reatus poenae* that are both central to a proper understanding of purgatory and the bone of contention. Based on the overview of Orthodox and Protestant positions, Wilgenbusch clarifies these issues, which he then develops within the Thomistic approach.

While Duns Scotus equated the *reatus culpae* and the *reatus poenae*, thus considering the grace of forgiveness unnecessary, Aquinas saw the forgiveness of venial sins through an act of fervent love for God, impossible without the presence of habitual charity. This act involves a return to God contrary to the way in which one departed from him in venial sin. In other words, Thomas, distinguishing repentance from satisfaction, points to the irreconcilability of guilt and debt of punishment.

The problem is that the *reatus poenae* is the greatest challenge for the contemporary reader and therefore calls for justification. “It is not evident in the same way for us as it was for Aquinas why a sin already forgiven is deserving of punishment” (p. 34), and even worse: punishment is associated by “Nietzsche’s descendants” with the arbitrary imposition of will and cruelty, that is, with yet another evil.

The Orthodox approach emphasizes the need for personal healing and inner conversion, without reference to divine justice and punishment. The Orthodox churches therefore deny the usefulness of the category of the *reatus poenae* for

the doctrine of purgatory. As for the positions taken by Protestants, they considered that the concepts of satisfaction and punishment are not compatible with Protestant soteriology, which excludes human cooperative participation in Christ's reparation for sins. Christ's Passover would result not only in the remission of sins, but also in the remission of the debt to divine justice (eternal death). "Protestant arguments in favor of purgatory are not based on the demands of divine justice and do not include a notion of satisfaction" (p. 43). As in Orthodoxy, the emphasis is placed on the need for healing of the soul, and therefore only the second object of purification (evil dispositions) is accepted, while the third (debt of punishment) is rejected.

According to Wilgenbusch, "the satisfaction of the *reatus poenae* remains the only sufficiently good reason why God does not immediately heal the soul's dispositional imperfections" (p. 46). Wilgenbusch agrees that purgatorial punishment should be seen in connection with the process of internal transformation (medicinal punishment), but believes that "they cannot be reduced to one another." He reiterates his conviction that "the catholic position must account for the fundamental irreducibility of the punishment owed to divine justice and of subjective interior transformation, even as it maintains the harmony of the two" (p. 47).

Ultimately, the difference between Catholics and Protestants approaches always boils down to the idea of the *reatus poenae* and reparation. Neither the Orthodox nor the Protestant position "can grasp the place of punishment *within* a relationship of friendship with God" (p. 48). In turn, "Aquinas's system is able to account more faithfully for the transformative power of a divinely imposed punishment within our relationship with God" (pp. 48–49). In his view, "forgiveness is the foundation and beginning of a process that simultaneously heals us internally of all the inherent consequences of sin and also makes due reparation and satisfaction in a way that accords with the objective demands of divine justice" (p. 49). Thus, he facilitates an understanding of the true nature of purgatory.

In the third chapter ("Punishment and the *Reatus Poenae*"), Wilgenbusch undertakes to show the compatibility of his argument with Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church. In Scripture, he looks for passages that would show God's punishment taking place after the forgiveness of sins (cf. e.g., Num 14:12, 19–23; 2 Sam 12:13–14; Heb 12:5b–6; Rev 3:19; Luke 19:1–10). He finds in them confirmation that the restoration of God's loving friendship (forgiveness, remission of sins) is not incompatible with the long-term punishment and satisfaction that follows and which differs from the immediate consequence of sin. At the same time, he does not fail to notice that this is

usually accompanied by internal healing or transformation of the sinner (as in the case of David, for instance). Nonetheless, the author argues that although a clear picture emerges from this collection of Scriptures, neither individual passages nor their collections are indisputable confirmation of the Thomistic view of the doctrine of purgatory.

As far as the Magisterium is concerned, Wilgenbusch first refers to the decree of the Council of Florence, which mentions reparation and punishment in relation to the debt owed to God's justice. He then identifies an analogy between reparation after death and penance after confession of sins in the sacrament of confession. Further, he draws on the Council of Trent, which, in contrast to the Protestant position, insists on the obligation to God that remains after forgiveness. From the contemporary teaching of the Church, Wilgenbusch only quotes Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* and par. 1473 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.³ (The other two statements, by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, are for some reason found elsewhere in the monograph⁴). He summarizes the overly brief (just over one page) presentation of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* with the words: "Our investigation of the Church's teaching then supports what we encountered in the Scriptures and points toward the distinction between guilt, evil dispositions, and the *reatus poenae* as suggested by Aquinas." (p. 57).

Thomas placed man within the framework of three orders of justice: reason, social, and divine. He believed that those who sin do something contrary to reason, human law, and divine law. Man, as subject to three different orders of justice, is subject to three different orders of punishment – it can come from himself (remorse), from people, and from God. According to Thomas Aquinas, punishment can be carried out in three ways; what is contrary to someone's will can be directed against: the actual will, the habitual will, and the true nature of the will itself. The last point is the most important for considerations about purgatory: the evildoer receives something that is in accordance with his actual will, while simultaneously contrary to what his will desires by its very nature.

Thomas allows us to perceive both the harmony between the types of punishment and the irreducibility of one to the other, e.g., the consequences of sin and temporal punishment. Wilgenbusch believes that for a proper understanding of purgatory, it is essential to both connect and distinguish between

³ Unfortunately, the author relocates an interesting comparison of his own proposal to other articles of the *Catechism* – cf. p. 73, n. 1.

⁴ Cf. pp. 74 and 103, respectively. The author emphasizes, in a not entirely convincing manner, what he considers to be striking similarities between his proposal and a passage from Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi*, 2007, no. 47.

punishment of the order of reason and divine punishment in the strict sense of the word (p. 66). This punishment resulting from divine justice is identical to the *reatus poenae*, and cannot be equated with the immanent consequences of sin – this is because the order of divine justice cannot be equated with the natural order of reason. However, if there is harmony between them (natural law is man's participation in eternal law!), "we should not think of God's justice as somehow arbitrary or extrinsic to the created order" (p. 67).

According to Wilgenbusch, "purgatory must be understood as a punitive process with a retributive value. The only sufficient reason that a soul possessed of charity at the moment of death does not immediately enter into the joy of eternal beatitude is because it still has some debt before divine justice" (p. 73). This may result either from unforgiven venial sins or from sins that have been forgiven but not perfectly satisfied. Contrary to what Orthodox Christians and Protestants believe, even accepting the transformative dimension of purification, "purgatory can only be understood be reference to the unique demands of divine justice for proper satisfaction" (p. 72).

Thomas' principles prove useful, as Wilgenbusch argues in chapter four ("The Two Theories of Purgatory"), for incorporating the concept of medicinal punishment in purgatory into the doctrine of purgatory, that is, for integrating the approach emphasizing the debt of punishment with the transformative dimension of purgatory. The author perceives purgatorial purification as a process in which divine enlightenment in the soul can be providential, directed by God to evoke deep regret for past sins (punishment), and leading to the ultimate repair of the will through repeated acts of love (healing). "In other words, only the punitive dimension of the experience fulfils the demand of divine justice, and it is the sorrow and repentance caused by the divine illumination that form that indispensable punitive element. The act of love which accompanies that vision has a distinct finality: the rectification of the habits. The two must be seen distinctly even in their coordination" (p. 97).

Wilgenbusch presents the reader with two different schools of theological reflection on purgatory. The difference between them is boiled down to the question of whether the moral transformation of the soul takes place at a specific moment after death, so that it is not accompanied by punishment, or whether it takes place gradually, through the experience of punishment. Wilgenbusch opts for the Thomistic position, but admits: "I do not believe that Aquinas himself gives us a definitive position on this question in his writings" (p. 75). Despite this fact Wilgenbusch maintains that "it can be argued that the transformative dimension of purgatory actually provides the interior and subjective ground for a just and fitting punishment – one that accords best with God's surpassing

justice, goodness, and wisdom. The most fitting punishment, in other words, is the one that transforms us" (p. 76).

In Thomas's writings, one can find an argument for rejecting moral transformation immediately after death – it stems from the difference between *visio beatifica* and spiritual insight at the moment of personal judgment. The unified vision therefore becomes continuous transformation in purgatory: "the mode of transformation begun in the particular judgment continues with the punishments of purgatory and reaches completion on the soul's entrance into beatitude" (p. 86).

In order to understand how punitive transformation takes place, Wilgenbusch recommends looking at the nature of purgatorial punishments. Two aspects of sin – *aversio a Deo* and *conversio ad creaturam* – correspond to two types of punishment: *poena damni* and *poena sensus*. *Poena damni*, or pain of loss, consists in deprivation (or rather delay) of the beatific vision. This loss, as incompatible with the habitual and natural will of the soul, has a truly punitive character. *Poena sensus* (pain of sense), is a punishment corresponding to *conversio ad creaturam*, and therefore an element inherent to all sins, whether venial or mortal. According to a long tradition, this type of punishment is inflicted by means of actual, material fire (the similarity of purgatory to hell in terms of retributive value) (cf. Matt 25:41; 1 Cor 3:11–15). God uses the object of man's sinful desire as an instrument of punishment, and the creature that turned man away from God is now used to restore man to the proper order of justice. Fire represents the created goods to which man turned when he sinned.

The combination of punishment in the order of divine justice and transformative punishment offers a harmonious comprehension of the two orders of justice and facilitates understanding of the "quantity" of punishment needed to restore justice in purgatory. Thomas Aquinas believed that God always punishes less than faults deserve (no man suffers true punishment for his sins), and he also claimed that the length of time in purgatory corresponds to the rootedness of sin. "In light of the harmony between the punishments of reason and divine justice suggested by the vision of transformative punishment, it is possible to imagine that, by God's sapiential dispensation the 'amount' of punishment needed to satisfy divine justice in purgatory is coordinated with the time required to painfully root out the evil dispositions" (pp. 94–95).

As Wilgenbusch acknowledges, several passages from Aquinas pose a potential challenge to the vision presented, but Wilgenbusch believes that they either express Thomas's early position or may provide helpful explanations against the intention of the proposed approach. The author writes: "Nevertheless, I believe the presentation I have given here is a plausible account of how Aquinas himself might have considered the issue in light of his definitive positions." (p. 101).

The principles developed in the previous four chapters also prove helpful for the last two chapters. In them, Wilgenbusch deals with what a person can do to alleviate or eliminate the need for purgatory (for themselves or others). The author addresses here the issues of satisfaction (Chapter 5: "Personal Satisfaction in This Life") and indulgences (Chapter 6: "The Exchange of Satisfaction and the Theology of Indulgences").

According to Wilgenbusch, understanding the central role of temporal punishment in purgatory allows us to understand the nature and form of personal satisfaction in the present life. The foundation of such satisfaction is the satisfaction accomplished by Christ, to which personal satisfaction is subordinate (real but subordinate nature of personal satisfaction). The author starts from a sacramental perspective and then moves on to extra-sacramental forms of satisfaction. He accentuates the centrality of charity, which shapes the satisfactory work and gives them additional value beyond the punitive or retributive. "The harmony between the perfective and retributive elements of human purification in purgatory is all the more present in the satisfactory works performed by the living" (p. 106).

Christ's satisfaction enters human life for the first time in the sacrament of baptism, which is the fundamental means of remission of temporal and eternal punishment. As for sins committed after baptism, man must participate in the work of satisfaction. This cooperation between man and God is indicated by the sacrament of penance. Its matter consists of the penitent's actions, and the grace of the sacrament enables and supports the penitent's own actions so that they remain directed toward the proper goal. The believer cooperates in his own healing when, relying on the grace of Christ, he overcomes the evil of sin. The constitutive elements of the sacrament of penance, which include contrition for sins, confession, and reparation, are coordinated in such a way as to effectively combat three types of evil: guilt, evil dispositions, and the *reatus poenae*.

The penance imposed by the confessor should take into account not only the remedying of the interior wounds of sin, but also the debt to divine justice. The retributive dimension of punishment is combined with the healing dimension, but does not lose its inherent logic. Divine justice does not demand an "equality of quantity" (which only Christ could offer), but is content with an "equality of proportion," which Thomas Aquinas explained by the nature of friendship. According to the measure of the equality of proportion, "God demands from the soul that which is possible and reasonable according to his state in his life, his condition, and the relative gravity of his sins, considering at the same time the intensity of his friendship with him" (p. 118). The fact that only the restoration of friendship with God through the forgiveness of sins

opens up the possibility of personal reparation implicitly confirms the main thesis of the book, that one can speak of a personal debt of punishment only after the forgiveness of sin.

According to Wilgenbusch, the sacramental form of satisfaction can be a paradigmatic model for extra-sacramental forms of satisfaction. The beginning of repairing the damage caused by sin is a reorientation of the will towards God; repentance is always a condition for satisfaction. It is love of God and neighbor, not forgiveness of punishment for debt, that remains the main goal and driving force of all works of satisfaction. These, in turn, lead to an increase in the believer's love. As Wilgenbusch writes, "[t]hose who are intent on making satisfaction for the right reasons often reach the most profound heights of holiness" (p. 117).

Unity with Christ deepens, as Wilgenbusch asserts in the last chapter, when believers offer satisfaction for others, as Christ did. Later in the chapter, the author discusses the Church's practice of indulgences, which is based on the ability to make satisfaction for one another. He even believes that "our own efforts pale in comparison to the satisfaction available to man by means of indulgences" (p. 119).

Punitive justice does not apply only to individuals, but above all to the social order (in the case of sin – the universal moral order). Therefore, others may voluntarily share the burden carried by the sinner out of love—making reparation for their neighbor (cf. Gal 6:2 – the author does not refer to this, which is a pity, because Aquinas actually confirms this use⁵). This is possible because of love as a supernatural bond uniting the saints in community. As Wilgenbusch emphasizes, "[i]f one man offers his satisfaction for another, the remission of temporal punishment truly passes to the other" (p. 121).

An indulgence is neither forgiveness nor exemption from temporal punishment, but a genuine payment. It does not replace satisfaction, but is an alternative means of achieving it—the debt is paid from the treasury of the satisfaction of Christ and the saints. The works that the Church recommends to the faithful are not particularly difficult, as they arise from the generosity of the Church and give priority to the growth of love among the faithful (e.g., adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least half an hour, devout recitation of the Rosary in a church or chapel, and reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour). In this way satisfaction also merits an increase of grace. Wilgenbusch recalls,

⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Super ad Galatas*, cap. VI, lect. 1, no. 347, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Gal.C6.L1>.

following Aquinas, that the merit of eternal reward is infinitely better than dismissal of temporal punishment.

In addition, the Church requires confession, Holy Communion, and prayer for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff. Wilgenbusch considers the necessity of being free from all attachment to sin (including venial sin) in order to obtain a plenary indulgence to be a result of the very nature of a plenary indulgence. It is in the authority of the Church to establish the criteria for granting indulgences, including the “amount” of remission to grant for each work, the conditions for granting the indulgence, and the acts to be performed to receive the indulgence. Since attachment to sin is contrary to true repentance for sins, one cannot receive forgiveness for a sin when the will still clings to it. “To be truly free to receive the benefit of a plenary indulgence, one must be willing to repent of each and every sin out of a complete love of God” (p. 131).

The bond of love also unites us with those who have already died, which is why it is possible to offer indulgences for the dead. In the case of the indulgence for the living, it is granted by the Church by way of absolution, that is, *per modum absolutionis*. However, this type of absolution does not refer to the forgiveness of sins, but to the remission of the penalty of punishment. In the event of “redirecting” an indulgence to the deceased, it is offered by way of suffrage, that is, *per modum suffragii*. The effect of this indulgence is not guaranteed in the same way as it is for the living; the measure of the benefit granted is at God’s discretion.

Wilgenbusch devotes the end of the last chapter to the apostolic pardon. Apostolic pardon granted by a priest at the moment of death is a plenary indulgence. Wilgenbusch even claims that “[T]here is no better means at man’s disposal for the remission of temporal punishment than the generous gift of an apostolic pardon” (p. 139). When there is no priest, the Church offers this kind of indulgence to those who are properly disposed, provided that they were in the habit of saying some prayers during their lifetime.

The author raises an interesting question in the appendix entitled “Can the Souls in Purgatory Pray for Us.” Thomas’ negative answer to this question is considered to be the binding doctrine of the Church. Contrary to this, Wilgenbusch argues that from a Thomistic point of view, souls, although they do not usually pray for the living, may sometimes be asked to do so as part of punitive healing.

The process of purification, guided by God’s providence, may require that God should give souls those ideas that are related to the ways in which they need purification. Through such enlightenment, God wants to evoke acts of love that include repentance for past wrongs. However, Wilgenbusch argues that it

is not impossible that God may sometimes ask souls in purgatory to intercede for a specific person as part of this process, revealing some knowledge about that person's condition. This may involve praying for those who, for instance, may struggle with the same sins that the soul had to tackle in life, or for those who were hurt by the soul during its earthly life. "It is not hard, then, to further imagine that in his great mercy God would grant some grace to those still on earth in response to their prayers" (p. 148).

This topic requires in my opinion further discussion. The possibility that souls in purgatory can pray for the living may find its confirmation in Thomas' teaching on the two degrees of love of God. The first degree means that the soul is more focused on one's own good (relationship with God), while the second, that the soul seeks the glory of God in serving others.⁶ In this light, it is reasonable to ask whether souls in purgatory should be focused solely on their purification?

* * *

I should like to accentuate the solid work done by Wilgenbusch and definitely recommend reading this impressive publication. The few critical remarks to follow by no means detract from the high value of *Saved as Through Fire*.

What I missed was the apology for purgatory that Thomas Aquinas proposed in his work *De rationibus fidei*.⁷ Incidentally, in this *opuscula*, completely omitted by Wilgenbusch, Aquinas brings the purifying nature of punishment to the fore, and only then does he mention the penance not done during one's lifetime.⁸ Wilgenbusch, the other way round, first encourages the conclusion that the primary purpose of purgatory is the *reatus poenae* to further attempt the assimilation of this punishment with its healing dimension.

Another downside of the book is Wilgenbusch's relatively scarce use of Thomas's biblical commentaries (cf., for instance, insufficient discussion of the explanation of 1 Cor 3:11–15 on p. 89, especially in the light of the fact that the title of Wilgenbusch's monograph is a quote from verse 15). It would be appropriate to consult Thomas' biblical commentaries on the passages of Scripture referred to by the author. As rightly proven by biblical Thomism, Aquinas'

⁶ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Super ad Philipenses*, cap. 1, lect. 3, no. 36, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Philip.C1.L3.n36>.

⁷ Cf. Sławomir Zatwardnicki, "Tomasza z Akwinu apologia doktryny czyśćca," *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 17, no. 3 (2024): 317–49, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2024.017>.

⁸ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De rationibus fidei*, cap. 9, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~DeRatio>.

biblical commentaries shed light without which a full understanding of the legacy of the *Doctor Communis* would not be entirely feasible.

Wilgenbusch voices the hope that the proposed synthetic approach has ecumenical potential, because the transformative dimension has been of primary concern to the Orthodox and Protestant explanations of purgatory. In my opinion, one could speak equally well, and perhaps even more in line with the intention of the Angelic Doctor himself, of the apologetic dimension of his monograph.

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