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## *Editor's Statement*

Whereas the articles of the previous issue were devoted to philosophical matters, this first issue of 2023 is devoted entirely to sacred theology.

The first three articles are expansions of lectures presented at the Thomistic Summer Conference held at the California campus of Thomas Aquinas College in June 2022, the theme of which was “Faith and Reason.” In the first of these Steven Long explains how the analogy of being in relation to God lies at the foundation of sacred doctrine, understood as a science, and how an error about that analogy infects the entire endeavor of the science. In the second article John Nieto applies St. Paul’s aim of taking “every thought captive unto obedience to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5) to manifest how theology does not merely use philosophical reasoning as a helpful tool, but in fact integrates and elevates it into its own supernatural order. In a complementary article Louis-Joseph Gagnon discusses the role of natural reason in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, contrasting St. Thomas’s understanding with that of the late Catholic philosopher Claude Tresmontant.

The remaining three articles range from disputes about central theological doctrines to sacramental theology to commentary on Scripture. Brett Smith carefully explains how Luther’s insistence that sin need not be voluntary leads inexorably to his rejection of the possibility of human merit, whereas St. Thomas’s account of sin, which Luther repudiates, does not. In the fifth essay Thomas Kaiser presents an overview of St. Thomas’s account of the sacraments for the sake of manifesting the deep relevance of our sense faculties to forming an awareness of and orientation toward the holy. In the final article, Rocky Brittain develops a theme from a previously published article on the sin of Moses at Meribah, arguing that God’s desire to glorify Moses

was profoundly difficult for the latter—or anyone of his day—to fathom, and that this was what led to his failure.

Christopher A. Decaen  
Thomas Aquinas College  
May 2023

## *Preface*

At Thomas Aquinas College we often say that the education we provide is only a beginning. For the most part, our students are reading the important works in our program for the first time, and the class discussion, while certainly helping them to better understand the principal arguments and themes in the readings and to acquire the intellectual virtues, only introduces them to the profoundest truths and deepest questions that have engaged mankind for centuries.

Accordingly, it is fitting that the College publish *The Aquinas Review* to honor its patron and to provide a forum for deeper consideration of those matters which constitute its curriculum and are central to genuine Catholic liberal education. Consistent with the nature of the College itself, this review is marked by fidelity to the *Magisterium* of the Catholic Church and a respect for the great tradition of liberal learning which is our common heritage.

The essays in *The Aquinas Review* reflect positions taken by their authors and not necessarily by the College itself. The editor—in collaboration with the editorial board—determines the contents of each issue. Any interested person may submit an essay for consideration or letters or comments on articles already published.

It is our hope that *The Aquinas Review* will be a source of wisdom to its readers and contributors.

Paul O'Reilly  
*President, Thomas Aquinas College*



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## ON THE ANALOGY OF BEING AND SACRA DOCTRINA

Steven A. Long

### *Introduction*

There are many questions and considerations that arise precisely under the *ratio* of the relation of faith and reason, especially when viewed in the light of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, who rightly is honored as the preeminent Doctor of the synthesis of nature and grace. His contributions to this subject are too many and various for one paper even properly to summarize.<sup>1</sup>

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Dr. Steven Long is Professor of Theology at Ave Maria University, having received a BA and MA in philosophy from the University of Toledo, and a PhD from the Catholic University of America. His most recent books include *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); and *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act* (Naples, FL: Ave Maria Press, 2007). This essay was originally presented, under the title of “The Analogy of Being as the Metaphysical Framework for Sacra Doctrina,” as a plenary session at the “Faith and Reason” Thomistic Summer Conference at Thomas Aquinas College, California, June 16–19, 2022. The matter of this essay is significantly co-extensive with that of the presidential address he gave before the American Catholic Philosophical Association in November 2022, differing in that it engages St. Thomas’s account of the analogicity of the *imago dei*, but overlapping in that the presidential address also concerns St. Thomas’s teaching regarding the nature of the preambles to faith.

1 They are also extremely formal: ranging from his understanding of *sacra doctrina* as such, to his understanding of divine motion in nature and in grace, to the distinction and synthesis of nature and grace and the treatment of specific *obediential potency*, to the explication of grace, providence, and

Yet all of his theology proceeds within his vision of the formal unity and metaphysical structuring of *sacra doctrina*.

St. Thomas clearly holds that theology as a science integrally and essentially requires metaphysics as a *conditio sine qua non* of its existence. For Thomas, the *analogia fidei*, the analogy of faith, and the development of genuine theological science, depend by way of God's primordial revelation in creation upon the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. Metaphysical truths are not alien to revelation, but presupposed to it, as the structure of created being flowing forth from God is presupposed to revelation. St. Thomas is the Common Doctor because his work is adapted wholly and with a true docility to the effects of God in nature and in grace.

I have long since concluded that comment on question 1, article 7 of the Prima pars of the *Summa Theologiae* is necessary for understanding Thomas's vision of *sacra doctrina*. Rarely do I teach any class in theology without adverting to it. There Thomas famously ponders the problem with theology as a science: namely, that a science normally takes for granted knowledge of the essence of its subject. But we lack quidditative or direct natural knowledge of the essence of God. Thomas's answer is straightforward: just as in philosophy we know something about a cause from its proper effects, so in theology what stands in for the lack of direct knowledge of the divine essence is the knowledge of God through His effects of nature and grace. In question 45, article 5 of the Prima pars, Thomas affirms that the proper and most universal effect of God is *esse*, or existence, which is presupposed to all divine effects. And in question 5, article 2, Thomas says that what is first in the intellect's conception is *ens*, *that which is or exists*, *actual nature*, whose most formal actuating principle is *existence*. Potency can only be or be

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predestination as such, to the entirety of his sacramental theology, moral theology, and account of the infused Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

known in relation to *act*, and the diverse essences of things can only be known in relation to existential act, *esse*. *Ens* is first in our conception because the intellect knows things according as they are actual, “because according to this is each thing knowable: insofar as it is in act.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the knowledge of *ens* and the knowledge of existence as its most formal principle of act enjoy an essential and privileged instrumentality within theology.

The theologian, lacking the beatific vision, must contemplate revelation in the light of the effects of God in nature and grace, and Thomas identifies the most universal of these effects as *esse*. *If* all the effects of God in nature and grace stand in for the lack of quidditative knowledge of God; and *if* the proper and most universal divine effect is, as Thomas expressly states, *esse absolute*; then it will hardly be possible for the theologian to gain any insight about God whatsoever without consideration of actual nature or being. Whereas an error regarding being and the knowledge thereof will, by entering into the stream of theology, divert its course and lead it into the rocks, a proper advertence will enable a true regard for creation, God, and, with respect to revelation, what Maritain has called the “superanalogy of faith.”<sup>3</sup>

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2 *Summa Theologiae* (henceforth, *STh*) I, q. 5, a. 2, c.: “quia secundum hoc unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu.”

3 Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. Gerald B. Phelan, presented by Ralph McInerney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 256–57: “But a capital difference from metaphysical knowledge intervenes here. For in the metaphysical knowledge of God, it is from the heart of the intelligible that our intellect, having discovered the ananoetic value of being and of objects which belong to the transcendental order, rises, thanks to them, to the divine analogate. On the contrary, in the knowledge of faith it is from the very heart of the divine transintelligible, from the very heart of the deity that the whole process of knowledge starts out, in order to return thither. That is to say, from this source, through the free generosity of God, derives the choice of objects and of concepts in the intelligible universe which fall under our senses, which God alone knows to be analogical signs of what is hidden in Him, and of which He makes use in order to speak of Himself to us in our own language. No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who

It is thus unsurprising that early in his work Thomas undertook to develop an account of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, as metaphysically structuring *sacra doctrina*. In his *Scriptum on the Sentences*<sup>4</sup> and *De veritate*,<sup>5</sup> Thomas articu-

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is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. If God Himself had not revealed it, never would we have known that the notions of generation and filiation, or the notion of three having the same nature, or the notion of being made flesh and of personal union with human nature, or the notion of participability in deity by the creature and the love of friendship with it, could be valid in the proper order of the deity itself, and in regard to the intimate life of God.”

4 *Scriptum super Sententiis* (henceforth, *In Sent.*) I, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1; “it is to be said that something is said according to analogy in three ways [*aliquid dicitur secundum analogiam tripliciter*]: either according to notion only and not according to being [*secundum intentionem tantum et non secundum esse*]; and this is when one notion [*una intentio*] is referred to several [things] through priority and posteriority, which nevertheless has being only in one: for example, the notion of health [*intentio sanitatis*] is referred to the animal, the urine, and the diet in diverse measures [*diversimode*], according to priority and posteriority; not nevertheless according to diverse being, because the being of health is only in the animal.

“Or else, [something is said according to analogy] according to being and not according to notion [*secundum esse et non secundum intentionem*]; and this occurs when many things are taken as equal [*parificantur*] in the notion [*in intentione*] of something common, but that common item does not have being of one intelligible character [*esse unius rationis*] in all: as for example, all bodies are taken as equal in the notion of corporeity [*in intentione corporeitatis*]; hence, the logician [*logicus*], who considers only notions [*intentiones tantum*], says that this name ‘body’ is predicated of all bodies univocally; however, the being of this nature [*esse hujus naturae*] is not of the same intelligible character [*ejusdem rationis*] in corruptible and incorruptible bodies; hence, for the metaphysician and the physicist, who consider things according to their being, neither this name, ‘body,’ nor any other [name] is said univocally of corruptibles and incorruptibles, as is clear from *Metaph.* 10, text 5, from [both] the Philosopher and the Commentator.

“Or else, [something is said according to analogy] according to notion and according to being [*secundum intentionem et secundum esse*], and this is when they are not taken as equal either in the common notion [*in intentione communi*] or in being; the way, for example, ‘a being’ is said of substance and accident; and in such [cases] it is necessary that the common nature [*natura communis*] have some being in each of those things of which it is said, but

lates an account of analogy that pertains both to concept and to *esse*, which he comes to identify in *De veritate* as an analogy of “proper proportionality.” This is a likeness of differing *rationes* or proportions precisely insofar as they are different. Such an analogy is required given that, as Aristotle teaches at the beginning of

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differing according to the [measure] intelligible character [*rationem*] of greater or lesser perfection.

“And similarly I say [*dico*] that ‘truth’ and ‘goodness’ and all such [items] are said analogically [*dicuntur analogice*] of God and creatures. Hence, it is necessary that according to their being all these be in God and in creatures according to the measure/intelligible character [*secundum rationem*] of greater and lesser perfection; from which it follows, since they cannot be according to one being [*esse*] in both places, that there are diverse truths [*diversae veritates*].” 5 *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (henceforth, *De Ver.*), q. 2, a. 11, “Is Knowledge Predicated of God and Men Purely Equivocally?”: “It is impossible to say that something is predicated univocally of a creature and God because in all univocal predication the nature signified by the name is common to those of whom the univocal predication is made. Hence, from the point of view of the nature signified by the predicate, the subjects of the univocal predication are equal, even though from the point of view of its real existence one may take precedence over another. For example, all numbers are equal from the point of view of the nature of number, even though, by the nature of things, one number is naturally prior to another. No matter how much a creature imitates God, however, a point cannot be reached where something would belong to it for the same reason it belongs to God. For things which have the same formal characters but are in separate subjects are common to the same subjects in regard to substance or quiddity but distinct in regard to the act of being. But whatever is in God is his own act of being; and just as his essence is the same as his act of being, so is his knowledge the same as his act of being a knower. Hence, since the act of existence proper to one thing cannot be communicated to another, it is impossible that a creature ever attain to the possession of something in the same manner in which God has it, just as it is impossible for it to attain the same act of being as that which God has. The same is true of us. If man and to exist as man did not differ in Socrates, man could not be predicated univocally of him and Plato, whose acts of existing are distinct.

“Nevertheless, it cannot be said that whatever is predicated of God and creatures is an equivocal predication; for, unless there were at least some real agreement between creatures and God, His essence would not be the likeness of creatures, and so he could not know them by knowing his essence. Similarly,

the *Metaphysics*, being is not a genus,<sup>6</sup> much less a species.

The standard reading of Thomas today holds that he abandoned this teaching because he dropped explicitly named reference to analogy of proper proportionality and spoke differently in later works. Because Thomas undertakes different inquiries in his later work, and uses the term “proportion,” this is taken

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we would not be able to attain any knowledge of God from creatures, nor from among the names devised for creatures could we apply one to him more than another; for in equivocal predication it makes no difference what name is used, since the word does not signify any real agreement.

“Consequently, it must be said that knowledge is predicated neither entirely univocally nor yet purely equivocally of God’s knowledge and ours. Instead, it is predicated analogously, or, in other words, according to a proportion. Since an agreement according to proportion can happen in two ways, two kinds of community can be noted in analogy. There is a certain agreement between things having a proportion to each other from the fact that they have a determinate distance between each other or some other relation to each other, like the proportion which the number two has to unity in as far as it is the double of unity. Again, the agreement is occasionally noted not between two things which have a proportion between them, but rather between two related proportions—for example, six has something in common with four because six is two times three, just as four is two times two. The first type of agreement is one of proportion; the second, of proportionality.

“We find something predicated analogously of two realities according to the first type of agreement when one of them has a relation to the other, as when being is predicated of substance and accident because of the relation which accident has to substance, or as when healthy is predicated of urine and animal because urine has some relation to the health of an animal. Sometimes, however, a thing is predicated analogously according to the second type of agreement, as when sight is predicated of bodily sight and of the intellect because understanding is in the mind as sight is in the eye.

“In those terms predicated according to the first type of analogy, there must be some definite relation between the things having something in common analogously. Consequently, nothing can be predicated analogously of God and creature according to this type of analogy; for no creature has such a relation to God that it could determine the divine perfection. But in the other type of analogy, no definite relation is involved between the things which have something in common analogously, so there is no reason why some name cannot be predicated analogously of God and creature in this manner.

by many readers of Thomas to signify his abandonment of his earlier teaching. Yet not only is the analogy of proper proportionality to be found in the *Summa Theologiae* itself, but his first treatment of analogy there is in terms of the analogy of participation in being according as “existence is common in all” in *Prima pars*, question 4, article 3.<sup>7</sup> Further, Thomas always called “proportionality” a unique kind of “proportion.” Thomas

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“But this can happen in two ways. Sometimes the name implies something belonging to the thing primarily designated which cannot be common to God and creature even in the manner described above. This would be true, for example, of anything predicated of God metaphorically, as when God is called lion, sun, and the like, because their definition includes matter which cannot be attributed to God. At other times, however, a term predicated of God and creature implies nothing in its principal meaning which would prevent our finding between a creature and God an agreement of the type described above. To this kind belong all attributes which include no defect nor depend on matter for their act of existence, for example, being, the good, and similar things.”

6 See note 22.

7 Note the first reference to analogy in the *STh* I, q. 4, a. 3, both the body of the article and all the replies to objections, but especially ad 2, 3 & 4. In the body we see: “Si autem agens non sit contentum in eadem specie, erit similitudo, sed non secundum eandem rationem speciei, sicut ea quae generantur ex virtute solis, accedunt quidem ad aliquam similitudinem solis, non tamen ut recipiant formam solis secundum similitudinem speciei, sed secundum similitudinem generis. Si igitur sit aliquod agens, quod non in genere contineatur, effectus eius adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis, non tamen ita quod participant similitudinem formae agentis secundum eandem rationem speciei aut generis, sed secundum aliqualem analogiam, sicut ipsum esse est commune omnibus. Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei in quantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse.” (“If, however, the agent and its effect are not contained in the same species, there will be a likeness, but not according to the formality of the same species; as things generated by the sun’s heat may be in some sort spoken of as like the sun, not as though they received the form of the sun in its specific likeness, but in its generic likeness. Therefore if there is an agent not contained in any ‘genus,’ its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent’s form according to the same specific or generic formality, *but only according to some sort of analogy, as existence is common to all.* In this way all created things, so far as

explains in intermediary works why he shifts his manner of speaking, and makes plain that this semantic shift is only valid if the very reason he earlier argued to require proper proportionality is acknowledged and retained.

In this essay I will attempt to explain this analogy and its role as a metaphysically structuring principle in Thomas's account of creation and revelation. I will first offer extremely preliminary remarks regarding analogy, being, logic, and language; second, I will provide an account of Thomas's treatment of analogy that is continuous rather than discontinuous; third,

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they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of the totality of existence.") But how is existence "common to all" save by analogy of proper proportionality, as proportioned in each case to its subject, which either is a subjective potency for existence, or *tantum esse*? Thus as God operates according to his mode so does the creature operate according to its (i.e., implicitly, *esse subsistens per se* unlimited by passive potency vis à vis *esse* limited by passive potency). In the ad 3 Thomas states: "Ad tertium dicendum quod non dicitur esse similitudo creaturae ad Deum propter communicantiam in forma secundum eandem rationem generis et speciei, sed secundum analogiam tantum; prout scilicet Deus est ens per essentiam, et alia per participationem." ("To the third it should be said that likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation.") But a being by participation is a being by reason of receiving *esse*—and in an aligned but distinct sense, act generally—from God as limited by subjective potency. It is of interest that Thomas is answering a metaphysical objection: "Further, we speak of those things as like which agree in form. But nothing can agree with God in form; for, save in God alone, essence and existence differ. Therefore no creature can be like to God." In other words, *before* speaking of the analogy of one to another (I would say implicitly requiring proper proportionality), and speaking in terms of extended or associated meanings, he addresses *metaphysical analogy*. Without that consideration in q. 4, a. 3, there would be no *occasion* for the treatment of q. 13 because without this it would be metaphysically impossible intrinsically to attribute existence to God—intrinsic attribution of being—*without implying real determinate relation of God to the creature*. The divine perfection, it should not need to be said, is not first a matter of language, but of reality as such. *Participation* is understood by Thomas in terms of the

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I will consider merely one of a great many illustrations of this analogy within Thomas's theology; fourth, and finally, I will conclude with a postlude on analogy, being, logic, and language.

### *I. Preliminary Remarks*

Analogy has semantic and linguistic aspects, and there are many voices, ranging from analytic philosophers to savants as profound as Charles De Koninck of the Laval School of Thomism, who wish to argue that analogy is principally a logical doctrine.<sup>8</sup> It is tempting to say that analogical predication of God is simply "extending" language we use of creatures, and that all analogy is, is taking a word that has hitherto had one principal usage, and stretching it to apply to something somehow similar to, or related to, the principal usage. But with respect to the use of language derived from creatures and its application to God, at least somewhat more must be said. The reason is that God, as actually infinite, does not have a determinate real relation or commensurate proportion to the creature.

We are not nominalists. In affirming perfections of God, it

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participated actual perfection as limited in relation to the potential principle. For the same reason that the proofs for God precede q. 13 in the *Prima pars*, the consideration of the analogy of being and participation does so. In re: the divine transcendence, see also *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 1, c.: "Manifestum est autem quod inter Deum et hominem est maxima inaequalitas, in infinitum enim distant, et totum quod est hominis bonum, est a Deo. Unde non potest hominis ad Deum esse iustitia secundum absolutam aequalitatem, sed secundum proportionem quandam, in quantum scilicet uterque operatur secundum modum suum." ("Now it is clear that between God and man there is the greatest inequality: for they are infinitely apart, and all man's good is from God. Thus there is not able to be justice of absolute equality between man and God, but only according to a certain proportion, inasmuch as each is operative according to its own mode.") These are as distinct as limited and unlimited perfection: but as God is to what is his, so is the creature to what is its, the very language of *De veritate*...

<sup>8</sup> See Charles De Koninck, "Metaphysics and the Interpretation of Words," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 171 (1961): 22–34, especially at 34.

must be the case *both* that we are not confining God to the finite limits of the creature *and* that we are affirming something that is true of God. As I hope will become clear, Thomas's account of the analogicity of act in relation to potency provides the requisite principles.

To be clear, when Thomas writes that in knowing that God exists we know neither the divine essence nor the divine existence, but only the truth of the proposition that God exists,<sup>9</sup> this does not render that proposition "logical" in the reductive sense of being purely conceptual or linguistic or a mere second intention. Thomas clearly holds that we enjoy natural positive knowledge about God. This is *not* a direct knowledge of the divine essence. It is a true knowledge about God achieved through causal inference predicated on real evidence of divine effects. Thomas writes in *De potentia dei* that

unless the human mind knew something positively about God, it would be unable to deny anything about him. And it would know nothing if nothing that it affirmed about God were positively verified [*verificaretur affirmative*] about him.<sup>10</sup>

"Positively verified." Proceeding from real evidence, our reasoning accordingly yields a real and not merely a conceptual conclusion. Knowledge of something through causal inference is knowledge about that thing and not about something else. St. Thomas famously teaches that the *modus significandi*—the limitation in the way we signify perfections owing to their real

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9 See *STh* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2.

10 *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei* (henceforth *De Pot.*), q. 7, a. 5: "Et praeterea intellectus negationis semper fundatur in aliqua affirmatione: quod ex hoc patet quia omnis negativa per affirmativam probatur; unde nisi intellectus humanus aliquid de Deo affirmative cognosceret, nihil de Deo posset negare. Non autem cognosceret, si nihil quod de Deo dicit, de eo verificaretur affirmative."

limitation in creatures—does not pertain to the *res significata*, the reality of the signified perfection in God. And the perfection signified pertains to God more properly than to creatures. As Thomas puts it in article 6 of question 13 of the *Prima pars*, there are names nonmetaphorically applied to God and “these names are applied to God not as the cause only, but also essentially.” Definitive real metaphysical knowledge of God is not a definition of God—because God infinitely transcends the effects through which we know Him, God is not in any genus, and the effect from which we reason to God—being—is not a genus. There is inferential and indirect knowledge of definitive truths about the divine essence that is not direct knowledge or *visio* of the divine essence.

## II. Thomas’s Treatment of the Analogy of Being

The prerequisite for such knowledge is the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. It is called this because Thomas states both in the *Scriptum on the Sentences* and *De veritate*—and never anywhere retracts—that this is so.<sup>11</sup> Here I refer to the division of substance and all the categories by act and potency, which as Aristotle expressly teaches is an analogical division of being according to what Thomas in *De veritate* identifies as “analogy of proper proportionality”—an analogy of “proportion” that is a likeness of differing proportions not requiring true reciprocal commensurate proportion. Being is not first and principally an object of second intention—of logical relation or linguistic usage—but actual nature, *ens*, that which exists, a real being.

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11 For the more extended passage where this is found, see note 25: “sicut sunt omnia in quorum definitione non clauditur defectus, nec dependent a materia secundum esse, ut ens, bonum, et alia huiusmodi.” (“to this kind belong all attributes which include no defect nor depend on matter for their act of existence, for example, being, the good, and similar things.”) See *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1.

And it is no secret that Aristotle applies the term “analogy” to actual being or nature, and to what Thomas later refers to as *ens commune*, to substance and all the categories.

As pertains to the division of being by potency and act, Thomas embraced and further perfected Aristotle’s account. While Aristotle develops this teaching in relation to the analysis of physical being, his purpose is in part from the beginning the provision of an adequate metaphysical response to Parmenidean monism.<sup>12</sup> Aristotle saw that there was a principle in being which is neither act, nor mere negation of act, but rather potency or capacity for act,<sup>13</sup> and that potency explains the reality of manyness, limit, and change.<sup>14</sup> This discovery of the only truly philo-

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12 G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), fragments of Parmenides, *On Nature*, e.g., 248–249, 249–250, 251. Parmenides famously held that being is self-identical and one with itself, so that *plurality is unreal*; that being is all there is, and outside of being there is nothing, such that nothing exists outside of being to limit it, so that *being is unlimited*; and that being could only change by becoming nonbeing, but being *is* not nonbeing and nothing is outside of it that could alter it, so that *change is impossible*. Of course, we look up and see a flock of many, limited, changing creatures flying by, and conclude that Parmenides is out to lunch. But the difficult question is how to reconcile the principle of contradiction as a *principle of being* with real manyness, limit, and change. For being is self-identical, and there is nothing outside of being either to limit or change it. So, in denying the counterfactual claims of Parmenides, one must also secure the application of the first principles to being, on pain of embracing a thoroughgoing irrationalism.

13 Of course Aristotle makes clear that subjective potency exists solely in relation to, and as limiting, some principle of act: potency in itself is not a subject of being but exists in relation to an actual subject. The extension of this principle to what we would call “possibility” refers to what is within the objective frame of causality of an active power, or else to what is noncontradictory, as that which is noncontradictory *might* be, although of course the real constraints of the nature of the principles in play make this something quite different from the logicism of “possible worlds” scenarios.

14 Regarding change, see Aristotle’s *Physics* 1.7 & in re: Parmenides, see 1.8. Regarding the analogicity of the division of being by act and potency, see his *Metaphysics* 9.6 (1048a25–1048b9) & 11.9 (1065b15–16).

sophic explanation of manyness, limit, and change is one of the greatest intellectual achievements in human history. As Fr. Guy Mansini, OSB, has observed in his criticism of Balthasar:

This is not a matter of a Thomistic and Aristotelian account of change versus some other possibility of thought. There is no other analysis of change besides that of Aristotle. There are denials of change, from Parmenides to (in his own way) Hume. There are assertions that some kinds of change are really other kinds of change, as with the reduction of qualitative to quantitative change in materialism. There are assertions of novelty with no ground or cause, with Nietzsche and Bergson. There are reversals of the priority of act to potency, with Hegel. But there is no *analysis* of change, a location of the principles of change, except that of Aristotle.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the use of analogy of proper proportionality regarding being does not occur to Thomas *de novo*, out of thin air. He receives it from Aristotle. Proceeding from the Aristotelian insight into the real distinction of act and potency and the relative transcendence of act, Aquinas explicates Aristotelian actual nature in terms of existence as act and essence as potency in finite being (arguably something strongly implied by Aristotle's teaching). The analogical formality of act according to proper proportionality—a likeness of truly differing proportions—is Aristotelian in provenance, and is taken up and developed by St. Thomas. As Aristotle puts it:

Our meaning can be seen in the particular cases by induction, and we must not seek a definition of everything but be content to grasp the analogy, that it is as that which is building is to that which is capable of building,

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15 Fr. Guy Mansini, OSB, "Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity," *The Thomist* 64.4 (2000): 499–519, p. 518.

and the waking to the sleeping, and that which is seeing to that which has its eyes shut but has sight, and that which has been shaped out of the matter to the matter, and that which has been wrought up to the unwrought. Let actuality be defined by one member of this antithesis, and the potential by the other. But all things are not said in the same sense to exist actually, but only by analogy—as A is in B or to B, C is in D or to D; for some are as movement to potency, and the others as substance to some sort of matter.<sup>16</sup>

The division of being by act and potency passes through every category of being. This is a metaphysical, and not a purely physical, account of this distinction (occurring, appropriately, in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle). According to Aristotle, every kind of thing is divided into the potential and the real: act and potency divide substance and the categories.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.6, 1048a35–1048b9. We are following Ross's translation in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

17 As Aristotle teaches in *Metaphysics* 11.9, 1065b15–16: "Now since every kind of thing is divided into the potential and the real, I call the actualization of the potential as such, motion." With respect to the latter part of this proposition, it cannot be taken with respect to creation, for two reasons: creation does not presuppose antecedent matter or substrate, and there is no passive potency and hence no motion *in* God as mover, who is in reality unmoved. However, there is something analogous with motion, as Thomas observes in his *Scriptum on the Sentences* (the first *Scriptum*), *In I Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, ad; see *Aquinas on Creation*, ed. & trans. Steven E. Baldner & William E. Carroll (Toronto: PIMS, 1997), 76: "To the third it ought to be said that no enduring thing is able simultaneously to become and to have been made if 'to become' is taken properly. But there are some expressions that indicate the 'having been made' as though it were a 'becoming,' as when it is said that motion is ended, for at the same time motion 'is ended' and 'has been ended.' And likewise at the same time [something] is illuminated and has been illuminated, because illumination is the end of motion, as the Commentator says, *Physics* 4. And likewise also, substantial form at the same time is received and has been received; and likewise, something at the same time is created and has been created.

In *De veritate* Thomas distinguishes two kinds of proportion: one with determinate real distance between the related things, and the other involving no such reciprocal relation but only “proportionality.”<sup>18</sup> Thomas’s initial illustration of proper proportionality is a mathematical example (e.g., as 6 is to 3, so is 4 to 2) that while conceptually distinct reduces mathematically to a univocal double. But he quickly moves to the proposition that as sight is in the eye, so is understanding in the mind. The

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“If it is objected that before something has been made there is always a becoming in the proper sense of the word, I say that this is true in all things that come to be through motion, as generation follows upon alteration, and illumination follows upon local motion, but it is not so in creation, as was said.”

Thus creation properly is not motion, as there is no antecedent subject brought from potency to act, and no motion in God. There is production with no antecedent matter and so no “change” save the being of the creature itself. It is the division of being by potency and act to which motion testifies—as well as the limitation, contingency, imperfection, and multiplicity of being—that demands the causal inference to God as absolute first cause of being. Motion pertains to *ens commune* (and, analogically, to the angels as actuated by species, which actuation is a reduction from potency to act) but not to the First Cause, nor to creation *ex nihilo* absolutely considered. It takes time for the terminological distinctions required by an insight to be developed in expressing it. Yet one notes, however, that for Aristotle, God as *actus purus* has no dependence on the world (e.g., see *Metaphysics* 12.10, 1075a10–15, and 12.7, 1072b1–30) and “produces motion as being loved” (notice both efficiency—“produces”—and finality—the object of “being loved”) without suffering any motion whatsoever. Further, as he notes at the end of *Metaphysics* 2.1 (993b28), eternal things are the causes of the being of other things, and as things are according to being, so are they according to truth. Thus eternal things are most true because “most being.” It follows that *actus purus*, God—transcending other beings which are hypothetically necessary but yet dependent on God—is the first cause of all being and truth. The initial metaphysical account of the universal analogous division of being by potency and act—with its prior substrate containing potency *vis à vis* act—contains the principles (because matter has being only through form, and because act is limited solely by potency) for demonstrating the universal divine causality of being that Aristotle expressly affirms. This is a remarkable insight for Aristotle to have achieved, and I believe St. Thomas is right to have discerned its formal presence in Aristotle’s teaching.

18 See note 4.

“illumination” in question is not one thing but radically diverse, yet proportionately identical as each may be taken to articulate relations of act to potency<sup>19</sup> which yet are simply different. This takes the term “proportion” from its common quantitative meaning and applies it to things that share no univocal genus or species. This is the first instance of what Thomas calls “transferred proportion,” namely the transference of the term “proportion” from its quantitative sense to the likeness of diverse proportions of act.<sup>20</sup> While such analogy may pertain to metaphors which do not properly pertain to God—as in the metaphor of God as a Lion—St. Thomas argues that this form of analogy objectively pertains to transcendental or pure perfections, such as being or good, that include no limit of potency or defect in what they designate: for example, “act” in itself does not designate lack of act or non-act nor include matter in its definition; “being” does not in itself denote lack of being or nonbeing, or materiality; “true” does not denote untruth, nor does “good” designate any lack of good (although these limitations do pertain to the things of our direct experience). Thus these perfections are more properly affirmed of God than of creatures, although they are analogically affirmed both of God and of creatures. Because God is the perfection of act with no limitation of potency, he infinitely exceeds even these perfections, such that while transcendental and pure perfections are predicated of God as identified with his simple substance, these predicates are exceeded by God—and by no mere finite degree—and *incomprehend* God.<sup>21</sup>

This analogy of being in terms of diverse *rationes* of act

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19 E.g., as sight is to the eye, so is understanding to the mind: the eye and the mind are each “in act,” but “act” signifies diverse realities, i.e., potency and act analogically divide being.

20 Thomas will speak of a second “transference” of proportion, but one should note the first before proceeding to the second. See *De Ver.*, q. 2, a. 11, c.; q. 23, a. 7, ad 9.

21 See *STh* I, q. 13, a. 5, c.

as limited by potency transcends genera and species which, as univocal, exclude from their accounts that from which they abstract. For example, circularity is not defined by individuating characteristics of particular circles, and the nature of the genus does not include specific difference in its definition since if it did, everything in the genus would be of that species. Being, however, contains all of its inferiors on pain of them not existing at all. Being is not a genus;<sup>22</sup> it is, to use the famed phrase of John of St. Thomas commenting on Aquinas, a *confusio*, a fusing

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22 As Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 2.3, 998b22) and Thomas (in his commentary and elsewhere) both hold, being is not a genus, because no genus includes in its definition the specific differences that cause there to be different species within the genus: if it did, then all members of the genus would necessarily be of that species. For example, if the definition of the genus “animal” contained “reason” then all animals would be rational. But all the *differentiae* of being are included within being, on pain of not existing at all. The actual being affirmed of different beings and kinds of beings is thus already a transcendental and analogical perfection, proportionate to the subject and limited only by whatsoever degree and kind of potency. If being were not analogical from the start, then the “is” of the premises in the argumentation for the existence of God would mean only “is material” or “is of this limit of potency,” and thus the “is” of the conclusion correspondingly would mean only “is material” or “is materially limited.” Nothing can be in a valid conclusion that is not already in the premises. If, and only if, the “is” of the premises is intrinsically analogical can the conclusion to God as unlimited in perfection and wholly immaterial be reached. If the prime perfection of being is affirmed proportionate to the subject as limited by whatsoever passive potency, and the subject is unlimited by passive potency, the subject possesses the perfection of being without any limit. Indeed, all the ways in which the plurifiability of being is affirmed require potency, and so a subject lacking all passive potency is radically one, as there is nothing to account for its plurification. Thus Thomas argues in *De ente et essentia* that if there were a being whose essence were not really distinct from its existence, there could only be one, and he makes this argument before formulating his argument for the universalization of the real distinction (a fortiori in all other cases, existence and essence are really distinct) and before offering a universal proof for the reality of God predicated on the universal distinction of essence and existence in all but one possible case and showing that, since beings that are not their own *esse* cannot account for their being, all things must receive their existence from *ipsum esse subsistens per se*, God.

together of different things precisely insofar as they are different.<sup>23</sup> As sight is in the eye, so is understanding in the mind, but these are simply different. Angel and man share no natural genus, but only the logical genus of substance, because they share no natural substratum. There is no natural genus of “angel/man.”<sup>24</sup> Yet it is true to say that as man is to his existence, so is the angel to its: a likeness of differing *rationes* of act.

While the analogy of proper proportionality is transgeneric and transspecific, it does not *of itself* or *necessarily* always exclude true analogical proportion or reciprocal commensurate relation. Two finite beings that share no natural genus because they lack common matter, and that share only the logical genus of substance—for example, angel and man—are, as finite, still ontologically separated by a finite degree of perfection. Thus one

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23 See John of St. Thomas (Jean Poinsot), *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus: Ars Logica seu Forma et Materia Ratiocinandi*, Log. II, q. 13, a. 5, p. 494 (Marietti, Resier 1929 ed.).

24 *STh* I, q. 88, a. 2, ad 4: “Ad quantum dicendum quod substantiae immateriales creatae in genere quidem naturali non conveniunt cum substantiis materialibus, quia non est in eis eadem ratio potentiae et materiae, conveniunt tamen cum eis in genere logico, quia etiam substantiae immateriales sunt in praedicamento substantiae, cum earum quidditas non sit earum esse. Sed Deus non convenit cum rebus materialibus neque secundum genus naturale, neque secundum genus logicum, quia Deus nullo modo est in genere, ut supra dictum est. Unde per similitudines rerum materialium aliquid affirmative potest cognosci de Angelis secundum rationem communem, licet non secundum rationem speciei; de Deo autem nullo modo.” (“To the fourth it should be said that created immaterial substances are not in the same natural genus as material substances, for they do not agree in power or in matter; but they belong to the same logical genus, because even immaterial substances are in the predicament of substance, as their essence is distinct from their existence. But God has no connection with material things, as regards either natural genus or logical genus; because God is in no genus, as stated above [q. 3, a. 5]. Hence through the likeness derived from material things we can know something positive concerning the angels, according to some common notion, though not according to the specific nature; whereas we cannot acquire any such knowledge at all about God.”)

may determinately and ordinally possess a greater perfection of act, and may be said to be “closer to” the divine perfection which yet infinitely exceeds it, as the *imago* of the angel is superior to that of man. Yet as superior as the angelic intellect is to the human intellect, it is not *infinitely superior*, and there is an analogically “ordinal distance” between the two which, since they lack a common natural genus, is not univocal. The language of analogical hierarchy according to diverse *rationes* of the perfection of act is warranted.

God, who is reached by the proofs as *Actus Purus* and First Cause without potency, infinitely exceeds *ens commune*, and supereminently and infinitely possesses all the perfection of being in a way that we can affirm but cannot directly cognize, apart from the beatific vision. The perfection of God infinitely exceeds *ens commune*—that being common to substance and the categories which is an *effect* of God. God does not participate being. This analogy is not of two to a third, as though creature and God alike participate being with only finite difference. To the contrary, God participates no perfection, infinitely and supereminently exceeding the limit of creation.

This leads to the second and major instance of “transferred proportion.” In *De veritate*, Thomas affirms what he affirms everywhere else in his corpus: the creature has a determined real relation to God, but God has no real determined relation to the creature, because God infinitely exceeds any created reality limited by potency.<sup>25</sup> Thus here there is no strict or “two-way”

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25 *De Ver.*, q. 2, a. 11. Speaking of commensurate proportion, and of analogy of proper proportionality, he writes: “Quia ergo in his quae primo modo analogice dicuntur, oportet esse aliquam determinatam habitudinem inter ea quibus est aliquid per analogiam commune, impossibile est aliquid per hunc modum analogiae dici de Deo et creatura; quia nulla creatura habet talem habitudinem ad Deum per quam possit divina perfectio determinari. Sed in alio modo analogiae nulla determinata habitudo attenditur inter ea quibus est aliquid per analogiam commune; et ideo secundum illum modum nihil prohibet aliquod

commensurate proportion even analogically, but rather only a relation of one thing to another, or, as Thomas puts it, as the creature is to what is its own, so is God to what is his own. This is the second and major sense of Thomas's "analogy of transferred proportion"<sup>26</sup>—*proportionis translatum*. It takes the term "pro-

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nomen analogice dici de Deo et creatura." ("In those terms predicated according to the first type of analogy, there must be some definite relation between the things having something in common analogously. Consequently, nothing can be predicated analogously of God and creature according to this type of analogy; for no creature has such a relation to God that it could determine the divine perfection. But in the other type of analogy, no definite relation is involved between the things which have something in common analogously, so there is no reason why some name cannot be predicated analogously of God and creature in this manner.") Of course, Thomas also states about this analogy that it need not apply only metaphorically, but that "Quandoque vero nomen quod de Deo et creatura dicitur, nihil importat ex principali significato secundum quod non possit attendi praedictus convenientiae modus inter creaturam et Deum; sicut sunt omnia in quorum definitione non clauditur defectus, nec dependent a materia secundum esse, ut ens, bonum, et alia huiusmodi." ("At other times, however, a term predicated of God and creature implies nothing in its principal meaning which would prevent our finding between a creature and God an agreement of the type described above. To this kind belong all attributes which include no defect nor depend on matter for their act of existence, for example, being, the good, and similar things.")

26 *De Ver.*, q. 23, a. 7, ad 9: "Quamvis autem propter hoc quod a Deo in infinitum distat, non possit esse ipsius ad Deum proportio, secundum quod proportio proprie in quantitibus invenitur, comprehendens duarum quantitatum ad invicem comparatarum certam mensuram; secundum tamen quod nomen proportionis translatum est ad quamlibet habitudinem significandam unius rei ad rem aliam, utpote cum dicimus hic esse proportionum similitudinem, sicut se habet princeps ad civitatem ita gubernator ad navim, nihil prohibet dicere aliquam proportionem hominis ad Deum, cum in aliqua habitudine ipsum ad se habeat, utpote ab eo effectus, et ei subiectus." ("It is true that, because man is infinitely distant from God, there cannot be proportion between him and God in the proper sense of proportion as found among quantities, consisting of a certain measure of two quantities compared to each other. Nevertheless, in the sense in which the term proportion is transferred to signify any relationship of one thing to another (as we say that there is a likeness of proportions in this instance: the pilot is to his ship as the ruler to the commonwealth), nothing prevents us saying that there is a proportion of man to God, since man stands in a

portion” from the case where there may be a “two way” finite analogical proportion unconfined to any genus or species—as in the angel’s “more perfect” intellect vis à vis man—and transfers the term “proportion” to the case where the creature has a real relation or proportion to God,<sup>27</sup> but not the converse. Only a way of affirming being, true, and good, that does not limit the divine perfection to the perfection of creatures will be sufficient. There is not “two-way” proportion here, not even in ordinal perfection, because God is not merely first in a series but infinitely transcends the series: God possesses transcendental perfections proportionate to the absolute freedom from the constriction of any potential principle whatsoever.

In *De potentia dei*, the *Summa contra Gentiles*, and other works, Thomas drops the phrase “transferred proportion” and speaks simply of the relation of any one thing to another as proportion, but he makes explicitly clear that the language of proportion may be used only insofar as no real determined reciprocal relation of God to the creature is intended.<sup>28</sup> When we speak of the real relation of creature to God, we may be tempted to think that this places God in a real determined relation to the creature. Thomas throughout his work denies that there is such

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*certain relationship to him inasmuch as he is made by God and subject to him.”*) Thomas’s other example, which follows upon what is cited previously, is also proper proportionality: the creature is to what is its own, as God is to what is his. *These are two semantic versions of one essential answer, not systematic alternatives.*

27 See *De Ver.*, q. 2, a. 11, ad 1, and q. 23, a. 7, ad 9.

28 See *De Pot.*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 9: “Ad nonum dicendum, quod si proportio intelligatur aliquis determinatus excessus, nulla est Dei ad creaturam proportio. Si autem per proportionem intelligatur habitudo sola, sic patet quod est inter creatorem et creaturam; in creatura quidem realiter, non autem in creatore.” (“If by proportion is meant a definite excess, then there is no proportion in God to the creature. But if proportion stands for relation alone, then there is relation between the Creator and the creature: in the latter really, but not in the former.”)

a real determined relation of God to the creature.<sup>29</sup> Yet one must speak of the real attribution and relation of the created effect to God since the effect is only an effect in relation to the cause. It is unsurprising that he does this in the *Summa Theologiae* in his treatise on the Divine Names and in many other works.<sup>30</sup>

In the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas persists in using the analogy of proportionality in speaking of the divine transcendence and in his first treatment of analogy in terms of participation;<sup>31</sup> nowhere does he hold that God has any proportion in a commensurate reciprocal relation to the creature; and nowhere does he unsay his unequivocal affirmation that the analogy pertinent to being, true, and good is that of proper proportionality. Given that he explains his shift to the simple use of the term “proportion” for the relation of any one thing to any other, and

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29 See *STh* I, q. 13, a. 7: “Cum igitur Deus sit extra totum ordinem creaturae, et omnes creaturae ordinentur ad ipsum, et non e converso, manifestum est quod creaturae realiter referuntur ad ipsum Deum; sed in Deo non est aliqua realis relatio eius ad creaturas, sed secundum rationem tantum, in quantum creaturae referuntur ad ipsum.” (“Since therefore God is outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea, inasmuch as creatures are referred to him.”)

30 E.g., in *ScG* III, 54, the final paragraph: “Proportio autem intellectus creati est quidem ad Deum intelligendum, non secundum commensurationem aliquam proportionem existente, sed secundum quod proportio significat quancumque habitudinem unius ad alterum, ut materiae ad formam, vel causae ad effectum. Sic autem nihil prohibet esse proportionem creaturae ad Deum secundum habitudinem intelligentis ad intellectum, sicut et secundum habitudinem effectus ad causam.” (“Now, the proportion of the created intellect to the understanding of God is not, in fact, based on a commensuration in an existing proportion, but on the fact that proportion means any relation of one thing to another, as of matter to form, or of cause to effect. In this sense, then, nothing prevents there being a proportion of creature to God on the basis of a relation of one who understands to the thing understood, just as on the basis of the relation of effect to cause.”)

31 See note 7.

that he expressly states he is willing to use this term of God only so far as it is understood that God is not in any commensurate reciprocal proportion with the creature and has no real relation to the creature, the claim that Thomas shifted his analysis from that of *De veritate* seems unfounded. In many cases it is a conclusion of scholars who simply have assumed that a shift in semantics betokens a shift in doctrine, even when the author in question has made quite clear the reason for the shift in semantics and its compatibility with all he has said before. In question 13, article 7 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas famously speaks of the analogy of creature to God as one of “proportion”—but clearly he cannot mean the first sense of proportion, which he rules out in *De veritate*, nor intend to affirm a real determined relation of God to creature, which indeed he rules out both in the body of this article and in ad 2, 4, and 5. In speaking of God, *of course* we must speak of the real relation of the effect to the cause—but without placing God in a real determined relation to the creature. Yet we must be able to affirm that perfections first known as limited in creatures are unlimited in God, and the middle term of the reasoning is “act.”

The analogy of proportion, of one to another, and effect to cause between the creature and God must be understood as presupposing the analogy of being as one of proper proportionality: *first*, because actuality is intrinsically affirmed of each thing that is proportionate to what it is, and these proportions are radically diverse, and *secondly*, because only such analogy permits the intrinsic attribution of perfections to God in a mode infinitely exceeding the way they are predicated of creatures. God cannot be limited to the proportion of creatures.

There is no determinate finite “distance” between God and the creature. What enables this metaphysical judgment is the truth that act is limited only by relation to potency. Act is not itself self-limiting. This is *not* an ontological argument, cognate

with that of Anselm, for the existence of God—it is not yet to affirm the reality of *ipsum esse subsistens per se*—although clearly Anselm does discern the centrality of *esse* or existence as perfection and Thomas shares this profound premise. One might at some stage think: perhaps everything is limited by passive potency. Nonetheless, this would not be because act is self-limiting—it is evident that act is limited only by potency. Whether there is a reality that exists separate from, and wholly unlimited by, potency is a question of experience, evidence, reasoning, and revelation. In fact, it is the causal analysis of finite being that leads to the judgment that there is a First Cause that is Pure Act. But that act is only limited by potency is given in the evidence of *ens commune*. The causal analysis stands or falls on its own. Yet contrary to the old atheism that would have it that the idea of God is self-contradictory because actual nature is necessarily limited by potency, the idea of Pure Act is not self-contradictory, because act is really distinct from, and only limited in relation to, potency—and this is known as true prior to the demonstration of the truth of the proposition that God exists.<sup>32</sup>

There is nothing in the nature of act that simply prohibits the extensibility of act to the limit case of a reality that is *tantum esse*, wherein essence and existence are one. The proofs proceed from being as intrinsically analogous, divided by potency and act, yielding a likeness of diverse *rationes* of act. Being is analogous in the premises and ergo can be analogous in the conclusion. We do not say that limited act is unexplainable unless there is one first limited actuality: we say that limited act is only intelligible as an effect of Prime Act which is unlimited. What is not in the premises cannot be in the conclusion. If “actuality” or “existence” or “is” designate exclusively limited or material actuality

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32 There can be nothing in the conclusion that is not in the premises. If being is not intrinsically analogous in the premises, it cannot become so in the conclusion. This seems manifest in regard to the proofs for the existence of God.

in the premises, then there will be no warrant for the conclusion taking “actuality” or “existence” or “is” in any different sense. Nor can there be prior affirmation of infinite act in the premises since infinite act is not a proportionate object of human knowledge and, of course, if we directly knew this already there would be no need for demonstration. Rather, actuality in the premises must be extensible to the conclusion. And actuality is extensible in this way precisely because act is really distinct from potency and is limited only in relation to potency. Act is not self-limiting.

I do not concur with the judgment of some Thomistic authors such as the late Fr. Norris Clarke that the metaphysical doctrine of the limitation of act by potency cannot be found in Aristotle’s teaching.<sup>33</sup> In my view Aristotle clearly understands that *manyness and limitation* pertain to being only owing to *potentia*, and that there can be but one *Actus Purus*; whereas manyness and limitation follow upon the relation of act to potency. For example, to take one illustration, substantial form is limited to particular dimensions in relation to matter as a potential principle. Aristotle speaks of the indefiniteness of matter as a potential principle in relation to its determinate actuation by form as act, and this “indefiniteness” is imperfection, but it is owing to the contraction of form to matter that there can be manyness within a species. Further, Aristotle clearly holds that God is Pure Act whose perfection is neither dependent on, nor limited by, the world. Aristotle’s analysis rejecting Parmenidean monism is *pari passu*, with equal pace, an argument for act as limited solely in relation to potency. After his *Scriptum* on the Sentences, St. Thomas in his later work—for example, in the *Summa contra Gentiles* and in *De potentia dei*—explains why a participated perfection is not received in its totality by the participating subject:

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33 See W. Norris Clarke, SJ, “The Limitation of Act by Potency” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

namely, that the perfection is received according to—proportionate to—the receptive subjective potency.<sup>34</sup> Because proper proportionality requires no real determinate reciprocal relation or proportion between the things said to be analogous—because the proposition that as God is to what is his, so the creature is to what is its, does not establish any real determinate relation of God to the creature—it permits the intrinsic attribution of all transcendental and pure perfections of God.

In a different way, this consideration explains why the way of eminence is prior to the way of negation. The negation of any potency in God is consequent on the causal resolution of the actuality of the many, limited, changing things of the world to the one, unlimited, absolutely simple and immutable God. It is *because* God is supereminent and infinite Act that God cannot be said to “be” in the way that composite beings of act and potency are said to be. Thus if the perfection of act were simply equated with the *modus significandi*, or *mode of signification*, of perfections which is marked by created limits, it would be truer to say that “God is not” than that “God is.” But *the perfection designated—the res significata*—is not self-limiting, and the causal resolution is of the limited actual being of creatures to the infinite self-subsisting God. This same consideration also explains why Thomas argues in various places in his work for the unicity of God, since all the ways in which plurifiability pertains to things presuppose potency.<sup>35</sup>

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34 See George P. Klubertanz, SJ, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960), 27–29.

35 For example, he argues for this conclusion in the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa contra Gentiles* after the proofs, as clearly implied by the arguments for God themselves. However, as we noted earlier (note 21), in *De ente et essentia*, after establishing the real distinction of essence and existence in physical things, he argues that *if* there were a reality whose essence and existence were identical, *there could only be one*, because all the ways in which manyness and limit really accrue to being *presuppose potency* and, were there a being whose essence and existence were identical, it would *ex hypothesi* be Pure Act, *tantum*

### III. *Imago Dei and Analogia Entis*

It is reasonable to provide one of many prominent illustrations of Thomas's use of the analogy of proper proportionality with respect to theology as such, keeping in mind that the presupposition of proper proportionality is implicitly present as the foundation for the considerations of the "one-way" causal proportioning of the effect to the divine causal principle. Since we know God principally as cause of all the effects of nature and grace, the "transferred proportion" whereby we consider the creature in relation to God as "one to another" is of course presupposed to our understanding of the real relation of the created effect to its Uncreated cause.

There are many illustrations, and I thought to consider the Trinity, or participated and unparticipated priesthood. But here I will simply note St. Thomas's treatment of the *imago dei* in the Prima pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, as it rests expressly on metaphysical analogy.

In his work *The Person and the Common Good*,<sup>36</sup> Jacques Maritain spoke of the person as more a whole than a part, and he famously distinguished between the *person* and the *individual*: the former a spiritual whole, the latter, a material part. Yet the human person by nature *includes* bodily nature, not only the *principles* of the sense powers in the soul but these *bodily powers themselves*. Human persons are not merely "spirit," and body is not a positively spiritual principle. Because at the divine summit of reality substance and *imago* are substantially one, Maritain seems to identify the integral human person with the *imago dei*. This, rather than opposition to De Koninck's justly

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*esse*. Ergo, a fortiori, in all other cases, essence and existence are necessarily distinct. Only then does he proceed with the ensuing argument for the existence of God.

<sup>36</sup> See Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1994).

famed achievement in articulating St. Thomas's doctrine of the common good, seems largely responsible for the difficulties in reconciling De Koninck's account of the common good (with which Maritain indicated agreement) with Maritain's own project in this work. In fact, his conclusion that the beatific vision is "personal" is not meant to deny its character as the ultimate common good, precisely because what most designates the person is our intellectual nature, whereby we may know and order ourselves to the common good precisely as common.

It appears that Karl Barth<sup>37</sup> and Edith Stein<sup>38</sup> implicitly identify the *imago dei* with person *in the other direction*, as implying that the creation of the human person *ad imaginem dei* essentially includes in the *imago* the entire created human nature. One sees this, for example, in Barth explicating the Pauline account of unilateral uxoral/wifely submission by a principal appeal to the hypothesis of "submission" within the trinity, and in Stein affirming that the sexual difference is originatively spiritual rather than owing to prior material differentiation. Maritain thus collapses "person" *into imago*, whereas others who wish to include bodily nature *in the imago* collapse *imago* into the integral perfection of the person. But in human

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37 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/1: "His divine unity consists in the fact that in Himself He is both One who is obeyed and Another who obeys" (201); and "As we look at Jesus Christ we cannot avoid the astounding conclusion of a divine obedience. Therefore we have to draw the no less astounding deduction that in equal Godhead the one God is, in fact, the One and also Another, that He is indeed a First and a Second, One who rules and commands in majesty and One who obeys in humility" (203). Also, the famed prime advertence to obedience within the Trinity as the model for the unilateral uxoral submission in matrimony is, at least as regards that effort to provide an ultimate reason, seemingly inferior to that of which a serious metaphysically grounded Christian anthropology is capable.

38 See Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., vol.2, trans. Freda Mary Oben, eds. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2017).

persons these are distinct.

Thomas does not equate the integral human person with the positive immateriality of the *imago*, either by including the entirety of the integral human person in the *imago* or by wholly spiritualizing the person. Although the separated soul is personal, it is not for St. Thomas the integral perfection designated by the term “person”—although arguably there is a ground for considering the separated soul to be a person *in virtute*, since the *esse* of the separated soul is numerically identical with the *esse* of the whole composite nature complete in its species. But for Thomas the *imago dei* in the human creature is *an analogical pure perfection variously affirmed of man, angel, and God*, and as such is diversified in creation by various limiting potential principles extrinsic to the *imago*. Whereas the completeness of the substance of the integral human person *includes* the limitation of materiality which hence is included within it, the intelligibility of the analogical perfection of the *imago* essentially *excludes* matter. Thus the sensitive life of the person is excluded from what is essentially designated by the *imago*.

The specific analogical likeness of the *imago* is *intellect or spirit*, found with differing limitations which are *ad extra* in relation to it and are modes of its composite limitation. By way of contrast, the note of analogical pure perfection that pertains to the integral person *qua* person is *complete substance of intellectual nature*, and here the *completeness* pertaining to human persons intrinsically includes matter and the added real essential perfections of a bodily nature.

In short: *the imago dei in man is the formal principle of human nature itself taken in precision from anything other than its positive intellectual immateriality, whereas human person entails and implies the integral perfections of bodily nature*. The analogical perfection of the *imago* is the positive immateriality of the intellectual nature as such, whereas the analogical

perfection of *person* is that of *complete substance of a rational nature*, which thus comprises whatsoever is analogically requisite to that *completeness*. *Contra* Maritain and, implicitly, *contra* Barth and Stein, the analogical *rationes* of *person* and of *imago dei* are not the same, although they are interrelated. In creatures the perfections of *person* and *imago* are not necessarily coextensive. One notes Thomas's proposition in *Summa Theologiae* I, question 93, article 2 that "the intellectual nature is alone to the image of God"—"sola natura intellectualis est ad imaginem Dei"—and his later proposition that

the intellect or mind is that whereby the rational creature excels other creatures; wherefore this image of God is not found even in the rational creature except in the mind, while in the other parts, which the rational creature may happen to possess, we find the likeness of a "trace," as in other creatures to which, in reference to such parts, the rational creature can be likened.<sup>39</sup>

Presupposing the proximity of that "trace" in the human

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39 *STh* I, q. 93, a. 6, c.: "Id autem in quo creatura rationalis excedit alias creaturas, est intellectus sive mens. Unde relinquitur quod nec in ipsa rationali creatura invenitur Dei imago, nisi secundum mentem. In aliis vero partibus, si quas habet rationalis creatura, invenitur similitudo vestigii; sicut et in ceteris rebus quibus secundum partes huiusmodi assimilatur." See also *De Ver.*, q. 10, a. 1: "Patet ergo, quod mens in anima nostra dicit illud quod est altissimum in virtute ipsius. Unde, cum secundum id quod est altissimum in nobis divina imago invenitur in nobis, imago non pertinebit ad essentiam animae nisi secundum mentem, prout nominat altissimam potentiam eius. Et sic mens, prout in ea est imago, nominat potentiam animae, et non essentiam; vel si nominat essentiam, hoc non est nisi in quantum ab ea fluit talis potentia" ("It is clear, then, that in us mind designates the highest power of our soul. And since the image of God is in us according to that which is highest in us, that image will belong to the essence of the soul only in so far as mind is its highest power. Thus, mind, as containing the image of God, designates a power of the soul and not its essence. Or, if we take mind to mean essence, it means it only inasmuch as such a power flows from the essence.")

body to the spiritual form of the immaterial soul, Aquinas will say the *imago* can be said to be present in it in a secondary way,<sup>40</sup> but not in the principal, specific, and proper sense of the *imago*, for *God is essentially incorporeal Pure Spirit, and no bodily perfection can be a specific analogical likeness of the divine nature*, although all things bear some wider analogical community owing to the perfection of existence. Were we only to have Thomas's words in article 3 of question 93 regarding accidental bodily qualities—"these do not of themselves belong to the nature of the Divine image in man, unless we presuppose the first likeness, which is in the intellectual nature"<sup>41</sup>—we *might* take the double negative as indicating that the secondary *imago* is "essential" to the *imago dei* in man as such. But article 6, as noted previously, removes this possibility. For *even* in the rational creature, bodily analogy is by way of *trace*—a sign of God that does not rise to the level of analogical *imago*—and not by way of specific analogical image.<sup>42</sup>

The person is not simply "intellectual nature," but intellectual nature may be taken as a pure perfection—with a floor (certain things do not rise to the level of intellect) but no ceiling (God possesses the perfection of Intellect with no limitation of potency). Thus the *imago dei* is a pure perfection predicated analogously of man, angel, and God according to proper proportionality and is limited in creatures *extrinsically* by potency. Of course, the *imago dei* in the human person is also further ordered in grace and in glory, and is in this sense *pros hen*, "toward one," or ordered to God singularly. But for this to be

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40 Ibid., a. 3, c.: "Secundo potest considerari imago Dei in homine, quantum ad id in quo secundario consideratur . . ." ("Second, the image of God can be considered in man in reference to that in which he is considered in a secondary way . . .")

41 Ibid.: "Sed quantum ad hoc non attenditur per se ratio divinae imaginis in homine, nisi praesupposita prima imitatione, quae est secundum intellectualem naturam."

42 See note 39.

the case it must first be affirmed as proportionate to the subject: and this occurs owing to the intellectual nature of the subject, which is capable of natural knowledge of God, and susceptible with the aid of God to be elevated to grace and glory. Grace and glory thus denote the further teleology of the *imago*, which is perfected in becoming first, the *imago gratiae*, and finally, the *imago gloriae*.

These observations pertain to the desire of many authors to place the distinctive modes in which the *imago* shines forth in men and women owing to the diversification of bodily *potentiae* in men and women *into* the Trinity. That the image of God in man and woman shines forth differently owing to the diverse material limitations of potency bestows personal spiritual significance to the sexual difference. But the same *specific imago*, and the same *specific* human nature, exists in male and female, as conditioned diversely by the diverse matter of the composite. Nor does this contravene the proposition that matter and potency give form to nothing. It is because of the antecedent formal limitations of the procreative matter that it is proximately disposed to be male or female; but once received, this distinction conditions the individual person essentially, such that the same specific humanity, and the same specific *imago*, will shine forth divergently according to the differing limitations of potency.

#### IV. Postlude on Analogy, Being, Logic, and Language

It is pertinent by way of postlude to point to a standard query concerning the nature of analogy. It is often asked, Which is first: analogy as logical, or (if it is even thought that there is such a thing) analogy as metaphysical? Often the question is asked simply in terms of language: Which is prior, analogy as metaphysical, or analogy as linguistic? With respect to metaphysics and logic, it is of course true that in different orders each is

“first” and “most universal.” In respect to actual nature or being, metaphysics is unreservedly “first” (and second intention makes oblique reference to first intention), because things are known according as they are actual. Nonetheless in relation to second intentions that pertain to the manner of our conception, predication, and reasoning—encompassing everything thought about or known—logic is universal and “first.”

Yet there is no dispute as to whether what is first in our conception is for Aquinas *ens*—that which exists or something that exists, or actual nature—as opposed to being a second intention that exists and can exist only in the mind. What is first known is *ens*, not *ens rationis*, and not even “possible being,” which is unintelligible apart from prior knowledge of actual nature. Given this priority of actual nature, if there is a true sense in which being is analogical—implying proportion in every being of subjective potency to act, such that being pertains to diverse things according to differing *rationes* of act—then this sense will be actual and implicit in our knowledge of being from the start. That is, the “act” of actual nature is proportionate to the subject, which in the finite things of our direct acquaintance is limited by receptive potency.

Whatever is actual and implicit in every object of first intention is presupposed to second intentions both in reality as such and as really and implicitly given in our initial knowledge. This does not mean that everything actual and implicit in first intention is brought to proper scientific scrutiny and clarity prior to logic. Metaphysics is not glossalia. That there is *first* an obscure and implicit knowledge of actual nature *qua* actual nature is not to say that there is first a clear, explicit, and scientific knowledge of actual nature as actual nature. But the actuality of the nature pertains to the nature, not to something else, and this is realized obscurely from the start. Without the truth

that act<sup>43</sup> is distinct from and limited by receptive potency, the *res significata* could not intelligibly be affirmed as distinct from the *modus significandi*.

That there is a real intrinsic proportioning of actuality to subject in every real being is the premise on which metaphysical analogy stands or falls, not the proposition that because our first knowledge achieves it really but obscurely, we therefore immediately know it scientifically and with conspicuous logical clarity. We are speaking here of being as divided by act and potency, and of analogy as the likeness of diverse *rationes* of act. Many Thomists—for example, Garrigou-Lagrange—who know they are speaking of proper proportionality, still speak of it—as does St. Thomas himself!—as an “analogy of proportion,”<sup>44</sup> because the analogy of proper proportionality that Thomas says pertains to being presupposes the intrinsic proportioning of act to potency in the limited beings of our experience. Thus, as Thomas teaches, in finite beings act is received by, proportioned to, and limited by the subject or potency actuated.

It is important to distinguish between logic in its proper sense from logic understood as purely extensional, or from the somewhat Platonist Fregean logicism. The latter two have more in common with mathematics and set theory than with the universal science and art of logic. But natures are wholly predicable of individuals whereas sets are not. A “logic” that must reduce substance to quantity in order to reason about it is already a category mistake.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Thomas does not suppose, with Frege,

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43 One must of course remember that *esse*, the *actus essendi* or most formal act of being, is *simple*: it has no potency, but it is the act of a potency really distinct from it that receives and limits it to the confines of *this capacity to be*. Thomas teaches that *esse* is simple in many places. One, e.g., is Thomas’s exposition of Boethius’s *De hebdomadibus*, lectio 2, n. 32.

44 Of course, St. Thomas himself speaks this way in *De veritate*, referring to “proportionality” as one of the two forms of analogy of “proportion.” See note 5.

45 See Henry Veatch, *Two Logics: the Conflict between Classical and*

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that existence is only the negation of nought, the negation of nothing or “zero.” One may negate “nothing” or “zero” of a real subject, or negate “nothing” or “zero” purely conceptually, and the latter yields nothing real. Frege, as a mathematical Platonist, turns “existence” into something purely conceptual. This is what Thomists refer to as “a mistake.” With respect to language, the “use/mention” distinction is often forgotten. It is simply assumed that first intentional speech cannot extend to metaphysics. In the end this turns out to be a similar mistake wearing different makeup.

### V. Conclusion

The analogicity of being according to the division of being by act and potency, and the proportioning of act to potency in created things, is not a small premise, but an overarching and framing premise, for Thomas’s theology. We can have Thomas’s theology: but we can’t have it small.<sup>46</sup>

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*Neo-Analytic Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

<sup>46</sup> It is significant that for many authors today, the consideration of the analogy of being as first one of proper proportionality according to diverse *rationes* of act, and second one of *pros hen* attribution of effect to cause, is viewed as purely logical. But in fact it is a necessary aspect of the doctrine of participation, in which the totality of the effect is not possessed by the participating subject owing to the limitation of act by potency, that is to say, owing to composition. The human person is not “constituted by relation to God” but is constituted by God: being created is a quasi-accident in the creature of having being from another, which absolutely requires first and foremost: *habens esse*. Hence the intelligibility of discourse regarding God proceeds from creature to God, and indeed, as Thomas notes regarding *sacra doctrina*, this science proceeds from the effects of God in nature and in grace in place of direct quidditative knowledge of God (as distinct from knowledge about the quiddity inferentially garnered from the divine effects). When many critics infer that this analogy is solely logical, they implicitly treat the distinction of potency and act as dividing substance and the categories as merely logical: but this analogy concerns both being and concept. This is exactly why, in speech concerning

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God, anything that implies composition must be negated, excluded. God is *Actus Purus*, and the limitations that pertain to creatures are denied of God. God possesses simply and unitedly the pure and transcendental perfections that creatures can possess only dividedly and multiply owing to their limitation by potency. Thomas's account of participation is profoundly Aristotelian. The participant receives everything it receives according to its own composite nature, a composition of essence as potency vis à vis *esse* (true solely in creatures, since in God essence is not distinct from *esse* and is a transcendental perfection), and in corporeal things a composition of matter as potency vis à vis form. Act is limited solely in relation to *potentia*. Especially in his later work, Thomas articulates the doctrine of participation in terms of the real division of *ens commune* by act and potency: according to the diverse limitations of act vis à vis potency.

## FAITH TAKES REASON CAPTIVE

*John Francis Nieto*

1. In his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, Saint Thomas teaches that "those who use philosophical teachings [*documentis*] in sacred doctrine by leading [them] into obedience to faith, do not mix water with wine, but convert water into wine."<sup>1</sup> This metaphor suggests emphatically that such philosophical teachings have been fully integrated into sacred theology. Further, his reference to the miracle at Cana—and perhaps the Mass—makes clear that he thinks this is principally the work of God in Christ. Note also that the phrase "leading into obedience" alludes to another metaphor—used by St. Paul, who says that his weapons are not fleshly but made powerful by God to "lead every thought captive unto obedience to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

2. The principal purpose of these remarks is to make clear that theology or sacred doctrine has the power to integrate

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1 *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 5 (henceforth *Super De Trin.*): "Et tamen potest dici quod quando alterum duorum transit in dominium alterius, non reputatur mixtio, set quando utrumque a sua natura alteratur; unde illi qui utuntur philosophicis documentis in sacra doctrina redigendo in obsequium fidei, non miscent aquam vino, set aquam convertunt in vinum."

various works of reason—definitions and propositions—into its own order in such a way that these are truly theological instruments. Such arguments from reason are distinct from arguments through philosophical authority. Arguments from such authority are extrinsic to theology and thus within theology they remain dialectical rather than demonstrative. To make this clear, I will do three things. First (3–27), I will look at distinctions St. Thomas makes in three passages concerned with theological method. Second (28–55), I will make some observations about the gift of understanding. Third (56–92), I will give examples of the manner in which I understand sacred doctrine to make works of reason into instruments for its own work.

3. I will begin with consideration of three passages where St. Thomas describes sacred doctrine's use of reason. The first of these passages (4–8) makes clear the role played in the habit of sacred theology by argument—often named more exactly as argument from reason. The second (9–23) makes clear that reason plays this role as an instrument of faith. The third (24–27) clarifies this by excluding erroneous ways one might introduce reason into sacred theology.

4. I look first at an article where St. Thomas distinguishes two modes of argument and their utility in theological studies. This is his fourth *Quaestio Quodlibetalis*, question 9, article 3: Whether the *magister* in determining questions should use reason or authority? The single objection argues that such questions ought to be determined through authorities: every science makes things known through its first principles, while the articles of faith are first principles of theology. The objection *sed contra* opposes this from the authority of St. Paul in Titus, saying that a bishop must “be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to reprove those contradicting [that doctrine].”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* IV, q. 9, a. 3, sc (henceforth *Quodl.*): “potens exhortari in doctrina sana, et contradicentes revincere.”

5. The *respondeo* of this article solves the question by distinguishing two kinds of *disputatio* or debate according to two ends. A debate may intend to remove doubt whether something is so or it may intend to instruct those hearing by leading them into an understanding of the truth.<sup>3</sup> If one intends the former, to remove doubt about some truth, the *magister* should argue from authority accepted by the one with whom one is disputing. If, however, one intends to lead those hearing to understanding of the truth, one must use arguments. I will look more closely at this part of his response, since this surely describes the sort of theological endeavor that St. Thomas has in mind in the *Summa*. In passing, however, note that I have no intention of asserting that the first sort of debate is not part of and a work of theology. Examination of the second of these three passages will show the role proper to arguments from authority in sacred doctrine.

6. St. Thomas describes this second sort of debate as intending “to instruct those hearing so that it may lead them into an understanding of the truth which it intends.”<sup>4</sup> Later I will argue that *intellectus* here names an act of the gift of understanding. As he goes on to say, this demands the use of arguments: “Then one must depend upon [*inniti*] arguments tracking down [*investigantibus*] the root of the truth [*veritatis radicem*] and making [one] to know how what is said is true.”<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas describes these arguments in two ways. First, such a dispute must be supported with arguments investigating the root of the

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3 Ibid., corpus: “Disputatio autem ad duplicem finem potest ordinari. Quaedam enim disputatio ordinatur ad removendum dubitationem an ita si . . . Quaedam vero disputatio est magistralis in scholis non ad removendum errorem, sed ad instruendum auditores ut inducantur ad intellectum veritatis quam intendit.”

4 Ibid.: “ad instruendum auditores ut inducantur ad intellectum veritatis quam intendit.”

5 Ibid.: “et tunc oportet rationibus inniti investigantibus veritatis radicem, et facientibus scire quomodo sit verum quod dicitur.”

truth. Second, these arguments must make one know how what is said is true.

7. I take the root of the truth here as something held by faith that is prior to the truth intended. Later, as an example, I will take as root that God has a Word as prior to the truth that this Word is a Son, though, as I will make clear, I think the other order equally possible. I take the second description to make clear that one does not intend to prove something true as if understood through itself (as in the demonstrative sciences) but to show how “what is said,” namely, the teaching concluded in the debate, is true. This involves seeing how it follows from the root, from the article of faith believed in.

8. But I am most concerned here with the reason St. Thomas gives for the use of such arguments. He says,

Otherwise, if the *magister* determines the question by mere [*nudis*] authorities, the hearer will be determined [*certificabitur*] that it is so but he will acquire nothing of science or understanding and leave empty [*vacuus*].<sup>6</sup>

Clearly St. Thomas thinks that one receives from authority the truths of the faith that stand as roots to the truth of sacred doctrine, while the understanding and science through which sacred doctrine is a habit other than faith rely upon argument. Sacred doctrine is a habit by which we use reason to bring forth gracious acts of understanding and science from gracious acts of faith. Arguments, that is, arguments from reason, are the subjects offered by nature in which grace is communicated from the habit of faith to acts of understanding and science, by which sacred doctrine too bears the notion of wisdom—in distinction from but complementary to the gift of wisdom.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: “alioquin si nudis auctoritatibus magister quaestionem determinet, certificabitur quidem auditor quod ita est, sed nihil scientiae vel intellectus acquirat et vacuus abscedet.”

9. I turn now to a second passage considering sacred doctrine, the reply to the second objection of *Summa Theologiae* I, question 1, article 8. The article asks whether sacred doctrine is argumentative; it sometimes distinguishes argument from authority and at others distinguishes arguments into those from authority and those from reason. The second objection argues against both kinds of argument. It rejects arguments from authority through the weakness of this mode of argument and against arguments from reason because they would undo the merit that faith aims at.<sup>7</sup>

10. In answer, St. Thomas must explain how arguments from authority befit so high a science as sacred theology and how arguments from reason remain meritorious. I am looking only at the first part of this reply, where he distinguishes three species of argument found in sacred theology. The second part makes distinctions in authority that I will merely assume here.<sup>8</sup> But the first part, as I read it, expresses the order in which argument proceeds in sacred theology, not temporally, but as each of these three species of argument constitutes an integral part in the nature of this supernatural habit: argument from the authority of divine revelation (11–12), argument from reason (13–21),

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<sup>7</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8, obj. 2 (henceforth *STh*): “Praeterea, si sit argumentativa, aut argumentatur ex auctoritate, aut ex ratione. Si ex auctoritate, non videtur hoc congruere eius dignitati, nam locus ab auctoritate est infirmisimus, secundum Boetium. Si etiam ex ratione, hoc non congruit eius fini, quia secundum Gregorium in homilia, fides non habet meritum, ubi humana ratio praebet experimentum. Ergo sacra doctrina non est argumentativa.”

<sup>8</sup> The three kinds of argument distinguished in the first part of the reply include two from authority: those from the human authority of the philosophers and those from the authority of divine revelation. The second part of the reply immediately recognizes the authority of human philosophy as extrinsic and probable in sacred doctrine. Then it distinguishes authority proper to this science as two in kind: that of canonical scripture, which is necessary, and that of other doctors of the church, which remains probable. In these remarks I will develop St. Thomas’s understanding of sacred doctrine’s use of philosophical authority.

and argument from the authority of human philosophy (22).

11. In the beginning of this reply St. Thomas describes the manner in which the argument from authority is appropriate to this science.<sup>9</sup> Because we receive the principles through divine revelation, we must take these on the authority of those through whom God reveals. Since divine revelation grounds this authority rather than human reason, sacred doctrine suffers no derogation to its strength and eminence. I merely note here that St. Thomas is not yet distinguishing the necessary force of scripture from the probable force of holy doctors in argument from authority. He does not do so because he is here determining the order among the species of argument in sacred doctrine taken as a habit of certain nature.

12. I can clarify and confirm my assertion that this reply intends to express the order among species of argument entering into the habit of sacred doctrine with the *sed contra* of this article. Here St. Thomas argues that sacred doctrine is argumentative through the authority of St. Paul. If this were a debate about whether this is so, this argument would be decisive and discussion would come to an end.<sup>10</sup> But theology as a habit of a believer's intellect requires the sort of investigation into the root of this truth as found in the body of the article and in the replies to objections. It requires arguments supplied by human reason that show us how what we have drawn from St. Paul's teaching is true. I merely add here that anyone familiar with St. Thomas's

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9 Ibid., ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod argumentari ex auctoritate est maxime proprium huius doctrinae, eo quod principia huius doctrinae per revelationem habentur, et sic oportet quod credatur auctoritati eorum quibus revelatio facta est. Nec hoc derogat dignitati huius doctrinae, nam licet locus ab auctoritate quae fundatur super ratione humana, sit infirmissimus; locus tamen ab auctoritate quae fundatur super revelatione divina, est efficacissimus."

10 Note the abundance of authorities in the near parallel consideration found in *Contra Impugnantes*, Pars 3, ch. 5. There St. Thomas is arguing in part against those who refuse to admit argument in theological discourse.

teaching recognizes this as a very familiar pattern: a *sed contra* determining the question by the authority of scripture and a body offering arguments showing how this is true.

13. In what follows St. Thomas considers the role of argument from human reason. I will look at this text with care.<sup>11</sup> In it St. Thomas does three things: he asserts that sacred doctrine uses human reason (14–15), he makes clear that this use does not destroy the merit of faith (16), and he explains this from the order between grace and nature (17–21). In this last part he quotes the captivity metaphor.

14. I take the first line of this passage as very significant. He says, “Sacred doctrine also uses human reason.” Here St. Thomas is not merely observing the fact that sacred doctrine uses human reason. He is declaring that human reason is the proper instrument of sacred doctrine. After receiving its principles from revelation as determined by the first species of argument, sacred doctrine must proceed to an understanding of the various truths it intends. As faith is seated in the human intellect, sacred doctrine must bring forth that understanding through the power of human reason.

15. Note that this is a proper sense of “instrument,” even if it falls away from the very first imposition of the name. I propose this use falls under a distinction offered by St. Thomas in discussion of the sacraments:

The instrument has two actions: an instrumental one according to which it works not by [*in*] its own active

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11 *STh* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: “Utitur tamen sacra doctrina etiam ratione humana, non quidem ad probandum fidem, quia per hoc tolleretur meritum fidei; sed ad manifestandum aliqua alia quae traduntur in hac doctrina. Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat, oportet quod naturalis ratio subserviat fidei; sicut et naturalis inclinatio voluntatis obsequitur caritati. Unde et Apostolus dicit, II ad Cor. X, in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi.”

power [*virtute*] but by the active power of the principal agent, but it has another, proper action, which belongs to it according to its own [*proprium*] form, just as sawing belongs to the saw from its own sharpness but to make a bed insofar as it is an instrument of art. But it does not complete [*perficiet*] its instrumental action except by exercising its proper action; for by cutting it makes the bed.<sup>12</sup>

As an instrument, reason forms various acts proper to its own power—definitions, syllogisms, and so on—in which the truths found primordially in the articles of faith take on a scientific and sapiential form. To be proportioned to the supernatural life, grace must inform these activities. As I will argue presently, this occurs principally through the gifts of understanding and science and is complemented by the gift of wisdom.

16. The next part of this passage shows how this use of human reason does not destroy the merit that sacred doctrine aims at. St. Thomas states here that sacred doctrine does not use human reason to prove the faith. Rather, reason serves to manifest other things handed down in the doctrine. I add here that, insofar as grace completes the contributions of reason through the gifts of understanding and science, these arguments constitute acts proper to sacred doctrine as a supernatural virtue. In fact, sacred theology is the one supernatural virtue that is acquired and not merely infused, albeit it relies upon various infused habits.

17. The last part of this passage explains this teaching from the order between grace and nature. Referring to the distinction

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12 Ibid. III, q. 62, a. 1, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod instrumentum habet duas actiones, unam instrumentalem, secundum quam operatur non in virtute propria, sed in virtute principalis agentis; aliam autem habet actionem propriam, quae competit sibi secundum propriam formam; sicut securi competit scindere ratione suae acuitatis, facere autem lectum in quantum est instrumentum artis. Non autem perficit actionem instrumentalem nisi exercendo actionem propriam; scindendo enim facit lectum.”

made in the passage previously discussed, I point out that I understand St. Thomas to begin from the distinction between grace and nature as what he has elsewhere described as a root of the truth we are seeking. From his understanding of grace as a power distinct from nature, he will explain how reason can serve faith in the way that solves the difficulty. Again, the distinction of grace from nature—as a root—shows “what is said,” namely, that arguments from reason are proper instruments of sacred doctrine, is true.

18. As I said, the text begins with the order between nature and grace: “Since grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason necessarily serves faith as the natural inclination of the will obeys charity.”<sup>13</sup> I will make three observations about this passage. First, the distinction of grace from nature, the judgment that God allows intellectual creatures to share in his own nature, is a truth we can only hold through grace and by the habit of faith. I fear that many believers reading St. Thomas are so accustomed to making this distinction—even in discussion with non-believers—that they forget that we cannot believe that grace is at work—in ourselves or in others—except through the power of grace, and that we must bring this truth forth from the habit of faith. This is very important for grasping how arguments from human reason become acts formed by understanding and other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

19. Second, what St. Thomas draws from the order between grace and nature is an appropriation of the power of grace to the natural powers grace perfects. As grace perfects nature, so the particular powers and works of grace perfect the particular powers and works of nature. He implies a general understanding that every natural power in which some gracious work is

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13 Ibid.: “Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat, oportet quod naturalis ratio subserviat fidei; sicut et naturalis inclinatio voluntatis obsequitur caritati.”

accomplished must be perfected by some particular power of grace so that it can accomplish this work. The general understanding is insinuated by the distinction of faith and charity and their appropriation to the natural powers of reason and will. I propose further that some power of grace—or several taken in various ways—must complete reason's natural power insofar as it takes the form of sacred doctrine.

20. Third, St. Thomas illustrates this perfection in the order of knowledge through the perfection in the order of will. He proposes this comparison because he considers the order in the will more clear. We see that we bring forth acts of love for God and for our neighbor through love of God from the will in a way that is not opposed to our natural inclination for happiness. Rather, charity brings forth an act from the will that perfects that inclination so that it aims at a form of happiness higher than the happiness the will can naturally order its acts to. Likewise, through faith our natural power to know the truth attains to truths to which our agent intellect—as the principle measuring our natural power—has no proportion. In service to this faith, reason can bring forth acts that serve these supernatural truths as principles of actions whose species follow its own supernatural character. Of course, the truths held and attained in them remain beyond the power of the agent intellect, just as water has no natural power to cleanse the soul of sin. I will defend this assertion presently.

21. St. Thomas completes this consideration by quotation of the captivity metaphor. In fact, he alluded to the metaphor when he said the will's natural inclination *obeys* charity. Clearly this implies that natural reason's service of faith is a captivity by which it becomes obedient to Christ. At the same time, the fact that this service allows reason to bring forth particular conceptions and arguments to serve particular supernatural truths brings our particular thoughts under the metaphor. They too

come forth as captives obedient to Christ. I suggest that the notion of Christian perfection makes clear that we aim at a life in which every thought comes forth through such obedience.

22. I will close discussion of this reply with a brief look at the third species of argument found in sacred doctrine, that based on the authority of philosophy. Then (23) I will summarize the reply. St. Thomas goes on to say, “And hence it is that sacred doctrine uses even the authority of philosophers, where they can know the truth through natural reason.”<sup>14</sup> And he confirms this with the authority of St. Paul. Note first that St. Thomas expressly says *etiam*, “also.” This makes clear that argument from authority is a third sort of argument employed by sacred doctrine. St. Thomas clearly draws the use of philosophical authority from the captivity metaphor. Here, however, “capture” suggests not merely an order to a power above one’s natural power. It also expresses the fact that these philosophers have not brought forth their arguments in service of Christ. Rather, we Christians take these arguments captive so that they might serve him.

23. The part of the reply to the second objection I have examined makes clear that sacred doctrine employs three kinds of argument. At its foundation, sacred doctrine receives the truth from God through scripture and its interpreters. According to its nature, sacred doctrine makes arguments through the authority of those who have revealed it to determine just what the various elements of this truth are. Then, reason argues from these elements or articles to various other truths belonging to the faith, and this order belongs to reason as the proper instrument of sacred doctrine. Finally, sacred doctrine can turn to natural philosophical habits—expressed principally in those defined by these habits, the most eminent philosophers and scientists—and take arguments from these habits for its use. These last, however,

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14 Ibid.: “Et inde est quod etiam auctoritatibus philosophorum sacra doctrina utitur, ubi per rationem naturalem veritatem cognoscere potuerunt.”

remain extrinsic and therefore dialectical to sacred doctrine. For this reason, however necessary they are in themselves, they have only probable force as received dialectically on the authority of these philosophers.

24. I will look at one more passage where St. Thomas quotes the captivity metaphor. Here he draws an important aspect of sacred doctrine's use of reason from the metaphor, namely, the manner in which reason enters sacred doctrine. This is question 2, article 3 of his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*. Here the article considers whether one can use philosophical arguments in things pertaining to the faith.

25. My principal interest in this article is the clarification that St. Thomas makes to sacred doctrine's use of reason through reference to the captivity metaphor. He points out two ways of erring:

Nevertheless those using philosophy in sacred doctrine can err in two ways. In one way by using things which are against the faith, which do not belong to philosophy, but are its corruption or abuse. Origen does this. In another way, so that those things which pertain to the faith are enclosed under the borders of philosophy, namely, as if someone refuses to believe except what can be had through philosophy, when, conversely, philosophy must be led to the borders of faith, according to the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 10: "Leading into captivity every intellect unto obedience to Christ."<sup>15</sup>

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15 *Super De Trin.*, q. 2, a. 3, c: "Tamen utentes philosophia in sacra doctrina possunt dupliciter errare. Uno modo in hoc quod utantur his quae sunt contra fidem, quae non sunt philosophiae, sed corruptio vel abusus eius, sicut Origenes fecit. Alio modo, ut ea quae sunt fidei includantur sub metis philosophiae, ut scilicet si aliquis credere nolit nisi quod per philosophiam haberi potest, cum e converso philosophia sit ad metas fidei redigenda, secundum illud Apostoli 2 Cor. 10: in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi."

The second of these errors is to limit matters of faith to or contain them within what one can know through the habit of philosophy. I see this conception of argument from reason as an occasion of error to readers of St. Thomas in a manner I will presently describe. St. Thomas himself describes the converse as the proper order: philosophy must be led into captivity by theology. Philosophy must be brought to the limits or borders (*metas*) of faith.

26. This image suggests constraining philosophical truths to go to the border where another country, that of faith, begins. There, in the realm of faith, these truths will serve the Lord of that realm, Christ. To hold that arguments from reason—whether offered by philosophers or not—have only the power and force of reason, after they have entered the service of Christ, is to conceive these arguments as if they propose the truths concluded from them as *proper* to the power of reason and philosophy. Sacred doctrine does employ arguments proceeding from this power dialectically, as dispositive to its own work. But many beginners in sacred doctrine and, I fear, many who should be proficient imagine that sacred doctrine receives all arguments from reason as if they remain outside Christ's kingdom.

27. But the conversion metaphor of the reply to the fifth objection of this article teaches otherwise: if the theologian uses philosophical truths so as to lead them into the service of faith, they do not remain properly philosophical, as if he mixes water with wine. Rather they become integral parts of theology, as Christ converted water into wine. In turning now to consideration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I intend to show how certain gifts effect such a conversion. Later, I will look at examples of arguments that make clear—to the believer—that such a conversion has in fact taken place.

28. The present consideration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their role in sacred doctrine is not a complete consideration.

I will first (28–30) look at them generally and then (31–55) look at a few gifts in particular, especially the gift of *intellectus* or understanding, for reasons I will presently explain. As is well known, four of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit take their names from intellectual virtues: wisdom, science, understanding, and counsel. The last of these names expresses intellectual acts integral to the acts of prudence proper to the moral and political order. Therefore, the acts proceeding through these gifts will not pertain directly to sacred doctrine.

29. The other three gifts bearing names taken from intellectual virtues each play a role—as I read St. Thomas—in the constitution and perfection of sacred doctrine. But I must clarify this statement in two ways. First, I do not think every act of these gifts comes forth from these gifts together with the habit of sacred doctrine as such. I have various acts in mind, especially acts of infused contemplation. At the same time, I suspect most of these acts (perhaps all of them) have a disposition to sacred doctrine.

30. Second, while I hold that every mature Christian has the habit of sacred doctrine in some measure, I do not think that Christians ordinarily possess the habit of sacred doctrine in the academic or scholastic form proposed in the *Summa Theologiae* or similar treatises. This means nothing more than the fact that most adult Christians cooperating with grace attend to some truths of the faith habitually through one or more necessary middle terms proposed by the power of reason. Of course, most of them do not call these reasons for what they believe “middle terms” or distinguish between those that are necessary and those that are probable. At the same time, I do not propose this in a tendentious manner, as if this is necessary to understand the principal concern of these remarks.

31. To make the role of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in sacred doctrine more clear I will do three things. First (32–34), I will

recall St. Thomas's reference to science and understanding in the first of the three passages I examined above. Second (35–51), I will examine the gift of understanding in detail. Third (52–55), I will suggest the manner in which the gifts of science and wisdom relate to sacred doctrine.

32. In the passage first examined, St. Thomas said that in debates intending an understanding of the truth the debate aims at one must rely upon arguments—clearly describing what he elsewhere calls “argument from reason”—he defends this with the following argument:

Otherwise, if the magister determines the question by mere [*nudis*] authorities, the hearer will be determined [*certificabitur*] that it is so but he will acquire nothing of science or understanding and leave empty [*vacuus*].<sup>16</sup>

I do not think it difficult to see two things about the science and understanding mentioned here.

33. First, these acts of understanding and science must be integral parts of sacred doctrine. The body of the article immediately describes theological debates or disputes and considers disputes even with those outside the faith. But the article's objection proceeds from consideration of the first principles of theological science, as if the debates considered in the body are the work of this habit. Again, these acts are clearly what the one listening to such discussion intends, and such a listener—or reader—certainly intends to form acts by which he will attain the habit of sacred doctrine.

34. Second, these acts cannot be completely natural. This should be clear from the syllogisms proper to sacred theology. Conception of the subject proper to such a syllogism depends

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<sup>16</sup> *Quodl.* IV, q. 9, a. 3: “alioquin si nudis auctoritatibus magister quaestionem determinet, certificabitur quidem auditor quod ita est, sed nihil scientiae vel intellectus acquirat et vacuus abscedet.”

upon an act of faith. The conclusion is a truth that the unaided human intellect can at best suspect. But sacred doctrine is a science having a subject proper to it and a necessity attainable only through syllogism. There are certainly superior ways of knowing this subject and with certitude—the beatific vision and prophecy, for example. But sacred doctrine has an intelligibility and necessity distinct even from the intelligibility and necessity of faith. This is not to say that all or even most of what sacred doctrine teaches is necessary. Much of what it teaches is probable. Still, as I intend to make clear below, its first and most fundamental teachings have a necessity proper to demonstrative syllogism.

35. I turn now to consider the gift of understanding in more detail than those of science and wisdom. I do so for various reasons. The most important of these is that the act of forming the middle term of theological syllogism and grasping each of premises including this term will not be a supernatural act—as I am arguing—unless it proceeds from the gift of understanding. I will comment briefly on how these syllogisms bear the notion of science and wisdom later. I will consider the gift of understanding in three stages. First (36–40), I will show how St. Thomas understands truths of the faith to fall under the notion of an act of understanding. Second (41–44), I will consider the sort of “penetration” appropriate to this act. Third (45–51), I will defend this claim against the sort of misunderstanding of sacred doctrine I have already proposed—the view that the rational contribution to sacred theology remains wholly natural.

36. In the first article of his question on the gift of understanding in the *Summa Theologiae*, to manifest the gift of *intellectus* or understanding, St. Thomas begins with an etymology of the Latin verb *intelligere*, which he hears as a contraction of *intus legere* or “to read within.”<sup>17</sup> Next, he defends this through

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17 *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1, c: “nomen intellectus quamdam intimam cognitionem importat, dicitur enim intelligere quasi intus legere.” The consensus in our time

the difference between intellect and sense:

For sensitive knowledge is occupied with exterior sensible qualities; but intellective knowledge penetrates all the way [*usque*] to the thing's essence, for the object of the understanding is *quod quid est*, as is said in *De Anima* 3.<sup>18</sup>

Then, he shows that many things stand to the intellect as object from this need to penetrate through something better known:

But there are many genera of things which hide interiorly, to which man's knowledge must penetrate intrinsically, as it were. For under accidents hides the substantial nature of things, under words hide the things signified by the words, under similitudes and figures hides the truth figured: intelligible things too are in some way interior with respect to sensible things, which are sensed exteriorly, and in causes hide effects and the converse. Whence with respect to all these things understanding can be said.<sup>19</sup>

I draw particular attention here to the passage from similitudes to the truth figured under a similitude or figure. I will return to this presently and again through an example of such an argument below.

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37. From this account of the natural power of

is that the verb is a contraction of *inter legere*, "to read between." This comes to the same thing as the reading of St. Thomas, since in this phrase "between" is a metaphor for seeing "into" something.

18 Ibid.: "nam cognitio sensitiva occupatur circa qualitates sensibiles exteriores; cognitio autem intellectiva penetrat usque ad essentiam rei, obiectum enim intellectus est quod quid est, ut dicitur in III de anima."

19 Ibid.: "Sunt autem multa genera eorum quae interius latent, ad quae oportet cognitionem hominis quasi intrinsecus penetrare. Nam sub accidentibus latet natura rerum substantialis, sub verbis latent significata verborum, sub similitudinibus et figuris latet veritas figurata: res etiam intelligibiles sunt quodammodo interiores respectu rerum sensibilibus quae exterius sentiuntur, et in causis latent effectus et e converso. Unde respectu horum omnium potest dici intellectus."

understanding, St. Thomas draws the need for the gift of understanding. I note in passing that this is itself a movement from the account of the understanding we experience by nature to the account of the understanding we possess by grace and believe in by faith. Here is his argument that there must be a gift of understanding:

But since man's knowledge begins from sense, as if from something exterior, it is manifest that by how much the light of the intellect is stronger, by that much it can penetrate further inward [*magis ad intima*]. But the natural light of our intellect has a finite virtue; whence it can attain to something determinate. But man needs a supernatural light that he might penetrate further to knowing certain things which one is not able to know through the natural light. And that supernatural light given to man is called the gift of understanding.<sup>20</sup>

What I am proposing is that one of the principal jobs of this gift is to form definitions of the realities proposed in the articles of faith and through these definitions to express the premises by which sacred theology argues from reason. Further, I think this is the understanding he has in mind in the passage quoted above, where he says that without arguments investigating the root of the truth and showing how what is said is true, those hearing debates intending an understanding of the truth will go away empty, having acquired nothing of science or understanding.

38. In the following article, St. Thomas argues that this gift

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20 Ibid.: "Sed cum cognitio hominis a sensu incipiat, quasi ab exteriori, manifestum est quod quanto lumen intellectus est fortius, tanto potest magis ad intima penetrare. Lumen autem naturale nostri intellectus est finitae virtutis, unde usque ad determinatum aliquid pertingere potest. Indiget igitur homo supernaturali lumine ut ulterius penetret ad cognoscendum quaedam quae per lumen naturale cognoscere non valet. Et illud lumen supernaturale homini datum vocatur donum intellectus."

is not incompatible with faith. He first makes a distinction on the side of faith. He explains that faith has certain truths as its object *per se* and directly. Others fall under faith as ordered to such truths. Later he makes clear that the question concerns the compatibility of acts of faith and understanding about the truths that belong to faith *per se* and directly.

39. St. Thomas then turns to understanding and distinguishes two ways we are said to understand. In one way we understand perfectly, when we know the essence of what is understood or the very truth enunciated by the intellect as it is in itself. This is incompatible with faith. He goes on to state another mode of understanding:

In another way something might be understood imperfectly, namely, when the essence of the thing, what it is, (or the truth of the proposition, how it is [so]) is not known. But it is still known that those things which appear exteriorly are not contrary to the truth, namely, insofar as a man understands that one ought not, because of those things which appear exteriorly, to draw back from the things belonging to the faith. And according to this, nothing prohibits—while the state of faith endures—that one understands things which fall under the faith *per se*.<sup>21</sup>

Here the gift of understanding forms a rational act in which the principle, the essence of the thing or the truth of the proposition, is not grasped sufficiently by reason. As I will argue below this

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21 Ibid., a. 2: "Alio modo contingit aliquid intelligi imperfecte, quando scilicet ipsa essentia rei, vel veritas propositionis, non cognoscitur quid sit aut quomodo sit, sed tamen cognoscitur quod ea quae exterius apparent veritati non contrariantur; in quantum scilicet homo intelligit quod propter ea quae exterius apparent non est recedendum ab his quae sunt fidei. Et secundum hoc nihil prohibet, durante statu fidei, intelligere etiam ea quae per se sub fide cadunt."

agrees with the use of a similitude taken from a nature known to us, through which we form a definition or account of the supernatural reality we believe in.

40. St. Thomas makes this yet clearer when he distinguishes a minimal share in the gift of understanding from one much more full:

The gift of understanding never draws back from the saints [those with sanctifying grace] regarding things which are necessary for salvation. But regarding other things sometimes it draws back, so that they cannot penetrate all things *ad liquidum*.<sup>22</sup>

The reason some do not attain to understanding more fully is not important. What matters is this notion of penetrating things *ad liquidum*. I think this clearly refers to the property of liquids to permit one to pass through them to some solid object.<sup>23</sup>

41. Again, this act of penetration passes through things exterior to what the faith proposes so as to reach the things of faith in its own way. What this gift grasps is that these exterior things—the proper objects of our intellect, it seems to me, and the universal truths grasped in them—do not oppose the truths of faith. By the gift of understanding, we can still “see” the truths made known (*innotescunt*) by faith distinctly, despite whatever in the proper object of our intellect might seem to stand opposed to, and thus to cloud, those truths. So St. Thomas says, “The superadded light stands to those things which are made known to us supernaturally thus as our natural light stands to those things we know primordially.”<sup>24</sup> As the power of intellect

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22 Ibid., a. 4, ad 3: “donum intellectus nunquam se subtrahit sanctis circa ea quae sunt necessaria ad salutem. Sed circa alia interdum se subtrahit, ut omnia ad liquidum per intellectum penetrare possint . . .”

23 Compare the phrase *penetrat usque ad essentiam rei* in the first article of this question.

24 Ibid., a. 1, ad 2: “ita se habet lumen superadditum ad ea quae nobis

articulates the definitions and first truths that follow our understanding of being, one, as well as the subject proper to the particular sciences, so the gift of *intellectus* grasps that the *rationes* and “principles” at work in the truths of faith do not oppose those at work in our proper object. Rather, it sees an agreement or an aptitude to agreement in our proper object to the truths held by faith.

42. I will propose here (and support in an example below) what St. Thomas has in mind by penetration *ad liquidum*. I do not suggest, however, that my account should be taken as the only way that the gift of understanding operates. I begin with the notion of similitude mentioned above. St. Thomas says one must pass from the similitude or figure to the truth figured. I think we should not limit this phrase to speak only of speech that is metaphorical or improper. In particular, I think “similitude” should be understood as embracing the natures that constitute the proper object of our intellect.

43. In fact, St. Thomas speaks of similitudes this way in the article I have quoted from the commentary on *De Trinitate*. The body of the article begins with the principle that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. Then, after arguing that the light of natural reason cannot be contrary to the faith, he proposes their proper relation:

But rather, since in imperfect things there is found some imitation of perfect things, in the very things which are known by natural reason there are certain similitudes of those things which are handed on through faith.<sup>25</sup>

This provides the foundation for the comparison between sacred

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supernaturaliter innotescunt sicut se habet intellectus naturale ad ea quae primordialiter cognoscimus.”

25 *Super De Trin.*, q. 2, a. 3, c: “Sed magis cum in imperfectis inveniatur aliqua imitatio perfectorum, in ipsis, quae per naturalem rationem cognoscuntur, sunt quaedam similitudines eorum quae per fidem sunt tradita.”

doctrine and philosophy that immediately follows.

44. He appropriates his teaching about the light of reason and the light of faith to these habits and then appropriates to philosophy the study of the natures that are similitudes of what belongs to faith:

But just as sacred doctrine is founded upon the light of faith, so philosophy is founded upon the natural light of reason. Whence it is impossible that those things which belong to philosophy are contrary to those things which belong to the faith, but they do fall short of them. Still, they contain some similitudes of them and some preambles to them, just as nature is a preamble to grace.<sup>26</sup>

This makes clear how St. Thomas draws the power of sacred doctrine to employ philosophy for proving preambles and for manifesting truths of the faith through the similitudes found in nature to the realities revealed by faith. I will give examples of each of these kinds of argument below.

45. At present I will merely make the following remark about this passage sacred theology makes from the natures immediately known to us to the realities we believe in, the supernatural realities which we believe these natures are likenesses of. I take it as sufficiently clear that the names employed in offering these similitudes must refer in some way to the sensible nature most known to us. Passage from these imperfect creatures to their perfect creator must involve the three ways we name God from creatures: causality, negation, and eminence. We make the similitudes of the divine that are naturally known to us appropriate to the divine in these three ways. Each of these ways allow

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.: "Sicut autem sacra doctrina fundatur supra lumen fidei, ita philosophia fundatur supra lumen naturale rationis; unde impossibile est quod ea, quae sunt philosophiae, sint contraria his quae sunt fidei, sed deficiunt ab eis. Continent tamen aliquas eorum similitudines et quaedam ad ea praeambula, sicut natura praeambula est ad gratiam."

us to pass from the similitude to the reality in a manner appropriate to a believer.

46. It may seem to many—especially those studying theological works apart from prayer—that what I describe here and what one sees St. Thomas doing habitually does not involve any supernatural light. I described this above (25) as closely related to an error some make in theology. St. Thomas says that some err by introducing philosophical teachings, “so that those things which pertain to the faith are enclosed under the borders of philosophy,” and he exemplifies this in one who “refuses to believe except what can be had through philosophy.” I am claiming that those who suppose that no supernatural aid is at work in forming definitions and middle terms in sacred doctrine “enclose” those definitions and middle terms within the “borders” of human reason.

47. Let me offer three ways of seeing that we must have some supernatural assistance in these acts. One way we need it may not be difficult to see. Through the concupiscence proper to our fallen nature, our intellects are ready to be satisfied with the material and corporeal and to rest in these. Even in natural considerations, the intellect suffers resistance in its passage to what is formal and spiritual. The gift of understanding clearly provides the intellectual strength to overcome such resistance.

48. But even apart from this deficiency, our intellect needs some aid in these acts from its proportion to natural and sensible reality rather than the supernatural reality revealed by grace. Let me express this need by comparing two students of the *Summa* having equal intellectual strength, yet one believes and the other does not. The non-believer can certainly form the acts in which he sees that one who believes that God has revealed himself in Christ must understand what the faith proposes in this way. But no light allows his intellect to encounter the spiritual realities he speaks of in his studies. Again, he does understand insofar

as he knows the significations or meanings of names and how these found the propositions formed from them. But he does not understand any supernatural reality, which is the work of the gift of understanding.

49. The believer, however, experiences some communication of light from the articles he affirms through faith to the definitions and propositions he forms concerning those things. This light grows as he purges his natural understanding of the natures employed as similitudes of the realities proposed by the faith. This light arises from faith but here it reflects off the truths proper to the faith to the definitions by which we clarify the terms proper to faith.

50. I emphasize two things here proper to the order of faith. If things are not really as the faith proposes, neither habit—neither faith nor understanding—brings the intellect before the things proposed by faith. Likewise, if they do exist, yet one does not have faith and employ it in considering these things, his intellect in no way approaches these realities by forming the definitions and propositions that correspond to the gift of understanding. We see once more that one must believe not only in these supernatural realities but also in the gracious gift of understanding through which these definitions and the premises formed from them remain in touch with the reality revealed.

51. Again, this light is the power by which the principal agent—God at work in faith—raises the natural power of its proper instrument so that it can bring forth sacred doctrine as wisdom. By the articles of faith, the believer is now united in his mind to God as God reveals himself through the articles. God's infinite and pure intelligibility works through these articles to integrate the natural concepts of the believer with the truth found in these articles. And in this act, just as the believer receives the natural light by which he grasps the truths proportioned to his concepts from God as first mover in the order of

nature, so, to apprehend the truth about supernatural realities by means of these concepts, he must receive some illumination from God as first mover in the order of grace. Just as the light found in the definitions and premises of human sciences flows from the light by which we grasp the axioms, postulates, and the definitions of the subjects of these sciences, so God communicates light to the definitions and middle terms of sacred doctrine through the light of faith. By this light borrowed from that of faith, the believer understands in an act of the gift of understanding what he believes by an act of faith.

52. St. Thomas makes the order between understanding and three other gifts clear by distinguishing the gifts of understanding, wisdom, science, and counsel, according to their order to the things proposed by the faith. The acts of each of these gifts differs from that of faith by some contribution on our part. We receive the truths of faith in the act of believing them; the power of each of these gifts demands an additional act: "So regarding things which are proposed to be believed by faith, two things are required on our part."

53. The first of these acts involves the formation of a definition or proposition. Here St. Thomas describes such an act as follows: "First, [it is required] that they be penetrated or grasped by the intellect, and this pertains to the gift of understanding." I have discussed this above in some detail. St. Thomas proposes the second act in a general way as it applies to all three of the remaining gifts: "Second, a man must have right judgment about them, so that he may recognize that he must adhere to these and recede from their opposites." The judgment he speaks of here is the conclusion of some sort of syllogism. Here the light of faith, reflected by the definition and premises formed in acts of understanding, illuminates some truth concluded through a middle term.

54. Before presenting St. Thomas's division of such

sylogisms as works of the gifts, I merely note that insofar as this occurs through an acquired habit of syllogism, sacred doctrine is itself wisdom, active wisdom, as St. Thomas teaches near the beginning of the *Summa*. The passive wisdom he speaks of is the gift of wisdom and this agrees with the first distinction he makes in the judgments that proceed through syllogism: “This judgment then, so far as divine things, pertains to the gift of wisdom.”<sup>27</sup> I would point out here that I hold that the gift of wisdom “vivifies” sacred doctrine in the same way that charity by forming faith makes it a living faith.

55. He goes on to distinguish the remaining gifts according to the object of judgment: “so far as created things, [this judgment] pertains to the gift of science; but so far as application to singular works, it pertains to the gift of counsel.”<sup>28</sup> This science can become part of sacred doctrine, in my reading of St. Thomas, insofar as one has a habit of syllogizing about created things through the truths of the faith. Again, the gift will vivify the acquired sacred doctrine. While I do not deny that the gift of counsel can have some bearing upon sacred doctrine, this gift is principally concerned with particular actions. For this reason, its contribution to sacred doctrine would demand a more careful consideration than is possible here.

56. I will now offer examples of the kinds of argument I outlined above. I will offer two examples of the complete integration of human reason into theology, examples of the “water” of reason converted into the “wine” of divine truth. But, to emphasize the nature of such a conversion, I will first point out an example of theology using philosophical authority and show that such an argument remains dialectical and extrinsic to

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27 *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 6, c.: “Hoc igitur iudicium, quantum ad res divinas, pertinet ad donum sapientiae.” See also *STh* I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3.

28 *Ibid.*: “quantum vero ad res creatas, pertinet ad donum scientiae; quantum vero ad applicationem ad singularia opera, pertinet ad donum consilii.”

theology. Then, I will offer the proofs that become integral parts of sacred doctrine.

57. Note that although I mention three arguments here, these do not correspond straightforwardly to the three species of argument I described above. I omit examples of authoritative arguments determining whether something is so. I do not omit them because I think them unimportant. I omit them because they pertain to sacred doctrine's power to order its principles, which does not distinctly express its own intrinsic nature as a habit of the human intellect.

58. Of these three arguments, the first (59–66), concerned with the human soul, is based on human authority. I consider the other two intrinsic to the habit of sacred doctrine. These fall on either side of human reason's power. The second argument (67–77) is St. Thomas's first way. Here I will show how St. Thomas integrates something philosophically demonstrable, God's existence, into sacred doctrine according to the proper power of sacred doctrine. The third argument (78–92), or rather a short series of closely connected arguments, belongs to his teaching on the second person of the Trinity under the names "Word" and "Son." I will show how he integrates concepts and propositions of human reason into a scientific consideration of a truth that human reason cannot attain by its proper power.

59. After arguing that sacred doctrine uses human reason in the passage I examined above,<sup>29</sup> St. Thomas asserts that it "also uses philosophical authorities." In its most proper form, I understand this as argument from the authority of philosophers. St. Thomas clearly considers such arguments as proceeding from improper principles because the principle is not known by the light proper to sacred doctrine. Further, they are merely probable because, as St. Thomas teaches, necessary principles come to sacred doctrine through sacred scripture. St. Thomas

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29 See note 11, quoting *STh* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

distinguishes argument through philosophical authority from the employment of human reason in sacred doctrine, though he does not point out clearly where the one begins and the other ends.

60. My principal purpose in discussing sacred doctrine's use of argument from philosophical authority is to distinguish such arguments from a more integral use of human reason. To accomplish this, I will do two things. First (61–62), I will point out one place where St. Thomas argues from the authority of philosophers and show where he ceases to rely upon such authority and goes on to employ an argument more appropriate to sacred doctrine. Second (63–66), I will argue that argument from philosophical authority is dialectical.

61. Many good examples of St. Thomas's use of philosophical authority occur in the questions about our intellectual powers. In fact, most of these truths can be known by philosophical demonstration. Still, as I hope to make clear, that is not sufficient for their integration into theology. In the *Summa*, where he asks whether our intellectual knowledge is received from sensible things, he begins the *respondeo* by stating: "The opinion of philosophers about this question was threefold."<sup>30</sup> He then reviews the opinions of Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle, and he orders these opinions as two extremes and a mean: Democritus considered all human knowledge to be a sensible mutation, Plato thought sensation merely excited the intellect to its own intellectual act, and Aristotle held that intellectual acts differ from the sensible and are spiritual, though images received from sense are principles of these acts insofar as the agent intellect illuminates them.

62. This attention to these positions is the foundation for his theological judgment at the end of the *respondeo* and in the replies. This theological judgment is not a philosophical opinion

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30 Ibid. I, q. 84, a. 6, c: "circa istam quaestionem triplex fiat philosophorum opinio."

though he “took counsel” with philosophers to arrive at it. I would add further that one cannot merely identify St. Thomas’s judgment here with that of Aristotle in the *De Anima* (or with St. Thomas’s reading of the *De Anima*). The theological consideration of the human intellect, even in this question, always considers this intellect as it proceeds from God. This implies two comparisons: that of the human intellect with the divine and angelic intellect, in which the human appears as the lower extreme, and comparison of man with all creatures, in which he appears as a mean between the purely spiritual and the purely material.

63. Clearly, these uses of the authority or authoritative texts of philosophers in sacred doctrine is dialectical. In some way this description merely clarifies the claim that such arguments are improper or extrinsic and merely probable. But saying this may lead some to think that this means that sacred doctrine does not really use them. One might think that calling such arguments “extrinsic” means that, being outside the habit of sacred doctrine, the habit cannot be at work in them in any way. To show this is not so, I will observe three aspects of dialectic that are easily neglected.

64. First, while dialectic is necessarily prescientific, dialectic is not accidental to the generation of science. This arises principally because determination of the proper principles of demonstration in most sciences is very difficult. Dialectical arguments allow us to engage in the analysis through which one can grasp the principles proper to the method of the science at hand.

65. Second, because dialectic does not demand a grasp of the proper principles of the science in question, it has power in arguing against those opposed to some teaching of the science or even to the existence of that science. Note also the breadth of this aspect of dialectic’s power. Insofar as dialectic is formally a

part of logic, it employs nominal definitions able to move those who know as well as those who only have opinion. Further, a dialectical argument that employs philosophical authority does not demand certitude or clarity regarding the truth of what the philosopher says. It merely leads us to attend to the position and perhaps to the principles from which the philosopher argues.

66. Third, focus on the student's prescientific use of dialectic should not prevent one from seeing that dialectic is also a tool of the teacher. The teacher uses dialectic to dispose the student to a particular teaching of a science, to discern its proper principles, or even to understand the method of the science as a whole. In the soul of the teacher, the science is at work in these dialectical arguments directing the mind of the student to their proper end. We can see this in one way in the various dialectical introductions to Aristotle's *Physics*, *De Anima*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Metaphysics* and in another way in the objections and replies that complete the teaching found in the body of St. Thomas's articles. The power of the scientist is particularly clear in the distinction and order found in these works. The presence of the teacher's scientific power in dialectic—especially his power to continue teaching those who have already received the principal doctrine in question—illustrates the manner in which I hold that the power of sacred doctrine is present in those concepts and propositions formed by human reason that it incorporates into its own teaching.

67. I turn now to the first of St. Thomas's five ways of proving God's existence. Here I want to use the first way principally to illustrate my understanding of how theology "leads [human] reason captive" all the way to the "borders" of the faith. The first way, of course, proposes God as the first unmoved mover. But, as St. Thomas explains, those using philosophy in sacred doctrine err, if they use it so that they "bind the things which belong to faith within the borders of philosophy, namely, as if someone will

not believe except what can be held by philosophy.”<sup>31</sup> I propose that this includes, at least implicitly, someone who only accepts the argument and the *ratio* of first unmoved mover according to God’s movement of creatures according to nature.

68. Of course, the need to receive the *ratio* of the first unmoved mover according to gracious movement as well as the natural is something implicit in what St. Thomas says in the first way.<sup>32</sup> I am not surprised when I encounter students first reading the *Summa* who imagine that the force of the first way should be constrained to the movement arising through nature. But I do think it a sign that the habit of theology has not taken root, when those experienced cannot see that St. Thomas takes the argument and the name “first mover” to include supernatural movement. I will defend this first (69–70) from the context of the five ways, then (71–73) by passages where St. Thomas clearly does so, and finally (74–77) I will reflect upon the fact that the teaching I am using as illustration also proposes the illumination by which God, as first mover, integrates human reason into theology.

69. St. Thomas presents the five ways as part of the act by which he establishes the existence of God as the principal part of the subject genus of sacred doctrine. From the nature of a subject genus, this genus includes all the things within God’s power. But, as St. Thomas makes clear, this science attends to these beings according to the light of divine revelation. For this reason, argument from divine authority has greater certitude than argument from human reason. So, the *sed contra* of the article presenting the five ways, which reports God revealing himself to Moses under the name, “I am who am,” expresses the mode in which we—with and following Moses—receive sacred doctrine

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31 *Super De Trin.*, q. 2, a. 3, c.: “ea quae sunt fidei includantur sub metis philosophiae, ut scilicet si aliquis credere nolit nisi quod per philosophiam haberi potest.”

32 *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3, c.

from God. Nothing is properly theological except insofar as we receive it as from God revealing himself to us above the power of human nature and, most perfectly, in Jesus Christ.

70. If the five ways—which I take here as the *rationes* by which we name God in these arguments—will become proper instruments of theology, the theologian must hear each of these *rationes* as encompassing more than the philosopher hears in them. The theologian must hear these *rationes* as they agree with God’s revelation of himself and of the divine nature he shares with us through grace and glory. As I argued above, one cannot hear anything in this way without faith and the gift of understanding. Here I propose that the *sed contra* reporting God’s revelation to Moses determines the manner in which we should receive each of the five ways. If so, one must hear God conceived as the first unmoved mover to be a mover not merely according to the first and proper imposition of that name. In fact, one must hear the names “movement” and “mover” not only according to the extension by which “movement” names activity of soul but also according to its power to name the acts by which God raises us to the divine life.

71. As illustration of such an understanding of the first way, I will look at the first article of question 109 of the *Prima secundae* as example. Here St. Thomas asks whether man can know the truth without grace. Note here that, speaking of the intellect, we can even call its movement “illumination.” In fact, St. Thomas does so with perfect fluidity. In the body, he argues that “all movements whether bodily or spiritual are reduced simply to the first mover, which is God.”<sup>33</sup> From this he draws out his answer to the question by saying,

for the knowledge of any truth whatever, a man needs

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33 *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 1, c: “omnes motus tam corporales quam spirituales reducuntur in primum movens simpliciter, quod est Deus.”

divine help so that his intellect might be moved by God to its act. But he does not need a new illumination [*illustratione*] superadded to his natural illumination for knowing the truth in all things...<sup>34</sup>

72. In the reply to an objection, St. Thomas distinguishes this natural illumination from a further illumination or movement from God:

the natural light bestowed upon the soul is God's illumination by which we are illuminated by him for knowing those things which pertain to natural knowledge. And for this another illumination is not required but only for those things that exceed natural knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

That this falls under the first way should be clear from the comparison upon which he bases this judgment: "the bodily sun illuminates exteriorly, but the intelligible sun, who is God, illuminates internally."<sup>36</sup> The illumination of air (and ethereal bodies supposed by St. Thomas) by the sun is some kind of alteration that falls under the definition of movement immediately employed in that way.

73. In the body of the article, St. Thomas determines this distinction between our natural intellectual light as a divine illumination and some further light God offers. He says that the human intellect suffices,

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34 Ibid.: "ad cognitionem cuiuscumque veri, homo indiget auxilio divino ut intellectus a Deo moveatur ad suum actum. Non autem indiget ad cognoscendam veritatem in omnibus, nova illustratione superaddita naturali illustrationi...?"

35 Ibid., ad 2: "Unde ipsum lumen naturale animae inditum est illustratio Dei, qua illustramur ab ipso ad cognoscendum ea quae pertinent ad naturalem cognitionem. Et ad hoc non requiritur alia illustratio, sed solum ad illa quae naturalem cognitionem excedunt."

36 Ibid.: "sol corporalis illustrat exterius; sed sol intelligibilis, qui est Deus, illustrat interius."

for knowing those things we can arrive at the knowledge of which through sensibles. But the human intellect cannot know higher intelligibles unless it is perfected by a stronger light, as by the light of faith or of prophecy, which is called the “light of grace” insofar as it is added above nature.<sup>37</sup>

The reply to another objection adds that this higher knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit “as from someone indwelling by the grace that sanctifies or as from one bestowing some habitual gift added above nature.”<sup>38</sup> But this qualification determines a more general understanding already stated that “everything true by whomever it is said is from the Holy Spirit as from one infusing [a] natural light and someone moving [him] to understand and speak the truth.”<sup>39</sup> Even the supernatural illumination therefore implies an understanding of God as a mover of intellectual creatures, according to the conception of God formed in the first way.

74. I have proposed this as an illustration of theology “leading philosophy captive” all the way to the “borders” of the faith, insofar as theology takes the notion of first mover from philosophy all the way to grace. But the teaching itself offers us an understanding of how God communicates the truth of this order. We can apply this teaching to consider how even in formation of “first unmoved mover” as a *ratio* or “definition” of God, God moves and illuminates us in two ways.

75. Through human nature, God illuminates the human

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37 Ibid., c: “intellectus humanus... est de se sufficiens ad quaedam intelligibilia cognoscenda: ad ea scilicet in quorum notitiam per sensibilia possumus devenire. Altiora vero intelligibilia intellectus humanus cognoscere non potest nisi fortiori lumine perficiatur, sicut lumine fidei vel prophetiae; quod dicitur lumen gratiae, in quantum est naturae superadditum.”

38 Ibid., ad 1: “sicut ab inhabitante per gratiam gratum facientem, vel sicut a largiente aliquod habituale donum naturae superadditum.”

39 Ibid.: “omne verum, a quocumque dicitur, est a spiritu sancto sicut ab infundente naturale lumen, et movente ad intelligendum et loquendum veritatem.”

intellect so that we can grasp this ratio as it completes our understanding of the natural, mobile beings best known to us, as this occurs in *Physics* 8 or *Metaphysics* 12. In fact, we form this *ratio* through the intelligible species abstracted from such beings that serves as the principle of natural philosophy. Through this species, we grasp that the natural movements of such beings must arise from a first mover.

76. But God also moves us to a further end, as he reveals and as we believe by faith. Employing the gift of understanding, the theologian clarifies this belief through use of this *ratio* formed by reason; he understands God as moving believers to an end beyond their natural power and giving them a supernatural light so that they can cling to him as he moves them to this higher, supernatural end. And in making arguments from such an understanding, as here St. Thomas proves that grace is necessary to know truths beyond human power, the theologian proceeds with necessity only by the gift of science, at least insofar as his arguments concern creatures. The definitions and arguments the theologian forms by the natural power of our intellect cannot attain to the realities spoken of unless strengthened by the superior light this article considers. Note that I do not claim that the theologian *sees* these realities; but his intellect does reach them in the order proper to faith and by an instrument completing the act of faith. Faith communicates this light it receives immediately from God to such definitions and arguments through the gifts of understanding and science.

77. I emphasize here that this teaching depends upon two things I spoke of earlier: that the realities spoken of are as they are described and that the one teaching or learning about these realities possesses and uses the virtue of faith. I think this helps us see why we can speak of sacred doctrine as science and wisdom. Someone who does not believe may well state that the Christian holds that grace is necessary for faith and science about

any truth beyond the power of the human intellect. He may see why a Christian holds this. But he does not have the certitude about this reality as it really is. He may well imagine himself certain things are not so. Only by faith and the gifts described does the habit of considering such truths constitute a supernatural intellectual virtue.

78. I turn now to a question more properly theological, the integration of the names “Word” and “Son” into our theological consideration of the second person of the Trinity. I will do three things here. First (79–86), I will consider the role of the gift of understanding in the act of integrating the name “Word.” Second (87), I will briefly consider the integration of the name “Son.” Third (88–92), I will look at the acts by which we demonstrate that the person who is the Word must be God’s Son and that the person who is the Son must be God’s Word.

79. Anyone possessing faith can encounter the opening of the gospel of St. John—in English, let us assume—and make an act of faith: “God has a Word” or “There is a Word in God.” Most can usually affirm their faith much more distinctly: “The Word of God is the second person of the Trinity” or “The Word of God is God’s Son.” Faced with the question, “What does the name ‘Word’ mean, when said of God?” the believer can recognize that he has used it so far to mean more or less this: There is in God some reality that is like what we men call “words.” This is not properly an answer to that question, but an affirmation of one’s faith in the names God uses to communicate supernatural truth and in what God intends by using these names.

80. To answer the question—at least correctly—demands the use of the gift of understanding. I will exemplify in a schematic way how this happens. I will focus principally on the negation involved (81–84), though after (85) I will point out ways in which we understand this name according to eminence and causality, and add a comment (86) about the contributions of

reason and the gift of understanding. I will begin (81) discussion of the negation by making observations about a conversation. Then (82–83), I will consider the necessity of such formulas and how one proceeds further. Finally (84), I will comment on what is necessary to penetrate *ad liquidum*.

81. Recently, I asked my theology class in our first meeting on John's gospel, "What does St. John mean by the 'Word' that is with God?" One of my students said, "Well, God's Word must be something like our words, but it can't be a vocal sound." A young woman disagreed with him, "Why can't it be a sound? God can do anything he wants." The young man responded, "But vocal sounds are made in air and Genesis says that God created air. But St. John says that everything created was created through the Word. So the Word must be prior to the air that carries vocal sounds." I think this young man made the first negation necessary in passing from our reception of the nature that constitutes a similitude for the second person of the Trinity. In doing so he formed some understanding of the name "Word." I think he went further by making clear that this understanding is also present in the mind of St. John.

82. I will add here that so long as the conception formed in offering such an account involves no error, the necessity of faith communicates itself to the act of understanding. In passing, I note that I am speaking here precisely of the necessity that defines science and wisdom rather than the necessity by which the magisterium determines us to the truths of faith.<sup>40</sup> If there

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40 Perhaps the most obvious difference between these kinds of necessity is that no one can have the necessity definitive of science or wisdom unless he possesses the scientific demonstration of some necessary truth, while the magisterium of the Church determines some truths of the faith such that anyone using the habit of faith believes these truths as necessarily true. Of course, sacred doctrine begins with truths determined to be necessary by the magisterium; it also defends some truths the magisterium proposes with necessity with arguments that proceed necessarily from the articles of faith. Nothing I

is necessarily a Word in God, and the formula clarifying what is meant by that name is correct, then something bearing the *ratio* expressed in this formula necessarily exists in God. Note carefully, however, that the necessity of concluding from propositions formed through such an account cannot communicate necessity to a conclusion except on the following condition: the negations—or other appropriations to the divine—necessary for the major term in question must be present in the formula from which the theologian draws the middle term.

83. Ignoring the possibility of mistakes, to continue to advance in the employment of the gift of understanding along the route of negation, one must be both very careful in proposing that the negations already employed are sufficient for our theological use and fearful of proposing that no more negation is possible. This is so difficult that few should ever imagine themselves prepared to do so. I suspect this is why some beginners and even some theologians become so attached to the *via negativa*; they fear any positive significance will include something unbecoming to God and will thus include an impediment to naming him. One can see in St. Thomas many acts of negation in making the name “Word” appropriate to the second person. Few can keep all these negations habitually in mind. Still, note that St. Thomas does not wait until all these negations are complete. He is willing to use the name theologically as soon as we have some formula that resolves the name to things more intelligible to us.

84. I do think that it must be possible to make all the negations that can be made, based on the simple fact that the natures from which such similitudes arise are finite. And, while

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am saying, however, should be taken as if sacred doctrine provides a necessary scientific understanding of any matter proper to faith from truths proper to human reason—as if such necessity replaced the need for faith or submission to the magisterium.

we rarely have need to mention more than the negation or negations necessary for the demonstration in hand, the more we strengthen the habit of sacred doctrine the more the negations made in prior demonstrations are at work in the posterior ones. To arrive at all such negations and to see that these must be all is to penetrate *ad liquidum*, all the way through, at least along the route of negation.

85. I will make the briefest comments on our clarification of the notes of eminence and causality in extending the name “word” to the divine person. First, implicit in the doctrine that we are made in the image of God is the teaching that the procession of the concept—in particular the concept arising in self-knowledge or in the knowledge of God—participates in the order by which the Word proceeds from the Father. This expresses his eminence as a word. Second, though the act of causing creatures can in no way be appropriated to the Word, implicit in the teaching that God is cause of all things is the understanding that things attain their species insofar as things come from the Father through the Word. This is an element in the teaching that there is a trace of the Trinity in all created things. This expresses God’s causality as that causality belongs to the Word, albeit in common with the Father and the Spirit.

86. Let me repeat—hopefully more clearly—something I have pointed out above. Reason, according to its natural power, forms the various formulas expressing what we mean by “word” in our naming the divine person. The gift of understanding does not proceed miraculously, much less magically, by producing an intelligible species that was not previously in the intellect. I emphasize the fact that the non-believer can grasp why a Christian reformulates his understanding of the name “word,” given the articles of faith. But the intellect of the non-believer does not reach or attain the divine person in forming this understanding of the name “word” as the believer does. One of the

reasons theologians do not understand this teaching is because they fail to recognize that in acts of faith the intellect really attains to the reality believed in, even if it does not attain to that reality by sight. The effect of grace in which we attain to the things believed in through a definition or formula articulated by reason is the act of the gift we call understanding. The act of reason is an instrument by which grace brings forth the act of understanding what faith believes.

87. I will say a few things about the extension of the name “son” to the second person of the Trinity. Here too we see that from the article of faith that there is a Son in God, St. Thomas argues in *De Potentia* that there is a generative power in God.<sup>41</sup> Through this generative power St. Thomas forms a notion of the Father and the Son as begetter and begotten. He performs various negations to make these names appropriate to each of these persons. This requires, as I have argued, use of the gift of understanding by which the formulas or accounts of these names are formed, including negations, so that the truth found in the act of faith can be communicated to the act of understanding what these names mean. In passing, I note that in the letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul proposes that the name “father” is said eminently of the Father within the Trinity, when he points out that all *πατριά* or family is named from him. I will not look here at the eminence or causality found in the name “son” as applied to the divine person, since various preliminaries are necessary to understand this sufficiently.

88. I have in fact looked at the name “son” principally to consider the manner in which the gift of understanding is at work in the act of concluding truths, for example, that God’s Word is his Son, from the propositions employing the definitions formed by this gift. Certainly the act of concluding is proper to sacred doctrine as it is itself a scientific habit of wisdom. The gift

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41 See *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q. 2, a. 1.

of understanding does not cause the necessity of the conclusion. Rather, the scientific form draws this necessity from the premises. But in these premises, the gift of understanding is properly at work. The habit of sacred doctrine is a habit of bringing our concepts under such a scientific form. So sacred doctrine is also a habit that employs the gift of understanding to form the premises by which the believer completes an act of faith with an act of science or wisdom. Insofar as the theologian cooperates with grace in doing this, an act of the gift of wisdom (attending charity) will perfect the wisdom proper to the acquired habit of sacred doctrine.

89. As examples I will take the demonstrations by which we prove that the divine person that is the Word is also God's Son and that the divine person that is the Son of God is also his Word. I assume it is clear that these demonstrations proceed through similitude as a middle term. Each of these two names belong to the second person insofar as he proceeds from another according to a procession by which the one proceeding is like the one from whom he proceeds.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, I have only stated what is common here and I have not expressed the notes by which we grasp such processions in creatures.

90. More important to the present consideration is attention to the fact that this notion of proceeding according to likeness does not belong to the second person as he bears the name "son" according to the same meaning that it belongs to him as he bears the name "word." I defend this merely by pointing out that the aspects we must negate in the procession we find in created sonship differ from the aspects negated in our understanding of the created word. Most obvious is the fact that in sonship we must deny the numerical distinction attending the nature common to created father and son, whereas we must deny the accidental existence of the human word. This also makes clear that

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<sup>42</sup> See *STh* I, q. 27, a. 2, and q. 34, a. 2.

these names have distinct meanings, although both must name the one divine person in whom there is no distinction answering to these meanings.

91. When, therefore, we form the proposition that the divine person of the Word is a person proceeding according to the notion of likeness found in the *ratio* of word, we do so through a necessity communicated from the article of faith to the proposition by the gift of understanding. We do the same when we form the proposition that one proceeding according to the notion of likeness with the divine nature bears the *ratio* of son. Then, in virtue of the necessity found in each of these premises we can conclude necessarily that the Word of God is God's Son. Clearly, by reordering these premises, one can also conclude that God's Son is his Word.

92. This scientific order and the necessity found in it—when we do arrive at necessity—belong properly to the habit of sacred doctrine. The habit of faith has an illumination proper to itself and the gift of understanding has another. These illuminations are at work in the terms, definitions, and propositions employed by sacred doctrine. Through the natural power of reason illuminated in an act of the gift of understanding, reason's power and its product are taken captive into theology. And in this way—by the integration of the work produced by reason—sacred doctrine as a scientific order becomes a light in its own right, completing the light begun in faith and communicated to it through the light shared in the gift of understanding.

**FAITH AND REASON:  
CONTRASTING THE PROLOGUE OF THE *SUMMA  
CONTRA GENTILES* WITH CLAUDE TRESMONTANT’S  
THEORY OF RECIPROCAL IMMANENCE**

*Louis-Joseph Gagnon*

The *Summa contra Gentiles* (ScG) is a major work of Saint Thomas Aquinas, according to many scholars a theological synthesis.<sup>1</sup> Yet a widely held view is that Aquinas composed two *summae*, one for philosophy, the ScG, and one for theology, the

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1 For example, Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin. Sa personne et son œuvre* (Paris: Cerf, 2015), 435.

*Summa Theologiae* (*STh*).<sup>2</sup> Two arguments that favor taking the ScG as philosophical include the marked use of Aristotle and its overall structure: specifically, the first three books are concerned with demonstrating what can be known about God from natural reason. However, the work of René-Antoine Gauthier OP has persuasively argued that Aquinas himself considered the ScG to be theological.<sup>3</sup> How, then, does Aquinas reconcile the significant role he attributes to natural reason in the ScG with the truth that is revealed and received in faith?

To begin with, this paper argues from a careful reading of the first nine chapters of the ScG that Aquinas sees wisdom as the unifying element between faith and reason. These chapters constitute a sort of “discourse on method” for the ScG. They are the privileged place where Aquinas lays down his conception of the relation between faith and reason in the work.

Secondly, Aquinas’s view in the ScG can give us a critical purchase on a modern conception of the relation between faith and reason. Building on the preceding exegesis, we contrast the epistemological harmonization of faith and reason in Aquinas with the contemporary approach of the late twentieth century French Catholic philosopher Claude Tresmontant. In return, the contrast gives a fuller understanding of Aquinas on matters of faith and reason.

Tresmontant worked out a theory of “reciprocal

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2 From experience, we often hear this idea in the course room and in discussions at the university. It is still held by some academics in scholarly works. See Jean Grondin, “La religion dans la philosophie et la philosophie dans la religion,” *Théologiques* 27.1 (2019), 63. We translate: “This philosophical justification of faith reaches a sort of peak in Thomas Aquinas who, fortunately for our purpose, happens to be the author of a *Summa of theology* and a *philosophical Summa* (that against the Gentiles).” See also Alain de Libéra, “Thomas d’Aquin. Le philosophe et la théologie,” in *Philosophie. Auteurs et Thèmes*, ed. Véronique Bedin (Paris: Éditions Sciences Humaines, 2012), 34.

3 René-Antoine Gauthier, *Somme contre les Gentils*, Introduction (Éditions universitaires: France, 1993).

immanence” between faith and reason during his career at the Sorbonne. Reacting against the Kierkegaardian conception of “blind faith,” or “leap in faith,” Tresmontant claims that theology and metaphysics encompass each other, i.e., that the condition for the possibility of the two disciplines depends on the integration of one into the other. Despite the intentional reciprocity, Tresmontant’s conception echoes a current trend in arguing rationally about matters of faith, where faith is treated at the term of the rational investigation: Because faith must be grounded in reason, reason becomes the only real intellectual activity when thinking about God. Aquinas likewise recognizes the ability of natural reason to attain divine truth, but his approach is the opposite. For him, faith is the rule of natural reason with respect to divine truth. It acts as a tutor to natural reason and elevates man’s intelligence to the comprehensive knowledge of God.

### 1. *Faith and reason in ScG I, 1–9*

We will first present an internal step-by-step analysis of the first nine chapters, which together constitute the prologue of the *ScG*. This careful reading aims to grasp how Aquinas reconciles faith and reason in his endeavor to understand the truth about God. Here Aquinas unites faith and reason in the activity of the wise man by recognizing the superiority of faithful knowledge over rational knowledge about God.

The prologue can be divided into four parts: chs. 1–2 deal with wisdom; chs. 3–6 deal with the superiority of faith over reason in matters of divine truths; chs. 7–8 deal with the specific contribution of reason to divine truths; ch. 9 announces the plan and method of the *ScG*.<sup>4</sup>

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4 These first nine chapters constitute one of the commonplaces of Aquinas’s thought on the relationship between faith and reason. See Serge-Thomas Bonino, *De la Vérité ou La science en Dieu* (Paris, Fribourg: Cerf, Éditions universitaires de Fribourg, 1996), 118.

1.1 *Wisdom*

In chapter 1, Thomas Aquinas explains the work of the wise man through an exegesis of Proverbs 8:7: “My mouth shall meditate truth, and my lips shall hate impiety.”<sup>5</sup> Aquinas starts by defining the *officium sapientis*, what Gauthier calls the “métier du sage,” the “profession of the wise.”<sup>6</sup> Aquinas combines two works of Aristotle, *Metaphysics* and the introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. *Metaphysics* defines the wise man as one who orders, who puts things in order;<sup>7</sup> as for the *Ethics*, Aquinas takes up the *architectonization* of ends to show that the wise man will not consider just any end, nor even all ends, but that he considers the *causas altissimas*, the universal end of all things: “the name of being wise simply is reserved to him alone who considers the end of the universe, which is also the beginning of the universe. Thus, according to the Philosopher, it belongs to the wise man to consider the highest causes.”<sup>8</sup> Here, note the shift from the word *end* to the word *cause*. It indicates that Aquinas is considering the final cause, which is both first and last.<sup>9</sup>

St. Thomas corroborates his position first from a more theological point of view. The ultimate end is that which is aimed at by the first intelligent mover. The good of intelligence, its end, is truth. Therefore, the ultimate end of the universe is truth, which is consistent with the teaching of Wisdom made

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5 Thomas Aquinas, ScG I, 1: “Veritatem meditabitur guttur meum, et labia mea detestabuntur impium.”

6 Gauthier, *Somme contre les Gentils*, Introduction, 143.

7 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.2, 982a18–19.

8 ScG I, 1. All quotations and translations of Thomas Aquinas are taken from the digital transcription available online at the Aquinas Institute of Wyoming (<https://aquinas.cc>). The passage on which St. Thomas comments is *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1, 1094a1–7.

9 Aquinas, *De principiis naturae*, ch. 4: “finis est causa causalitatis efficientis.” (“The final cause is the cause of the causality of the efficient cause.”)

flesh: “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37).<sup>10</sup> But not just any truth. Aquinas envisages the *veritas divina*, that is, God, who is the truth by antonomasia.<sup>11</sup> Then, from a more philosophical point of view, Aquinas takes up Aristotle’s conception of *prima philosophia* as the science of the truth which is the source of all truth. The exposition of the primary truth is the positive task of the wise man. The wise man also has a negative task, to refute the error that is contrary to the truth. Thus, his tasks are to expose the truth about God and to refute contrary errors. St. Thomas calls this the *duplex sapientis officium*, the double activity of the wise man, which is exercised in view of a single object, the ultimate end, the supreme cause, God.

To this dual positive and negative activity corresponds a double modality of faith and reason, introduced in ch. 2. In one of the rare passages where he expresses himself in the first person, albeit indirectly by making his own the words of St. Hilary, Aquinas summarizes the intention behind the writing of his work:

Therefore, assuming the office of the wise man with confidence from God’s loving kindness, although it surpasses our own powers, the purpose we have in view is, in our own weak way, to declare the truth which the Catholic faith professes, while weeding out contrary errors; for, in the words of Hilary, “I acknowledge that I owe my life’s chief occupation to God, so that every word and every

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10 ScGI, 1 : “ego in hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati.”

11 *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines antonomasia as “a figure of speech that replaces a proper name with an epithet (the Bard for Shakespeare), official address (His Holiness for a pope), or other indirect description; or one that applies a famous proper name to a person alleged to share some quality associated with it, e.g. a Casanova, a little Hitler.” Chris Baldick, “Antonomasia,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For Aquinas, to say “God” means the same thing as to say “truth.”

thought of mine may speak of him.”<sup>12</sup>

The exposition of truth is more a matter of faith, while the refutation of contrary errors is more a matter of reason, but this statement should not be understood in exclusive terms. For Aquinas, the exposition of truth goes hand in hand with showing the errors it excludes and harmonizing it with the truth established by way of demonstration. Nevertheless, divine truth is superiorly attained by faith, which gives a more perfect knowledge of God. Refutation, on the other hand, is more a matter of reason.<sup>13</sup> To understand this statement, we must identify Aquinas’s opponents when he speaks of refuting errors. He has in mind the errors of the infidels, that is, the Muslims, the pagans, the Jews and the heretics.<sup>14</sup> However, not everyone

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12 ScG I, 2: “Assumpta igitur ex divina pietate fiducia sapientis officium prosequendi, quamvis proprias vires excedat, propositum nostrae intentionis est veritatem quam fides Catholica profitetur, pro nostro modulo manifestare, errores eliminando contrarios: ut enim verbis Hilarii utar, ‘ego hoc vel praecipuum vitae meae officium debere me Deo conscius sum, ut eum omnis sermo meus et sensus loquatur.’”

13 However, the reverse in the mind of Aquinas is not true, that reason operates only through refutation in the activity of discovering the truth about God, as we shall see in the analysis of chapters 7 and 8.

14 A still common conception on the purpose of the ScG promotes the legend of a missionary work, namely that Aquinas would have written his work on the order of the Master of the Dominican Order, Raymond of Peñafort, for the conversion of the Muslims and the Jews in Spain. However, as Gauthier has shown, there is reason to believe that the missionary legend is purely fictional. From an external analysis, the legend is based on a misreading of the testimony of the life of Raymond written by Peter Marsili, the testimony of whom is without historical value. From an internal analysis, the common title *Summa contra Gentiles* is not the original (*Liber de veritate catholice fidei contra errores infidelium*), which increases the confusion. Moreover, Aquinas is largely apathetic to Muslim religion. Only a small paragraph in ScG I, 4 addresses this religion, a derisory treatment. Gauthier notes that the propagation of the missionary legend severely affected the valuation of the ScG in that “it prevented us from seeing . . . what it is, the most personal work of Saint Thomas, not provoked by an accidental and external intervention, but born of an interior call which

uses the same authorities, nor hierarchizes them the same way. It should be noted that Thomas's argumentation technique in debates requires that he use only the authorities accepted by his opponent.<sup>15</sup> Now, the common authority admitted by both the opponents and the Christian is natural reason. But Aquinas notes that natural reason is deficient in matters of truths about God, which contributes to asserting the preeminence of faith over reason in the exposition of divine truth.

### 1.2 Superiority of faith

Urged by the request to use natural reason when the time comes to refute errors, St. Thomas clarifies in chapter 3 the modality by which the truth about God is discovered. Here he presents a theory of the *duplex veritatis modus*, one which combines the contributions of faith and reason in the approach to divine truth.<sup>16</sup> There are truths about God that exceed the capacities of

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makes us penetrate to the heart of the intellectual life of the saint." For the refutation of the missionary legend, see Gauthier, *Somme contre les Gentils*. Introduction, 165–76.

15 Thomas asserts this in this very chapter. ScG I, 2: "Secundo, quia quidam eorum, ut Mahumetistae et Pagani, non conveniunt nobiscum in auctoritate alicuius Scripturae, per quam possint convinci, sicut contra Iudaeos disputare possumus per vetus testamentum, contra haereticos per novum. Hi vero neutrum recipiunt. Unde necesse est ad naturalem rationem recurrere, cui omnes assentire coguntur. Quae tamen in rebus divinis deficiens est." See also Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* IV, q. 9, a. 3, c.

16 The so-called "double truth theory" gained the attention of researchers in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The theory is normally described as maintaining two realms of truth, philosophical and theological, that can be contradictory without detriment to each other. Today's scholars doubt that medieval scholars actually defended that theory, even if it was the subject of vivid disputes. We can find a critique of the theory in Bishop Étienne Tempier's condemnations of 219 philosophical and theological propositions in 1277. Of course, this is not how Aquinas describes the *duplex modus veritatis*. A complete account of the prologue of the ScG would certainly have to consider the influence of those lively discussions on Aquinas's own theory. However, we are approaching the prologue from a systematical rather than historical perspective. For the double

reason (e.g., God is both triune and one), and there are truths that reason can demonstratively reach in its own right (e.g., God exists, God is one). What is most surprising for the modern reader is that Thomas is particularly concerned in chs. 3–6 to show the superiority of the knowledge of divine truth based on faith over that based on reason. In ch. 3, he uses three arguments to show “That certain divine truths wholly surpass the capability of human reason.”<sup>17</sup> The three arguments highlight the disproportion between finite human intelligence and God, infinite essence. They prevent a counterargument on the part of the infidel and a trap for the Christian. For the infidel, it guards against the argument that what cannot be discovered about God through the investigation of reason must be rejected as false. For the Christian, St. Thomas’s response allows him to overcome the limitation induced by the technique of argumentation commonly used in debates which would have mistakenly confined the discussion and exposition of divine truth only to that which the human intellect can demonstrate.

Chapter 4 is famous for the doctrine of the *praeambula fidei*, those articles of faith that are also demonstrable by reason.<sup>18</sup> For Aquinas, it is appropriate that what is attainable by reason about God should also be proposed to men as objects of faith, and this for three reasons that are summarized in the universal scope of salvation:

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truth theory, see Luca Bianchi, *Pour une histoire de la “double vérité”* (Paris: Vrin, 2008); Jean-Michel Counet, “Vérité” in *Dictionnaire du Moyen-Âge* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2002); David Piché, *La condamnation Parisienne de 1277. Texte latin, traduction, introduction et commentaire*, coll. Sic et Non (Paris: J.Vrin, 1999).

17 ScG I, 3: “Quod autem sint aliqua intelligibilium divinorum quae humanae rationis penitus excedant ingenium.”

18 Aquinas does not use the expression *praeambula fidei* in this passage. In fact, he rarely employs it. See *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3. In *STh* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1, and II-II, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2, he uses the expression *praeambula ad articulos [fidei]*.

Therefore, the divine mercy provides in a salutary manner that even what [things] reason is able to investigate in regards to divine truth are held by faith, so that all may share in the knowledge of God easily, and without doubt and error.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, the truths about God attainable by natural reason are the work of only a few, considering, on the one hand, the condition of man, either the incapacity of many or the laziness of others and, on the other hand, the condition of the end aimed at, that is, a knowledge that is difficult and long to acquire.

Chapter 5 completes the preceding chapter. In it, Aquinas maintains that it is appropriate that truths inaccessible to reason be proposed to men as objects of faith. This is because of the superiority of the knowledge of God that comes from faith, which is taken from the perfection it produces in man: “although human reason is unable to fully grasp things above reason, it nevertheless acquires much perfection if at least it holds things, in any way whatever, by faith.”<sup>20</sup> The first is because of the final good that man desires and that exceeds what the present world can give him, and the least knowledge of the noblest realities perfects the soul immeasurably; secondly, because of the divine substance whose knowledge exceeds the capacity of reason; finally, because faith cures the pride of the intellect. The man who exercises his reason risks the presumption of judging as true only what he can evaluate from his natural capacity. Presumption is the *mater erroris*, the root of error, for Aquinas. The true attitude of the seeker is *modestia*, humility. Faith necessarily places the

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19 ScG I, 4: “Salubriter ergo divina providit clementia ut ea etiam quae ratio investigare potest, fide tenenda praeciperet: ut sic omnes de facili possent divinae cognitionis participes esse et absque dubitatione et errore.” Here, we have adapted the translation.

20 ScG I, 5: “Et ideo, quamvis ea quae supra rationem sunt ratio humana plene capere non possit, tamen multum sibi perfectionis acquiritur si saltem ea qualitercumque teneat fide.”

wise man under the free initiative of a God who reveals.

In chapter 6, Aquinas makes the case that even though faith surpasses reason, it does not mean that the believer assents frivolously. At this point, a modern reader might expect to see the truths of faith that are founded in reason, thanks to the proofs of the existence of God, for example, but he would be disappointed. This is not surprising, since Aquinas has just argued in ch. 4 for a universally attainable knowledge of God. Only an elite reaches the proofs of reason, whereas the proofs of faith are available to a multitude. But most of all, knowledge by faith is credible primarily on the authority of divine Wisdom, who has substantiated revelation with various miracles. The greatest argument for the truth of the faith, for Aquinas, is the assent of the hearts and minds of Christians to invisible goods, in defiance of the appeal of visible goods. His position is summed up in Hebrews 2:3–4, which he himself quotes:

This particular kind of proof is alluded to in Hebrews 2:3–4, which, namely the salvation of mankind, having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed with us by them who heard him, God also bearing witness by signs and wonders, and diverse distributions of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

### *1.3 Counterbalancing the relationship between faith and reason*

Chapters 3–6 have highlighted the superiority of the divine truth reached by faith over that reached by reason. One is left with the impression that Aquinas devalues the contribution of reason in this matter. Chs. 7–8 counterbalance the picture. On the one

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<sup>21</sup> ScG I, 6: “Huius quidem confirmationis modus tangitur Hebr. 2:3 ‘quae,’ scilicet humana salus, ‘cum initium accepisset enarrari per dominum, ab eis qui audierunt in nos confirmata est, contestante Deo signis et portentis et variis spiritus sancti distributionibus.’”

hand, ch. 7 stands at the level of the negative task. Since faith is not opposed to the innate principles of natural reason,<sup>22</sup> any argument against it will *de facto* only be probable or sophistical. There will then be room for refutation.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, ch. 8 is situated in the positive activity of the wise, the exposition of divine truth. If reason is not opposed to faith, it is able to provide plausible arguments (*verisimilitudines*) which will enlighten faith without having any demonstrative value. Indeed, reason proceeds from the natural world, which contains a trace of God since the effect always keeps a mark of its cause. In both cases, reason has a role to play in the truth about God. This is what Aquinas affirms in ch. 9:

Therefore, in order to deduce the truth according to the first modality [i.e., reason], we must proceed with demonstrative arguments by which we can convince our adversaries. But since there are no such arguments in support of the second kind of truth [i.e., faith], our intention must be not to convince our opponent by our arguments, but to solve the arguments that he brings against the truth, because, as shown above (ch. 7), natural reason cannot be opposed to the truth of faith. This particular

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22 What is an innate principle? Let us quote the author himself, ScG I, 10: “Illa enim per se esse nota dicuntur quae statim notis terminis cognoscuntur: sicut, cognito quid est totum et quid est pars, statim cognoscitur quod omne totum est maius sua parte.” (“Those things are said to be self-evident which are known as soon as the terms are known; thus, as soon as it is known what is a whole, and what is a part, it is known that the whole is greater than its part.”)

23 ScG I, 7: “Ex quo evidenter colligitur, quaecumque argumenta contra fidei documenta ponantur, haec ex principiis primis naturae inditis per se notis non recte procedere. Unde nec demonstrationis vim habent, sed vel sunt rationes probabiles vel sophisticae. Et sic ad ea solvenda locus relinquitur.” (“From this we may evidently conclude that whatever arguments are alleged against the teachings of faith, they do not rightly proceed from the first self-evident principles instilled by nature. Hence they lack the force of demonstration, and are either probable or sophistical arguments, and consequently it is possible to solve them.”)

way of convincing an opponent against such truth is taken from the authority of Scripture confirmed with miracles, since we do not believe what is above human reason unless God has revealed it. In support, however, of this kind of truth, certain probable arguments must be adduced for the practice and help of the faithful, but not for the conviction of our opponents, because the very insufficiency of these arguments would rather confirm them in their error if they thought that we assented to the truth of faith on account of such weak reasonings.<sup>24</sup>

In matters of divine truth, reason has a demonstrative value of its own, albeit limited. It is subordinate to faith, which encompasses, guides, and perfects it. Its usefulness in the project of Aquinas lies especially in supporting faith by refuting objections and illuminating the truths of the second modality. Faith thus acts towards reason in the manner of a tutor who guides the growth of reflection on God. It affirms reason in its convictions and sharpens its demonstration. It is like a notebook of answers to mathematical exercises. To know the answer leads to the right reasoning.<sup>25</sup> The plan and the method of the ScG are based on

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24 ScG I, 9: "Ad primae igitur veritatis manifestationem per rationes demonstrativas, quibus adversarius convinci possit, procedendum est. Sed quia tales rationes ad secundam veritatem haberi non possunt, non debet esse ad hoc intentio ut adversarius rationibus vincatur: sed ut eius rationes, quas contra veritatem habet, solvantur; cum veritati fidei ratio naturalis contraria esse non possit, ut ostensum est. Singularis vero modus convincendi adversarium contra huiusmodi veritatem est ex auctoritate Scripturae divinitus confirmata miraculis: quae enim supra rationem humanam sunt, non credimus nisi Deo revelante. Sunt tamen ad huiusmodi veritatem manifestandam rationes aliquae verisimiles inducendae, ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium, non autem ad adversarios convincendos: quia ipsa rationum insufficientia eos magis in suo errore confirmaret, dum aestimarent nos propter tam debiles rationes veritati fidei consentire." Here, we have adapted the translation.

25 Étienne Gilson used the image of the mountain guide. See Gilson, *Le thomisme: Introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (J. Vrin: Paris, 1947), 33.

this relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Some authors distinguish the plan of the ScG according to whether Books I to III deal with a “philosophical” or “rational” subject, while Book IV would be “theological,” relying on faith and revelation. This view seems confirmed by the plan Aquinas announces in ch. 9.<sup>27</sup> However, we need to qualify this view, as it risks introducing an excessive division between the approach by reason and the approach by faith. It also risks implying that Aquinas balances faith and reason on an equal footing, which is not at all the case, as has already been shown.

We have three authors in mind who display that kind of division between faith and reason in the ScG: Mortimer J. Adler,

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26 ScG I, 9: “Modo ergo proposito procedere intendentes, primum nitentur ad manifestationem illius veritatis quam fides profitetur et ratio investigat, inducentes rationes demonstrativas et probabiles, quarum quasdam ex libris philosophorum et sanctorum collegimus per quas veritas confirmetur et adversarius convincatur. Deinde, ut a manifestioribus ad minus manifesta fiat processus, ad illius veritatis manifestationem procedemus quae rationem excedit, solventes rationes adversariorum et rationibus probabilibus et auctoritatibus, quantum Deus dederit, veritatem fidei declarantes.” (“With the intention, then, of proceeding in the manner laid down, we shall first endeavor to declare that truth which is the object of faith’s confession and of reason’s researches, by adducing arguments both demonstrative and probable, some of which we have gathered from the writings of the philosophers and of holy men, so as to thereby confirm the truth and convince our opponents. After this, so as to proceed from the more to the less manifest, we shall, with God’s help, proceed to declare that truth which surpasses reason by refuting the arguments of our opponents, and by setting forth the truth of faith by means of probable arguments and authority.”)

27 Ibid.: “Intendentibus igitur nobis per viam rationis prosequi ea quae de Deo ratio humana investigare potest, primo, occurrit consideratio de his quae Deo secundum seipsum conveniunt; secundo, vero, de processu creaturarum ab ipso; tertio, autem, de ordine creaturarum in ipsum sicut in finem.” (“Seeing, then, that we intend by the way of reason to pursue those things about God which human reason is able to investigate, the first object that offers itself to our consideration consists in those things which pertain to God in himself; the second (Bk. II) will be the procession of creatures from him; and the third (Bk. III) the relation of creatures to him as their end.”)

Norman Kretzmann, and Brian Davies.

In writing his book *St. Thomas and the Gentiles*, Adler's goal was to address the gentiles of his day, those who reject the perennial truth of which Aquinas's thought is the most excellent model. The ScG inspired Adler to reach these gentiles. In line with Aquinas, he distinguishes among the opponents of the Christian faith the heretical and schismatic Christians, who share certain authorities, the Jews, who recognize only the Old Testament, and finally, the Moors, who share only the authority of human reason. Considering only the latter, Adler notes,

The project which St. Thomas undertook in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* was to argue for the truths of the Christian religion without at any point relying upon faith or appealing to the dogmas of the Church. As you know, this was accomplished by using philosophical truth as a common ground from which to proceed.<sup>28</sup>

Adler's view of the ScG leads him to conclude that philosophy is sufficient for the exposition of truth and debate. For Adler, the ScG is conditioned by a discussion with unbelievers. Therefore, faith must be somehow paused to expound the truth to this audience adequately.

Brian Davies offered a presentation and a commentary of the ScG.<sup>29</sup> In describing the distinction between the ScG I-III and IV, he builds on Norman Kretzmann's distinction in natural theology between "theology from the top down" and "theology from the bottom up":

By "theology from the top down" Kretzmann means "reflecting on God in the light of divine revelation." By

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<sup>28</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, *Saint Thomas and the Gentiles* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1938), 23.

<sup>29</sup> Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016).

“theology from the bottom up” he means “reflecting on God without recourse to revelation.” And, although Aquinas is clearly writing as a Christian from the start of ScG, he might, I think, have been willing to accept Kretzmann’s distinction. I suspect that he might have been happy to describe ScG 1–3 as “theology from the bottom up” and ScG 4 as “theology from the top down.” Be that as it may, however, ScG 1–3 certainly amounts to a long treatise on natural theology, albeit that it comes from someone who clearly believes in God and is happy to cite biblical texts and various Christian authorities as he continues about his business.<sup>30</sup>

In the work Davies quotes to explain how he conceives of the distinction between ScG I–III and IV, we see that Kretzmann has long been interested in ScG in the broader context of natural theology and metaphysics, resulting in two major studies, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I*, and *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II*.<sup>31</sup> For Kretzmann, the first three books of the ScG are “the most fully accomplished and most promising natural theology”<sup>32</sup> he knows of. At the beginning of the second volume, he summarizes his position on natural theology and the relationship between reason and revelation in the four books of the ScG.<sup>33</sup> He uses and applies William Alston’s definition of natural theology to Aquinas’s project in the ScG:

Whatever may be said of natural theology generally,

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30 Ibid., 16.

31 Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

32 Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 2.

33 Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 2–8.

Aquinas's version of it certainly is, as Alston puts it, "the enterprise of providing support for religious beliefs by starting from premises that neither are nor presuppose any religious beliefs."<sup>34</sup>

Kretzmann recognizes that Aquinas uses the resources of revelation in the first three books of the *ScG*. He explains that the contribution of the Bible in Aquinas's natural theology, which we observe in many endings of chapters of the *ScG*, does not support the results of natural theology by removing doubts on the conclusion. The Scriptures are a guide in choosing what propositions he will argue for by means of reason:

So Aquinas needs Scripture in these circumstances to provide a chart to guide his choice of propositions to argue for, as well as a list of specifications that can be consulted to see, first, that it is indeed one and the same "truth that faith professes and reason investigates" (I.9.55) and, second, "how the demonstrative truth is in harmony with the faith of the Christian religion" (I.2.12).<sup>35</sup>

But for Kretzmann, revelation in the first three books of the *ScG* is somewhat occasional, which aligns with his conception of natural theology as only employing reason's capacity in arguing about God.<sup>36</sup>

The general idea that Aquinas does not rely on faith at

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<sup>34</sup> William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 289 (quoted in Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 7).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> We can also quote from his first volume: "This metaphysics of theism teaches theism but nevertheless counts as philosophical, because the starting points and ultimate justifications of its arguments are all accessible and because it never uses revealed propositions as more first phase of a systematic presentation of the rest of philosophy, beginning than occasional guides to its agenda." Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 23.

any point in the ScG, as Adler asserts, lacks too much nuance to be accepted as it stands. Moreover, Adler's account depends mainly on the missionary legend, whose inaccuracies Gauthier has clearly shown.<sup>37</sup>

The position of Davies, and especially that of Kretzmann, on whom he depends, is not lacking in substantial arguments in its defense. Aquinas, who is explicit on this point in ScG I, 9, does divide his work roughly in such a way that the first three books develop the truths about God that are attainable by reason, and the fourth those that are revealed in faith. But the whole problem lies in determining the contribution of faith and revelation in the first three books. Are they only incidental?

Certainly, the earlier quotation from Davies follows this line. Digging deeper into Kretzmann, it becomes clear that revelation serves, at best, an occasional function in ScG I–III. However, faith is much more than mere decoration in these books. First, although Davies's and Kretzmann's viewpoint corresponds to the plan of the ScG, it needs to harmonize with its method. Second, the overarching principle of the four books of the ScG is primarily theological.

First, when we read ScG I, 9, the chapter indicates both the *ordo* of the work, its plan, and its *modus procedendi*, its method. The plan is the general division of the work, whereas the method is applicable in each individual question and chapter. The allegedly sharp division between Books I–III as philosophical and Book IV as theological is a claim about the *ordo* of the work. Now, Aquinas's method in the first three books aims at showing the truths about God that are intricately conjoined between faith and reason by means of arguments both demonstrative and probable, using philosophical and theological authorities.<sup>38</sup>

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37 See note 14.

38 On a side note, let us remember that Aquinas counts the teaching of the saints alongside the Bible in the authorities in matter of faith. Kretzmann

Here, faith is by no means left on standby. Certainly, the exposition will use demonstrative arguments and the authority of philosophers, but also probable arguments and the authority of saints. This is because Aquinas's goal in these three first books is not to expose a natural theology solely dependent on philosophical resources. He wants to show concatenated truths that are proved by reason and professed by faith. It is significant to notice in reading the first three books of the *ScG* that St. Thomas constantly confirms the truth demonstrated in each chapter by the authority of the saints and Holy Scripture. In the first book alone, if we exclude the first nine chapters, 55 chapters out of 93 confirm their conclusions with the theological authorities.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the Scriptures are the most quoted work in the whole *ScG*, 602 times, as opposed to 432 times for Aristotle.<sup>40</sup> This way of proceeding does not take faith as mere decoration.

Second, although the first three books deal with truths that are attainable by reason, Aquinas views them from a theological point of view. In ch. 4 of Book II, he explains that the order followed in the *ScG* is proper to theology, which begins with God considered in himself and moves towards the creatures that proceed from him. Philosophy, on the other hand, follows the opposite path, from creatures to God. In the prologue of Book IV, he calls these two orders the *via ascensus* for philosophy and the *via descensus* for theology, specifying that he will proceed in Book IV, in the same way as in Books I to III, i.e., following the

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mentions only the Scriptures.

39 The first book of the *ScG* has 102 chapters. Saint Thomas did not confirm his demonstrations in chapters 10–11, 16–19, 21, 24–25, 32–36, 46, 48, 51–53, 62–64, 73–74, 76–77, 79–81, 83–86, 88, 90, and 101–102. The numbers we provide are only an overview of raw statistics. It would be interesting to distinguish between the chapters using the Scriptures and the saints as authorities. Furthermore, why does Aquinas not confirm his demonstrations with theological authorities in 38 chapters?

40 Gauthier, *La Somme contre les gentils*, Introduction, 180.

*via descensus*.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the plan announced in ScG I, 9 must be integrated into this theologically overarching principle.

Maybe the revealed divine truth gives the chart for Thomas's work, as Kretzmann claims. But by providing the organizing principle, it shows the opposite of his argument: faith is integrative in Aquinas's natural theology. What is important to grasp in the ScG is that Aquinas conceives the truth he attempts to demonstrate as attainable both by reason and faith. Why would he leave aside a more perfect and secure knowledge of what he aims to understand? The second clause of Alston's definition of natural theology on which Kretzmann builds his commentary of the ScG—i.e., that natural theology does not start from "premises that neither are nor presuppose any religious beliefs"—is inapplicable in the ScG, both considering that the arguments more often join faith and reason and that the overarching principle originates from a theological standpoint. Moreover, it appears that the recourse to Alston's definition is methodologically unsound, as Kretzmann projects it into the ScG. The best way to mitigate this risk is to delve into the text to extract Aquinas's own approach and principles to the question of divine truth.

The very goal of the ScG is to expound a conjoined divine truth, and thus to excessively stress the division of this work as reason (I–III) and faith (IV) seems to suggest that, for Aquinas, faith is on hold when he demonstrates a truth by reason. Rather,

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41 To answer Brian Davies (note 30), the application of Kretzmann's distinction on the division between the four books of the ScG seems unfit. First, the division of the ScG is not one about what is revealed and what is not. It is only about revelation, whether pertaining to divine truth that is conjoined with natural reason's capacity (Bks. I–III) or pertaining to divine truth that exceeds natural reason (Bk. IV). Secondly, the first three books surely do not follow a "bottom up" theology, as is made evident not only from the prologue of Book IV, but from ScG II, 4. If we should make use of Kretzmann's distinction, only the "theology from top down" seems applicable in the mind of Aquinas to describe the ScG's plan.

we will significantly benefit from Thomas if we recognize the unity between the two modes of knowing God and the intricacy of their relationship in intellectual and sapiential activity.

Thomas Aquinas thus unites faith and reason in the double activity of the wise man who aims at a single object: God. The *duplex sapientis officium* is exercised positively insofar as it exposes the divine truth, and negatively insofar as it refutes contrary errors. Divine truth requires a double approach: God is discovered by faith and by reason. The wise man will therefore use both modes of discovery in the exposition and refutation he undertakes concerning the ultimate cause. However, chs. 3–6 show that the two approaches are not equivalent. Faith is superior to reason in its exposition of God. Reason, in divine matters, is limited and deficient (ch. 3). It is subject to error and doubt. It is restricted to an elite, whereas the knowledge of God is universal and salutary (ch. 4). Reason is imperfect in comparison with faith (ch. 5).<sup>42</sup> Man's assent to faith is based on the authority of God himself and on grounds of credibility that all can confirm (ch. 6). Does this mean that Aquinas completely devalues the role of reason in regard to divine truth? Chapters 7 and 8 clarify the picture. Faith is not opposed to the innate principles of reason. Therefore, in principle it is assured in its task of refutation (ch. 7). Reason is also useful to the Christian since it allows him to clarify the truths of faith (ch. 8). Finally, Aquinas affirms the capacity of reason to arrive by demonstrative means at the knowledge of God. But this enterprise will be guided and confirmed by the truth of faith. All puny human intelligences can thereby arrive at such a high truth.

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42 Although we are here trying to stay focused on Aquinas's text, let us note that when we consider the superiority and perfection of faith over reason, we must distinguish between the object and the mode of knowledge. Faith is superior because it attains God more fully. However, considering the mode of knowledge, faith is between opinion and reason. We will return to this below.

## 2. *Claude Tresmontant on Faith and Reason*

We now turn our attention to the contribution of Claude Tresmontant to the conception of the relationship between faith and reason. Tresmontant articulated the thesis of “reciprocal immanence” between faith and reason. The section is divided into three parts: 1) a brief presentation of Tresmontant’s life and work; 2) an analysis of his conception of faith and reason; 3) a critique of his vision.

### 2.1 *Presentation of Tresmontant*

Claude Tresmontant<sup>43</sup> (1925–1997) was a French Catholic philosopher and theologian of the twentieth century who accumulated several skills: historian of philosophy, philologist, Hellenist, Hebraist, exegete, and much more. Coming from an atheist family in Paris, he converted and was baptized Catholic at the age of eighteen. He defended his doctoral thesis in philosophy in 1961 under the direction of Paul Ricoeur and became a *maître de conférences* in medieval philosophy at the Sorbonne. As a prolific author, he published no less than forty books and countless reviews and articles. He was an assiduous reader of the Bible, ancient authors, and the great scholastics. He was also influenced by three of his contemporaries: Henri Bergson, Maurice Blondel, and Teilhard de Chardin.

Tresmontant’s thought attracts both by its clarity and by the author’s fidelity to his main ideas, tirelessly affirmed throughout forty-five years of publication: he rejects Kantian nominalist epistemology in favor of realism in continuity with Aristotle, Aquinas, and modern experimental science; he

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43 To date, there is no biography of Tresmontant. We refer to the notice written by his son on the website dedicated to him: Emmanuel Tresmontant, “Claude Tresmontant – Biographie,” <https://www.claudetresmontant.com/biographie>.

supports a metaphysics proper to Christianity stemming from an originality proper to the Hebrew people, one that stands in opposition to monism, pantheism, and atheism, God being above all supremely transcendent; he argues for a philosophical analysis of biblical revelation, particularly that received by the Hebrew prophets; and in a more “heterodox” thesis, he claims that Hebrew is the original composition language of the Gospels that were later translated into Greek.

### 2.2 *Faith and reason in Tresmontant*

Throughout his works Tresmontant returned to the difficulty and necessity of reconciling faith and reason in Christianity.<sup>44</sup> His thought was profoundly consistent during his career, his last work synthesizing his view with the thesis of “reciprocal immanence,” a thoughtful conception of the relationship between reason and faith that is in line with contemporary issues. Moreover, it is expressed in a language that is more accessible to a contemporary reader than that of Thomas Aquinas. On the other hand, it is not impervious to fundamental criticism.

In 1965, Tresmontant published the article “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui” (“Tasks of Christian thought today”),<sup>45</sup> following this up in 1969 with *Le problème de la révélation*.<sup>46</sup> For Tresmontant at that time, Christianity extended to two main tasks, the advancement of justice and the promotion of truth. His own labor falls into the second category, the most urgent, in his opinion, because of its recent desertion.

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44 I have chosen three of them, two at the beginning of his career, published in the mid-1960s, and one at the end of his career, published in 1996. The three works are only available in original French. In this paper, all the translations are mine.

45 Tresmontant, “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,” *Esprit*, 33.7–8 (1965): 94–120. His son refers to this article as a kind of “combat manifesto.” See note 32 for reference.

46 Tresmontant, *Le problème de la révélation* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

To understand the relationship between faith and reason in Tresmontant, it is necessary to understand where his reaction stems from. It springs first from the concern of today's men and women, who are more and more trained in the rigor of modern science. They ask for the reasons for a faith that has become foreign to them. In the second place, Tresmontant is reacting against the fideism Christians often offer to this question.

### 2.2.1 *The question asked of Christianity*

For Tresmontant, everything begins with this question: *Is what Christianity professes true?* He writes: "For the only legitimate, valid, fundamental question for the Christian is to know whether or not Christianity is the *truth*."<sup>47</sup> Both Christians and non-Christians are entitled to ask this question. He writes:

Outsiders, who do not have faith, are entitled to ask Christians: "What is this faith, *on what is it based, how does reason justify it*, how do you understand it, and how do you integrate it into your rational knowledge of the world? Why do you have it and not us?"<sup>48</sup>

Human reason is Tresmontant's starting point for answering this question. He writes:

discussion with unbelievers can only take place, it is obvious, on the ground that is theirs, or rather on the ground that is common to all men: the real, the common experience, the world explored by human reason.<sup>49</sup>

For Tresmontant, this question is legitimate and symptomatic of an intelligence increasingly trained by the rigor of modern science, which demands an account of advanced truths. He writes:

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47 "Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd'hui," 107 (italics in original).

48 *Le problème de la révélation*, 27 (italics in original).

49 "Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd'hui," 108.

The development of the positive sciences has brought—and this is excellent—a new dimension to human intelligence, a more rigorous and purer sense, more respectful of reality as well, of what is truth, of what are the requirements of logic, the rigor of reason. Christianity today must confront itself with this stronger demand for rigor and rationality.<sup>50</sup>

Tresmontant mentions the distortion between the language of the Christian faith and the language of modern men. The scientific culture has accustomed us to perceive as abnormal the vocabulary of the Christian faith (trinity, incarnation, real presence, faith, etc.). It legitimizes the question since new generations need to reappropriate the fundamentals of Christianity. The meaning of words changes through time and space, so should the vocabulary of faith be changed? No, answers Tresmontant. It must be explained and understood. Historical analysis is essential for this task. How can we understand *hemounah*, *pistis*, *fides*, if we do not transpose ourselves in the perspective of the Hebrews, of Jesus, of the Greeks, of the Latins?<sup>51</sup>

In addition to legitimizing the question about the requirements of the subject and the vocabulary, ultimately Tresmontant says that the very nature of reason demands that the question be asked. For Tresmontant, reason seeks to understand everything. It does not accept restriction in its capacity to seek, to question, to investigate.<sup>52</sup>

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50 Ibid., 105.

51 Ibid., 110: “it will be necessary to rethink the great treatises of Dogmatics. To rethink, that is to say, to *understand*, starting from the sources, what our Fathers wanted to say in faith, and to retell it today, in today’s language, in such a way that it is *thinkable* for our contemporaries.”

52 Ibid., 106: “Philosophy, by essence, wants to understand everything, to penetrate everything. Human reason does not admit that one imposes limits, walls to it. If there is a wall, it wants to know what happens on the other side. It is normal, it is legitimate.”

Secondly, Tresmontant reacts against the fideism of the commonplace Christian response. Every question requires an answer. But Tresmontant sees a major problem in the one often proposed by Christians, one that assumes a death-dealing fideism, which he defines as a schism between faith and reason:

One of the main diseases of Christianity today is fideism, that is, a false conception of faith, according to which intelligence and knowledge are foreign to faith: a schism between faith and knowledge, faith and intelligence, faith and reason.<sup>53</sup>

This schism is the result of several thinkers: Plato, Ockham, Luther, Descartes, Kant, to name a few.<sup>54</sup> Plato placed *pistis* just above opinion, but inferior to *noêsis* and *dianoia*, the intuitive and the discursive knowledge. Luther deprives human nature of its rational capacity. Reason is associated with intelligence, while faith is associated with obscure things and the will, *fides quaecumque est de obscuris, non ingenii actio est, sed voluntatis*, as Descartes wrote.<sup>55</sup> In the end, duplicity characterizes faith and reason, which leads to an irreducible division between the two. For Tresmontant, this schism corresponds to the heresy of Nestorius. It prevents any communication between faith and reason in the same way that Nestorianism prevents the communication of idioms by postulating two natures and two persons in Christ. It prevents any dialogue between the believer and the unbeliever. It requires a leap but does not build bridges.

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53 Ibid., 97.

54 *Le problème de la révélation*, 27–28; “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,” 102–103.

55 René Descartes, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (quoted in Claude Tresmontant, “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,” 102): “Faith, which bears on obscure things, is not an act of the intelligence, but of the will.”

2.2.2 *Tresmontant's answer*

It is precisely this “qualitative leap into the absurd,” that Tresmontant reads in Kierkegaard, against which he reacts.<sup>56</sup> His answer to the question of whether Christianity is true consists, first of all, in asserting the proper contribution of reason regarding his definition of faith. He formulates his definition using orthodox Catholic doctrine, which he finds in the Bible and the First Vatican Council. From the Bible, he draws the insight that faith designates the act of adherence of the intelligence to the signs that God gives to the people of Israel, to the cripples of the Gospel, that it is indeed God who acts favorably. It is not so much a question of signs that show that he exists, but that the brilliant divine action aims at making man understand that God leads him to his salutary goal. From Vatican I, he depends above all on the pre-conciliar teaching of Cardinal Victor Augustin Isidore Dechamps, one of the contributors to the constitution *Dei filius*. It is worth quoting directly from the cardinal, who is a major source of Tresmontant's definition:

It is reason . . . that calls for Revelation, and it is to reason that Revelation is addressed. It is to reason that God speaks, it is to reason that he asks for faith, and he asks for it only after having *made it see* that it is indeed he who speaks. Reason, which asks for God's testimony about future realities, therefore adheres to this testimony with the supernatural certainty of faith, only after having seen with its own eyes, that is to say, verified by its own light, and with the natural certainty which is proper to it, the *divine fact of Revelation*. Now, God does not manifest himself less clearly to reason in the great fact of Revelation than in the great fact of nature.<sup>57</sup>

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56 “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,” 99.

57 Cardinal Dechamps, *L'infailibilité et le Concile général*, in Tresmontant, *Le problème de la révélation*, 29, and “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,”

On this basis, Tresmontant derives both his definition of faith and his intellectual program. He defines faith as “the *assent of the intelligence to the truth of God, manifested by intelligible and tangible signs.*”<sup>58</sup> Or elsewhere, “Faith is the assent of *the intelligence to the discerned truth.*”<sup>59</sup> Those quotes allow us to grasp the work of intelligence in discerning the signs of God. It proceeds inductively, starting from nature and working up to the cause. He writes:

[Faith] is an act of human intelligence, its highest act, the act by which the intelligence rises from the world, from the empirical signs given in the world to the One who is the principle and giver of these signs.<sup>60</sup>

This act is free and supernatural as well. It is not violently imposed but rather is informed by the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit is not to be a substitute, but an auxiliary of intelligence. For it is always a human reason that discerns and sees, that is free.

Reason brings a response to the truth of faith since it serves as an examiner of what is professed. This work is carried out in two stages in Tresmontant. This program he takes from Cardinal Dechamps. First, it is necessary to demonstrate the *fact* of the existence of God. Then, it is necessary to demonstrate the *fact of revelation.*<sup>61</sup> First, demonstrate that God exists and come to some conclusions about his attributes, such as that he is an

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100–101. Same quotation and italics in both texts.

58 “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,” 100 (italics in original).

59 *Le problème de la révélation*, 30 (italics in original).

60 “Tâches de la pensée chrétienne aujourd’hui,” 101.

61 *Le problème de la révélation*, 30: “But in our unbelieving century, a previous work is necessary, which deals with the question of whether, first, there is a Being who can or must be called God. And, secondly, whether this Being has really spoken to man, in Israel, or whether it is a delusion.” This program corresponds to two of his works, *Comment se pose aujourd’hui le problème de l’existence de Dieu* (Paris: Seuil, 1965) and *Le problème de la révélation* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

intelligent being, and personal, and therefore capable of communicating himself. Then, from these conclusions, to demonstrate that God has indeed communicated himself in the prophets of Israel up to Christ. The second step is original in Tresmontant. Revelation is conceived as a philosophically apprehensible *fact* before being a supernatural content. Here, to demonstrate God or his revelation is spoken of univocally in Tresmontant, in the sense that for both it is, properly speaking, the same process of human reason.<sup>62</sup>

### 2.2.3 Reciprocal Immanence

At the end of his life, in his book *L'activité métaphysique de l'intelligence et la théologie* (*The Metaphysical Activity of the Intelligence and Theology*),<sup>63</sup> Tresmontant synthesized his views, for the first time explicitly forging the thesis of “reciprocal immanence” between metaphysics and theology, between reason and faith. The thesis claims that metaphysics is impossible without theology and that theology is impossible without metaphysics. By “metaphysics,” Tresmontant means a rigorous analysis of reality and the natural world. In the same manner, he means by “theology” the analysis of the new information contained within the Hebrew people.<sup>64</sup>

Proving God’s existence acts similarly to proving God’s revelation. Theology is only possible after a metaphysical examination of revelation proves the fact of God’s communication with the world. This is exactly what the French philosopher affirms in the book’s first sentences:

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Metaphysical analysis proceeds from objective

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62 In Aquinas’s approach, unlike Tresmontant’s, revelation is properly God’s gift and theology builds on the principles God mercifully revealed.

63 Tresmontant, *L'activité métaphysique de l'intelligence et la théologie* (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 1996).

64 *Ibid.*, 56–57.

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experience, nature and human history, the Universe, nature and Man—as well as the Hebrew people who are part of objective reality. Metaphysical analysis deals with everything we know in and through experience. Theology proceeds from Revelation, once the metaphysical analysis has established the fact or reality of Revelation, *divinae revelationis factum*.<sup>65</sup>

What characterizes the relationship between faith and reason for Tresmontant is the need to verify the content of revelation through rational examination in order to thereby make faith intelligible. By this sort of verification, Tresmontant reacts against a common view that sees Christianity only as a matter of belief. However, all beliefs are unverifiable; they are not based on the certainty of truth. For Tresmontant, there is only experimental verification. Moreover, for him, metaphysics is based on an experimental approach. One can establish divine revelation, however, on solid experimental grounds since it is communicated in the history of the Hebrew people:

All the history of the Hebrew people since their origin is an experimental verification of the existence of God by his action. The contempt for the Holy Hebrew Library by the *goyim* since Marcion and Valentinus has meant that this experimentation has escaped many philosophers thereafter. It is the entire Hebrew people who are proof of the existence of God. The knowledge of God through the Universe, through the Creation, is legitimate and necessary. But it continues through this new creation which is the Hebrew people.<sup>66</sup>

This analysis of revelation is justified in Tresmontant's eyes because it is the human intelligence that receives revelation,

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65 *Ibid.*, 9.

66 *Ibid.*, 37.

and thus the treatment of divine communication must be done according to sound principles of human reason. He writes:

If man had received Revelation purely passively, it would not have been received at all. . . . For Revelation to be received and thus assimilated, there must be on the part of the man who receives it an activity of the intelligence capable of assimilating the new information communicated to him.<sup>67</sup>

In his book, Tresmontant reacts against modern philosophy and positivism, which have entirely evacuated metaphysics and revelation from the Hebrew people. His argument shows that suppressing one or the other suppresses the Christian truth. The Bible and the prophets, and more broadly Hebrew monotheism, teach one particular kind of metaphysics; they transmit identifiable ideas about the cosmos and the origin of the universe, for instance, in Genesis 1:1, Deuteronomy 5:6, or Romans 1:21:

Hebrew monotheism for forty centuries has obviously been a complete and integral metaphysics: an ontology, a cosmology, an anthropology, a philosophy of history, a theory of causality and finality, and even a theory of knowledge. In order to better fight and, if possible, annihilate this metaphysics which they do not appreciate, [some modern philosophers] have found a very efficient method. They have declared that there is no Hebrew metaphysics. . . . Hebrew monotheism is relegated to the domain of what they call, since Spinoza, religion.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, for Tresmontant, properly metaphysical propositions are not part of revelation:

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67 *Ibid.*, 11.

68 *Ibid.*, 28–29.

When theology maintains against all odds the absolute simplicity of God and the fact that God is absolutely immutable, that he does not change, neither through Creation nor through the union of created Man [i.e., Incarnation], Catholic theologians start from a metaphysical certainty because Revelation says nothing on this topic.<sup>69</sup>

Tresmontant considers the modern theory of information to be best suited to describe divine revelation. Creation, like revelation, is a continuous communication of information that human intelligence assimilates. The universe's information is contained in physical or biological matter, such as genetics. What is remarkable about revelation, according to Tresmontant, is that it acts as a new source of information transmitted by prophetic means. He summarizes his theory as follows:

The modern language of information is the most adapted to understand and explain, to make intelligible the Christian theology, since Creation is carried out by communication of information; Hebrew prophetism is a communication of creative information from the radical origin of information, by the intermediary of the *nabi*, the prophet; the *ben adam* is the one who communicates the ultimate creative information that is necessary to complete the Creation of Man; he is new creative information, the intelligible bread that must be assimilated to take part in the new creation; and the expansion of the Church, its development, is the communication of the creative information that constitutes it as an organism.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to the metaphysical framework of information included in Hebrew monotheism, human reason is fundamental

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69 Ibid., 32.

70 Ibid., 48–49.

for Tresmontant, for the information transmitted by the prophet is verifiable insofar as it is experimental. The visions of the nabi are about the future, and we can test their veracity if they concretize in the duration. Tresmontant gives the example of the oracles of the deportations to Samaria or Babylon in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

All this leads Tresmontant to perceive that the metaphysical activity of intelligence is at work in revelation. It verifies the prophetic revelation incorporated within the Hebrew people. It verifies the metaphysical theses that serve as the foundation for theology. It makes

a critical judgment on the whole, the fact of Creation, the fact of Revelation, the fact constituted by the union of the newly created Man with the unique uncreated God, the fact constituted by the Church which is the new creation in a regime of genesis, the old humanity in a regime of metamorphosis, a judgment of truth.<sup>71</sup>

### *2.3 Critique of Tresmontant's "reciprocal immanence" theory*

Tresmontant's approach is susceptible to significant criticism. To begin with, if one reads him carefully, it is difficult to perceive what is properly theological in his approach. The role of reason is overemphasized. It reduces theological analysis merely to philosophical analysis. Metaphysics must verify everything, not only the existence of God and revelation, but all the central dogmas of Christianity. He stretches the principles of analysis to the very limit, adding a metaphysical examination of Christian discourse on ecclesiology and union with God.

What Tresmontant struggles to show is the specific contribution of faith. This is what his definition discloses. He understands it only as an activity of human intelligence. However, the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 56.

constitution *Dei Filius* itself declares the following on faith:

Thus the Catholic Church professes that faith, which is the beginning of human salvation, is a supernatural virtue, inspired and sustained by the grace of God, and by which we believe that true things are revealed not because of the intrinsic truth of realities known from the light of natural reason but from the authority of God Himself who reveals, and who cannot deceive Himself or deceive others.<sup>72</sup>

In the orthodox perspective, faith is a *virtus supernaturalis*, a theological virtue that depends entirely on God and the Salvation of mankind. What is primary in the understanding of faith is not the ability to reason and verify, but to trust in the authority of God. We believe because it is God who reveals, and he reveals a supernatural truth that exceeds the capacities of natural reason for our salvation. Salvation, the divine authority, and the supernatural and transcendent dimension are completely absent from Tresmontant's notion of faith.

Still, at the end of his career, Tresmontant commented on Aquinas, and in particular on the ScG to found his thesis of reciprocal immanence. Let us note at first that Tresmontant did not comment on the first nine chapters of the ScG. He is content with a reading of a portion of ch. 9 and other circumscribed passages.<sup>73</sup> Rather, he sought to see how the relationship between

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72 "Dei Filius," in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Vol. 5 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1911): 486: "Hanc vero fidem, quae humanae salutis initium est, Ecclesia catholica profitetur, virtutem esse supernaturalem, qua, Dei aspirante et adiuvante gratia, ab eo revelata vera esse credimus, non propter intrinsecam rerum veritatem naturali rationis lumine perspectam, sed propter auctoritatem ipsius Dei revelantis, qui nec falli nec fallere potest." It is surprising and unfortunate that Tresmontant never quotes *Dei Filius*, but instead focused on one of its authors, who was expressing himself before its publication.

73 See the second chapter in Claude Tresmontant, *L'activité métaphysique de l'intelligence et la théologie*, 63–105.

faith and reason was concretely exercised in specific chapters of the ScG. Tresmontant's analysis is thus in a certain way complementary to that of this essay, since it tests in the particular what has been affirmed in the universal. However, he runs the risk of projecting his particular interpretation of the relation between faith and reason onto that of Aquinas by not taking into account the method and perspective that Aquinas himself sets in motion in the prologue of the ScG. He has not understood that the ScG is above all a theological work.

Tresmontant believes he notices three elements in the ScG: metaphysical analysis precedes theological analysis, accompanies it, and commands it.<sup>74</sup> Thomas would agree that it precedes and accompanies it, yet it is necessary to understand in what sense. In the logical and scientific order that Aquinas follows, one begins by demonstrating the existence of God and then moves on to the following truths about God. One cannot know and believe at the same time and in the same respect.<sup>75</sup> A truth available to both faith and reason can be known by the authority of God or by demonstration, but not by both simultaneously. As we have seen, in Aquinas, within the practical and salutary order, the truth about God discovered by reason does not necessarily precede that which faith gives. The reality is even totally different since what reason had discovered is accessible only to an elite. However, a multitude of men in the course of history, the most ignorant as well as the most learned, has believed.

When Tresmontant says that reason commands faith, he means that "it says what is impossible."<sup>76</sup> He gives the example in Christology of the impossibility of the incarnation bringing about any change in God, since he is immutable. We can

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74 Ibid., 64.

75 See Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 14, a. 9, c (henceforth *De Ver.*).

76 Tresmontant, *L'activité métaphysique de l'intelligence et la théologie*, 64.

draw a parallel with ch. 7 of the ScG, where Aquinas maintains that faith does not contradict reason, with the difference that in Tresmontant, reason will act as a fence that indicates where believers should not cross except with metaphysical demonstrations in order to positively examine that belief. In St. Thomas, it is the opposite: faith guides reason and points it to its ultimate purpose, God.

Despite serious criticisms undermining Tresmontant's thought—the misuse of sources, an unwary reading of Aquinas, a reduction of theological analysis to metaphysical analysis, a rationalism leading to a loss of transcendence and mystery—his initial starting point has the merit of shedding modern light on the faith and reason problematic with respect to Aquinas's approach. It goes without saying that in medieval Christian society, it was much more accepted that faith encompasses the whole process of the wise man's activity. Tresmontant notes well the cultural change. In our increasingly secular modern societies, experimental science is given the final say in verifying the truth. Today, it becomes essential to start from the common basis of reason to dialogue with non-Christians, but also to avoid the occasion for doubt among Catholics whose intellectual activity might be perceived as somewhat irrelevant if exercised in a hermetically sealed microcosm. Demonstrative analysis of the truth about God in the present context does not seem optional. Every Christian, to the best of his abilities, ought to rigorously educate himself rationally about God.

For our context, as depicted in Tresmontant's analysis, one of the basic problems is the superiority of faith. For Aquinas, the knowledge of faith is superior to that of reason. However, does not Tresmontant, with his concern to verify faith, give it a status inferior to reason? From a Thomistic perspective, it seems that a distinction must be made between the mode of knowledge and

the object of knowledge.<sup>77</sup> At the level of the mode of knowledge, faith is superior to opinion, but inferior to science:<sup>78</sup> superior to opinion, because it has the certainty of assent, but inferior to science, because faith grasps an object that it does not see, whereas science can see what it asserts as true as in fact true. But precisely from the point of view of the object in itself faith does not see it obscurely, but in an effervescence of brightness.<sup>79</sup> The object of faith is certainly the same as that of reason since both are ultimately about God, but its object is higher to the degree in which in faith are revealed supernatural truths, truths about the same God which exceed the capacities of reason.

This distinction helps us understand in what sense wisdom brings about unity between faith and reason. Surely it makes sense to speak of wisdom when considering the object of knowledge. Wisdom has a profound existential element, the truth every human seeks as the ultimate end that puts order into human life. However, when considering the *mode* of knowledge, which is more concerned with methods and the way to secure

77 Gilson, *Le thomisme*, 32.

78 See Aquinas, *De Ver.*, q. 14, a. 2, c.

79 On this, see the example of the bat in *ScG* I, 3: "Furthermore, the same is made abundantly clear by the deficiency which we experience every day in our knowledge of things. For we are ignorant of many of the properties of sensible things, and in many cases, we are unable to discover the nature of those properties which we perceive by our senses. Much less, therefore, is human reason capable of investigating all the truths about that most sublime essence. This agrees with the saying of the Philosopher, where he says that our intellect is like the eye of a bat in relation to the sun in relation to those primary things which are most evident in nature (*Metaphysics* II, 1)." See also *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1, c. to read in relation with the *ad tertium*. In the *corpus*, Aquinas uses the example of the bat in connection with the idea of excess of light (*excessum luminis*). Sometimes, Aquinas quotes the passage from *Metaphysics* II, 1, but it is an owl and not a bat. See, for example, *ScG* II, 60 or 77. For a connection with the defect of human reason in regards of faith, see *STh* I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1. The light of revelation is too bright for our human mind to grasp it. It defects because its object exceeds our capacity.

valid propositions in the human mind, it seems wisdom gives way to erudition and scholarship.

Today—and Claude Tresmontant is symptomatic of this situation—because of the advent of experimental science, the perspective is rather at the level of the mode of knowledge. What guarantees the truth of a proposition is whether the human mind is able to experience it, test it, and verify it. In our current epoch, it is more and more difficult to judge the truth of a proposition that goes beyond the framework of human intelligence, even with Catholics. Tresmontant had well seen the difficulty by pointing out Plato's conception of *pistis*. However, his solution, like that of Plato, reaffirms that faith is inferior to reason since human reason and not God remains the ultimate guarantor of the truth of the proposition.

The emphasis on the mode of knowledge complicates the audibility of Thomas Aquinas's project today. How can the Thomistic and Catholic theologian and philosopher maintain the primacy of faith vis-à-vis the condition of examination and verification by reason that is demanded by many of our contemporaries? Two risks follow. Either, in favor of dialogue and receiving a hearing from our contemporaries, we risk losing the transcendence of faith and the subjection of our reason to divine authority. Or we favor the superiority of faith, which in turn risks the isolation of Catholics in the eyes of contemporary culture. This is a colossal challenge for faith in a dechristianized age.

FAITH AND REASON

**AQUINAS AND LUTHER ON  
SIN, CONCUPISCENCE, AND MERIT**

*Brett W. Smith*

A popular conception of scholastic theologians, and of St. Thomas Aquinas as their chief representative, is that they were in the business of splitting hairs. This description is, of course, meant pejoratively. The feeling is that scholastic theology is unnecessarily precise or perhaps even sophistical. Martin Luther regularly referred to scholastic theologians as “the Sophists.”<sup>1</sup> My own view of the matter is that the best scholastic theologians, and in particular St. Thomas, brought greater clarity and rigor to Christian theology precisely through their care in defining terms clearly and identifying the different senses in which a given theological or philosophical term may be used. Renaissance Humanism, however, brought with it a disdain for many scholastic categories and concepts, and some humanists,

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1 See, for example, the following passages in *Contra Latomus*: LW 32, 194 (WA 8, 83, 5–7) and LW 32, 203 (WA 8, 89, 10–12), both quoted below. “LW,” followed by volume and page numbers, refers to Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, American Edition (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–1986). For the original Latin or German, “WA,” followed by volume, page, and line number, refers to Martin Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009).

such as Martin Luther, eventually broke with the Catholic Church in part due to their disdain for scholastic theology.

As we reflect in the present day on where Protestant theology and Catholic theology still differ, one striking issue is the question of merit. Catholics have affirmed, and Protestants have denied, the proposition that humans can merit eternal life by the works the Holy Spirit does through them.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this study is twofold. The primary aim is to compare Aquinas and Luther on the question of merit and to identify theological reasons why they held contrary positions. The secondary aim is to illustrate the importance of including Thomistic theological terms in Christian education.

I am going to argue the following thesis: An important theological root of Catholic and Protestant differences on the question of merit lies in the different concepts of sin represented by Aquinas and Luther. These different understandings of sin entailed different views of concupiscence, which in turn entailed different answers to the question of merit.<sup>3</sup> Thus, by reflecting on

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2 As Root has shown, it is precisely the question of meriting eternal life, not of meriting justification or anything else, that forms the key difference. Michael Root, "Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology after the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*," *Modern Theology* 20, 1 (January 2004), 13–14. The present study is concerned principally with the question of meriting eternal life.

3 I do not mean to suggest, of course, that these are the only reasons their views differ. Scholars have suggested psychological and cultural reasons why they may have been inclined to form these different conceptions. One study, for example, suggests differing penitential practices as a partial explanation for why Luther felt the need to hold *simul iustus et peccator*, while Aquinas did not. James F. McCue, "*Simul iustus et peccator* in Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther: Toward Putting the Debate in Context," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, 1 (March 1980), 82. This may be a step toward understanding why Luther defined sin and concupiscence more strictly (in a sense) than Aquinas, although Luther would certainly insist that his concepts simply come from the Bible. Although McCue thinks that the differences between Luther and scholastics like Aquinas are "secondary," he states clearly that this is not a judgment about the abstract systems in question (94). The present study, in contrast, does

what St. Thomas taught about merit and why Luther rejected the idea, we will come to understand in microcosm why Aquinas's terms and concepts are as important today as they were in the thirteenth century. When I have compared Aquinas and Luther on these three points—sin, concupiscence, and merit—I will conclude with a brief reflection on why such ideas are relevant to Christian higher education today.

I will begin with Aquinas, presenting his views on sin, concupiscence, and merit. Then I will proceed in the same order with Luther. This approach will allow us to see clearly where and why Luther parted ways with the Catholic and Thomistic tradition, and why Protestants and Catholics still differ on the question of merit.<sup>4</sup>

### *Thomas Aquinas on Sin, Concupiscence, and Merit*

The primary sources for Thomas Aquinas will be select passages from the Prima Secundae of the *Summa Theologiae* and from his *Commentary on Romans*. In addition to the fact that it represents Thomas's mature thought, another factor makes the *Summa* relevant for comparison to Luther. It is among the three works by Aquinas of which Luther had considerable knowledge, the other two being the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the opusculum entitled *De Angelis*.<sup>5</sup> Denis Janz has argued that Luther was familiar with the Prima secundae specifically and found it "tolerable."<sup>6</sup>

Thomas's *Commentary on Romans* is important for this

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seek to compare the abstract systems on certain particular questions.

4 Of course, Luther was not the only reformer to critique traditional ideas about merit. It was also a major issue for John Calvin in the next generation. On Calvin's critique of merit, see Charles Raith II, "Calvin's Critique of Merit, and Why Aquinas (Mostly) Agrees," *Pro Ecclesia* 20, 2 (Spring 2011), 137–148.

5 Denis R. Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989), 110. *De Angelis* is an alternative title for *De Substantiis Separatis*.

6 Janz, *Luther on Thomas*, 108–110.

study because it allows for easy comparison with Luther on the interpretation of Romans 6–8. As will become apparent later, Luther regarded this passage as decisive for establishing the sinfulness of all human actions and the consequent need for even righteous deeds to receive forgiveness. It will thus be instructive to see how Thomas treats some of the exegetical and theological issues that Luther later utilized in his argument.

Aquinas's thought on all three matters—sin, concupiscence, and merit—is deep and complex.<sup>7</sup> This study seeks only to touch on the aspects of these concepts that are directly relevant for understanding Aquinas's argument in favor of merit and for comparison to Luther's argument against it.

*Sin.* One can find Aquinas's definition of sin stretched throughout question 71 of the *Prima secundae*. In a very basic formulation, the Angelic Doctor states, "properly speaking, sin denotes an inordinate act."<sup>8</sup> Even a sin of omission, he argues, contains or results from some act, although that act may be accidental to the sin.<sup>9</sup> Then he defends Augustine's definition of

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7 Joseph Wawrykow has argued that Aquinas explained merit differently at different stages of his career, presenting one view in his early teaching (1252–59), represented by his *Commentary on the Sentences*, and another in his mature teaching (1266–1273), represented by the *Summa Theologiae*. Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), vi. The present study will focus upon Aquinas's mature views. For an exposition of Aquinas's early teaching on the subject, see Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 66–77.

8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947) I-II, q. 71, a. 1, c.: "peccatum proprie nominat actum inordinatum." Latin of the *Summa* is according to the Leonine Edition (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Opera omnia*, volumes 4–11, ed. the Leonine Commission [Rome: 1888–1903]). Hereafter the *Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated *STh*.

9 *STh* I-II, q. 71, a. 5, c, ad 1, ad 2. Here Thomas takes pains to show that even a sin of omission, like not going to mass on Sunday, is voluntary. It may not involve an act of willing not to go, since one may simply will to play instead.

sin: “A word, deed, or desire contrary to the eternal law.”<sup>10</sup> In the course of this defense, he adds a level of complexity: “sin is nothing else than a bad human act.” There are two parts to this definition (and that of Augustine). A sin must be evil, of course. Something is evil in its genus if it lacks conformity with its measure, in this case, the eternal law (*lex aeterna*). The second part of the definition, where the complexity increases, is that it must be a human act, as indicated by Augustine’s “word, deed, or desire.” The Angelic Doctor explains, “an act is human due to its being voluntary.”<sup>11</sup>

Aquinas expresses this view in another question as well. “Sin consists essentially in an act of the free will [*liberi arbitrii*], which is a faculty of the will [*voluntatis*] and reason.”<sup>12</sup> From this it follows that a deed can be a sin only “insofar as it is voluntary, and under our control.”<sup>13</sup> Thomas holds that wrong desires can be sinful, as his use of Augustine’s definition shows. However, an evil desire is not a sin unless the rational agent consents to it, and Christians are never forced to do this.<sup>14</sup>

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Nevertheless, the failure to will what one should is voluntary because the sinner is free to will or not to will in that situation.

10 Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22, 27 (PL 42:418): “peccatum est dictum vel factum vel concupitum contra legem aeternam,” quoted in *STh* I, q. 71, a. 6, c. In his *Commentary on Romans*, Thomas uses a similar definition that he attributes to Ambrose: “Sin is a transgression of the divine law and a disobedience against the heavenly commands.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), §501; the Latin of the *Commentary on Romans* is according to the Marietti Edition (1953), as reprinted in the Aquinas Institute edition. Hereafter the commentary will be abbreviated as *Comm. Rom.*

11 *STh* I-II, q. 71, a. 6, c.: “Quod autem aliquis actus est humanus, habet ex hoc quod est voluntarius.”

12 *Ibid.*, q. 77, a. 6, c.: “peccatum essentialiter consistit in actu liberi arbitrii, quod est facultas voluntatis et rationis.”

13 *Ibid.*: “inquantum est voluntarium et in nobis existens.”

14 *Comm. Rom.* §513, §593.

Thomas explains the need for rational consent in his *Commentary on Romans*:

the fact that he desires [*concupiscit*] something evil, so far as the sensitive appetite pertaining to the flesh is concerned, does not proceed from the work of reason but from the inclination to sin [*ex inclinatione fomitit*]. But a person is said to do what his reason does, because man is what he is according to reason; hence the movements of concupiscible desire [*concupiscentiae*], which are not from reason but from the inclination to sin, the man does not do. . . . But this cannot properly be understood of a man in sin, because his reason consents to sin; therefore he commits it.<sup>15</sup>

So for Aquinas, sin, in order to be sin, must on some level be chosen by a rational agent.

Now, reason functioning normally leads the will toward what it perceives as good. Yet a fully rational person can still sin by pursuing a good inordinately, e.g., preferring some temporal good to the eternal good. One does this, according to Thomas in the *Summa*, out of an inordinate love of self. He concludes in *Prima secundae*, question 77, “Therefore it is evident that inordinate love of self is the cause of every sin.”<sup>16</sup> He then explains, in response to an objection, that this kind of self-love leads to

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15 *Ibid.*, §570: “quod enim concupiscit malum secundum appetitum sensitivum ad carnem pertinentem, non procedit ex opere rationis, sed ex inclinatione fomitit. Illud autem homo dicitur operari quod ratio operatur, quia homo est id quod est secundum rationem: unde motus concupiscentiae, qui non sunt a ratione sed a fomite, non operatur homo. . . . Sed de homine sub peccato constituto hoc proprie intelligi non potest, quia eius ratio peccato consentit, et ideo ipsemet operatur.” See also §563, §565–566. In these passages, Thomas calls actions “incomplete” (*imperfecta*) if desire has arisen but the will has not consented to the unwanted desire. See also §508.

16 *STh* I-II, q. 77, a. 4, c.: “Unde manifestum est quod inordinatus amor sui est causa omnis peccati.”

contempt of God.<sup>17</sup>

*Concupiscence.* For Thomas, all the passions are good in themselves, although they are prone to disorder by the Fall.<sup>18</sup> Among these passions are the two parts of the sense appetite, the concupiscible power (*concupiscibilis*) and the irascible power (*irascibilis*).<sup>19</sup> The concupiscible power is the inclination of the soul to pursue what is agreeable to the senses and to pull back from what is harmful.<sup>20</sup> This understanding may at first appear to depart significantly from Augustine's treatment of concupiscence in works like *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, but as Nicholas Lombardo notes, Thomas can use an Augustinian concept of concupiscence in the right context.<sup>21</sup>

When discussing the effects of the Fall on human nature, Thomas argues that the four powers of the soul subject to virtue—reason, the will, and the irascible and concupiscible powers—have all been wounded. The wound of reason is ignorance. The wound of the will is malice. The wounds of the irascible and

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17 Ibid., ad 1.

18 Nicholas Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 54. On the passions in general, see Thomas's *Treatise on the Passions*, questions 22–48 of the *Prima secundae*. Lombardo claims that “[w]hen Thomas Aquinas finished the *Prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae* in 1271, questions 22–48 probably constituted the longest sustained discussion of the passions ever written” (1).

19 Lombardo, *Logic of Desire*, 50.

20 See *STh* I, q. 82, a. 2. The same article explains that the irascible power grows out of and defends the concupiscible power by opposing arduously whatever would thwart the aims of the concupiscible power. This power explains why people often choose to endure difficulties that may be disagreeable to the senses for the sake of obtaining what is agreeable to the senses.

21 Lombardo, *Logic of Desire*, 53; Although Aquinas had a positive view of the passions overall, the purpose of this study requires a focus on the concupiscible power as wounded by the Fall. For the positive aspects of concupiscence in Aquinas, see, in addition to Lombardo, G.J. McAleer, “The Politics of the Flesh: Rahner and Aquinas on *Concupiscentia*,” *Modern Theology* 15, 3 (July 1999), 356–357.

concupiscible powers are weakness and concupiscence, respectively. It is worth noticing here that Thomas uses the same word for “concupiscible power” and “concupiscence” but makes an important distinction between concupiscence as a power and wounded concupiscence: “and in so far as the concupiscible is deprived of its order to the delectable, moderated by reason, there is the wound of concupiscence.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, *concupiscentia*, after the Fall, has a tendency to disorder—to pursue pleasure inordinately. This tendency ultimately reduces to an inordinate self-love as its cause.<sup>23</sup> In this way, it is possible for Thomas to speak of concupiscence (*qua* wounded by the Fall) as an inclination toward sin.

This is, in fact, exactly how Aquinas treats Paul’s discussion of concupiscence in Romans 6–8.<sup>24</sup> When Paul exhorts in 6:12, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof,” Thomas explains in his commentary that “sin” here refers to “the inclination to sin,” the *fomes peccati*.<sup>25</sup>

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22 *STh* I-II, q. 85, a. 3, c.: “inquantum vero concupiscentia destituitur ordine ad delectabile moderatum ratione, est vulnus concupiscentiae.”

23 *Ibid.*, q. 77, a. 4, ad 2.

24 According to Jean-Pierre Torrell, Thomas worked on his Romans commentary in Naples near the end of his life (1272–1273). Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 250–253. This situates the work in the mature period of his thought on merit, defined by Wawrykow as 1266–1273 (Wawrykow, *God’s Grace and Human Action*, 147). Furthermore, Torrell places the writing of the *Prima secundae* in 1271 (Torrell, *Saint Thomas*, 146). If these dates are correct, then Thomas’s comments on Romans come at a time when his thought on merit and connected issues has fully formed. Thus, where he invokes concepts that he previously worked out in the *Prima secundae*, we may reasonably take his comments on Romans as his last word on the matter. I have not, however, noticed any discrepancy between the teachings of the *Commentary on Romans* and the *Prima secundae*.

25 *Comm. Rom.* §493: “Non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore ut obediatis concupiscentiis ejus.” Cf. Luther’s treatment of the same verse below. Aquinas selects one of the guilt-free replacements for sin that Luther expressly rejects.

In Romans 7, where Thomas reads the famous struggle between two laws as something that occurs in the Christian,<sup>26</sup> he identifies the “other law” in one’s members as this same “inclination to sin.”<sup>27</sup> Alluding to the Fall, he states that this inclination is itself a punishment for sin.<sup>28</sup> It has its source in the sensitive appetite, but it is found in all the members “which play a role for concupiscent desire in sinning.”<sup>29</sup>

Thomas thinks that concupiscence, as the inclination to sin, is always present for the believer. Explaining the phrase in Romans 7:18, “to will is present with me,” Aquinas says this willing, along with the actual doing of “some good [*aliquid boni*],” is due to divine grace and the leading of the Spirit that allows one to act against concupiscence. Nevertheless, “I do not find it within my power to accomplish that good so as to exclude concupiscence entirely.”<sup>30</sup> This line calls for some scrutiny. The Latin reads, “sed non invenio in mea potestate quomodo istud bonum perficiam, ut scilicet totaliter concupiscentiam excludam.” The words *istud bonum* (“that good”) clearly refer back to the *aliquid boni* (lit. “something of the good”) that one does by grace. Even this good, it appears, would be better if concupiscence were excluded. Otherwise, one would not be seeking to exclude concupiscence entirely. Yet the Christian, according to Thomas, does not find any way to accomplish this exclusion. Therefore it follows that the good works of a Christian lack some perfection because of concupiscence.

Similarly, in the *Summa* he states that human nature “healed by grace as to the mind” nevertheless “remains corrupted and poisoned in the flesh, whereby it serves the ‘law of sin’

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26 Ibid., §558.

27 Ibid., §586.

28 Ibid., §587.

29 Ibid., §588: “quae deserviunt concupiscentiae ad peccandum.”

30 Ibid., §580.

(Romans 7:25).<sup>31</sup> He is clearly referring to concupiscence, considered as the inclination to sin. Referring back to this statement later on, he adds, “But here grace is to some extent imperfect, insofar as it does not completely heal man, as stated above.”<sup>32</sup> If the endurance of concupiscence (A) implies an imperfection of the grace received (B), then there must be some imperfection involved with concupiscence such that concupiscence would be removed ( $\sim$ A) if grace were perfect ( $\sim$ B) (as it will be in the end).<sup>33</sup>

Remembering that concupiscence (the bad kind, not the concupiscible power as such) grows out of inordinate self-love that leads to contempt of God, it makes sense within Thomas’s account that the presence of concupiscence would detract from the perfection of a work. A good work is ultimately one that is done for the love of God.<sup>34</sup> Yet, due to the disordered pull of concupiscence toward the self, one’s love for God is never perfect in this life.<sup>35</sup>

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31 *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 9, c.: “Quae quidem licet per gratiam sanetur quantum ad mentem, remanet tamen in ea corruptio et infectio quantum ad carnem, per quam servit legi peccati, ut dicitur ad Rom. VII.”

32 *Ibid.*, ad 1: “Hic autem aliquantulum gratia imperfecta est, in quantum hominem non totaliter sanat, ut dictum est.” See also a. 10, ad 3.

33 The logic here follows *modus tollens*: If A, then B. Not B, therefore not A.

34 See discussion of *Ibid.*, q. 114, a. 4, later.

35 Thomas does not spell out these logical steps, but he does confirm their conclusion, at least implicitly. In *Ibid.*, a. 8, he argues that one can merit the increase of charity, yet this assumes that charity is not perfect, at least for most believers under normal circumstances. Otherwise, it could not increase. Further, Thomas holds that in the beatific vision the righteous will shine in proportion to each soul’s degree of charity. Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 134, 139. This implies that many souls, at least, will merit eternal life with imperfect charity. Finally, Thomas argues that Christ could fulfill the law on behalf of humans only if as a man he enjoyed the beatific vision at all times. An uninterrupted beatific vision is required because perfect love requires always thinking fully of God (Levering, *Torah and Temple*, 59). From this it is clear that Thomas did not think many,

Although concupiscence causes the believer's good works to lack some perfection, it does not make them sins. In order to sin, a rational agent must choose to perform a sinful action (or make a choice that leads to a sinful omission or desire, or consent to an evil desire). Concupiscence may lead to sin,<sup>36</sup> and it is sinful if one consents to a concupiscent desire, even if no outward action ensues.<sup>37</sup> Thomas will go as far as to say that a desire to which one has not consented can be a sin if the desire was incited by an apprehension that involved deliberation.<sup>38</sup> The

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if any, Christians would ever love God fully in this life, since they do not now enjoy the beatific vision.

36 In question 77 of the *Prima Secundae*, Aquinas discusses at length how disordered passions can cause sin. Because the will follows reason to pursue the perceived good, the passions of the sensitive appetite cannot divert the will directly. Yet they can divert the will indirectly, either by monopolizing the soul's energy so that reason and will are distracted, or by moving reason in a disordered way which the will then follows. See *STh* I-II, q. 77, a. 1, c.

37 See previous discussion in the section on sin.

38 In *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, q. 7, a. 6, ad 8 (henceforth *De malo*), Thomas says that the first movement of the sensitive appetite can be sinful when it arises from apprehension rather than from bodily disposition. When it arises from bodily disposition, it is not sinful. Yet, one may observe, there clearly must be some manner of apprehension for the sensitive appetite to move at all. Thomas explains in *STh* I-II, q. 30, a. 3, c that there are two kinds of concupiscence, one natural, and the other not. The natural, or irrational, kind, which seems to match the desire arising from a bodily disposition in the *De malo*, includes desire for things fitting (*conueniens*) to our nature as animals, such as food. The unnatural (*non naturalis*), or rational, kind includes desire arising from the apprehension of something as fitting. In response to the second objection, he clarifies what this means. Both kinds of concupiscence do in fact arise from apprehension, but the natural/irrational kind arises from absolute apprehension, whereas the unnatural/rational kind arises from apprehension with deliberation (*prout apprehenditur aliquid cum deliberatione*). The implication for the present discussion is that a disordered desire to which one does not consent can only be sinful if it arises from an apprehension to which one consented by the act of deliberation. I am indebted to Matthew Dugandzic for connecting these two texts and for furnishing much of what I have just said about them. See Matthew Dugandzic, "The First Movements of the Sensitive Appetite: Aquinas in Context," *New Blackfriars* 99, 1083 (Sept. 2018): 638–652,

mere presence of concupiscence, however, does not necessarily involve any voluntary element and therefore cannot constitute a sin. Further, concupiscence, or any passion whatever, can never coerce anyone to sin.<sup>39</sup> If a passion were to precede an act and were so strong that it actually rendered the act involuntary, then the person who did it would not be guilty of sin.<sup>40</sup> If the passion should precede the act and reduce rational control but not remove it completely, then the perpetrator would be less guilty to the extent that the deed was less voluntary than an ordinary action.<sup>41</sup> Thomas explains in his *Commentary on Romans* that believers, “by the habit of justice and grace,” are inclined to do good so that they can be “free from sin” (Romans 6:22) by not consenting to act by the dictates of concupiscence.<sup>42</sup>

Although Aquinas may not cite the verse specifically, a possible scriptural source for his view of sin and concupiscence is James 1:14-15:

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire [*tēs . . . epithumías; concupiscentia*]. Then desire [*hē epithumía; concupiscentia*] when it has conceived gives birth to sin [*hamartían; peccatum*]; and

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esp. 647–652.

39 “Therefore, in regard to the freedom of the will [*quantum ad arbitrium rationis*] man is always free of compulsion, although he is not free of inclinations.” *Comm. Rom.*, §508.

40 “An act which, in its genus, is evil, cannot be excused from sin altogether, unless it be rendered altogether involuntary. Consequently, if the passion be such that it renders the subsequent act wholly involuntary, it entirely excuses from sin; otherwise, it does not excuse entirely.” *STh I-II*, q. 77, a. 7, c.

41 “Accordingly if we take passion as preceding the sinful act, it must needs diminish the sin: because the act is a sin in so far as it is voluntary, and under our control.” *Ibid.*, a. 6, c.

42 *Comm. Rom.*, §513: “cum aliquis ex habitu iustitiae et gratiae inclinatur ad bonum, est liber a peccato; ut scilicet ab eo non superetur usque ad consensum.” See also *Ibid.*, §588; §593.

sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.<sup>43</sup>

Here there seems to be a progression from being tempted by one's concupiscence to the conception and birth of sin. This progression seems to assume that one must choose to give in to the temptation of concupiscence in order for sin to occur. Otherwise, it is hard to see what would be the purpose of mentioning temptation.

*Merit.* With the relevant concepts in place, I will now present Thomas's argument in favor of merit.<sup>44</sup> A number of excellent studies in the recent past have explicated Aquinas's mature teaching on this subject.<sup>45</sup> This study will only summarize what the Angelic Doctor taught about meriting eternal life for the purpose of comparison to Luther.

The key passage for understanding Aquinas's mature view of merit is question 114 of the *Prima secundae*.<sup>46</sup> The first article addresses the very possibility of merit. Aquinas bases his

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43 RSV Second Catholic Edition; Greek according to NA 27, transliterated by the author; Latin according to the Vulgate. Robert Weber, ed., *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 1969, 1994).

44 It is worth noting that Thomas does not think one can merit justification. While Luther tends to equate justification with eternal salvation, and thus virtually collapses the question of merit into the question of justification, Aquinas treats initial justification separately and does not think one can merit it. See Raith, "Calvin's Critique," 149. For a summary of all the goods in question 114 that Thomas does not think one can merit, see Root, "Aquinas," 13–14.

45 Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, is the reigning authority on this subject. He deals with question 114 of the *Prima secundae* on pages 177–233. Three other studies build upon Wawrykow's analysis and are very valuable: Root, "Aquinas"; Raith, "Calvin's Critique"; Charles Raith II, "Aquinas and Calvin on Merit, Part II: Condignity and Participation," *Pro Ecclesia* 21, 2 (Spring 2012), 195–210.

46 Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 178, states, "The achievement of I-II 114, is that Thomas offers in this question a comprehensive discussion of merit in the Christian life which fits coherently with the insights into grace and the motive of creation and redemption which shape the theology of the *Summa*."

doctrine of merit on the biblical promise of reward.<sup>47</sup> He says that, “Merit and reward refer to the same, for a reward means something given anyone in return for work or toil, as a price for it.”<sup>48</sup> Then Aquinas makes the vital point that there is no justice between man and God in the sense of absolute equality, “for they are infinitely apart, and all man’s good is from God.”<sup>49</sup> Thus merit is only possible in a restricted sense. It must be by God’s ordination, and any debt involved is owed by God to God as a result of that ordination.<sup>50</sup> Thomas’s concept of divine *ordinatio*, according to Wawrykow, refers to the fact that “every creature is ordained to a specific end and given all that is required to come to this end.”<sup>51</sup> God has ordained certain individual rational creatures to eternal blessedness, and he has ordained merit as the means by which they are to attain it.<sup>52</sup> Only rational creatures enjoy the privilege of earning merit. God has given them free will, and only freely chosen good deeds can earn merit.<sup>53</sup> Yet, even the fact that creatures freely choose to do good deeds depends wholly upon God’s grace, as the Angelic Doctor soon

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47 He cites Jeremiah 31:16, which includes the clause “There is a reward [*merces*] for thy work.”

48 *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 1, c.: “Meritum et mercedes ad idem referuntur, id enim merces dicitur quod alicui recompensatur pro retributione operis vel laboris, quasi quoddam pretium ipsius.” See Root, “Aquinas,” 11.

49 *Ibid.*: “in infinitum enim distant, et totum quod est hominis bonum, est a Deo.”

50 See *Ibid.* and ad 3; Wawrykow, *God’s Grace and Human Action*, 180–181; Raith, “Calvin’s Critique,” 163; Raith explains, “God is not benefitted or put in *our* debt, and what we ‘give,’ that is, our meritorious works, are understood fundamentally as God’s gifts to us.” Raith, “Aquinas and Calvin,” 203 (emphasis added). This so because, as Thomas says elsewhere, “man can give God only what he has received from God.” *Comm. Rom.*, §941.

51 Wawrykow, *God’s Grace and Human Action*, 182.

52 *Ibid.*, 183.

53 “[T]he rational creature moves itself to act by its free will, hence its action has the character of merit, which is not so in other creatures.” “[C]reatura rationalis seipsam movet ad agendum per liberum arbitrium, unde sua actio habet rationem meriti; quod non est in aliis creaturis.” *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 1, c.

makes clear.

In articles two through four, Thomas turns to questions that relate specifically to meriting eternal life. First he argues for the necessity of grace. After the Fall, humans need grace for the removal of sin.<sup>54</sup> He calls the grace by which the sinner is initially justified “operative grace” (*gratia operans*).<sup>55</sup> Even if humans had never sinned, however, they would still need grace to merit eternal life because of the inequality between human and divine nature.<sup>56</sup> He calls the grace that makes merit possible “cooperative grace” (*gratia cooperans*).<sup>57</sup> It supernaturally makes human actions proportionate to God.<sup>58</sup>

Aquinas explains what this means in article three, where he tackles the question of condign merit. He uses 2 Timothy 4:8 in the *sed contra* as the biblical basis for this type of merit: “As to the rest, there is laid up for me the crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day.”<sup>59</sup> The key

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54 Ibid., a. 2; Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 191. On the necessity of grace for merit, see also Ibid., q. 109, a. 5.

55 See Ibid., q. 113, intro.; Root, “Aquinas,” 11; Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 66, states that operative grace “elevates the person to the supernatural order, making its possessor pleasing to God and orienting his being to God.”

56 *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 2; Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 191. Cf. *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 2; Thomas appears to differ from Luther on this point, since Luther sees sin as the only obstacle to merit. It may be, however, that Luther assumes some sort of elevating grace to be included in the initial gift of faith or baptism.

57 See Ibid., q. 114, intro.

58 Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 66, 191.

59 *STh* I-II, q. 113, a. 3, sc.: “in reliquo reposita est mihi corona iustitiae, quam reddet mihi dominus in illa die, iustus iudex.” Here is the verse in the original Greek (NA 27): λοιπὸν ἀποκείται μοι ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος, ὃν ἀποδώσει μοι ὁ κύριος ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, ὁ δίκαιος κριτής, οὐ μόνον δὲ ἐμοὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἠγαπηκόσι τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ. Note that Paul expects this just reward to be given to all faithful Christians, those who “love his appearing (τοῖς ἠγαπηκόσι τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ).” Thus it would seem to follow that the crown of righteousness is equivalent to eternal life. This verse is one example of the promise of eternal life as a reward for works. He certainly

point in this text for Thomas's argument is that the judgment must be just because the judge is just. For Thomas, condign merit is required to explain how God can grant eternal life to a human as a just reward.

It is critical to distinguish between congruous and condign merit. Congruous merit is not a matter of debt. Rather, God rewards human deeds far beyond what they deserve, yet in a way that affirms the value of the deeds considered as human deeds.<sup>60</sup> The reward seems appropriate, even though justice does not require it. In Thomas's terms, it seems "congruous" that God should reward good human deeds, even though

considered as regards the substance of the work [*secundum substantiam operis*], and inasmuch as it springs from free will, there can be no condignity, because of the very great inequality.<sup>61</sup>

Condign merit, on the other hand, creates a debt on the basis of the worth of the meritorious act such that justice requires a reward proportionate to the true value of the deed.<sup>62</sup> Someone who condignly merits eternal life really deserves eternal blessedness as a matter of justice.

For Aquinas, a single act can merit eternal life both congruously and condignly. In neither case does the human actually add anything to the grace earned by Christ's passion. Thomas

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could have cited others as well. See, for example, Matthew 25:31–40; Romans 2:2–16; 2 Corinthians 5:9–11; Galatians 6:7–9; Revelation 22:12–14.

60 *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 3, c; Raith, "Calvin's Critique," 160.

61 *Ibid.*: "Si consideretur secundum substantiam operis, et secundum quod procedit ex libero arbitrio, sic non potest ibi esse condignitas, propter maximam inaequalitatem." Translation modified.

62 *Ibid.*; Raith, in his discussion of this article, explains that for a person to merit eternal life condignly "would render eternal life a 'due' in justice on account of the 'value [*valor*]' and 'worth [*pretium*]' of the meritorious act." Raith, "Aquinas and Calvin," 198. See also Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 73.

is unambiguous both in the *Summa* and in the *Commentary on Romans*: “All man’s good is from God,” and “man can give God only what he has received from God.”<sup>63</sup> Raith sees the meaning of texts such as these by saying: “for Aquinas all merit from God, whether condign or congruous, falls under the category of ‘gift’ when viewed in its relation to human nature.”<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere in the *Summa* Thomas explains that when meriting eternal life Christians appropriate the merits of Christ, rather than add to them.<sup>65</sup>

The difference between congruous and condign merit is in the agent responsible for the action. Aquinas’s view implies a double agency in which one good deed may be ascribed both to the human agent and to God, who works within the human agent. As Root notes,

This double agency is not a cooperation where two agents each do part; rather, God is at work moving human action. God (and God alone) can move the human person in this way without violating that person’s freedom.<sup>66</sup>

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63 Ibid. (see the longer quotation from this passage previously) and *Comm. Rom.*, §941, respectively.

64 Raith, “Calvin’s Critique,” 162. This point may address Luther’s concern below about the glory of the saints detracting from God’s glory. Aquinas’s view implies that God receives glory in the glory of the saints, rather than losing it, because their merit comes from God.

65 See *STh* III, q. 8, as. 1 and 5; q. 19, a. 4; q. 48, as. 1 and 2. Raith, “Calvin’s Critique,” 155. Levering states that for Thomas, “Christ’s saving work is the efficient (instrumental) cause, as well as the meritorious cause, of grace in all other human beings.” Levering, *Torah and Temple*, 41.

66 Root, “Aquinas,” 12. For further explanation of double agency, see Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 61–67. See also Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. J. Patout Burns (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971). Raith describes the condignly meritorious deed as “one act with two principles of causality,” one human and the other divine. The human principle merits congruously, but the worth and value of the work for condign merit comes from the principle of the

The good deeds of a Christian are ultimately the works of the Holy Spirit, thanks to the Christian's adoption by God and participation in the divine nature.<sup>67</sup> A Christian's good work, considered as coming from the human agent, can only merit congruously. The same action, considered as coming from the Holy Spirit, does merit eternal life condignly. Because the action is freely chosen by the individual, it can merit. Because it is the Holy Spirit who moves the will and also does the deed, the deed is proportionate to God and merits condignly.

In the fourth article of question 114, Aquinas argues that charity is the principal virtue through which deeds are meritorious, for both types of merit. Concerning the merit that earns everlasting life (condign merit), charity is central because everlasting life consists in the enjoyment of God and because the human mind's movement toward that end is "the proper act of charity."<sup>68</sup> In other words, true charity "has the last end [i.e., the

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Holy Spirit as the principal cause of the action; see Raith, "Calvin's Critique," 163–164.

67 "And the worth [*pretium*] of the work depends upon the dignity of grace, whereby as man, being made a partaker [*consors*] of the Divine Nature, is adopted as a son of God, to whom the inheritance is due [*debetur*] by right of adoption, according to Romans 8:17: 'if sons, heirs also.'" *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 3, c. "Et similiter per gratiam inhabitat hominem spiritus sanctus, qui est sufficiens causa vitae aeternae." ("And similarly the Holy Spirit, who is the sufficient cause of eternal life, dwells in a man through grace.") *Ibid.*, ad 3 (translation mine). Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*, 194–195; Raith, "Aquinas and Calvin," 198. Raith particularly emphasizes the importance of participation in Thomas's teaching on merit, arguing that Aquinas's view that humans can earn eternal life is "ultimately a claim for our *participation* in God and his work of manifesting his goodness and glory." Raith, "Aquinas and Calvin," 197 (emphasis in original). See also *Comm. Rom.*, 646. For additional discussion of participation in Aquinas's view of condign merit, see Mathias Joseph Scheeben, "Die Kontroverse über die Formalursache unserer Gotteskindschaft—noch einmal: mit einem Exkurs über die Lehre des Hl. Thomas vom meritum de condigno," *Gesammelte Aufsätze: Gesammelte Schriften*, 8, Heribert Schaaf (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1967), 203–237, esp. 223–237.

68 *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 4, c.: "proprius actus caritatis."

enjoyment of God] for its object”; it is directed toward God.<sup>69</sup> All other virtues are ordered to the same end because “all the other virtues are commanded by charity.” The merit that depends on human free will as such (congruous merit) also comes from charity because “what we do out of love we do most willingly.”<sup>70</sup> Without charity there can be no merit,<sup>71</sup> but the Christian’s every true act of charity, as Thomas clarifies later, “merits eternal life absolutely,” even though the believer’s charity is never perfect.<sup>72</sup> It is as the Lord said, “whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (Mt 10:42).

Aquinas consistently and lucidly expresses the same view of merit in his *Commentary on Romans*. Explaining Romans 6:23, which was his *sed contra* in article two of question 114, Thomas says,

The very fact that we do what is good and that our works are worthy of eternal life is the result of God’s grace. . . . Thus, therefore, if our works are considered in themselves and as coming from our free will they do not merit eternal life condignly, but only as coming from the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>73</sup>

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69 Ibid., ad 1: “caritas. . . habet ultimum finem pro obiecto”; Levering, *Torah and Temple*, 59, explains, “The charitable will loves the divine good for the divine good’s own sake and loves all human beings insofar as they are ordered to this good.”

70 *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 4, c.: “aliae virtutes imperantur a caritate. . . id quod ex amore facimus, maxime voluntarie facimus.”

71 Ibid., ad 3.

72 Here is the whole sentence: “unde dicendum quod quilibet actus caritatis meretur absolute vitam aeternam.” He then adds that subsequent sin, however, can prevent this merit from obtaining its effect. See Ibid., a. 7, ad 3. Raith, “Calvin’s Critique,” 164–165. See also previous discussion.

73 *Comm. Rom.*, §517: “Sic igitur opera nostra si considerentur in sui natura et secundum quod procedunt ex libero arbitrio hominis, non merentur ex condigno vitam aeternam, sed solum secundum quod procedunt ex gratia Spiritus Sancti.” On the fact that the will cannot produce condign merit, see Raith,

The role of the Holy Spirit becomes more explicit when Aquinas explains what it means for Christians to be “led by the Spirit of God” in Romans 8:14. Citing Philippians 2:13, he states, “the Holy Spirit causes the very movement of the will and of free choice in them.”<sup>74</sup> He glosses Romans 8:18 in the same framework:

Thus, the sufferings of this life, if they are considered in themselves, are slight in comparison to the quantity of this glory. . . . But if these sufferings are considered insofar as they are voluntarily endured for God out of love, which the Holy Spirit produces in us, then man properly [*ex condigno*] merits eternal life through them.<sup>75</sup>

As I have shown above, Thomas believes that human deeds always lack some perfection on account of concupiscence. A sin obviously could not merit eternal life. Yet because sin, for Aquinas, must be voluntary, concupiscence is not necessarily a sin. Because unwanted concupiscence is not a sin, its presence does not remove the possibility of merit. Aquinas believes that each deed is judged according to its object. In the *Prima secundae*, question 18, he writes, “just as a natural thing has its species from its form, so an action has its species from its object.” For example, a work that is evil in its species may have as its object “to

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“Aquinas and Calvin,” 205.

74 *Comm. Rom.*, §635. “[I]psum motum voluntatis et liberi arbitrii Spiritus Sanctus in eis causat.” Philippians 2:13, as he quotes it: “Deus est qui operatur in nobis velle et perficere.” (“It is God who works in us to will and to perform.”) Here is the verse in the original Greek (NA 27): θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας.

75 *Comm. Rom.*, §655: “passiones huius temporis, si secundum se considerentur, multum deficiunt a quantitate huius gloriae. . . . Sed si considerentur huiusmodi passiones in quantum eas aliquis voluntarie sustinet propter Deum ex caritate, quam in nobis spiritus facit, sic ex condigno per huiusmodi passiones homo meretur vitam aeternam.” On this passage, see Raith, “Aquinas and Calvin,” 199–200.

take what belongs to another.”<sup>76</sup> A meritorious deed must have the love of God as its object, and this is sufficient to fix its species as good and not evil, provided the act is not intrinsically evil.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, Aquinas specifically says, “that which makes an action to be more or less good or evil does not make the action differ in species.”<sup>78</sup> It follows that, although concupiscence detracts from the goodness of believers’ works, it cannot change them from good to evil unless the person selects an object other than the love of God, as a result of concupiscence. If a person should choose not to love God fully, that would be a sin. If a person wills to love God fully, yet falls short because of concupiscence, the person has not consented to any sin and therefore has not committed one. If the object of the believer’s act is the love of God, the Holy Spirit moving in the act merits eternal life even though the human’s love is not perfect.

### *Martin Luther on Sin, Concupiscence, and Merit*

With Thomas Aquinas’s theory on the table, we may now consider Martin Luther’s rejection of merit. Luther saw Aquinas as a chief representative of the theological tradition he was

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76 *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 2, c.: “Sicut autem res naturalis habet speciem ex sua forma, ita actio habet speciem ex obiecto; . . . sicut accipere aliena.” See *Ibid.*, q. 72, a. 1, c. Thomas does not, however, equate the object of an action with the agent’s intention *simpliciter*. Every action has a natural end, and the object of a moral act involves both the natural end of the act and the reason why the agent chooses to perform the action. See Steven A. Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 4, 12.

77 See previous discussion. For Thomas, this does not exclude having eternal life as the end for the sake of which one works, because eternal life is the ultimate love of God; see *Comm. Rom.*, §515. Whether a sin is mortal or venial does not change its species either; see *STh* I-II, q. 72, a. 5. This means that venial sins cannot be meritorious (by the sinful aspect being pardoned, for instance), because they are not good by species.

78 *Ibid.*, q. 18, a. 11, ad 1: “quod facit diversitatem in bono vel malo secundum intensionem et remissionem, non facit differentiam moralis actus secundum speciem.” See also a. 11, c.

rejecting,<sup>79</sup> so it is not surprising that he discusses the same topics. Luther was the only major Protestant reformer who had been thoroughly trained in scholastic theology, and that training is evident in his writings.

Our primary source for Luther's thought in this article will be *Rationis Latomianae confutatio*, commonly known as *Contra Latomus* (*Against Latomus*).<sup>80</sup> Luther wrote *Contra Latomus* during his stay at Wartburg Castle in 1521, following the Diet of Worms. Even though he wrote the work in about two weeks without the aid of a library, it is the best of his works for the present investigation for two reasons. First, it was written at the right time. Luther had only recently made his definitive decision to break from the authority of Rome. *Contra Latomus* thus may be supposed to reflect the stage of Luther's thought in which he first decided to reject traditional views on merit. To ensure that Luther's views did not arise in reaction to the Diet of Worms, the main conclusions derived from *Contra Latomus* will be confirmed by reference to some of his works written prior to the diet.

The second reason why *Contra Latomus* is ideal for this study is that it deals with the issue which, for Luther, constitutes the definitive refutation of merit—the sinfulness of every human action. The primary thesis Luther defends against Latomus is that “all good work is sin unless it is forgiven by mercy.”<sup>81</sup> Luther had begun the scholarly debate on this thesis in the Heidelberg Disputation three years earlier.<sup>82</sup> In *Contra Latomus*, Martin

79 Janz, *Luther on Thomas*, 78.

80 For a brief *précis* of *Contra Latomus* in its historical and theological context, see Jared Wicks, *Luther's Reform: Studies on Conversion and the Church* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1992), 68–70. For what is known about the person and work of Jacobus Latomus of Louvain, see J. Vercruyse, “Jacobus Latomus und Martin Luther: Einführendes zu einer Kontroverse,” *Gregorianum* 64 (1983), 515–538.

81 LW 32, 209 (WA 8, 93, 18–19): “Omne opus bonum esse peccatum, nisi ignoscat misericordia.”

82 The relevant theses were 6 and 7. Thesis 6 asserted, “The works of God (we

found the occasion to defend his earlier sentiments at length.<sup>83</sup> Jared Wicks has referred to this work as Luther's "most systematic defense of the *simul iustus et peccator*."<sup>84</sup> As such, for reasons that will become evident later, it is also perhaps Luther's most searching and trenchant refutation of the possibility of merit.

My choice of sin and concupiscence as organizing concepts in Aquinas actually grew out of Luther's text. The body of *Contra Latomus* takes its shape primarily from the Scripture passages Luther uses, but he focuses upon both sin and concupiscence as key elements in his argument. Concerning the definition of sin in Scripture and its relevance, he remarks, "[T]his is the point on which almost the whole question turns." Then he accuses Latomus of "sporting and equivocating about sin."<sup>85</sup>

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speak of those which he does through man) are thus not merits, as though they were sinless." "Non sic sunt opera Dei merita (de iis quae per hominem fiunt loquimur), ut eadem non sint peccata." Thesis 7 added, "The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God." ("Iustorum opera essent mortalia, nisi pio Dei timore ab ipsismet iustis ut mortalia timerentur.") LW 31, 39–40 (WA 1, 353, 25–28).

83 It is worth noting, however, that Luther was willing to reference some notion of merit in the *Heidelberg Disputation*: "for humility and fear of God are our entire merit" ("quia humilitas et timor dei est totum meritum"), LW 31, 44 (WA 1, 357). He may perhaps have meant this in a rhetorical, non-technical sense.

84 Wicks, *Luther's Reform*, 68. For an excellent exposition of the *simul iustus et peccator* theme that includes an argument from *Contra Latomus*, see David S. Yeago, "Martin Luther on Renewal and Sanctification: *Simul Iustus et Peccator* Revisited," in *Sapere teologico e unità della fede: Studi in onore del Prof. Jared Wicks*, ed. Carmen Aparicio Valls, Carmelo Dotolo, and Gianluigi Pasquale (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004), 655–674. Yeago treats *Contra Latomus* specifically on pages 664–669.

85 LW 32, 195 (WA 8, 83, 18–20). "Cum autem hic cardo totius ferme quaestionis versetur, et universum cahos Latomianae offae in peccati istis ludibriis et aequivocationibus superbiat." See similar formulations earlier in the work: "Every good work of the saints while pilgrims in this world is sin." ("Omne opus bonum in sanctis viatoribus esse peccatum"). LW 32, 159 (WA 8, 58, 7–8). "Every good work is sin." ("Omne opus bonum est peccatum"). LW 32, 161 (WA 8, 59, 2).

Concupiscence is important for Luther because he believes that Paul plainly calls it sin:

It is unbelievable how Paul torments the sophists in Romans 6, 7, and 8, for he there named the lust [*concupiscentiam*] which survives baptism sin [*peccatum*], and not penalty [*poenam*].<sup>86</sup>

On the same subject, elsewhere he states, “Now the issue between myself and the sophists is whether or not this sin which remains must be truly considered sin.”<sup>87</sup> This study will follow Luther’s own theological concerns in hopes of understanding him as accurately as possible. Since we have followed the same organization in the presentation of Thomas’s thought, it will be easy to see how the two theologians understand sin and concupiscence differently within their respective theological systems. It will be equally clear how their different concepts of sin and concupiscence led logically to their divergent views about whether the good work of a Christian can merit eternal life.

*Sin.* For Luther, the correct understanding of Paul depends upon having a proper definition of sin.<sup>88</sup> Luther asserts that “sin” in Scripture always has the same meaning: “sin is simply that which is not in accord with God’s law.”<sup>89</sup> What is significant

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86 LW 32, 194 (WA 8, 83, 5–7). “Incredibile est enim, quam torqueat sophistas Paulus Ro. vi. et vii. et viii., quod ibi peccatum et non poenam appellarit concupiscentiam superstitem baptismo.”

87 LW 32, 203 (WA 8, 89, 10–12). “De hoc reliquo peccato mihi cum sophistis quaestio est, an sit censendum vere peccatum nec ne.”

88 Sin was far from a new theme in *Contra Latomus*. On Luther’s doctrine of sin in his sermons leading up to the Diet of Worms, see Charles Ross Rowland IV, “The Importance of Martin Luther’s Commitment to a New Hamartiology for a Proper Interpretation of the Conflict at the Diet of Worms” (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 103–119.

89 LW 32, 195 (WA 8, 83, 28–29). “Peccatum vero aliud nihil est, quam id quod non est secundum legem dei.” The likely biblical source for Luther here is 1 John 3:4b, “sin is lawlessness.” A little later in his career, Luther would be

about this definition is what it does not specify. The phrase *id quod . . . est* (“that which is”) could refer to an action, but it could also refer to a feeling, a disposition, or perhaps something else. Sin does not have to be an action. It does not have to be intended by the rational agent. It only has to depart in some way from the law of God. Luther goes on to quote Romans 3:20, which suggests that the law of God, in this context, refers to the moral will of God as revealed in Scripture.<sup>90</sup> As will soon be evident, this broad definition of sin is of paramount significance for Luther’s theological interpretation of Romans 6–8. Before turning to the reformer’s argument from that passage, which is the heart of his whole refutation against Latomus, it will be helpful to set forth Luther’s general assertions about sin from two other important scriptural passages, Isaiah 64 and Ecclesiastes 7:20.<sup>91</sup>

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more explicit: “Sin, in the Scripture, means not only the outward works of the body but also all that happens to move men to do these works, namely, the inmost heart with all its powers.” LW 35, 369 (WADB 7, 6); quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 144. Hans-Martin Barth suggests that for Luther “sin is a relationship phenomenon.” Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 161. He claims that “sin does not represent a quality or nature in myself but a relationship that, certainly, also changes that nature.” *Ibid.*, 180. Although Barth is right to recognize that the sinner’s relationship to God is the central issue in sin, his statements may be misleading if they are taken to mean that sin is not internal to the Christian. As will become clear in the section on concupiscence, Luther, at least in this early stage of his career, sees concupiscence as both sinful and internal to the Christian.

90 Romans 3:20: “Through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (as quoted in LW 32, 195).

91 Luther also appealed to both of these passages in his *Defense and Explanation of all the Articles* (March, 1521) when defending Article 31: “A righteous man sins in all his good works.” LW 32, 83–84 (WA 7, 432). In 1518, he included these two passages in an explanation of (probably) the sixth thesis (quoted previously and later) of the *Heidelberg Disputation* (LW 31, 58–70). The arguments in that explanation anticipate very closely some of the arguments in *Contra Latomus*.

After setting forth his thesis for the work, Luther leads with a long defense of his interpretation of Isaiah 64, particularly verse 6: “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.”<sup>92</sup> The Wittenberg professor recognizes that the verse refers directly to historic Israel. Yet he also believes that it applies to Christians at all times because the words are “spoken in the name [*persona*] of elect believers.”<sup>93</sup> He thinks this must be the case because Isaiah, and through him the Holy Spirit, prays in the name of these same people.<sup>94</sup> The assumption is that Isaiah and the Holy Spirit would not identify with these people if they were not elect. Luther further argues that the words “all our righteous deeds” are to be taken straightforwardly because there is no absurdity here that requires a figurative interpretation.<sup>95</sup> On this basis Luther states that Isaiah 64:6 “proves that all our righteousness is unclean, and that every good work is sin.”<sup>96</sup>

Luther begins his discussion of Ecclesiastes 7:20 by quoting it: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and sins not.”<sup>97</sup> He soon makes an appeal to Hebrew grammar, which forms the heart of his exegesis of this verse. The Old Testament scholar states that “in expressions of this sort the conjunction is generally superfluous.” On this basis he claims that the clause “who does good and sins not” means “who sins not

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92 LW 32, 161 (WA 8, 59, 6–7): “Et facti sumus immundi omnes nos, et universae iustitiae nostrae, quasi pannus menstruatæ.”

93 LW 32, 162 (WA 8, 60, 5).

94 LW 32, 164 (WA 8, 61).

95 LW 32, 168 (WA 8, 64, 20–21): “omnes iustitias nostras esse immundas.” It may be worth noticing here that *iustitias* is plural. Luther is paraphrasing the verse to clarify that it is, specifically, our righteous deeds that are unclean.

96 “probatque, quod omnis iustitia est immunda, omne opus bonum peccatum.” LW 32, 168 (WA 8, 64, 23–24).

97 LW 32, 180 (WA 8, 73, 1–2): “Non est homo iustus in terra, qui bene faciat et non peccet.”

when he does good.”<sup>98</sup> This interpretation leads Luther to assert that “sin, as long as we live, inheres essentially in good works, just as the ability to laugh inheres in man.”<sup>99</sup> This verse was also the basis of his sixth thesis in the Heidelberg Disputation: “The works of God (we speak of those which he does through man) are thus not merits, as though they were sinless.”<sup>100</sup>

Given the importance of this verse for the early Luther, and given that it seems to prove his position if his exegesis is correct, a brief examination of Ecclesiastes 7:20 is in order. The Hebrew reads as follows: “*kî ’ādām ʾen ṣādîq bāʾareṣ ʾāšer yaʾšeh-tôb welôʾ yehēṭāʾ*.”<sup>101</sup> Luther is right that the Hebrew conjunction *wāw* (ו) has several uses that go beyond the range of the Latin conjunction *et*. Nevertheless, Latomus probably has the upper hand on this point. The Louvain professor, although working only with the Latin, suggested that 1 Kings 8:46 was relevant for understanding this verse.<sup>102</sup> The verse in 1 Kings, which is part of Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple, contains the following clause: *kî ʾenʾādām ʾāšer lôʾ-yehēṭāʾ* (“for there is no man who does not sin”).<sup>103</sup> All of the words in this clause appear in Ecclesiastes 7:20 in almost the same order. Thus Franz Delitzsch (d. 1890) was probably right to conclude that the verse in Ecclesiastes is in some way based upon this clause from 1 Kings.<sup>104</sup> The longer verse amplifies the meaning of the

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98 LW 32, 183 (WA 8, 74, 32–36): “soleat coniunctio superflue poni in eius generis locutionibus. . . Qui bene faciat et non peccet. . . qui cum bene fecerit, non peccet.”

99 LW 32, 186 (WA 8, 77, 9–11). “Peccatum enim . . . dico praedicatione per-seitatis inesse operi bono, quam diu vivimus, sicut risibile inest homini.”

100 LW 31, 45; for the Latin, see quotation in note 82.

101 The Hebrew is according to the diplomatic text *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967, 1977, and 1997): כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא:

102 LW 32, 183 (WA 8, 75, 5).

103 כִּי אֵין אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִחַטָּא

104 Karl Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Old Testament Commentaries*, vol. 4 (Grand

shorter, but it probably does not change it drastically. The sense of Ecclesiastes 7:20, then, is that among the righteous men on earth, there is not one who always does good and never sins.<sup>105</sup> The verse thus leaves open the question of whether some individual actions of the righteous may be without admixture of sin.

*Concupiscence.* Luther makes two points about concupiscence to show that every human action must be a sin. The first is that concupiscence itself is sin, and the second is that concupiscence infects every good deed, even the deeds of believers who do not consent to it. Before presenting Luther's arguments for these two points, it is necessary to clarify what he means by "concupiscence" (*concupiscentia*).

Paul Althaus suggests that concupiscence, for Luther in general, "is much more than sensuality lusting against reason; rather it is the opposition of the entire man to God. This opposition is centered in man's soul and spirit."<sup>106</sup> All people have inherited this inclination through the transmission of original sin. Unbelievers are simply slaves to it, with very little inclination to the good, but believers can oppose concupiscence by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, "For Luther, only the Christian can be seriously described as 'man in contradiction.'"<sup>107</sup> This

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Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1967), 1046.

105 A survey of five modern Protestant commentaries on Ecclesiastes, in addition to Keil and Delitzsch, found no supporters for Luther's interpretation, nor, apparently, did any consider it an option worth mentioning. Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 348; Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 68–70; Duane A. Garrett, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman Press), 324; J. Stafford Wright, *Ecclesiastes*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1176; Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 115.

106 Althaus, *Theology*, 155.

107 *Ibid.*

inner conflict is always present.<sup>108</sup> Althaus's definition fits with the general outlook of *Contra Latomus*, as long as one understands that, while concupiscence includes the sinful desires of the spirit, such as pride, it does not exclude any of the passions.<sup>109</sup> This is so because any of the passions can move the will against God, which they do by leading it to make its object into an idol that replaces God.<sup>110</sup> For the purpose of understanding Luther's precise argument, however, Althaus's broad definition will have to give way to the particular definition Luther uses in the course of his argument.

As noted previously, Luther's argument for concupiscence as sin is primarily that Paul refers to it as "sin" in Romans 6–8. Luther attempts to prove that Paul equates concupiscence with sin on the basis of Romans 6:12: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its passions."<sup>111</sup> Luther comments, "What could have been said more clearly? Sin and its passions are in the body, but one must take care that it does not reign."<sup>112</sup> He later clarifies that this sin does not in fact rule in the saints, but the fact that Paul has to command them about it proves that sin is "present with its passions [*concupiscenciis*] in

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108 Ibid., 156.

109 See for example LW 32, 210, and the discussion of this passage that follows.

110 Charles Boyer, *Luther: Sa Doctrine* (Rome: Presses de L'Université Grégorienne, 1970), 37.

111 As quoted in LW 32, 208 (WA 8, 92, 21–22). We have replaced "their" with "its" (*eius*) to better elucidate Luther's sense. The full Latin quotation of the verse here is: "Non regnet peccatum in mortali corpore vestro, ut obediatis concupiscentiis eius." The Greek for this verse, according to the Nestle-Aland edition is: "Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑποκοῦναι ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ." Aland, et al., eds. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27 revidierte Auflage (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1898 and 1993), in loc.; all references to the Greek of the New Testament are according to this edition. The Greek words corresponding to *peccatum* and *concupiscentia* are ἁμαρτία and ἐπιθυμία, respectively.

112 LW 32, 208 (WA 8, 92, 22–24).

the body.”<sup>113</sup>

Luther goes on to explain the relationship between the terms “sin” and “concupiscence” in Romans 6:12. He writes, “two evil things survive baptism, sin and its concupiscence. The words of Paul are clear: sin, the tinder (*fomes*), is natural evil, while concupiscence is its motion.”<sup>114</sup> So, according to this reading of St. Paul, the inclination to sin, the tinder is sin, and Luther is saying that concupiscence is sin-in-motion.<sup>115</sup> In other words, it is the already sinful movement of an inclination toward sinful action. This idea fits nicely with his definition of sin as whatever is not in accord with God’s law. A movement of affect toward sin is not in accord with God’s law. Therefore, it also has to be a sin. The same would apply to any inclination or disposition that gives rise to the movement. In another discussion of Romans, Luther called the disposition to sin “concupiscence” as well.<sup>116</sup> So, for Luther, both the inclination to sin and any movement of that inclination toward sinful action may be called “concupiscence”

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113 LW 32, 210 (WA 8, 94, 12–13).

114 Partial translation modified from LW 32, 214 (WA 8, 96, 33–36): “Non (inquam) negare poterunt duo mala superesse baptismo, peccatum et concupiscentiam eius. Verba Pauli aperta sunt, peccatum, fomes ipse, naturale malum, concupiscentia, motus eius, huic non obediendum, illud destruendum dicit, ‘ut destruaturs (inquit) corpus peccati.’”

115 Earlier in the work Luther may have glossed “lust” (*concupiscentiam*) as “the motions of sin remaining after baptism” (LW 32, 194 [WA 8, 82, 32–33]), although that passage is ambiguous and could be taken to refer simply to concupiscence (as a disposition) and its motion.

116 In his *Lectures on Romans*, which likely forms the exegetical basis of Luther’s discussion here, the Wittenberg professor defines concupiscence, understood as a disposition, as sin itself: “Therefore actual sin (as the theologians call it) is more truly the work and fruit of sin, while sin is that very passion, tinder, and concupiscence or disposition towards evil and resistance towards good.” LW 25, 259 (WA 56, 271). Yeago’s definition of concupiscence in the early Luther is “The disorder of affect and desire against which the faithful must struggle throughout their lives in this world.” Yeago, “Luther on Renewal,” 659.

and are in fact sin.<sup>117</sup>

The traditional interpretations that Luther rejects presented Paul as using some figure of speech in this part of Romans.

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117 In the American Edition of Luther's works, there is a small translation problem in this section that obscures Luther's argument. Several pages prior to defining concupiscence Luther says that Paul "named the lust which survives baptism sin, and not penalty." LW 32, 194. This is obviously the correct translation of the phrase, "peccatum et non poenam appellavit concupiscentiam superstitem baptismo." WA 8, 83, 6–7. Later, in a similar vein, Luther rejects the opinions of the fathers "sive appellent superstitem illam concupiscentiam infirmitatem, poenam, imperfectionem, vicium aut quoquo modo volent." WA 8, 89, 19–20. The American Edition renders this as "when they called this remainder lust, weakness, penalty, imperfection, fault, or whatever else they supposed it to be." LW 32, 203. The translation has taken *superstitem illam* to be the direct object of *appellent* and *concupiscentiam* to be a predicate accusative along with the words that follow—*infirmitatem, poenam, etc.* Grammatically, this is possible, but it is not the best possible reading. The American Edition makes concupiscence to be one of the guilt-free replacements, in Luther's mind, for Paul's "sin." Luther has already said, however, that Paul calls concupiscence sin and that this proves it is not a mere penalty. For Luther to change his understanding of concupiscence so that it could fit in the category of guilt-free replacements for "sin" would be quite inconsistent on his part. It is possible that Luther is simply being inconsistent, but it is not likely, particularly given the importance of concupiscence in Luther's present argument. A better translation of the lines in question would be as follows: "when they called this remaining concupiscence weakness, penalty, imperfection, fault, or whatever else they supposed it to be." On this reading, *superstitem illam concupiscentiam* is the direct object of *appellent*, while the words that follow *concupiscentiam* remain predicate accusatives. (On predicate accusatives in Latin, see J. B. Greenough and J. H. Allen, *Allen and Greenough's Latin Grammar*, Revised and Enlarged Edition [Boston and London: Ginn and Company, 1899], 239.) This appears to have been the understanding of editors of the Weimar Edition, who chose not to put a comma between *concupiscentiam* and *infirmitatem*, thus suggesting that it was not a part of the list of predicate accusatives. In addition, unlike the translation in the American Edition, this reading maintains the classical usage of the demonstrative adjective, which normally comes before, rather than after, the noun it modifies. See Frederic Wheelock, *Wheelock's Latin*, Sixth Edition, Revised, rev. Richard A. LaFleur (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 56. Of course, Luther was under no strict obligation to follow classical conventions, but he probably was aware of them.

While they could agree that Paul was talking about concupiscence, they did not think that concupiscence was itself a sin.<sup>118</sup> They held that, while calling it “sin,” Paul really meant that concupiscence was a “weakness, penalty, imperfection, [or] fault.”<sup>119</sup> While Thomas’s interpretation was of this kind, distinguishing between sin and the concupiscence that inclines us to it, Luther combines the concepts due to his broader concept of sin.

The result of the traditional interpretations was that Paul’s “sin” in Romans 6:12 was not directly the cause of any guilt. Luther will have none of that. He would grant a figurative usage of “sin” in Romans 6 “only if it were proved not to be genuine sin because of the absurdity of this opinion or of its consequences.”<sup>120</sup>

The second point in Luther’s argument that concupiscence makes all deeds sinful is that concupiscence infects all deeds.

It is indeed true that there is no passion ceaselessly driving us to distraction. Anger does not always burn, evil desire does not always rage . . . but one of these succeeds the other. When they all sleep then languor and sloth do not sleep. If you are strenuously active, then pride awakens. As I have most truly said, just as we are not without the flesh, so we do not work without the flesh.<sup>121</sup>

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118 LW 32, 194 (WA 8, 82, 28–83, 7).

119 LW 32, 203 (WA 8, 89, 18–23).

120 LW 32, 204 (WA 8, 89, 25–27): “Dicimus ergo, si probaverint, vel ex absurditate sententiae, vel ex consequentia, peccatum hoc non esse peccatum vere, cedemus et peccatum hoc loco non peccatum, sed poenam significare consentiemus.” Here is a literal translation: “We say therefore, if they prove, either from the absurdity of the opinion or from a consequence of it, that this ‘sin’ is not truly sin, we will concede and agree that ‘sin’ in this passage signifies ‘penalty’ and not ‘sin.’”

121 LW 32, 253; (WA 8, 123, 36–124, 4): “Verum est quidem, non semper una passione nos insanire, non semper ardet ira, non semper furit libido, non semper torquet invidia, sed una succedit alteri. Et quando omnes dormiunt, tepor et ignavia non dormitant. Quod si etiam strenue agas, superbia vigilat.

All human deeds involve concupiscence in some way, so all human deeds are sins. As Althaus concludes about Luther's view in general, "Throughout the life of a Christian, good and evil are mixed in every act."<sup>122</sup>

Consistent with his view that concupiscence is sinful in itself, with no need for conscious consent, Luther further infers, "The fact that we cannot sleep in purity is sin."<sup>123</sup> Even when awake, one may sin without being conscious of it.<sup>124</sup> If one consciously rejects the movement of concupiscence, one still sins. As Boyer has said, "for Luther, concupiscence makes us sinners by its mere presence, even if we do not follow it and refuse our consent."<sup>125</sup>

Luther also appeals to Augustine's *Letter* 167, where the bishop of Hippo states that everyone sins because no one has as much love as he should.<sup>126</sup> Surely Mark 12:30-31, or some

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Et ut verissime dixi, sicut sine carne non sumus, ita sine carne non operamur." In one passage Luther describes concupiscence as "a part of us which fights against us" by opposing God's law. LW 32, 212.

122 Althaus, *Theology*, 155-156. In the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) Luther has compared God's working through humans to cutting with a rusty hatchet: "even though the worker is a good craftsman, the hatchet leaves bad, jagged, and ugly gashes." LW 31, 45. In the *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (March 1521), he said of the saints, "At one and the same time, they serve God according to the spirit, and sin according to the flesh." LW 32, 84.

123 LW 32, 253 (WA 8, 124, 12). "Peccatum est, quod pure dormire non possumus."

124 LW 32, 191.

125 Boyer, *Luther: Sa Doctrine*, 36: "pour Luther, la concupiscence nous constitue pécheurs par sa seule présence, même si nous ne la suivons pas et si nous refusons notre consentement."

126 LW 32, 204 (WA 8, 89, 37-90, 5). Luther quotes lines from the following passage of Augustine, *Letter* 167 (CSEL 44, 602, translation mine): "And, in order that I might summarize generally and briefly the notion I have of virtue, which pertains to right living: virtue is the charity by which one loves what ought to be loved. This charity is greater in some, less in others. In still others,

similar verse, lies in the background of this discussion:

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.<sup>127</sup>

Although in other works Luther makes the command to love God central to the evaluation of all actions,<sup>128</sup> in this passage he uses Augustine’s remarks on the culpable lack of love in an effort to prove that when the Doctor of Grace refers to concupiscence as a “fault [*vitium*],” he means that it is a sin. He introduces the letter as an instance supporting his claim that “Augustine himself in many places calls it [i.e., the remaining concupiscence] both fault and sin.”<sup>129</sup> The difference from Luther’s other works is only one of emphasis, however. That which causes the believer’s love

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there is none. The fullest charity, however, which could not be increased, is in no man as long as he lives on earth. But, inasmuch as it can be increased, certainly that which is less than it ought to be is from vice. Because of this vice there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin [cf. Eccl. 7:20].” (“Et ut generaliter breuiter que complectar, quam de uirtute habeo notionem, quod ad recte uiuendum adinet, uirtus est caritas, qua id, quod diligendum est, diligitur. Haec in aliis maior in aliis minor in aliis nulla est, plenissima uero, quae iam non possit augeri, quam diu hic homo uiuit, in nemine; quam diu autem augeri potest, profecto illud, quod minus est, quam debet, ex uitio est. Ex quo uitio non est iustus in terra, qui faciet bonum et non peccabit.”)

127 RSV Second Catholic Edition. This passage is Jesus’s quotation and interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

128 See, for example, *The Small Catechism* (1529), where the answer to the “what is this [*was ist das*]” of each of the second through tenth commandments is “We are to fear and love God, so that we . . .” Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord; The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 351–354.

129 Translation modified from LW 32, 204 (WA 8, 89, 35–36): “Augustinus ipse in multis locis plane et vitium et peccatum appellet?”

to be imperfect is the presence of concupiscence.<sup>130</sup>

Bringing love into the discussion does strengthen Luther's argument in one way, however. Even if his other exegetical arguments failed, he could still argue that concupiscence constitutes a sin precisely because it prevents whole-hearted love of God.<sup>131</sup> He could make the same argument to support his definition of sin as anything contrary to the law of God, since he interprets the entire Decalogue as being about the inner disposition of the heart.<sup>132</sup> Failure to love God fully is exactly the same as "that which is contrary to God's law," because full love of God is precisely what the law stipulates.<sup>133</sup>

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130 For an excellent summary of this point see Yeago, "Luther on Renewal," 658.

131 Yeago, "Luther on Renewal," 657–658, focuses on this argument in particular.

132 "For Luther, no divine commandment has regard simply for outward behavior; every divine commandment aims by its own inner intentionality at the 'ground of the heart.'" Yeago, "Luther on Renewal," 658. See also David S. Yeago, "Martin Luther on Grace, Law and Moral Life, Prolegomena to an Ecumenical Discussion of *Veritatis Splendor*," *The Thomist* 62 (1998), 163–191. For an early instance of Luther's treating the last two commandments of the Decalogue in this way, see Martin Luther, *Decem praecepta Wittenbergensi praedicata populo*, (1518), WA 1, 511–516. For an overview of Luther's early sermons on the Decalogue, see Henri Strohl, *Luther Jusqu'en 1520* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 234–238.

133 For the Finnish interpretation of Luther and the command to love God fully, see Simo Peura, "What God Gives Man Receives: Luther on Salvation," in *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 76–95. Peura suggests that the believer receives the love that fulfills this commandment "from God, who is himself this love and who gives it to the believer who desires to receive him" (78–79). Peura grants, however, that this love is always imperfect (94). The problem with Peura's view is that, for Luther, imperfect love is a sin, as this study has shown. The Finnish school of Martin Luther interpretation developed in the context of Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue. In the process of preparing for this dialogue, Tuomo Mannermaa suggested that "[t]he indwelling of Christ as grasped in the Lutheran tradition implies a real participation in God." This idea provided a point of contact with the Orthodox concept of *theosis*, or deification. The basis for this view, and the central idea

On one level, Luther and Aquinas have significant agreement on the subject of concupiscence (the bad kind). Both see it as a result of the Fall that inclines all people toward sin. Both agree the believer can resist it by the power of the Holy Spirit, and both posit that it also detracts from every good work. They even agree that the love of God is what makes works good, and that all Christian acts fall short of perfect love. The principal disagreement comes from their different concepts of sin. For Luther, the inclination to sin is automatically a sin because it moves contrary to God's law. For Aquinas the inclination to sin cannot be a sin because it is not voluntary.<sup>134</sup>

*Merit.* Given that the movement of concupiscence against God's law makes every human deed a sin, it remains to show how this view relates to the possibility of merit. Luther is not concerned with the deeds of non-believers or the intentional sins of Christians. The issue under debate in *Contra Latomus* is whether any sinless action at all is possible for the believer.<sup>135</sup> Thus, when Luther considers the question of merit, which he does in this work only obliquely, he focuses upon the good works done by believers in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In response to Latomus's assertion that the apostle Paul performed a good deed without sin, Luther performs a thought experiment. He begins, "Let us take St. Paul or Peter as they pray, preach, or do some other good work." If the work they perform

of the new Finnish interpretation, is the claim that for Luther "Christ (in both his person and his work) is present in faith and is through this presence identical with the righteousness of faith." Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why is Luther so Fascinating: Modern Finnish Luther Research," in *Union with Christ*, 2.

<sup>134</sup> Perhaps this is what leads Aquinas to interpret *peccatum* in Romans 6:12 as the guilt-free inclination to sin. Whereas Luther insists that such interpretations are only admissible if his more literal interpretation leads to absurdity, Aquinas would perhaps respond that a scriptural interpretation that implies voluntary sin does meet the requirement of absurdity. This would eliminate several of Luther's exegetical arguments.

<sup>135</sup> LW 32, 234.

is truly without sin, they could rightly say to God,

Lord God, behold this good work which I have done through the help of Thy grace. There is in it neither fault nor any sin, nor does it need thy forgiving mercy. I do not ask for this, as I want Thee to judge it with Thy strictest and truest judgments. In it [my work] I can glory before Thee, because Thou canst not condemn it, for Thou art just and true. Indeed, I am certain Thou canst not condemn it without denying Thyself. The need of mercy which, as thy petition [in the Lord's Prayer] teaches, forgives the trespass in this deed is canceled, for there is here only the justice which crowns it.<sup>136</sup>

Luther follows this narration with the rhetorical question, "Latomus, doesn't this make you shudder and sweat?"<sup>137</sup> The point at which the thought experiment has been driving is that God would be obligated by justice to reward a sinless deed. This would lead the doer of the action to rely upon the deed, with no need for God's forgiving mercy. He summarizes, "a work without sin deserves praise, needs no mercy, and fears not the judgment of God."<sup>138</sup> This is, for Luther, an absolutely absurd and unacceptable scenario.

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136 LW 32, 190 (WA 8, 79, 17–29): "Demus itaque S. Paulum vel Petrum sive orantem sive docentem, sive aliud bonum opus operantem. Si est opus bonum sine peccato et absque omni vitio, potest ipse stare cum debita humilitate coram deo et dicere hoc modo: 'Ecce domine deus, hoc opus bonum per tuae gratiae auxilium feci, non est in eo vicium aut peccatum ullum, nec indiget tua misericordia ignoscente, quam super eo nec peto, deinde volo, ut iudicio tuo verissimo et strictissimo ipsum iudices. In hoc enim gloriari coram te possum, quod nec tu possis illud damnare, cum sis iustus et verax, imo nisi teipsum neget, non damnabis, certus sum, non iam opus misericordia, quae remittat debitum in isto opere, sicut oratio tua docet, evacuata hic est utique, sed tantum iustitia, quae coronet.'"

137 Ibid.: "Horrescisme et sudas, Latome?"

138 LW 32, 190 (WA 8, 79, 31–32): "opus esse absque peccato, laude dignum, misericordia non egens, iudicium dei non timens..."

He goes on to emphasize the point that a sinless deed, considered by itself, would require justification from God:

You cannot hold at one and the same time that, “I have a work without sin,” and “I am not justified in this.” Do not make God unjust so that he would not justify a good work without sin.<sup>139</sup>

It appears that, for Luther, if it were possible to perform a sinless deed, such a deed, considered in isolation, would merit justification. Here we see again that for Luther everything hinges on whether every Christian act is a sin.

A remark that appears earlier in *Contra Latomus* may help clarify what exactly Luther finds objectionable about a human hypothetically receiving praise and justification from God on the basis of a good work. He quips, “Now the saints of God are ashamed of their works before him and glory in him alone.”<sup>140</sup> It appears that, for Luther, glory is a zero-sum game. If the saints receive any glory, it would seem to detract from God’s glory. This is not acceptable, so neither is it acceptable to hold any view suggesting that the saints actually deserve glory. Thus Luther’s response to Latomus’s accusation that he was “blackening the glory of the saints,”<sup>141</sup> is ultimately, “Let people like Latomus stop blackening the glory of God . . . and no longer raise up idols for us out of our dubious and unbelieving works.”<sup>142</sup>

In a sense, Luther’s argument for the sin of every human action is the solution to the problem of how to keep the saints

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139 Translation modified from LW 32, 191 (WA 8, 80, 23–25): “Non stant simul ‘habeo opus sine peccato’ et ‘in hoc non sum iustificatus.’ Noli deum iniquum facere, qui non iustificet opus bonum sine peccato.”

140 LW 32, 181 (WA 8, 73, 10–11): “Nam sancti dei confunduntur in suis operibus coram deo et in solo ipso gloriantur.”

141 LW 32, 181 (WA 8, 73, 3–4): “ponere maculam in gloriam sanctorum.”

142 LW 32, 193 (WA 8, 82, 15–17): “Desinant ergo et mei Latomi maculam in gloriam dei ponere et . . . nec nobis idolum operis nostri dubii et infidelis erigant.”

from stealing God's glory. Althaus recognizes this theme, saying of *Contra Latomus* in general,

The most important matter of all was at stake, that is, the recognition of the infinitely great and marvelous glory of grace and of God's saving activity in Christ. Making sin great is inseparably connected with exalting and praising grace.<sup>143</sup>

So far from being worthy of glory, each good deed of the saints is actually damnable, considered in itself. Interpreting a verse from Isaiah 64, Luther makes this point explicitly, "This means that all righteous deeds are polluted to such a degree that absolutely no one has anything which in Thy sight is good enough to cause Thee to restrain Thy anger."<sup>144</sup>

Luther thus has two separable arguments for why each deed must be damnable in itself. The first argument turns on Luther's assumption that any deed with no fault would merit justification. He thinks the individual in such a situation would rob God of the glory God receives in giving mercy. One cannot allow this to happen. The second argument is that all human deeds are, in fact, sinful and therefore worthy of God's wrath. Luther sees this as a simple fact of Scripture. It obviously follows from Luther's view that it is impossible to merit justification. By a small logical extension, one can also see that it is impossible to merit eternal life.

Luther has made this extension on previous occasions. One of them was the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, when he claimed that God's works done through the saints are "not merits, as though they were sinless."<sup>145</sup> After Pope Leo X had con-

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143 Althaus, *Theology*, 142.

144 LW 32, 169 (WA 8, 65, 15-17): "Scilicet, adeo sunt omnes iustitiae pollutae, ut prorsus nullius apud te valeat, qua tenearis in hac ira tua."

145 LW 31, 39-40 (WA 1, 353, 25-28): "non sic sunt . . . merita . . . ut eadem non sint peccata." See note 82 above for full quotation of theses 6 and 7.

demned this idea, along with forty others drawn from Luther's writings, in the bull *Exsurge Domine* (1520), Luther replied with a series of works defending his condemned propositions.<sup>146</sup> In the last of these works, written in March of 1521, shortly before the Diet of Worms in the following month, he maintained that the "unrighteousness" in every good deed "cannot be merely a 'defect' or a 'weakness,' but must be a damnable sin, which prevents salvation, unless mercy intervenes, and accepts and rewards our works out of sheer grace."<sup>147</sup>

Thanks to mercy and grace, Luther does think the Christian's works ultimately can be acceptable to God. In multiple places he states that God in his mercy forgives the sin in the deed on the basis of faith in Christ and thus is able to accept the work done by the Holy Spirit through the believer as pure and perfect.<sup>148</sup> In light of this situation, Luther offers the following

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146 LW 32, 5.

147 Martin Luther, *Defense and Explanation of all the Articles* (March, 1521) (Grund und Urfach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, jo durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt find); LW 32, 86 (WA 7, 437, 22–26): "Szo es denn ungerechtigkeit findet ynn unferer gerechtigkeit, muß die felb ungerechtigkeit nit ertichtet, fzondernn warhafftig da feinn, und nit allein ein feil odder geprechenn, fzondernn ein vordamlich fund, die an der felickeit hindert, fzo nit die barmhertzickeyt furkumpt und aufz lautter gnaden die felben werck an nimpt und belonet."

148 LW 31, 56; 62–64; LW 32, 172; 173; 175; 189; Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520), trans. Scott Hendrix (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 20–23 (§3–6). Peura argues that in *Contra Latomus* "the reality of residual sin and the reality that a Christian is also really made righteous can be integrated through the medium of the indwelling Christ who effects unity with the Christian. Because of Luther's view of the real union with Christ, we can connect the effective aspect of justification to the forensic aspect." Simo Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift: The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification," in *Union With Christ*, 64. Peura's attempt to use Luther's remarks and metaphors about union with Christ to interpret his doctrine of justification seems to run aground on the main thesis of *Contra Latomus*. As this study has shown, Luther thought all Christian deeds were sins and therefore could not be the basis of justification. However eloquently Luther may affirm union with Christ

advice in *Contra Latomus*:

You will therefore judge yourselves one way in accordance with the severity of God's judgment, and another in accordance with the kindness of his mercy. Do not separate these two perspectives in this life. According to one, all your works are polluted and unclean on account of that part of you which is God's adversary; according to the other, you are genuinely pure and righteous.<sup>149</sup>

### Conclusion

In summary, Luther and Aquinas have significant agreement on the pervasiveness and practical effects of concupiscence. They agree that concupiscence involves an inclination to sin and affects every action, even the actions of Christians that are ultimately the works of the Holy Spirit. They agree that concupiscence causes every action, considered in itself, to lack some perfection. Luther's understanding of sin, however, requires him to see the very inclination to sin as a sin itself and therefore every action as a sin because it does not accord perfectly with the law of God. Obviously sins do not merit eternal life. Thomas,

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and the purity of works that have been forgiven, he probably does not mean to say that the real righteousness in Christian good works may be a part of justification after all.

149 LW 32, 213 (WA 8, 96, 2–6): “Aliud ergo de te iudicabis bis secundum rigorem iudicii dei, aliud secundum benignitatem misericordiae eius. Et hos duos conspectus non separabis in hac vita. Secundum illum omnia opera tua polluta et imunda sunt propter partem tui adversariam deo, secundum hunc vero totus mundus et iustus.” This passage provides an excellent example of how the “total” *simul* is based upon the ‘partial’ *simul*. Yeago, who argues this point from a variety of Luther's texts, presents it in this way: “I want to suggest on the contrary that the ‘total’ *simul* is an effect of the ‘partial’ *simul*, that *because* believers are partly sinners, partly righteous, they can therefore stand before God only as *peccatores totaliter* who are nonetheless received as *iusti totaliter* for Christ's sake.” Yeago, “Luther on Renewal,” 662.

however, believes sin must be voluntary and so does not see concupiscence as sinful unless it receives the consent of the will in some way. This allows that many good deeds of believers may not be sins, even though they are not perfect, and thus the possibility of merit remains open. Even so, for Aquinas, human works could never merit eternal life condignly unless they were also the works of the Holy Spirit. The works of the Holy Spirit in believers do merit eternal life condignly on Aquinas's account.

I have shown that Luther and Aquinas reached different conclusions on the question of merit as logical consequences of their differing views on sin and concupiscence. This is not at all to suggest that these were the only factors in their arriving at different conclusions. Nevertheless, it seems that Luther's view of sin combined with the pervasiveness of concupiscence logically precluded the possibility of agreeing with Aquinas on merit.

What remains now is to articulate how all of this connects to Christian higher education, as promised at the beginning. Martin Luther had at least a fair understanding of what he was doing when he rejected the notion of merit. Today, however, many Christians suffer from very fuzzy thinking in these matters. I suspect relatively few Protestants consider every one of their good works to be damnable sins, although I did hold this view myself at one time. Also, I have observed that Catholics are often reticent to affirm the doctrine of merit, or they may even reject it out of a misguided sense of piety. If we all had learned Thomas's terms and concepts, we would not be in this mess. I do not mean to say that all would agree with Thomas. Some would side with Luther, but at least they would know what their view entails. Ambiguity does not help anyone.

This study has focused on sin, concupiscence, and merit, but I offer this reflection as an example that I believe is representative of a broader theme. Similar popular ambiguities surround terms like *justification*, *faith*, and even *God*. Thus, in order for

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Christians to understand Protestant or Catholic theology, and especially to understand how they are alike and different, all Christian students should receive formation that includes the categories and concepts systematized by Thomas Aquinas.

AQUINAS AND LUTHER ON SIN, CONCUPISCENCE, AND MERIT

**INSTILLING A SENSE OF THE SACRED:  
THE ROLE OF SENSORY EXPERIENCE IN THE  
SACRAMENTAL LIFE**

*Thomas J. Kaiser*

*Introduction*

As the title suggests, this essay is about how Christ and his Church use sense experience to instill in us a sense of the sacred, especially in the sacramental life of the Church. The English word “sacred” comes from the Latin word *sacro*: to consecrate, to make sacred, to dedicate. The adjectival form, *sacer, sacra, sacrum*, is synonymous with holy, consecrated. The Israelites were called a holy people because they were set apart from all the other nations by God for his salvific plan. Furthermore, God revealed to Moses how the Israelites were to worship him. In the Book of Exodus we see the minute details with which Moses was commanded to make the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the Meeting Tent and all its furnishings, and the priestly garments. The building materials and dimensions were specified by God, as were the finishes of the rooms, the colors and designs of fabrics and images. The crown of the turban worn by Aaron and his sons bore the inscription, “Holy to the Lord” (Ex 39:30).

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When Moses completed all the work commanded by the Lord, “the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud abode upon it” (Ex 40:34). All these things were made sacred, set apart for the proper worship of God and as a sign of his presence with his people.

Having given some account of what is meant by the term “sacred,” we will examine the question why sensible signs are necessary. The focus of the discussion will be the New Testament sacraments. Let us begin by saying what a sacrament is and discuss why Christ made the sacraments as sensible things. Then we will show how these sensible aspects of the sacraments and the things surrounding the sacraments can lead us to a sense of the sacred.

### *I. Definition of Sacrament*

The first definition of a sacrament that comes to mind is the one I learned in preparation for receiving First Communion more than sixty years ago. It is amazing how things we had to memorize from the Catechism stay in memory over the years. And the formulations in the Baltimore Catechism were precise and very accurate. At seven years of age, we did not understand all that was implied in them, but we understood enough to be aware of and to desire the sacraments we were about to receive. As we mature, we can recall those definitions and think more deeply about them. There is no need to reformulate the definitions; they were perfectly adequate. But there is more to understand than we did at first.

The Baltimore Catechism defines a sacrament as an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. We can divide this definition into three parts: 1) outward sign, 2) instituted by Christ, 3) to give grace. The last part tells us the purpose of the

sacraments or what they do. The second part tells us who made the sacraments and gives them their power. What does the first part tell us? What does it mean to say that a sacrament is an outward sign? Does it tell us what it is? It strikes one as a bit strange to say a sacrament is a sign; at least it seems stranger than it did when I heard it as a seven-year-old. We are inclined to think of the New Testament sacraments primarily as causes of grace. However, if we assume the Church's definition is a good one, it must be telling us what a sacrament really is. It follows that a sacrament is essentially a kind of sign. The other two parts specify the notion of sign by saying who made it and what it does.

Therefore, in order to understand what a sacrament is we need to understand what a sign is. In his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine defines signs as "those things which are used to indicate something else."<sup>1</sup> At first glance this does not seem too helpful; but let us take a closer look. The first thing to notice is that a sign is a thing. When speaking of the sacraments it is clear that we are speaking of sensible things, because according to the definition they are "outward" signs. A sign is a sensible thing that indicates something else. What does "to signify" mean? It means that upon being perceived by the senses the sign leads the mind to something else. For example, when we see a red, octagonal-shaped piece of sheet metal mounted on a post at an intersection, we do not dwell on the beauty of its shape or the brightness of the red; our mind is led immediately to the notion of stopping.

There are many kinds of signs. Some are natural, such as smoke being a sign of fire, or footprints being a sign of an animal's presence. Other signs are conventional, i.e., they were made by us to signify something. The stop sign is a good example of

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk.1, ch. 2 (all translations of St. Augustine and St. Thomas are my own): "res eas videlicet quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur."

this. Red octagons do not naturally signify stopping. The spoken word is another excellent example of a conventional sign. The fact that there are many different languages makes clear that they are conventional. And when we hear a spoken word, the mind is immediately led to what is signified by the word, which is a concept in the mind of something understood. When I hear the word “water,” I think of what water is and I also form images in my imagination of the various sensible qualities of water. I do not dwell on the sensible sound of the word. In fact, this would be very difficult in the case of spoken words because they vanish into thin air as soon as they are spoken. The fact that a spoken word vanishes so quickly is one of the reasons they are such perfect signs to use for communicating thoughts. Imagine using odors to communicate, as many lower organisms do. It would significantly slow down the pace of a conversation, and, unfortunately, one might pay more attention to the sign than to what is signified.

We can conclude that insofar as sacraments are signs, they are sensible things that lead the mind to think of what they signify. One might wonder, then, why Christ instituted the sacraments as sensible signs. We are rational creatures. It is our intellect that separates us from the other earthly creatures. Why is it not sufficient to understand what a sacrament is and what it does without having the sensible signs? Or, to put it more generally, why cannot the practice of religion be a purely intellectual activity? Why do we need beautiful architecture, rituals, colorful vestments and sacred texts, works of art and music, bells and smells of candles and incense, etc.?

## *II. Why Christ Made Sacraments as Sensible Signs*

St. Thomas gives several reasons why sacraments, considered as signs, are necessary. Perhaps the most fundamental reason

is based on the human mode of knowing. Everything we know comes through sense experience. In fact, the proper object of our understanding is sensible things. As St. Thomas puts it, “we must be led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible.” Hence, he says,

it belongs to Divine providence to provide for each [creature] according as its condition requires. Divine wisdom, therefore, provides man with means of salvation in the shape of corporeal and sensible signs that are called sacraments.<sup>2</sup>

The second reason St. Thomas gives is that in sinning man has subjected his affections to corporeal things. A healing remedy should be given that reaches the part affected by the disease. “It was fitting,” says St. Thomas,

that God should provide man with a spiritual medicine by means of certain corporeal signs; for if man were offered spiritual things without a veil, his mind being taken up with the material world would be unable to apply itself to them.<sup>3</sup>

St. Thomas gives a third reason

taken from the fact that man is prone to direct his activity chiefly towards material things. Lest, therefore, it should be too hard for man to be drawn away entirely from

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2 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 61, a. 1 (henceforth *STh*): “proprium est ut per corporalia et sensibilia in spiritualia et intelligibilia deducatur. Pertinet autem ad divinam providentiam ut unicuique rei provideat secundum modum suae conditionis. Et ideo convenienter divina sapientia homini auxilia salutis confert sub quibusdam corporalibus et sensibilibus signis, quae sacramenta dicuntur.”

3 Ibid.: “conveniens fuit ut Deus per quaedam corporalia signa hominibus spiritualem medicinam adhiberet, nam, si spiritualia nuda ei proponerentur, eius animus applicari non posset, corporalibus deditus.”

bodily actions, bodily exercise was offered to him in the sacraments, by which he might be trained to avoid superstitious practices, consisting in the worship of demons, and all manner of harmful action, consisting in sinful deeds.<sup>4</sup>

The first reason is based on the natural mode of knowing. All knowledge comes through the senses, including our knowledge of God. *A fortiori*, knowledge of the sacraments and the grace conferred by them must come through the senses.

The second reason is based on the effects of original sin. Our concupiscible appetites are no longer perfectly subjected to our will. Insofar as our lower appetites get the upper hand, we become subjected to sensible things. We need other sensible things as an antidote to capture our attention and lead us away from the corporeal to the spiritual.

The third reason is also an effect of the human mode of knowing, which makes us prone to focus on material things. These are the proper objects of our understanding. It is difficult for us, therefore, to lift our minds and heart to God, who is wholly immaterial and outside the order of nature. The tendency is to look to material things as the causes of all things. This fact, combined with the effects of original sin, render man prone to worship material things and demons insofar as they manifest themselves in a sensible way. Bodily exercise involved with the reception of the sacraments helps lead us away from these evil practices.

So the human mode of knowing requires that we learn through our senses, and we can only come to know things insofar

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4 Ibid.: "Tertia ratio sumenda est ex studio actionis humanae, quae praecipue circa corporalia versatur. Ne igitur esset homini durum si totaliter a corporalibus actibus abstraheretur, proposita sunt ei corporalia exercitia in sacramentis, quibus salubriter exerceretur, ad evitanda superstitiosa exercitia, quae consistent in cultu Daemonum, vel qualitercumque noxia, quae consistunt in actibus peccatorum."

as they are somehow related to sensible things. For example, even though God is wholly immaterial, we can come to know that he exists (and some of his attributes) through what we know about sensible things. St. Thomas's first proof for the existence of God starts with the sense experience of things in motion. From this he proceeds to show that there must be a first mover that moves without itself being in motion.<sup>5</sup> Generally speaking this is an argument from effect to cause. That we can do this is verified by Scripture where St. Paul says, "The invisible things of God are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made" (Rom 1:20). Furthermore, the bodily exercise, worship, and reception of the sacraments help lead us to the things that are supernatural.

On the other hand, the effects of grace are not always clearly manifest. If someone performs a miracle, this would be an evident sign of grace, because something beyond the power of nature has been accomplished. Loving one's enemies, especially when they are harming us, might also be a sure sign of grace. But often it is not possible to distinguish between actions based on nature from those brought about by grace. Even more difficult is knowing that you have received grace as the result of performing some action or by an action being done to you. It is necessary, therefore, that sacraments be signs of grace. Since the presence of grace is not itself perceptible and even the effects of grace might not be clear, we need signs to give us confidence that grace has been conferred on us.

### *III. What Senses Are Used?*

What senses do we use to perceive the sacraments? Before we answer this question we should give some examples of sacramental signs. In Baptism water is used, but not water alone. There are also the words, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of

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<sup>5</sup> See St. Thomas, *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3.

the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Both the water and the words are taken together as the sign of Baptism. They are distinguished from each other as the matter and the form of the sacrament. Together they make one sign, as marble and its shape make one statue. This fits with what St. Augustine says: “The word is added to the element and this becomes the sacrament.”<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas gives an argument for the use of words:

in order to ensure the perfection of sacramental signification it was necessary to determine the signification of the sensible things by means of certain words. For water may signify both a cleansing by reason of its wetness, and refreshment by reason of its being cool: but when we say: “I baptize thee,” it is clear that we use water in baptism in order to signify a spiritual cleansing.<sup>7</sup>

So, just as shape determines the marble to be a statue of St. Peter, so the words pronounced in the sacrament determine the signification of the matter used. Bread might be used to signify many things, but when the priest says, “This is my body,” the words determine what is signified by the bread.

With these things in mind, it is clear that hearing is involved with all of the sacraments. In most of the sacraments the material element is also visible; hence the sense of sight is used. The sense of touch perceives the water, the chrism, and the Eucharist. Taste and smell are involved with the reception of the Eucharist. Therefore, all of the senses are employed, at least to

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6 St. Augustine, *Super Ioannem*, tract. 80: “Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum”; see *STh* III, q. 60, sed contra.

7 St. Thomas, *STh* III, q. 60, a. 6: “ad perfectionem significationis sacramentalis necesse fuit ut significatio rerum sensibilium per aliqua verba determinetur. Aqua enim significare potest et ablutionem propter suam humiditatem, et refrigerium propter suam frigiditatem, sed cum dicitur, ego te baptizo, manifestatur quod aqua utimur in Baptismo ad significandam emundationem spiritualem.”

some extent, with some of the sacraments.

Are some senses more important than others? Philosophers tend to answer this question by saying that insofar as we are concerned with the intellectual life, sight is the most important, because it reveals more than other senses the attributes that distinguish one kind of thing from another. In other words, sight reveals things that tell us most about what something is. Hearing not only tells us about things, it is also important for communicating and learning. Taste and smell help us to eat things that are healthy and avoid things that are not. Touch seems to be the most fundamental and necessary sense. No organism that senses is without touch. It is needed for locomotion of any kind, for feeding, and protecting the body from harm. Touch also gives us a sense of certitude about the reality of sensible things. But the sense of touch seems to tell us less about what things are than sight, and is less informative than hearing.

In the case of Baptism we clearly see the water and observe it cleansing the body and we hear the words, "I baptize thee," etc. Which is more important, sight or hearing? It is difficult to say, but we might say that hearing is, because it determines the manner in which water is signifying. In the case of the Eucharist, the most blessed of all the sacraments, the words of St. Thomas's *Pange Lingua* make us wonder whether the senses tell us anything at all.

Verbum caro, panem verum  
Verbo carnem efficit:  
Fitque sanguis Christi merum,  
Et si sensus deficit,  
Ad firmandum cor sincerum  
Sola fides sufficit.

A poetic translation puts it this way:

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Word-made-Flesh, the bread of nature  
By his word to flesh he turns;  
Wine into His blood He changes;  
What though senses no change discerns?  
Only be the heart in earnest,  
Faith her lesson quickly learns.

A more literal translation would render it: “By his word the Word-made-Flesh makes true bread his flesh, and wine becomes the blood of Christ. And though the senses fail, only faith suffices to confirm a sincere heart.” The words of another of St. Thomas’s hymns may also help. In *Adoro te Devote* one of the stanzas says:

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,  
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur.  
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius;  
Nil hoc verbo veritatis verius.

This poetic translation is fairly literal:

Taste, and touch, and vision, to discern Thee fail;  
Faith that comes through hearing, pierces through the veil.  
I believe whatever the Son of God hath told;  
What the Truth hath spoken, that for truth I hold.

By the sense of hearing we perceive the words, “This is my body,” which is the form of the consecration of the bread. Our other senses fail to perceive that the bread has become the body of Christ. But by the faith that comes through hearing<sup>8</sup> we believe what Christ, through his priest, has said. Our sense of hearing is not deceived. So we have two reasons for the superiority of hearing. One, the formal aspect of the sacraments are words which determine what the matter of the sacrament signifies, and two,

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8 Romans 10:17: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”

the sense of hearing does not fail even when other senses do.

Let me summarize what has been said up to this point. I have given the definition of a sacrament and explained what it means for it to be a sign. I have also given reasons why Christ instituted the sacraments as signs, i.e., because of our human nature and fallen condition, we need sensible signs to lead the mind to things above the sensible to the spiritual. We might add that sacraments are signs of God's grace given to us to heal our infirmities and make us worthy of everlasting life. St. Thomas points out that the word sacrament is taken from the word *sacrando*, which means to make holy.

#### IV. *The Sacraments as Causes of Sanctification and the Sense of the Holy*

This brings us to the final point I would like to make regarding the sacraments. St. Thomas says that a sacrament is a “sign of a holy thing insofar as it makes men holy.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, he says that there are three things to consider regarding what makes men holy: one, the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ's passion; second, the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; third, the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life. He says, “all of these are signified by the sacraments.”<sup>10</sup> He is speaking now of the New Testament sacraments, which are sacraments in the fullest sense of the word. The Old Testament sacraments were indeed signs of holy things, but of holy things to come. The New Testament sacraments were instituted by Christ and they are the instrumental causes of grace as an effect of his passion, death, and resurrection.

Now, as mentioned previously, the Latin adjective for holy is *sacer*, *sacra*, *sacrum* (masculine, feminine, and neuter forms,

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9 St. Thomas, *STh* III, q. 60, a. 2: “signum rei sacrae in quantum est sanctificans hominem.”

10 *Ibid.*, a. 3: “Et haec omnia per sacramenta significantur.”

respectively), which also means “sacred.” So sacraments are signs which lead the mind to something sacred.

The sacraments themselves can also be called sacred because they *contain* something sacred. Speaking of the sacredness of the sacraments, St. Thomas points out:

A thing can be called sacred [*sacrum*] in two ways: either absolutely, or in relation to something else. The difference between the Eucharist and other sacraments having sensible matter is that the Eucharist contains something which is sacred absolutely, namely Christ’s own body; whereas the baptismal water contains something which is sacred in relation to something else, namely, the sanctifying power [which comes from the Holy Spirit]: and the same holds for the chrism and such like. Consequently, the sacrament of the Eucharist is completed in the very consecration of the matter, whereas the other sacraments are completed in the application of the matter for the sanctifying of the individual.<sup>11</sup>

Hence the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the most sacred of all the sacraments.

We may say, then, that our Lord instituted the sacraments to give us a sense of the sacredness of what they signify *and* of what they contain. But our Lord, in his wisdom and superabundant goodness, does not stop here. Through his Church, Christ also has established rituals for the sacraments using sensible

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11 Ibid., q. 73, a. 1, ad 3: “Potest autem aliquid esse sacrum dupliciter, scilicet absolute, et in ordine ad aliud. Haec est autem differentia inter Eucharistiam et alia sacramenta habentia materiam sensibilem, quod Eucharistia continet aliquid sacrum absolute, scilicet ipsum Christum, aqua vero Baptismi continet aliquid sacrum in ordine ad aliud, scilicet virtutem ad sanctificandum, et eadem ratio est de chrismate et similibus. Et ideo sacramentum Eucharistiae perficitur in ipsa consecratione materiae, alia vero sacramenta perficiuntur in applicatione materiae ad hominem sanctificandum. Et ex hoc etiam consequitur alia differentia.”

signs and symbols to prepare and dispose the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments. This is true of all the sacraments, but it is most gloriously true of the ritual of the Mass, which surrounds the sacrament of the Eucharist.

*V. The Mass and the Sense of the Sacred*

Rather than go into detail on this matter, I will mention only a few things. The Mass is both a sacrament and a sacrifice. Insofar as it contains the sacrament of the Eucharist, it is a sacrament. The Mass is a sacrifice insofar as Christ's eternal sacrifice to the Father is made present on the altar. Christ's Passion is represented by offering the consecrated bread and wine up to the Father on the altar, which represents the cross. The bread and wine are consecrated separately to signify the separation of his body and blood at his death on the cross. In order to dispose the faithful to realize the sacredness of this mystery, the Church regulates where, when, how, by whom, and what instruments are used in the performance of this sacrifice.

St. Thomas states that, "because the whole mystery of salvation is comprised in this sacrament, therefore, it is performed with greater solemnity than the other sacraments."<sup>12</sup> It requires a house suitable in its architecture to raise our minds and hearts to God. Traditionally the space of the church is divided into parts, some of which are holier than others. The sanctuary is divided from the rest of the church to signify a place set apart for the altar where the sacred mysteries are performed. The tabernacle is given a central location within the sanctuary and is the fulfillment of the Holy of Holies. Christ, under the sacred species, resides there body, blood, soul, and divinity. All of these are sensible signs of the sacredness of the place and the mysteries

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12 Ibid., q. 83, a. 4: "quia in hoc sacramento totum mysterium nostrae salutis comprehenditur, ideo prae ceteris sacramentis cum maiori solemnitate agitur."

performed there.

The church and the altar are consecrated so as to render them more fit for Divine worship, and by a special power they may increase our reverence and devotion. The act of consecrating the Church and the altar gives us sensible signs of the fact that these things are in a certain way being made holy.

The vessels used for the sacred mysteries are made of precious metals and blessed in order to signify the dignity of the sacrament. The cloth covering the altar is made of pure linen to signify the burial cloth of Christ. I am only touching the surface, but one can already see how these sensible signs can help dispose the faithful for participation in the Mass. With the use of candles, incense, and sacred art, there is an appeal to all of our senses.

More important, however, are the words and prayers used in the liturgy of the Mass. As we have said, words lead the mind more directly and determinately to the things signified. Not only are the words important, but so is the order in which they are said. St. Thomas lays out the whole order of the words of the Mass.<sup>13</sup> The outline is as follows: first, prayers for preparation; second, instruction (which begins with the first reading and ends with the Creed), and third is the celebration of the mystery. Each of these has parts, so that a reason is given for every prayer of the Mass. Both the preparation and instruction dispose us to participate in the sacred mystery more perfectly. The third part, the celebration of the mystery, is divided into the offertory, the consecration, and, finally, the reception of the Blessed Sacrament. These prayers make clear that the Mass is a sacrifice, that Christ is truly present under the form of bread and wine, and that he is offering himself for our salvation. Through the words of the Mass, therefore, one is led to a more perfect awareness of the sacredness of the mystery and is able to participate in it more fully. Through the sacraments and the rites surrounding

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13 Ibid.

them, our Lord has given a means of coming to know the sacred things, the holy things, things set apart, the things that make us holy, and the invisible things of God.

It is worth noting here that the Latin language and Gregorian chant are also things that have been set aside by the Church for its liturgy. This was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>14</sup> It is fitting that the Latin language be used for the liturgy, especially since it is no longer in use for ordinary purposes. In God's providence, the Latin language has been set aside for use by the Church for its teaching, governing, and sanctifying. Use of Latin as the language for the liturgy lends itself to an awareness of the sacredness of the mystery being celebrated and inspires reverence. Gregorian chant is composed explicitly for the purpose of praying the liturgy; it is sacred music. The use of popular music or melodies is often unfitting, therefore, because these were designed for other purposes.

Both the sacraments and their rites move us according to our nature as composed of body and soul. Although we come to know through our senses and tend to be immersed in the things of sense, the sacraments can lead us beyond sensible things to those things that make us holy.

### *VI. The Importance of Proper Liturgical Practice*

It is clear from what has been said how important the liturgy is in our sacramental life. We were blessed to have had a recent pope, the late Benedict XVI, who was very much concerned with proper liturgical practice. He wrote much on the liturgy over the course of his life and made it clear that it is through the liturgy that we live our life of faith. I would strongly recommend his

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<sup>14</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ch. 1, section 3C, § 36.1: "the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites." ("Linguae latinae usus . . . in Ritibus latinis servetur.")

book, *Spirit of the Liturgy*.<sup>15</sup> One of the things the Pope emphasized during this time of liturgical anarchy is that the liturgy is not something *we* make up; rather, it is something *given to us* by the Church. There is a view that has been promoted since Vatican II, even by members of the Church's hierarchy, that the liturgy is something *we* do. Many parishes have set up their own liturgical committee to decide how the liturgy is to be celebrated in their parish. Unfortunately, this has led to many abuses. But more than that, it is the wrong attitude altogether. Strictly speaking, the liturgy is not simply something we do; rather it is something we participate in. In the liturgy of the Mass, our Lord is the primary agent, offering himself to his Heavenly Father for our salvation. We, as members of his mystical body, have the privilege of being joined with Christ, offering ourselves with him to the Father. The final goal of this participation is an even greater participation which will be had in the beatific vision. We, that is, the angels and saints, will participate in the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. We will join the heavenly choir in its unending hymn of praise. In fact, the Mass itself is a participation in that heavenly banquet.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the sacraments were instituted by Christ himself. He determined the proper form and matter for all seven sacraments. No man can change these without invalidating the sacrament. It is also clear from Scripture that even aspects of the liturgy are given by God. As mentioned above, the Israelites were told explicitly how to construct their place of worship and how to perform their rites. The feast of the Passover was one of the most important feasts, and its ritual was prescribed by divine revelation. Who of the Old Testament knew the full significance of that rite? God was preparing them for something beyond their comprehension.

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15 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000).

*Thomas J. Kaiser*

Likewise, the rites of the New Testament are preparing us for a heavenly banquet that is beyond our comprehension. Moreover, we do not even fully comprehend what is actually taking place in the liturgy itself. Therefore, we are incapable of making up a liturgy proper for the celebration of Mass; the liturgy is something that God gives us through His Church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Rather than having liturgical committees at parishes, we should have study groups organized to come to a better understanding of the liturgy that the Church has given us. In the Roman Rite, the Extraordinary Form of which can be traced back to the Apostolic times of Rome, every detail of the liturgy, the parts of the Mass, the prayers, rubrics, the vestments, the furnishings, all have meaning. The better we know and understand these things, the better we will appreciate the liturgy, and the better we will actively participate in it.

### *Conclusion*

Let me conclude by saying something about how this discussion applies to family life. As the father of eleven children, I have given some thought to how to teach my children to love the Mass and to keep their faith in what takes place there. We bring our children to Mass before they can have any understanding of what the Mass is about. Nevertheless, they learn by observing. They learn by all the sensible signs, including the actions of the priest and the parishioners, the character of what is taking place at Mass. This is why my wife and I decided early on in our marriage to bring our children to Mass at Thomas Aquinas College. We wanted a place where the sensible signs pointed to the sacredness of the Mass. At first our Chapel was just a part of the Commons separated by a wall from the dining area. So it was not because of the architecture of the chapel that we came; it was because of the reverence with which the liturgy was performed

and the reverence and devotion of the people attending the Mass. Even though we have not always had the Extraordinary Form, the liturgy has always been in Latin. The dress, posture, and demeanor manifested the disposition of those attending Mass, and this is communicated to children.

Moreover, the music heard at Mass is extremely important. In *The Republic*, Plato says that rearing children in music is sovereign

because rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them; and they make a man graceful if he is correctly reared, if not, the opposite.<sup>16</sup>

How true this is of liturgical music. The Roman rite developed with chant as an integral part of the liturgy. One could say that they developed together. The Second Vatican Council says that Gregorian chant holds the pride of place and is the measure of liturgical music.<sup>17</sup> Its plainness moves the mind from the sound to the things signified so that one does not dwell on nor is simply entertained by the music. Rather, the music moves our thoughts to the divine. The Council points out that in chant the music fits perfectly with the sense of the prayers being sung, and that in this way it is the model for all liturgical music. Polyphony is also strongly approved of.<sup>18</sup> It is important, therefore, that our

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<sup>16</sup> Plato, *The Republic* III, 401e (Bloom translation).

<sup>17</sup> *Sacrosanctum Consilium*, ch. 6, §112: “The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.” Ibid., §116: “The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical service.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., §116: “Other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations . . .”

children not only hear the proper liturgical music, they should be taught to sing it.

Of course this is only the beginning of the education of children. They must learn their catechism and deepen their understanding of the sacraments as they prepare to receive them. And as I was suggesting at the beginning of this essay, they must learn that there is no limit to the depth of understanding and appreciation they can have of the sacraments.

I have emphasized the sensible things that lead our thoughts to the invisible things of God. I would like to conclude by mentioning three things found in the Extraordinary Form that are the negation of sensation but which, nevertheless, signify something sacred. The first is “not touching”; not being allowed to touch the Blessed Sacrament or the vessels that contain it reminds us of the sacredness of these things. The other two go together: *Stillness* and *silence*. In his beautiful collection of talks called *Meditations Before Mass*, Romano Guardini devotes the first four chapters to the importance of these two things. He says,

We cannot take stillness too seriously. Not for nothing do these reflections on the Liturgy open with it. If someone were to ask me what the Liturgical life begins with, I should answer: with learning stillness. Without it, everything remains superficial, vain. . . . What we are striving for is something very grave, very important, and unfortunately sorely neglected: the prerequisite of the liturgical holy act.<sup>19</sup>

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19 Romano Guardini, *Meditations Before Mass* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1993 [reprint of English translation published by Newman Press, 1956, translator unknown]), 9, 25.

INSTILLING A SENSE OF THE SACRED

## THE SIN OF MOSES REVISITED

*Rocky Brittain*

For Larry Shields

A great lover and teacher of the Sacred Page

*Requiescat in Pace*

In the sermon on the mount, our Lord tells us, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land” (Mt 5:4).<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Jesus was primarily interested here in the inheritance of the spiritual land of eternal life. Nevertheless, this statement is startling if one has Moses in mind, “a man exceeding meek, above all men that dwelt upon the earth” (Nu 12:3), as he, of all people, did not possess the land promised to his fathers. We are troubled when we read that Moses, who had such tremendous faith, who is said to be the prophet whom the Messiah would be patterned after, was kept from the Promised Land on account of his unbelief. We hear him tell the Israelites that “The Lord thy God will raise up to thee a PROPHET of thy nation and of thy brethren like unto

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<sup>1</sup> All texts from Scripture are taken from the Douay-Rheims translation unless otherwise noted.

me: him thou shalt hear” (Dt 18:15).<sup>2</sup> Saints are holy because they are like Christ, and here we are told that the Messiah, the one whom the people will hear, will be like Moses.

Familiarity with the narrative of the Old Testament can make the shocking, wonderful, and miraculous seem commonplace. In fact, there is nothing common about the holy prophet Moses. Consider what is by no means an exhaustive account of how Scripture gives him pride of place: in addition to the aforementioned supreme meekness, there never again arose in Israel a prophet like him (Dt 34:10), he spoke to God face to face as friends are wont to speak (Ex 33:11), he was deputed to stand as God to the Israelites (Ex 4:16), he was buried secretly by God himself (Dt 34:6), to him was God’s name first revealed (Ex 3:14), when elders in Israel are given power they share in Moses’ spirit (Nu 11:25), and through him was the Law given. It is for good reason, then, that the people “believed the Lord, and Moses his servant” (Ex 14:31). Here we cannot help but think of the words of Christ, “you believe in God, believe thou also in me” (Jn 14:1).

The parallels between Moses and Jesus are many, and the Church has long recognized Moses as a type of the Messiah. But the Old Testament is filled with great saints and types of Christ; Moses does not seem to be unique in this respect. It is true that Moses is not the first to prefigure Christ, but his prefiguring is so complete that his life stands out in the Old Testament as something *new*. Christ is the new Moses, and St. John seems to summarize all of salvation history when he says, “For the law was given by Moses: grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). If Abraham is especially like the Father, then Moses is uniquely like the Son.

Now, I am not concerned here with arguing that Moses is the most complete type of Christ (although I think a strong argument for this claim could be afforded). But there is a distinct

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2 “PROPHET” is in capitals in the Douay-Rheims.

newness about the life of Moses that demands attention and, I will argue, sheds light not only on his position in salvation history, but also on his perplexing and disappointing sin of disbelief.

In his 2008 essay, “The Sin of Moses,”<sup>3</sup> Steven Cain offers a much needed and insightful interpretation of Moses’s disbelief (see Nu 20:2-13). The more common accounts had never seemed quite right to me, and I am grateful to Cain for supplying strong arguments in support of my unrest. While I agree with his account, I think there is more to be said, specifically with respect to the roots of Moses’s disbelief. I will here argue that Moses’s sin is occasioned by his supreme meekness, the novelty of his calling and power, and the difficulty of understanding how God can be glorified in his saints. In addition to helping understand Moses’s sin, this argument will also, I think, shine further light on how Jesus is the new Moses.

Toward the end of his essay, Cain says the following:

If God were using Moses to become more “incarnate” before Israel, to become more sensible to them, and so to give them someone that they could more faithfully follow—a sign of what He was Himself to do for them when He would send His Only-begotten Son—then Moses’ rejection of God’s plan here was implicitly a rejection of His plan to become Man Himself.<sup>4</sup>

He says this after presenting strong support to his overall thesis that Moses’s disbelief was not in God’s ability to make water come from a rock through speech, nor was Moses attempting to take to himself unmerited glory; rather, because of his fear that the people would look to him rather than God as their savior, Moses, out of zeal for the Lord, did not believe God’s command was prudent. Moses disobeyed God precisely to show Moses’s

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3 Steven Cain, “The Sin of Moses,” *The Aquinas Review* 15 (2008): 27–42.

4 *Ibid.*, 41.

own impotence and to protect the Israelites against idolatry. I agree with this assessment; I think there is more to be drawn from the text quoted previously.

From the beginning of Moses's calling until his burial, it is clear that God is making him great. Reading the accounts of his miracles and relationship with God, we are in awe at the particulars of his greatness, but it does not surprise us that God would give such glory to a man. We are used to this. We are accustomed to God using human instruments to work out salvation and accomplish marvelous deeds. We have heard from a young age of the parting of the Red Sea, of the exploits of Samson, of the crashing of the walls of Jericho, that David slew Goliath with a stone. Moreover, we have the revelation of the Incarnation, the God-man dying to destroy death and rising to restore life. We have his saints who worked even greater miracles than our Lord (Jn 14:12). St. Benedict seems like another Incarnation, his miracles are so great. Again, we are in awe at the particulars, but not at the principle.

But Moses is the first man in salvation history to do marvelous deeds in the sight of many. In Genesis many miracles happen, but the ones comparable in magnitude to those of Moses are all done by God himself. God speaks to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and angels appear to them (Gen 22:1–19), and while they have tremendous faith, Abraham and Isaac work no miracles. Jacob has a supernatural vision and wrestles with an angel, but these are private, and at any rate seem more to be things that happen to Jacob than things he accomplishes. Joseph can interpret dreams, and this certainly makes him great in Egypt, but these interpretations seem transitory. Moreover, having knowledge of the meaning of dreams, while miraculous, does not seem to inspire the same kind of wonder as turning an entire river into blood, or making water come from a rock, splitting the Red Sea, or commanding the earth to open up to devour the wicked. It

is God himself who sends a seemingly supernatural amount of rain to destroy all flesh, save those on the ark; he sends fire to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah; he makes the barren fruitful. But the greatness of the patriarchs is in their faith, obedience, and in the covenant God makes with them and their descendants. At the end of Genesis, we know that God works wonders, that he will continue to work wonders, that he has revealed himself to a specific man and his descendants, and that some of these descendants receive unique revelations and knowledge.

Fast forward 400 years and it appears that God's tactics are very different. He still works wonders, but now he is doing something new. Moses is a new kind of instrument, one that will harness and act with the divine power seemingly at will. We are so familiar with God working miracles through human instruments that we take the novelty of the Exodus narrative in stride. We are, of course, in awe at what God accomplishes through Moses, but we are not astounded that God would not just do it himself. But this *is* astounding, and it is new. Moses is the first miracle worker.

Moses seems to recognize the novelty of God's methods from the beginning. In chapters 3–6 of Exodus, Moses speaks to his inability or unworthiness to succeed on seven different occasions.<sup>5</sup> The force of Moses's repeated lack of belief in his own ability suggests that he is wondering why God would not just destroy Egypt himself. Moses certainly does not doubt the power of God, but he does seem to think that God's efforts can be thwarted by poor instruments. One can almost hear Moses saying, "Why would you use me? I am just going to mess everything up, and what you want won't be accomplished." In fact, on more than one occasion Moses seems to be confused about what is up to him and what is up to God. Moses is constantly looking to God for direction and guidance (as he should), but he also must

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<sup>5</sup> See Exodus 3:11; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:22; 6:12, 29.

## THE SIN OF MOSES REVISITED

make many decisions without consulting God. Certainly, God gives an abundance of directives and laws, but he does not solve every difficulty for Moses. Moses is burdened with an immense task and great power, but he must figure out what it really means to be an instrument of God, for in many ways, he is the first one.

For example, in Exodus 18 Moses is reunited with his wife Sephora when his father-in-law Jethro brings her to him. While they are together Moses is obliged to judge the disputes of the Israelites “from morning until night” (Ex 18:3). When Jethro observes this, he says to Moses,

The thing thou dost is not good. Thou art spent with foolish labour, both thou and this people that is with thee: the business is above thy strength, thou alone canst not bear it. But hear my words and counsels, and God shall be with thee. Be thou to the people in those things that pertain to God, to bring their words to him: And to shew the people the ceremonies and the manner of worshipping, and the way wherein they ought to walk, and the work that they ought to do. And provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, in whom there is truth, and that hate avarice, and appoint of them rulers of thousands, and of hundreds, and of fifties, and of tens. Who may judge the people at all times: and when any great matter soever shall fall out, let them refer it to thee, and let them judge the lesser matters only: that so it may be lighter for thee, the burden being shared out unto others. If thou dost this, thou shalt fulfill the commandment of God, and shalt be able to bear his precepts: and all this people shall return to their places with peace. And when Moses heard this, he did all things that he had suggested unto him. (Ex 18:17–24)

This counsel seems so reasonable, and I dare say obvious, that we should wonder, “Why didn’t Moses think of that?” We could

respond, in Moses's defense, what example from the past can Moses look to for guidance? How is he supposed to know he is allowed to depute others to a task to which God had appointed him? Moreover, we might consider that the last time Moses tried to get God to alter his plan was when, insisting he was not up for this great task, God called Aaron to be Moses's mouth to Pharaoh (Ex 4:14-16). But this made the Lord angry. Perhaps he is reticent to bring to the Lord his burden. How could Moses know that he is allowed to make decisions about power and authority without consulting God? When does availing yourself of help through prudence cross the line and become a transgression of God's law? This needs to be worked out. But no one has ever done this before. Moses is the first messiah.

At the beginning of Numbers, when the first census of the people is taken, they number every male (excluding the tribe of Levi) twenty years and older who are fit for battle and there are 603,550. This does not include any of the young of either sex, any of the women over twenty, and any of the men over twenty who are unfit for battle. Moses has been charged to lead this stiff-necked and fickle people, most likely exceeding two million in number, and to help God make them a "priestly kingdom, and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). How does one do such a thing? The short answer is that God will accomplish this through the cooperation and mediation of his people and Moses. But Moses is the first of his kind. He is the first miracle worker, first prophet to the people, and first leader of a united Israel.

In time Moses seems to come to understand more perfectly when he can make decisions on his own concerning the governance of the people. In Leviticus, two of Aaron's sons offer a sacrifice with "strange fire" (Lev 10:1) and are subsequently consumed by fire from the Lord. Moses then finds that the buck goat which was offered for sin was not eaten in the holy place by Aaron, and says,

## THE SIN OF MOSES REVISITED

Why did you not eat in the holy place the sacrifice for sin, which is most holy, and given to you, that you may bear the iniquity of the people, and may pray for them in the sight of the Lord. . . Aaron answered: This day hath been offered the victim for sin, and the holocaust before the Lord: and to me what thou seest has happened: how could I eat it, or please the Lord in the ceremonies, having a sorrowful heart? (Lev 10:17, 19)

Aaron has failed in his priestly duty, a serious offense. But his response to Moses suggests that his transgression was not out of defiance, negligence, or contempt, but that he did not think it was right to perform his sacred duty while in sorrow on account of a judgement of God. “Which when Moses had heard he was satisfied” (v. 20). Moses does not consult God or punish Aaron. This seems to be a wise decision, considering that Aaron’s sons have just been killed, but it is, nevertheless, not according to the letter of the law.

I do not mean to suggest that Moses does not know what he is doing or that he is not being guided through special inspiration from God, but no one has ever been asked to do what Moses is doing. We should ask, then, why is God asking this of Moses? Besides the principal reason of beginning to fulfill his promises to Abraham, what is God teaching his people? God is revealing in and through Moses how he desires to save: through the meditation of men. This, again, is new and wonderful. We know from Genesis that God saves and that in Abraham’s seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed, but we have little indication in Genesis *how* this is to be accomplished, and no hint that it will come to pass by men imbued with God’s terrible power.<sup>6</sup>

St. Paul tells us that, “there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). It is this

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 3:14 says that one will arise from Eve who will crush the serpent’s head, but it is not clear at that time what this means.

same Christ who “is able also to save forever them that come to God by him; always living to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25). Jesus is the one absolute mediator without whom no one comes to the Father, but he is also “the PROPHET” alluded to Deuteronomy 18, the one who was to be “like Moses.” Moses is the first intercessor and mediator for the chosen people. When God punishes the people he is, of course, molding and teaching them through discipline, but it seems he is also raising up, in Moses, one who will intercede. If it were not for the prayers and supplications of Moses, the Israelites would not have inherited the land. It is through Moses that they are saved. Certainly, then, Jesus is the prophet like unto Moses.

On several occasions God threatens to wipe out the Israelites and raise up a great nation from Moses. In every instance Moses intercedes for the people and stays God’s hand. But we see in Moses’s prayers for the people that he is afraid that God might do it. After the rebellion of the sons of Core the people complain to Moses about those the earth swallowed at Moses’s command. We read,

The following day all the multitude of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying: You have killed the people of the Lord. And when there arose a sedition, and the tumult increased, Moses and Aaron fled to the tabernacle of the covenant. And when they were gone into it, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. And the Lord said to Moses: Get you out from the midst of this multitude, this moment will I destroy them. And as they were lying on the ground, Moses said to Aaron: Take the censer, and putting fire in it from the altar, put incense upon it, and go quickly to the people to pray for them: for already wrath is gone out from the Lord, and the plague rageth. (Nu 16:41–46)

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Note that Moses and Aaron “fled,” and that Moses told Aaron to go “quickly.” Moses seems panicked. If he does not act now, God might destroy them all. But Israel is God’s “firstborn son” (Ex 4:22). Would he really destroy them? Moses seems to think so and must resort to intercession.

Again, Christ seems to be foreshadowed when in Deuteronomy Moses recounts to the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land their ancestors’ idolatry at Sinai. He says,

And I fell down before the Lord as before, forty days and nights neither eating bread, nor drinking water, for all your sins, which you had committed against the Lord, and had provoked him to wrath: For I feared his indignation and anger, wherewith being moved against you, he would have destroyed you. And the Lord heard me this time also. And he was exceeding angry against Aaron also, and would have destroyed him, and I prayed in like manner for him. (Dt 9:18–20)

Christ, like Moses, fasted for forty days before beginning his task of great mediation for all our sins, to appease the anger of God.

The Levites are priests, and therefore mediators, but Moses is their great mediator and intercessor. Moses anoints Aaron (Lev 8:6–12) and gives the prescriptions of worship. He performs the sacrifice which ratifies the covenant in blood (Ex 24:4–8). Implicitly, then, Moses is their great high priest. But he also receives the law and promulgates it. It is kings who, having care of the common good, promulgate and enforce laws. Moses is to the Israelites, then, priest, prophet, and king.<sup>7</sup>

We are heartbroken for Moses when he is not allowed to enter the Promised Land. But here, again, we see an image of

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7 Of course Saul is the first formally appointed king of Israel, but it is not a stretch to think that Moses, lawgiver and judge, would be seen as a king to the people, if not in name, at least in function.

Christ. Cain notes that perhaps God burying Moses is a sign that Moses entered heaven with his body. But what if even in his death Moses prefigures “the PROPHET” who will be like him? Moses has given his whole mind, strength, and soul for the Israelites. But we read in Deuteronomy that when Moses died “his eye was not dim, neither were his teeth moved” (Dt 34:7). Moses does not die of old age. Not entering the Promised Land is indeed a punishment, but it is paradoxically fitting. Moses must die before the Israelites enter the land because Christ must die if we are to gain eternal life. Here God seems to be teaching yet another new truth: the Messiah must die if we are to rise and live. Jesus is like Moses, but Moses still stands to Christ as the imperfect to the perfect. God buried Moses where no man knew, and no man knows “until this present day” (Dt 34:6). The people mourned for Moses for thirty days but without a body to mourn over. What can we see in this?

In John’s gospel we read,

But Mary stood at the sepulchre without, weeping. Now as she was weeping, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been laid. They say to her: Woman, why weep-est thou? She saith to them: Because they have taken away my Lord; and I know not where they have laid him.

(Jn 20:11–13)

In Mary we can see the Israelites, mourning for Moses without the comfort of having his body.<sup>8</sup> Moses’s body is not returned, but Christ’s is. Moses dies for the people and does not enter the land, but Christ will die for the people, rise, and lead the way. Perhaps Moses also entered into rest body and soul, but if he did, it is fitting that we do not know it with certainty, for this

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8 Cain, “The Sin of Moses,” 42.

prerogative belongs to the one whom, Moses prophesied, the people “will hear” (Dt 18:15). “Jesus saith to her: Mary. She turning saith to him: Rabboni (which is to say, Master)” (Jn 20:16). Until Jesus had called her by name Mary did not know it was him. For “My sheep hear my voice: and I know them and they follow me” (Jn 10:27).

Moses’s death, however, is different from Christ’s especially in that Moses is being punished whereas Christ is the spotless lamb. This highlights the principle that what prefigures stands to what is prefigured as the imperfect to the perfect, so the sign always falls short of the fullness of the reality it signifies. Thus, we can see how Moses’s death is a sign of the Paschal mystery. This prefiguration is supported further by the Israelites’ entrance into the Promised Land (as it were, rising to new life) thirty-three days after the death of Moses, and three days after their mourning for him,<sup>9</sup> while being led by Joshua, a man whose name in Hebrew is identical to “Jesus.”

The novelty of Moses’s calling and deeds must also be considered with respect to the inevitable glory and esteem that attends them. Although Moses is remarkably humble before other men, he is rather bold with God. When he is first called by God, we read,

And the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt. And Moses said: I will go and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. (Ex 3:2–3)

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<sup>9</sup> See Deuteronomy 34:8: “And the children of Israel mourned for him in the plains of Moab thirty days,” and Joshua 1:2: “Moses my servant is dead: arise, and pass over this Jordan, thou and thy people with thee, into the land which I will give to the children of Israel,” and 1:10–11: “Josue commanded . . . Prepare your victuals: for after the third day you shall pass over the Jordan, and shall go in to possess the land.” The narrative of Scripture suggests that the three days of preparing to enter the Promised Land occur immediately after the time of mourning for Moses is accomplished.

It is precisely because it is strange and perhaps supernatural that Moses goes to see it.

In his subsequent conversation with God, he even asks him his name, a question that is both bold and surprising. Is it obvious that he should have any name other than “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”? In asking God his name, Moses seems to be asking him to reveal his nature, which God then does reveal.<sup>10</sup> We can better see the strangeness of this question when we consider that Jacob asked the angel with whom he wrestled for his name, which the angel refused to reveal and replied, “Why dost thou ask my name?” (Gen 33:29) Again, at Sinai, after interceding for the people so that God would not depart from them after their idolatry, Moses suddenly says, “Show me thy glory” (Ex 33:18). This last request is surprising given the fact that Moses already enjoys an intimate relationship with God and knows that His presence can be overwhelming, terrifying, and even fatal (see Ex 20:19). And yet he asks for more.

This boldness with God is repeatedly met with grace and favor. “And the Lord said to Moses: This word also, which thou hast spoken, will I do: for thou hast found grace before me, and thee I have known by name” (Ex 33:17). Moses knows far more deeply than anyone in Israel that God is Lord and that it is by his hand that they are saved. Surely it is this intimacy with God, coupled with the Israelites’ tendency toward idolatry, that makes Moses zealous for the protection of God’s glory. But Moses is not immediately aware of how stiff-necked the Israelites are. His awareness of their concupiscence and infidelity seems to grow as they wander in the desert. Even at the beginning of their exodus, before the parting of the Red Sea, the people murmur against Moses.

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<sup>10</sup> “God said to Moses: I AM WHO AM” (Ex 3:14); capitals are in the Douay-Rheims translation.

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And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel, lifting up their eyes, saw the Egyptians behind them: and they feared exceedingly, and cried to the Lord. And they said to Moses: Perhaps there were no graves in Egypt, therefore thou hast brought us to die in the wilderness: why wouldst thou do this, to lead us out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we spoke to thee in Egypt, saying: Depart from us that we may serve the Egyptians? for it was much better to serve them, than to die in the wilderness. (Ex 14:10–12)

This manner of complaining will occur several more times throughout their forty years of wandering, but this is the first. By the time they reach Meribah, Moses seems to have run out of patience with the people. At that particular sedition Moses calls them “rebellious” and “incredulous” (Nu 20:10). But by this point Moses has seen the people fail so frequently and profoundly that he seems to think they are never going to understand that God and God alone is their savior. However, here in the earliest stages of the exodus he probably has hope that once the Israelites see God deliver them in spectacular fashion, they will see his glory, believe, and be faithful. Moses responds to the people,

Fear not: stand and see the great wonders of the Lord, which he will do this day: for the Egyptians, whom you see now, you shall see no more for ever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. (Ex 14:13–14)

As he will continue to do as they wander, here Moses draws all their attention to God: God will fight for you, and you will no longer wonder if he will provide. But before any miracles happen God interjects.

And the Lord said to Moses: Why criest thou to me? Speak to the children of Israel to go forward. But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch forth thy hand over the sea, and

*Rocky Brittain*

divide it: that the children of Israel may go through the midst of the sea on dry ground. (Ex 14:15–16)

Only God can divide a sea at will. Why should it be strange, then, that Moses is crying out to him? God tells Moses, “You do this thing! Command! Divide the water!” It is as if God expected Moses to know that he should spontaneously divide the sea.

God wants Moses to consult and obey him, but he also wants Moses to recognize the power and authority he has been given. Moses seems to understand that he can summon God’s power at will when he devises a unique death for the sons of Core after they challenge Aaron’s priesthood.

And Moses said: By this you shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all things that you see, and that I have not forged them of my own head: If these men die the common death of men, and if they be visited with a plague, wherewith others also are wont to be visited, the Lord did not send me. But if the Lord do a new thing, and the earth opening her mouth swallow them down, and all things that belong to them, and they go down alive into hell, you shall know that they have blasphemed the Lord. And immediately as he had made an end of speaking, the earth broke asunder under their feet: And opening her mouth, devoured them with their tents and all their substance. And they went down alive into hell the ground closing upon them, and they perished from among the people. (Nu 16:28–33)

Note that Moses emphasizes that this miracle will be proof that God has sent him to do all these things. It appears Moses is saying that, since God has sent me to do this and has given me power, I can command this to happen, and it will. Years later Joshua has had the benefit of following Moses’s example, and he seems to have a better understanding of his power and favor

from God. While fighting the Amorrites in the Promised Land Joshua performs a great miracle.

Then Joshua spoke to the Lord, in the day that he delivered the Amorrite in the sight of the children of Israel, and he said before them: Move not, O sun, toward Gabaon, nor thou, O moon, toward the valley of Ajalon. And the sun and the moon stood still, till the people revenged themselves of their enemies. Is not this written in the book of the just? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down the space of one day. There was not before, nor after, so long a day, the Lord obeying the voice of a man, and fighting for Israel. (Josh 10:12-14)

Joshua commands that the rotation of the heavens be stopped, and God obeys. Recall here God telling Moses to divide the sea. It seems, then, that while Moses does grow in his understanding of his power and authority, his taking this kind of initiative is uncommon and he never wavers in his primary commitment to safeguard God's glory.

For example, early in their sojourn, the people complain to Moses for want of meat. After expressing their desire to have suffered death in Egypt rather than eat only bread, they say to Moses, "Why have you brought us into this desert, that you might destroy all the multitude with famine?" (Ex 16:3) The people look to Moses to feed them since he is the one who brought them out of Egypt. In their eyes, he is responsible. Moses responds:

In the evening you shall know that the Lord hath brought you forth out of the land of Egypt: And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord: for he hath heard you murmuring against the Lord: but as for us, what are we, that you mutter against us? (Ex 16:6-7)

Moses insists that he did not bring them out of Egypt, that he has not saved them; rather, God has done this. Moses teaches the people that when they murmur against him, they are really challenging God, for he is their savior, not Moses.

Moses wants the people to know that it is God alone who saves, but God is teaching the Israelites, and Moses, that *men* must help him save. By the time of Elijah, the Israelites are used to God raising up great servants who work wonders, but not now. But making great saints brings with it the difficulty of glory. Who are the Israelites supposed to look to in distress? It is easy to see how the Israelites would want to worship Moses. No one has ever done the things he does. This Moses came suddenly in the midst of our slavery and destroyed the enemy. He worked wondrous miracles, fed us, gave us water, and led us safely through the desert. He says it is from God, but where was this God for 430 years in bondage (Ex 12:40)? He says it is by God's hand, but it is clearly Moses and his staff. If it seems unlikely that the Israelites would want to worship Moses, recall that when Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra, Paul heals one lame man, and the people think they are Mercury and Jupiter (Acts 14:11–13). The Israelites believed in God and in Moses, but as they wander, it seems that they tend to believe more in Moses than in God, or at least more in Moses than they should.

We turn now to the sin of Moses. At Meribah the people murmur for water. God tells Moses to take his rod and speak to the rock and water shall come forth. We then read,

Moses therefore took the rod, which was before the Lord, as he had commanded him, And having gathered together the multitude before the rock, he said to them: Hear, ye rebellious and incredulous: Can we bring you forth water out of this rock? And when Moses had lifted up his hand, and struck the rock twice with the rod, there came forth water in great abundance, so that the people

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and their cattle drank, And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: Because you have not believed me, to sanctify me before the children of Israel, you shall not bring these people into the land, which I will give them. (Nu 20:9–12)

Cain notes that God's words to Moses include a difficult clause, "to sanctify me before the children of Israel."<sup>11</sup> To what in the rest of the sentence does this refer? Cain argues that Moses is disobeying God precisely to show that God is the one who has power, not he himself. Moses strikes the rock hoping to fail so that the people would see his impotence and God would be sanctified. Moses wishes both to protect God's glory and to keep the Israelites from worshipping Moses. Here is Cain's account,

But because the Lord had commanded him to take the rod, he found himself with the means to correct this problem. Since God had told him to speak to the rock in order to bring forth the water, there was no reason to think that any would come forth by striking it. Yet the people had come to associate the rod with his power, so he could, before actually bringing forth the water, easily show them his own powerlessness by striking it and having no water come forth!

Now, assuming this to be so, we can then imagine the scene as occurring in some such way as the following. Moses has doubts about the wisdom of God's plan; he decides to add to it by using the rod he finds in his hand to show the Israelites that he is in fact no God, and then calls them together. They come and show him some adulation that is bordering on idolatry. Moses' jealousy for God is aroused, and so he addresses them in anger, calling them rebels—that is, accusing them of turning away from the true God. He then asks the question, do you think that we can bring forth water from this rock? Look!

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11 Cain, "The Sin of Moses," 33.

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He strikes the rock, and as he expects—but contrary to the expectation of the people—no water comes forth. He then looks out upon the people as if to say, “See, I am powerless to bring forth water.” To make this point even more emphatically, he strikes it again. This time, though, much to his horror, water does come forth. God then comes to him with punishment for his disobedience: “because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore, you shall not bring this assembly in the land which I have given them.” Now the infinitive makes good sense: you did not believe in me, that is, you did not trust me to be leading you as I ought, and so acted other than I commanded in order to sanctify me, or to show Israel that it is I and not you that takes care of them. Because of this you shall not enter the Promised Land.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation fits well with the Moses that we know. Moses, “who is most faithful in all [God’s] house” (Nu 12:7), is once again trying to teach the people to give all glory to God and none to himself. But God does not want this. Could it be that at the root of this sin is Moses’s ignorance of a new revelation? In Moses God is showing the wondrous truth, which again we take for granted: that God is given more glory when glorified in his saints. Moses was attempting to thwart the very thing God was trying to show, namely, that Moses is great and glorious, and the Israelites should see that. Moses has zeal for God and none for himself, but God’s “name is Jealous” (Ex 34:14), and *he* has zeal for Moses. Cain’s thesis is ultimately a defense of Moses: even Moses’s sin is an attempt to glorify God. This is a key insight, but Moses’s sin could be fundamentally rooted in the difficulty of this novel truth: All glory belongs to God and his saints.

It should not surprise us if Moses failed to see this clearly.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 38–39.

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It is not obvious that glory is not diminished when shared. In fact, it is reasonable to think that if I praise someone for a great deed, I cannot at the same time praise someone else for the same. Perhaps Moses knew that it is possible for the Israelites to glorify God in him. In support of this we could note that God told Moses that he would be glorified in the destruction of the Egyptians (Ex 14:18). But from the very beginning Moses's focus is so singularly on God that he seems to think it must be one or the other. The Israelites either praise God or commit idolatry. Now this sin takes on a new light. Moses did sin out of zeal for God, but he did not see that God was trying to make Moses a kind of savior and that it was right and good that the people honor him.

Moses did sin against faith; this is revealed by God himself and not open for debate. But the underlying reasons for our sins are rarely, if ever, transparent. As the Psalmist says, "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord" (Ps 18:13). If Cain is right, and Moses did not trust that God's directive was prudent, that it would not safeguard his glory, could it be that what underpins this sin is Moses's failure to see that God's desire—one that will be grasped in time—is to be glorified by sharing his glory with men? Why should Moses fully grasp this at the beginning? I doubt it would have occurred to Moses that he could utter the mysterious words, "from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk 1:48).

Following Cain's method, we could imagine a conversation between Moses and God.

- God:     *Why did you not trust me and strike the rock?*  
Moses:   *Because if I did this great thing which you asked me to do, the people would glorify me and fall into idolatry.*  
God:     *Why should they not glorify you? You are my greatest servant.*  
Moses:   *Lord, you know I am not great. You are the God of*

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*my fathers, and I am nothing.*

God: *Why do you think it pleases me to deny that you have a share in my glory and power? I have blessed you so that they could see my greatness more clearly.*

Moses: *But what if they don't see your greatness, but think it is all mine? Remember the golden calf, Lord? These people you have given me are carnal and weak.*

God: *It is because they are carnal and weak that I have chosen them.*

Moses: *But they can't see you. They can see me and will fall.*

God: *Yes, they will fall. But they will learn in time that I have made you great and my glory is not only not diminished, but it is now greater because of you.*

Moses: *But what if they don't see and your wrath is turned upon them?*

God: *What they cannot see now they will see later, and I will send them one whom they will see and can adore without idolatry.*

Our development in the spiritual life is a process through which we “ascend by steps” (Ps 86:3), not all at once. Christ’s burden is easy and his yoke, light (Mt 11:30), but not at the beginning. It is fitting that the revelation of God as sharing his glory with his saints, and being more glorified thereby, should be understood gradually, not all at once.

Moses’s increased frustration with the people also suggests that he fears that, although God is all powerful, the Israelites may ruin his designs. Moses is deeply aware of his own insufficiencies and seems to think he will fail in his task. Here also we see the beginning of what is so apparent in the New Testament: God is not only glorified in his saints, but he loves to use the weak. We cannot expect that truths which we hold dear 2,000 years after Christ, would have been grasped at the beginning of salvation

history. We might look to the commandment of love as a parallel example. Christians of course know that to follow the Law is to love God and neighbor with supernatural charity. But the commandment of love in Deuteronomy<sup>13</sup> is unlike anything else God commands them. If we can allow for the Israelites' understanding of what it means to love God to grow with time, why not also with the elevation of the little ones into glory? When we read of the glory of Solomon and the temple of the Lord, we should always look back on the early days of the Israelites and be astounded. Is the glory of Israel at that time much different than God making a great saint?

This exaltation of the weak is another point that could undergird Moses's sin. It is, of course, love which leads Moses to plead with God for the sake of the people, but could it also be his fear that if they keep failing in faith, God really will destroy them all and start again? Perhaps Moses does not yet see that the weakness of the people is precisely what attracts God. Why did God begin to exalt Israel only after they had been slaves for 400 years (Gen 15:13)? God says he will not deliver the land to the Israelites until the fourth generation, "for as yet the iniquities of the Amorrhites are not at the full until this present time" (Gen 15:16). But why must they be slaves? Why could they not prosper for 400 years, as they prospered in the time of Joseph? We noted previously that God is showing his power by exalting the weak, and it seems that, while Moses does understand that this adds to God's magnificence, he may not yet see that God will not fail, even with an incredulous and rebellious people. The Israelites learn in time what it means that God has "sworn by himself" (Gen 22:16), but at the beginning it seems uncertain whether God will stay with this people or raise up another.

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13 "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength" (Dt 6:4-5).

This point fits the newness of Moses's mediation. Moses has the utmost faith in *God's* power, but what can God do with an incredulous people? Moses's frequent begging for the safety of the people could suggest that he thinks God can do all things, but the people must do their part. Moses has heard, "I will have mercy on whom I will, and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me" (Ex 33:19), but he had not yet heard, "it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to *accomplish*, according to his good will" (Phil 2:13, emphasis added). Moses knows God can and will start over if necessary; it was by Moses's hand that the account of the great flood was written. Perhaps Moses does not yet clearly see that even the obstinate weakness of the Israelites cannot keep God from accomplishing his promises. Moreover, our Lord's death shows that not only is weakness not a stumbling block to God's power, it is precisely through weakness that God's power shines most brightly.

Consider also that God has never before called a people to himself as a "peculiar possession" (Ex 19:5). Moses is the first man to be charged with the task of helping God make a nation holy. The promises were given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, but Moses is the one called to help accomplish these promises. God's desire is to make the Israelites "holy," or "set apart," and perhaps Moses does not yet fully see that this is an end that will not fail to be accomplished. God has inseparably joined the glorification of his own name with the glory of Israel.

For my name's sake I will remove my wrath far off: and for my praise I will bridle thee, lest thou shouldst perish. Behold I have refined thee, but not as silver, I have chosen thee in the furnace of poverty. For my own sake, for my own sake will I do it, that I may not be blasphemed: and I will not give my glory to another. Hearken to me, O Jacob, and thou Israel whom I call: I am he, I am the first, and I am the last. (Is 48:9–12)

The calling of Israel is not merely one act of God among many; rather, it is the first stage in the unfolding of the salvation of the world. No matter the obstinacy of Israel, no matter how frequently and egregiously they fail, they have been called, “and whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). It is possible that Moses did not understand that in the calling of Israel God had begun that great work which will be the principal means of manifesting his own excellence. God says to the Israelites, “You have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, how I carried you upon the wings of eagles, and have taken you to myself” (Ex 19:4). The Israelites belong to God, and nothing will be taken from God which he has taken to himself.

When God calls Israel his “firstborn son,” how clearly could Moses have seen the reference to God’s eternal and only begotten Son? Certainly, Moses had faith in the “the PROPHET” who would come, as did Abraham,<sup>14</sup> but did he understand that God can never give up Israel, just as he could never deny his own Son? If Moses did not initially see the indissolubility of God’s covenant with Israel, this also could have occasioned his decreasing patience with the people, as well as his great fear that God would destroy them completely.

As we have seen, Cain suggests that God was raising up in Moses a sign of the Incarnation. Our Lord is wholly new—he is God made man. But it is fitting that God also begin the working out of salvation with something new. The life of Moses is unique in the Old Testament and his greatness is astounding. We have seen that he is the first miracle worker, the first messiah, the first prophet to the people of Israel, their first priest, and their first king. Moreover, God revealed in Moses and in the Israelites two truths that are at the heart of the Catholic faith: 1) It pleases God

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14 “Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see my day: he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56).

to use the weak and the humble to confound the strong, and 2) God is more perfectly glorified when he is glorified in his saints.

Moses tried to sanctify God in the sight of the people, but from all eternity this role was reserved for Christ. It is Jesus “Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to the shewing of his justice” (Rom 3:25). This should not suggest that Moses was appropriating to himself a loftier role than God had asked, rather, it further reveals the mystery of Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Law and the necessary growing pains of those called to begin his work.

The Israelites looked to Moses to save them, and he refused to accept this; to him it seemed idolatry. Christ fulfills what is imperfect here as well. It is Jesus who, as man, saves us from sin and death. Not seeing God’s plan of glorifying himself by glorifying his saints, Moses fell into sin, and our Lord, a prophet like unto Moses, completes what Moses could not see by uniting, in the person of the Word, one who is given all glory both as God and as man.

Moses asked God to see his glory. This was granted in part upon the initial request and more fully at our Lord’s transfiguration. It is wonderful that, although Moses so consistently refused glory from men, our Lord accomplishes what Moses would not allow. In his transfigured glory Jesus also reveals the glory of Moses and the witnessing apostles honor him in a way Moses would have never allowed during his sojourn on earth. Peter, James, and John fell on their faces after beholding Jesus in his glory with Moses and Elijah, and they desired to set up booths to honor all three. But it is fitting that when they lifted up their eyes, they “saw no one but only Jesus” (Mt 17:8).

THE SIN OF MOSES REVISITED



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