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THE DIVINE MERCY OF CREATION: A MANIFEST CONTRADICTION IN AQUINAS?

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MISERICORS DOMINUS et iustus et Deus noster miseretur."[1] In his discussion of the divine attributes of *justitia* and *misericordia*[2] in question 21 of the *Prima pars*,[3] Thomas Aquinas considers (in article 4) the problem of whether *justitia* and *misericordia* are found in all God's acts. His answer is that they are. However, a difficulty arises that suggests Aquinas's account might be incoherent. The problem is that an act of mercy presupposes as its object a subject that suffers a prior *defectus* addressed by the act, but in God's creative act there is no subject presupposed to the act of creation, and, thus, no *defectus* addressed by the act of creation. I will argue that, despite appearances, Aquinas's account of the act of creation as a divine act of *misericordia* is not incoherent. The resolution of this difficulty helps us to understand something Aquinas wants to argue concerning divine *misericordia*, namely, that it is through *misericordia* that God from the very beginning of creation calls creatures to himself, and not only

[1] Ps 114:5 (Vulg.).

[2] I will move indifferently between the Latin *misericordia* and the English *mercy*, although I will later explain in the body of the text a difficulty with using the term *mercy*.

[3] *STh* I, q. 21 (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia Iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita,* vols. 4-12 [Rome: Leonine Commission, 1888-1906]). All translations from Latin are mine.

that he addresses the *defectus* that arises in human life subsequent to creation as a result of human sinfulness.

I. A First Difficulty: *Iustitia* or Justice

In order to appreciate the difficulty of attributing mercy to the act of creation, it is important to understand how Aquinas first solves a difficulty with attributing justice to the act of creation. In article 1 of question 21, Aquinas attributes distributive justice to God, insofar as God acts to provide for his creatures what is due to them according to their natures. He writes, "Hence Dionysius says . . . 'it is necessary to see that God is truly just, that he gives to each and every existing thing what is proper to it according its standing [*dignitatem*], and preserves the nature of each with proper order and power.'"[4] However, this distributive justice to creatures does not pertain to the immediate effect of being created, since the distribution of goods to a creature presupposes that the creature already exists to have goods distributed to it. If existence as an effect is not due to a creature, then it seems that the act of creation does not manifest God's justice.

Aquinas addresses this problem straightforwardly. While it is true that being created is not due to a creature as a debt, Aquinas asserts that the *ratio* of justice consists in an agent acting according to a due order and proportion to achieve an end. Moreover, because all things are ordered and proportioned to God as end, ordered by God's goodness and wisdom, all God's acts involving creatures must be just. It is precisely by creation that all created things are directed, ordered, and proportioned by God's wisdom and goodness to God as end. Thus, the element of what is "due" is preserved not with respect to the creature that is created, but with respect to God himself as creator. Aquinas thus argues that creation is primarily an act of justice of God to himself. "For it is due [or appropriate] to

[4] "Unde dicit Dionysius, VIII cap. de Div. Nom., oportet videre in hoc veram Dei esse iustitiam, quod omnibus tribuit propria, secundum uniuscuiusque existentium dignitatem; et uniuscuiusque naturam in proprio salvat ordine et virtute" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 1).

God that he should implement in things that which expresses his will and wisdom and which manifests his goodness, and according to this God's justice regards what is fitting to him, insofar as he renders to himself what is due to himself."[5] Thus, creation does manifest God's justice. However, the effect of justice in creation is not God's justice to the creature created, but his justice to himself. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas says that this cannot be justice in its proper sense, because the latter requires some debt of necessity. It is, he writes "justice in a larger sense" ("*large iustitia accepta*").[6]

It is because of this primary sense of God's justice to himself that God acts justly in a secondary way to provide for his creatures, once created, what is due to them given the created natures they possess. "And so also God acts justly when he gives to each that which is due to it according to the *ratio* of its nature and condition. But this debt depends upon the first, because he owes to each what is ordained to it according to the order of divine wisdom."[7] God owed it to himself to create, without creation being necessitated. The sense of "owed it to himself" here would be the sense we have in mind in English when we say, "I owe it to myself to . . .". However, once the nature of the creature is created, God owes to the creature what is appropriate to its nature as he created it, fulfilling in the creature the end he gave himself in creating it according to his wisdom. Aquinas begins his response in article 1 by

[5] "Debitum enim est Deo, ut impleatur in rebus id quod eius sapientia et voluntas habet, et quod suam bonitatem manifestat, et secundum hoc iustitia Dei respicit decentiam ipsius, secundum quam reddit sibi quod sibi debetur" (ibid.).

[6] "Sicut igitur creaturarum productio non potest dici fuisse ex debito iustitiae quo Deus creaturae sit debitor, ita nec ex tali iustitiae debito quo suae bonitati sit debitor, si iustitia proprie accipiatur. Large tamen iustitia accepta, potest dici in creatione rerum iustitia, inquantum divinam condecet bonitatem" (*ScG* II, c. 28). (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia Iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita,* vols. 13-15 [Rome: Leonine Commission, 1918-30]).

[7] "Et sic etiam Deus operatur iustitiam, quando dat unicuique quod ei debetur secundum rationem suae naturae et conditionis. Sed hoc debitum dependet ex primo, quia hoc unicuique debetur, quod est ordinatum ad ipsum secundum ordinem divinae sapientiae" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3).

straightforwardly denying the application of commutative justice to God. In article 4, however, he attributes distributive justice to God, subsequent to the effect of creation in the creature.

In the body of the article Aquinas does not call this primary justice of God to himself in the act of creation "metaphorical" justice. However, he appears to be relying upon his understanding of the point Aristotle makes in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (5.11.1138b.5-6) that justice towards oneself is a kind of metaphorical justice by likeness, insofar as one's parts act in their due order to one another. Aquinas himself discusses this metaphorical justice towards oneself in the *Secunda secundae* (*STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 2). He explains that it ordinarily seems that justice must involve another supposit, another being, because justice imports the notion of equality, and equality is essentially a relation to another being. That is how equality differs from identity. However, one can speak of the distinction of one's parts and powers acting in relation to one another. But to speak of powers acting, rather than the substance acting, is to speak metaphorically. Properly speaking, it is substances that act. Thus, one can speak metaphorically of the justice within oneself, insofar as one's parts and powers are well ordered toward one another as distinctive principles of operation. This internal justice of the human supposit clearly harkens back to Plato's theory of the justice of a human being's parts as exhibiting a kind of harmony—the concupiscible, the irascible, and the rational—to one another. Indeed, Aquinas explicitly mentions those three parts in his discussion, although without mentioning Plato. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle had described this sort of internal justice as involving likeness and metaphor.

God does not have parts (*STh* I, q. 3). Nevertheless, Aquinas has established that "justice" can be applied metaphorically to a substance in relation to itself, and the connection of the metaphorical justice of God both to himself and to the effect that is creation is made clear where Aquinas writes, "The justice of God is from eternity according to eternal will and purpose, and justice chiefly consists in this. However, it is not eternal as

regards the effect, because nothing is coeternal with God."[8] In this passage, Aquinas argues that because of the difference between the eternity of divine justice and the lack of eternity in creation, divine justice is related to the order of God's will and eternal purpose, not to its effect in creation, the point he had made much earlier (*STh* I, q. 21). Here, what is playing the role of parts ordered one to another are God's will, wisdom, and goodness, again despite the fact that in reality there is no distinction in God between such parts. The distinction is in the way we speak.

Before turning to the problem of *misericordia*, it is important not to misunderstand Aquinas's appeal to "metaphorical justice." Earlier (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 9, obj. 1), Aquinas had asked whether it is appropriate for sacred doctrine to use metaphor to speak of divine things insofar as metaphor appeals to images and is akin to poetry. His response was that while poetry employs images in order to please, sacred doctrine employs them from necessity to communicate truth concerning divine matters in the least misleading way. In the *Secunda secundae* (*STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 2), Aquinas raises the issue of the "metaphorical justice" of a human being to himself or herself in a way that is not tied to the necessity of *sacra doctrina* (despite the fact that it arises within the *Summa*). The qualification he makes that, strictly speaking, the parts and powers of a substance do not act, but rather the substance acts in virtue of its parts and powers, is a point that he regularly makes about human action; it has nothing strictly to do with *sacra doctrina*. As seen in Aristotle's application of the justice of an individual to himself or herself, the metaphor occurs in a strictly philosophical context—the *Nicomachean Ethics*. That is the way that Aquinas uses the point in the body of the article, discussing whether one can be just toward oneself. It is a way of speaking that we engage in employing a metaphor, a way of speaking that is not in fact necessary, although there is no error in adopting it. With

[8] "iustitia Dei est ab aeterno secundum voluntatem et propositum aeternum, et in hoc pracipue iustitia consistit. Quamvis secundum effectum non sit ab aeterno, quia nihil est Deo coaeternum" (*STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 2, ad 3).

the metaphor, we assert that the parts and powers of the agent are well ordered toward one another in the act of the agent, who is strictly speaking the one who acts, not his or her parts.

However, as extended to God, metaphorical terms, as opposed to univocal or even analogical terms, are necessary because they are the best instruments of language in which to assert literal truths[9] about the divine. That the effect of creation, the existence of creatures, involves metaphorical justice rather than distributive justice thus marks a real distinction among all God's effects. It marks the distinction between creation as such, which initiates the manifestation of God's will and wisdom, and those effects that subsequently fulfill the manifestation of God's will and wisdom. In the human case, the truth can be communicated without the metaphor, although it is useful to employ the metaphor. However, in the divine case the metaphor cannot be paraphrased away. It is rather necessary in order to say something true about God that could not be said in ordinary nonmetaphorical language.

II. Another Difficulty: *Misericordia* or Mercy

What then of mercy? Can it be attributed to the effect of creation? Here Aquinas seems to face roughly the same problem he had faced with justice, for it seems that mercy requires a subject to be merciful to. Discussing *misericordia* in general in question 30 of the *Secunda secundae*, Aquinas uses Augustine's definition of *misericordia* in *De civitate Dei*: *misericordia* is heartfelt compassion at the suffering of another by which we are compelled to alleviate the suffering to the extent possible.[10]

[9] For what is meant by the "literal [*literalis*] sense" in Aquinas, see *STh* I, q. 13, a. 3 and esp. *STh* I, q. 1, a. 10, corp. and ad 3. The significant point is that in Aquinas the literal sense of a text does not exclude the use of image and metaphor, as it typically does in the contemporary use of the English term *literal*. For Aquinas, metaphorical statements if true are not "literally false" but true in some other sense, and are in fact literally true because they communicate something about reality through the use of an image.

[10] As quoted in Aquinas, "misericordia est alienae miseriae in nostro corde compassio, qua utique, si possumus, subvenire compellimur" (*STh* II-II, q. 30, a. 1).

In the general discussion, Aquinas explicitly argues that the suffering of another that prompts *misericordia* involves a *malum*, or defect, in a pre-existing subject.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the English term "mercy" is not generally a particularly felicitous translation of the Latin "*misericordia*." The contemporary secular philosophical discussion of mercy is almost exclusively confined to questions of refraining from doing harm to another, whether reducing just punishment (accompanied or not by forgiveness) or simply refraining from harming someone when one has the power to harm and the inclination to harm. The paradigmatic sense of the term in that discussion is what is meant by someone "being at the mercy of." In the latter case, there may be no question of justice, as it may involve someone making a plea for mercy from another who has unjustly attacked one, as for example a pirate or a mob killer. Emphasis is placed upon the phrase "at the mercy of" to isolate this sense: the petitioner is "at the mercy of" the powerful with the inclination to harm, whether the power to harm would be exercised justly or not. The central question of the contemporary discussion tends to concern what constraints questions of justice might place upon mercy so conceived. For example, is forgiveness of justly imposed punishment in pursuit of reconciliation between offender and offended a violation of justice, insofar as such acts of "mercy" limit and lessen the administration of justice through punishment?[11]

Augustine's actual text is "Quid est autem misericordia, nisi alienae miseriae quaedam in nostro corde compassio, qua utique, si possumus, subvenire compellimur?" (Augustinius, *S. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi Ad Marcellinum De Civitate Dei Contra Paagnos* [*PL* 41:261C]). Notice the slight variation in Aquinas's quotation of Augustine—from a rhetorical question in Augustine's actual text to an asserted definition.

[11] Among the many general discussions of mercy in contemporary philosophy, see, as exemplary instances, J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); C. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); M. C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a historical overview of this sense of mercy, see A. Tuckness and J. M. Parrish, *The Decline of Mercy in Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

By contrast, Aquinas discusses the first sense of reducing justly imposed punishment under the heading of *clementia*, a virtue falling under *temperantia* generally, in question 157 of the *Secunda secundae*, not *misericordia* in question 30. In question 157, Aquinas's arguments are heavily influenced by stoicism and Seneca's *De clementia*, the letter that Seneca wrote to Nero urging him to rein in his anger in punishing his enemies in order to achieve a temperate character in his rule. Mercy taken as *clementia* bears upon and pursues the good of the one who punishes, not the one who is punished, although it may have a suitable effect upon the latter *per accidens*. The second sense of mercy—refraining from doing harm, whether the harm is conceived of as justly or unjustly imposed—bears no resemblance at all to Aquinas's discussions either of *clementia* or of *misericordia*.

In religious and liturgical contexts "mercy" can mean God's refraining from punishing the sinful or assistance to one who is suffering that is prompted by the experience of compassion on the part of the one who extends mercy. It is the latter sense on which Aquinas focuses in his discussion of human *misericordia* (*STh* II-II, q. 30) and which he extends to the discussion of divine *misericordia* (*STh* I, q. 21)—coming to the assistance of those who suffer. Both senses are found in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, whereas the latter sense tends to dominate in the New Testament (while not entirely excluding the former). Thus, despite being commonly translated into Eng-

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2014). For mercy broadly construed as refraining from doing another harm, see A. Perry, "Mercy," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 46 (2018): 60-89. For mercy as *misericordia* as used in this article, see my discussions in "*Misericordia* in Aquinas: A Test Case for Theological and Natural Virtues," in *Jaarboek Thomas Institute Utrecht* (2013); "The Quality of Mercy: *Misericordia* and Three Forms of Forgiveness in Aquinas," in *The Virtuous Life: Thomas Aquinas on the Theological Nature of Moral Virtues*, ed. H. Schoot and H. Goris (Louvain: Peeters, 2017), 201-20; "Fearless Mercy beyond Justice: Aquinas and Nussbaum's Pity Tradition," in *Beyond the Self: Virtue Ethics and the Problem of Culture*, ed. R. Hain (Baylor, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2019), 43-66; and especially, "Mercy beyond Justice: The Tragedy of Shylock and Antonio," Plenary Address in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (2018): 31-53.

lish as "mercy," the reality signified by "*misericordia*" that is of interest to Aquinas is very different from the reality signified by "mercy" in most contemporary secular philosophical discussion.

In one sense, Aquinas has no difficulty arguing that *misericordia* can be attributed to God, even though God as impassible does not experience any passion, which is suggested by the general definition. Aquinas attributes *misericordia* to God on account of his general effect of alleviating suffering among those who suffer. Indeed, Aquinas argues that the alleviation of suffering includes even the damned in hell, who through God's *misericordia* are not punished as much as they may deserve.[12] The narrow case involving hell and punishment does bear a resemblance to the contemporary philosophical discussion of mercy. However, the general definition from Augustine bears upon any kind of suffering, not just the suffering of punishment, and so divine mercy as *misericordia* should not be thought of as limited to the judicial setting of divine punishment. Furthermore, because God is impassible and does not suffer passions, particularly the passions of pleasure and pain associated with the body on which the cardinal virtue of *temperantia* bears, the *misericordia* extended to the damned in hell ought not to be seen as an exercise of *clementia*, which reins in the passions of excessive anger and cruelty in the one who punishes. Rather, it is an exercise of God's coming to the assistance of those who suffer, even those who suffer justly in being punished with damnation.

For Aquinas, the form of this attribution of *misericordia* to the divine is a standard analogical extension of the predication of the perfection signified by a term, a term ordinarily applied to creatures but without the accompanying imperfect mode exemplified in creatures, in this case mercy without an accompanying passion.[13] Aquinas's argument for this analogical extension, the effect of alleviating suffering, simply underscores the necessity that there be some pre-existing subject distinct

[12] "Et tamen in damnatione reproborum apparet misericordia, non quidem totaliter relaxans, sed aliqualiter allevians, dum punit citra condignum" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4, ad 1).

[13] *STh* I, q. 13, aa. 5-6.

from God to which God can extend *misericordia* by alleviating the *malum*.

However, that necessity of a pre-existing subject is precisely the problem. In the case of *misericordia* in the act of creation bringing about the very existence of things, there are no pre-existing subjects suffering a *malum* that God's act of creation could alleviate.

Now, it might be replied that Aquinas could make use of a notion of metaphorical *misericordia*, as he had made use of the notion of metaphorical justice to solve the problem of creation and divine justice. In the case of a human being, *misericordia* might be applied metaphorically to oneself. In his general discussion of human *misericordia*, Aquinas does draw an explicit parallel with the point from Aristotle about metaphorical justice: "Strictly speaking *misericordia* is for another and not for oneself, except according to a certain likeness, just like justice insofar as diverse parts are considered in a human being, as is said in *Ethics* V."[14] Aquinas concludes that in the human case one can be said to be merciful to oneself because of the complexity of one's parts, one of which presumably is suffering and is assisted by another. For example, the hand might be pressed onto a wound to stop its bleeding (of course it must be acknowledged that it is in fact the human being who acts, not the hand). Or one might drink a glass of bourbon to soothe one's anguish over the loss of a loved one.

However, this solution will not work for divine mercy, for at least two reasons. In the first place, the *misericordia* that Aquinas attributes to God is attributed not metaphorically but by analogy. It does not appeal to a similitude as metaphorical justice does in speaking of how the really distinct parts of a human being may embody justice toward one another. Recall that in the metaphorical justice attributed to God in terms of

[14] "proprie misericordia est ad alterum, non autem ad seipsum, nisi secundum quandam similitudinem, sicut et iustitia, secundum quod in homine considerantur diversae partes, ut dicitur in V Ethic." (*STh* II-II, q. 30, a. 1).

the logical distinction[15] between God's will, wisdom, and goodness, these attributes are treated "as if" they were parts. However, *misericordia* is simply attributed to God in terms of its effect, without signifying the compassion that it signifies in application to human beings. Predicating an attribute of God in terms of God's effects, without the mode of its existence in creatures, is precisely a case of analogical, not metaphorical, extension of a term to God.[16]

What distinguishes the *ratio* of *misericordia* from several other attributes predicated of God, including justice, goodness, and liberality, is that whereas all these attributes provide some good, *misericordia* provides a good specifically with respect to a *malum* or defect that ought not to be present. In the discussion of God's mercy, Aquinas writes:

> But it ought to be considered that the perfections to be bestowed upon things pertain to the divine goodness, justice, liberality and mercy, but according to diverse *rationes*. For the communication of a perfection, absolutely considered, pertains to goodness . . . but insofar as perfections are given to things by God according to the proportion of things, that pertains to justice. . . . However, insofar as perfections are not attributed to things for God's use, that pertains to [his] liberality. And finally, insofar as perfections are given by God to things to expel any defect, this pertains to *misericordia*.[17]

So, by Aquinas's own account, in the attribution of *misericordia* to God the notion of a defect and its attendant subject cannot be eliminated. However, since God suffers from no defect in

[15] By "logical distinction" here I am referring to the distinction Aquinas has in mind among diverse *rationes*, while discussing in *STh* I, q. 13, a. 4 terms applied to God and whether they are synonymous.

[16] *STh* I, qq. 3 and 5.

[17] "Sed considerandum est quod elargiri perfectiones rebus, pertinet quidem et ad bonitatem divinam, et ad iustitiam, et ad liberalitatem, et misericordiam, tamen secundum aliam et aliam rationem. Communicatio enim perfectionum, absolute considerata, pertinet ad bonitatem, ut supra ostensum est. Sed inquantum perfectiones rebus a Deo dantur secundum earum proportionem, pertinet ad iustitiam, ut dictum est supra. Inquantum vero non attribuit rebus perfectiones propter utilitatem suam, sed solum propter suam bonitatem, pertinet ad liberalitatem. Inquantum vero perfectiones datae rebus a Deo, omnem defectum expellunt, pertinet ad misericordiam" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3).

virtue of himself or of a part of himself, being pure act and having no parts, *misericordia* simply cannot be directed in any sense by God to himself, as had been the case with justice—neither univocally, nor analogically, nor even metaphorically. So, it seems it must be directed to another being, to some being other than God, even in the act of creation.

Aquinas is well aware of this problem. He states it as the fourth objection in question 21, article 4 of the *Prima pars*, on whether justice and mercy are found in every work of God. The objection asserts, "Moreover, justice is to repay that which is owed, while *miscericordia* assists the miserable, and so both justice and *misericordia* presuppose some-thing in their works. But creation presupposes no-thing, [that is, nothing]. Therefore, in creation there is neither justice nor *misericordia*."[18] With respect to justice, Aquinas's response to this objection simply restates what he argues in general in the response—the *ratio* of justice is preserved insofar as a reality is produced in being in a manner that is due in the sense of fitting to the divine wisdom and goodness.

However, it is here, with respect to *misericordia*, that a much more difficult problem seems to arise for Aquinas precisely in his response. He writes, "the *ratio* of *misericordia* is preserved insofar as a thing is changed from nonbeing to being." The Latin at the end of that statement is "*res de non esse in esse mutatur*."[19] It seems the subject that is suffering is the thing, the individual that, according to the response, is in a state of nonbeing. The defect or *malum* is the nonbeing of that subject. The suffering of that defect in that subject is alleviated by God's creative act which supplies for it the perfection of being, being

[18] "Praeterea, iustitiae est reddere debitum, misericordiae autem sublevare miseriam, et sic tam iustitia quam misericordia aliquid praesupponit in suo opere. Sed creatio nihil praesupponit. Ergo in creatione neque misericordia est, neque iustitia" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4, obj. 4).

[19] "Et secundum hoc etiam salvatur ibi ratio iustitiae, inquantum res in esse producitur, secundum quod convenit divinae sapientiae et bonitati. Et salvatur quodammodo ratio misericordiae, inquantum res de non esse in esse mutatur" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4, ad 4).

as a subject, in this instance being as a substance. Thus, while no subject to which being is due is necessary in order to attribute justice to God in the effect of creation, in the case of divine *misericordia* Aquinas appears committed to positing a subject prior to the effect of creation, albeit a nonexisting subject that is changed, *mutatur*, from nonbeing to being. Here Aquinas seems to be committed to the view that there is some individual that is identically the same prior to its existence and after its being caused to exist, identically the same subject as between its state of nonbeing and its state of being. By God's creative act this individual undergoes a change, a *mutatio* from the state of nonbeing to the state of being.

On its face this assertion is not patently absurd. One might posit a realm of pure possibles, among which there are possible individuals that undergo or may undergo such metaphysical changes as from nonbeing to being, from possible existence to actual existence, or not undergo such changes, although they could—my second son, golden mountains, and the like. Considering Aquinas's claim in isolation, then, we might think that he is committed to such a realm of pure possibility prior to the actuality of being. Consider the difference between my second son Danny who was possible and is actual versus my fourteenth son, as yet unknown and unnamed, who is merely possible. The individual Danny who was merely possible and in the state of nonbeing is identical to the individual Danny who is actual and in the state of being. *Vis-à-vis* divine *misericordia*, Danny was mercifully delivered from the suffering of nonbeing by God's creative act. Surely, however, it is possible that I could have a fourteenth son, although I do not actually. Call my fourteenth son Randy. Pity then poor Randy, who languishes suffering in the realm of nonbeing but pure possibility, left there by God to suffer, along with my one-hundred and nineteenth son Jonathan, and so on *ad infinitum*—the realm of nonbeing as an infinite realm of suffering even only with respect to my possible but nonactual children, not to mention the nonactual children of other actual human beings. Should I not mourn them in their suffering? Or should I rejoice that it is part of God's will, wisdom, and goodness to leave them in this eternal suffering of

infinite extent? These thoughts are fantastical and border on the morally perverse and absurd.

In fact, placed within the larger context of Aquinas's metaphysics of creation, the metaphysical positing of possible individuals prior to the act of creation that change through creation is patently absurd as the basis for attributing *misericordia* to God in the specific effect of causing the creature to be. It is a constant of Aquinas's metaphysics of creation that "*creatio non est mutatio*," that is, creation is not a change. Aquinas holds this position from the *Commentary on the Sentences*,[20] through *De potentia Dei*,[21] the *Summa contra gentiles*,[22] and even the *Summa theologiae* in question 45 of the *Prima pars*—a mere twenty-four questions after this claim about God's *misericordia* in creation in question 21. The whole of chapter 17 of book 2 of the *Summa contra gentiles* is explicitly devoted to arguing "*Quod creatio non est motus neque mutatio*." In addition, question 3, article 1 of *De potentia*, on whether God can create from nothing, is by and large devoted to arguing that *creatio ex nihilo* does not involve some metaphysically prior thing or subject receiving being after a state of nonbeing. Any possibility prior to creation for a being to exist must be resolved into either the noncontradiction of terms in an assertion or the active power of God, but decidedly not some subject waiting in a state of nonbeing to be changed into the state of being. In the very next article Aquinas explicitly asks "*utrum creatio sit mutatio*." From the context it is absolutely clear that the question is not whether creation involves a change in God as God acts to create, but whether it is a change in the subject of creation, the being that is created. No, he argues, it is not.

Yet, in discussing God's *misericordia*, Aquinas appears to contradict himself precisely in the absurd suggestion that creation involves "*res de non esse in esse mutatur*." It also

[20] II *Sent*., d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, passim (*Scriptum super libros sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis* [Paris: Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, 1929-47]).

[21] *De Pot*., q. 3, aa. 1-2 (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Quaestiones Disputatae* [Turin: Marietti, 1953]).

[22] *ScG* II, c. 17.

appears absurd given that he explicitly argues that very point in the *Summa* itself in question 45 of the *Prima pars*, a mere twenty-four questions after his assert in question 21. However, it is difficult to believe that this apparent contradiction in Aquinas is inadvertent, given the constancy with which he holds and argues that creation is not a change and does not involve a metaphysically prior subject that receives being.

III. Resolving the Difficulty: The *Misericordia* of God

If what appears to be a contradictory assertion is deliberate, what is one to make of it? At the very least I think we can say that it manifests Aquinas's theological resolve to place divine mercy at the heart of God's action *ad extra* from the very beginning in the moment of creation—the alpha, not just the omega. In question 21 of the *Prima pars*, Aquinas argues that in God's works the effect of divine *misericordia* is always prior to divine *iustitia*, that divine *iustitia* is founded upon divine *misericordia*, while divine *misericordia* surpasses divine *iustitia* which itself aims at *misericordia* as its end. "Moreover, every work of divine justice always presupposes a work of [divine] mercy and has its foundation in [mercy]."[23] "It is clear that mercy does not take away from justice but is a certain fullness of justice. Hence, it is said in James 2 that 'mercy exalts itself above judgment.'"[24] It is important to keep in mind that the distinction of priority of *misericordia* to *iustitia* here is on the part of God's effect in creation, not on the part of God's act of creation, where there is no such distinction. So, if Aquinas is going to attribute justice to God in creation, *a fortiori* he must find a way of attributing *misericordia* to creation.

The apparently contradictory assertion of creation involving a *mutatio* is reminiscent of another problem Aquinas faces

[23] "Opus autem divinae iustitiae semper praesupponit opus misericordiae, et in eo fundatur" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4).

[24] "Ex quo patet quod misericordia non tollit iustitiam, sed est quaedam iustitiae plenitudo. Unde dicitur Iac. II, quod misericordia superexaltat iudicium" (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3, ad 2).

about creation in *De potentia Dei*. A number of objections throughout the articles of question 3 focus upon paradoxes of change and becoming to argue that there could not have been a first moment of time, and so the world could not have been created *ex nihilo*, or that the world must be coeternal with God, or that it is impossible for angels to exist before the corporeal world.[25] The substance of Aquinas's response in the questions is to distinguish a temporal notion of before and after from a metaphysical notion of before and after as causal dependency which does not require temporal priority. Then, specifically addressing the question of whether creation involves a change, Aquinas writes:

> But this is not properly speaking a change, but only by likeness, just as we may imagine time itself as a quasi-subject of those things which happen in time. However, in creation there is nothing common according to the ways specified above. For neither is there some common subject actually existing, nor potentially. Also, there is no identical time, if we speak of the creation of the universe, for before the world there was no time. However, a common subject can be thought to exist according to imagination, as namely we imagine one common time when the world was not and after which the world was caused to be. This [imagination] is just like that in which we are able to imagine a magnitude beyond the universe although there is no such real magnitude. And so, before the beginning of the world there was no time, even though it is possible to imagine it. Thus, properly speaking according to the truth of the matter, creation does not have the *ratio* of a change, but only according to a certain act of imagination—that is, not properly speaking, but by likeness.[26]

[25] *De Pot*., q. 3, a. 1, obj. 10 and 11; a. 14, obj. 6; a. 17, obj. 20; a. 19, obj. 5.

[26] "Sed haec non proprie vocatur mutatio, sed per similitudinem, prout ipsum tempus imaginamur quasi subiectum eorum quae in tempore aguntur. In creatione autem non est aliquid commune aliquo praedictorum modorum. Neque enim est aliquod commune subiectum actu existens, neque potentia. Tempus etiam non est idem, si loquamur de creatione universi; nam ante mundum tempus non erat. Invenitur tamen aliquod commune subiectum esse secundum imaginationem tantum, prout scilicet imaginamur unum tempus commune dum mundus non erat, et postquam mundus in esse productus est. Sicut enim extra universum non est aliqua realis magnitudo, possumus tamen eam imaginari; ita et ante principium mundi non fuit aliquod tempus, quamvis sit possibile ipsum imaginari: et quantum ad hoc creatio secundum veritatem, proprie loquendo, non habet rationem mutationis, sed solum secundum imaginationem

To deal with the various paradoxes of the objections, Aquinas simply distinguishes real time from this imaginary time that we are capable of projecting, as if it were continuous with the real time that began to exist with the existence of creation. It is, as he explains, comparable to how one might think imaginatively of dimensions of space outside the boundary of space. Such imagination with respect to time is useful for undergirding the ways we speak about causality, which, when analyzed, indicate a dependency of effect upon cause, but not necessarily a temporal priority of cause to effect. So, the image of time before real time helps to communicate the causal dependency of all of creation upon God's creative act, without that causal dependence expressing in reality a temporal priority of cause to effect. The passage draws the conclusion that creation is not in fact a change, "properly speaking," but only by "likeness" to material change, that is, metaphorically.

Something similar is happening with Aquinas's willingness to say that creation involves a change from nonbeing to being as a way of understanding the merciful effect of creation. The nonbeing of the subject is an imaginary projection of the mind, for in reality there can be no subject that does not exist according to Aquinas. Indeed, he writes that speaking of the nonbeing of a creature is according to "our manner of understanding" and specifically with respect to this problem about *misericordia* that "creation presupposes nothing in the nature of things but does in the knowledge of God." I can imagine anything that does exist as not-existing, as "residing" as if in a condition of nonexistence. Indeed, I can speak of any object that does exist and intelligibly, though falsely, speak of it as not existing, or I can truly assert that it no longer exists having ceased to exist, or truly assert that once it did not exist, and so on. The fool has said in his heart, falsely though not meaning-

quamdam; non proprie, sed similitudinarie" (*De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 2; see also q. 3, a. 1, ad 10).

lessly, that there is no God.[27] In addition, in our manner of thought and speech, we can use a proper name to assert that some being that once existed no longer does so. So, my thought and speech are not limited in their scope only to objects that actually exist, nor is my imagination. Given the ability aided by imagination to speak of things that no longer exist, to speak of time before the beginning of time, and space outside the boundary of space, even though these latter cannot possibly exist, there is no reason to think we cannot similarly employ the imagination to speak as if there were individual things that never existed. Our imagination is an aid to making true assertions concerning what has never existed, what may never exist, and even what cannot possibly exist, as for example that *a human being that is a quintessence of dust is an impossible being*.

Now, stipulate that "Randy" names anything that satisfies the definite description "my fourteenth son." The imagination is an aid in speaking of Randy and asserting that Randy does not exist. But imagining Randy, my true statement that Randy does not exist is not about my imagination or any "mental" image that I form to assist in my making the true assertion. As Aquinas says of imaginary time and imaginary space, there is no individual Randy of whom nonexistence is predicated that can be said to be identical to or continuous with any individual of whom existence is predicated. In short, the use of the imagination to speak of nonexistence does not posit some realm of nonbeing filled with subjects who change from that realm to the realm of being and are identical subjects between the two realms.

However, if this appeal to the imagination, our way of understanding, or the knowledge of God, simply transposes the realm of individualized pure possibilities into our minds or God's, that is as muddled a way of thinking as it was when this realm appeared to be an independent realm of pure possibility. My image or thought of my wife is not my wife in some other

[27] Of course, this last example is one in which the imagination should not be employed to make the false but meaningful assertion of nonexistence, lest one be tempted toward anthropomorphism in thinking about God.

state. When I have an image of my wife or think of her, it is her that I am imagining and thinking of, not the image or thought. When I imagine or think of kissing her, there is no kiss in my imagination that suffers nonbeing by being in the mind alone,[28] and there certainly is no individual that is my fourteenth son suffering misery in the mind of God until we conceive him and he becomes actual by God's creative act.[29]

This appeal to the mind, human or divine, must be understood in the way we understand what Aquinas says about how things change in coming to be known. When I come to know Bazaine's stained-glass windows in the church of Saint-Severin in Paris, it follows as a simple matter of grammar and logic that Bazaine's stained-glass windows in Saint-Severin have come to be known by me. That truth gives expression to our manner of understanding and speaking in the shift from the active to the passive voice. However, it expresses no actuality to be attributed to the stained-glass windows. The fate of the stained-glass is quite different if I clean and polish it, and we say Bazaine's stained-glass windows have been cleaned and polished by me. That does signify an actuality of the stained-glass, despite the use of the passive voice. The difference comes from the difference between the act of knowing X and the act of cleaning and polishing X. Some passive-voice predications attribute something real to the subject of predication, but others do not, particularly predications involving intentional verbs like imagine, think, know, desire. Even when it is true that my

[28] This denial that what is "in" the mind is or could be identical as a subject to some being that does or could exist in reality beyond the mind is at the heart of Aquinas's denial of the so-called Ontological Argument. For Aquinas "existence in the mind" is not a mode of existence for a subject or individual that might also have another mode of existence should it come to exist "outside the mind in reality." On "being in the mind" in general for Aquinas, see my *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 159-94.

[29] For Aquinas's account of creation and the workings of nature see *STh* I, q. 105, a. 5; and *De Pot.*, q. 3, aa. 7-8. See also Alfred Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is Not Enough," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 553-85.

fiancée is desired by me as my future spouse, no real property is being attributed to her, no actuality. Saying that some X exists in the mind or imagination of some thinker Y is not a way of attributing shadowy though unreal existence to X; it is a way of characterizing the thought of Y, that is, that Y is thinking in a certain way.

In the passage quoted above from *De potentia Dei*, Aquinas concludes, "thus, properly speaking according to the truth of the matter, creation does not have the *ratio* of a change, but only according to a certain act of imagination—that is, not properly speaking, but by likeness." Again, explicitly replying to an argument in the *Summa contra gentiles* (*ScG* II, c. 37) that the world must be eternal, because the world is "made" and making involves a motion through time, he writes:

> For creation is only said to be a change according to a metaphor, as a creature is considered to be after not being, for the same reason among those things in which no transmutation is found something is said to arise from another, only because one of them follows another, as for example day follows night. Nor can the *ratio* of motion be introduced from this that something is able to be created, for that which in no manner is, is not related to some manner or mode of existence such that one could conclude that when it begins to be it is now related to another manner or mode of existence than it was before.[30]

So, the day is said to arise out of the night. However, there is no underlying identical subject that was in the condition of being night that has changed to being in the condition of day, no pre-existing stuff that the day was drawn out of or from which it arose. In particular, notice that the passage ends by explicitly denying that because it is possible for something to be created, possibility should be understood as involving some mode or manner of existence for what is said to be possible. It "in no manner is" and so it is "not related to some manner or mode of

[30] "Nam creatio mutatio dici non potest nisi secundum metaphoram, prout creatum consideratur habere esse post non esse: ratione cuius aliquid ex alio fieri dicitur etiam eorum quae invicem transmutationem non habent, ex hoc solo quod unum eorum est post alterum, sicut dies ex nocte. Nec ratio motus inducta ad hoc aliquid facere potest: nam quod nullo modo est, non se habet aliquo modo; ut possit concludi quod, quando incipit esse, alio modo se habeat nunc et prius" (*ScG* II, c. 37).

existence" that would allow one to say such a manner or mode of existence had changed.[31]

Aquinas holds that we can speak of some being that exists as not existing, just as we can imagine a time before the beginning of time or a space outside of the boundary of space. What does not follow from that statement or act of imagination is that that very being ever was or could be in a state of nonexistence. There are no beings that do not exist. That some particular being does exist but need not do so says something about the power of God, not about a prior condition of nonbeing for that very being. To speak of change or a motion or a common subject between nonbeing and being involves likeness and metaphor to communicate that truth about reality. However, the use of metaphor in the assertion does not suggest that there is no metaphysical truth expressed by it. The truth expressed is simply not the metaphysical assertion one might think would be made, were one not to employ the metaphor. It is not only *sacra doctrina* that uses a likeness or a metaphor because it is necessary and useful,[32] but also at times metaphysics.

In contemporary English, the uses of the terms "literal" and "metaphorical" are used in opposition, such that a statement employing a metaphor is understood to be "literally false," but true perhaps in some other unspecified sense.[33] However, for Aquinas, following Augustine, metaphor can be employed in literal (*literalis*) statements to make true assertions about states of affairs in reality, events or happenings, and processes—in general about what exists. In contemporary English, we are likely to say that a statement that involves the use of a metaphor is not "literally" true. "It's raining buckets out there" will cause some officious interlocutor to respond, "Well, that's not

[31] In general, Aquinas resolves such possibility, not into subjects of the possibility, but into the noncontradiction of terms in a statement or the power of agents that are capable of making or creating. See *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 2; and q. 3, a. 17, ad 10.

[32] *STh* I, q. 1, a. 9, ad 2.

[33] See the "spiritual rain" scene with Rex Mottrom in Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 192.

literally true, but I see your point." However, that is not how Aquinas understands metaphor and literal truth.

Using a term metaphorically goes outside of its primary (*proprie*)[34] use by taking an image derived from the ordinary use and applying it in another context. For Aquinas, it differs from using a term analogously, because the latter does not rely upon an image taken from material beings to extend a term past its ordinary use. For example, calling a soldier in battle a lion, rather than brave, takes the image of a lion and how it acts and applies that image to the soldier, who might otherwise be truly and simply or properly called brave.[35] However, something of the depth of his bravery would be lost without the image of the metaphor. On the other hand, "wise" could be applied metaphorically to God by employing the image of a wise judge sitting on a bench. However, that image would limit the sense of God's wisdom, which Aquinas thinks extends to all of God's knowledge, well beyond questions of judicial determinations, even to his knowledge of himself and of what he does, including the entire order of Providence. So, one uses it without relying upon the image and applies it to God, in which case it is used analogously. But the key is that both the metaphors and the analogy are used to make assertions about the way the world and reality truly are. Aquinas argues that among other things the use of metaphor in talk about God prompts us to seek

[34] Unfortunately, translators of Aquinas often translate "*proprie*" as "literal" with the result that Aquinas seems to say that metaphor as such is nonliteral. Those who make this mistake typically do not notice then when having to translate "*literalis*" as "literal," they commit Aquinas to the position that the metaphors of Holy Scripture cannot be included in what Aquinas, following Augustine, calls the "literal sense" of Scripture, despite Aquinas's claims to the contrary. See *STh* I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 3. A better translation of "*proprie*" would be "common" or "ordinary" as in "the common or ordinary use of the term," in which case metaphor and analogy would involve "an uncommon and not ordinary use of the term," which does not suggest that they are potentially false. A referee for this article suggested simply using "proper"; I tend to resist that translation since it can suggest that somehow metaphor and analogy are, as departures from the "proper" use of a term, somehow improper.

[35] And yet, "brave" itself said of human beings might have begun its life in metaphor. As far as etymologists can determine it derives from the Italian "*bravo*" originally meaning wild or savage. See https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=brave.

understanding of the reality it signifies[36] about God beyond what we would otherwise pursue. The question then becomes what truth the speaker or writer is trying to communicate with the metaphor or analogy, using the terms outside of their primary use.[37]

The takeaway from this discussion of Aquinas on metaphor is that a metaphorical assertion concerning reality, if true, is as true as any other assertion not employing a metaphor is true about reality. The point is that in these contexts where metaphor is "necessary," the depth of the reality one is speaking about is better captured with the metaphor than without. Applied to the notion that a contradiction might be formed between two statements, because one appears to deny what the other asserts, the fact that one assertion employs a metaphor should not be taken to be grounds for responding, "Well, that's literally a contradiction, but true in some other sense." It should be grounds for recognizing there is no contradiction involved at all in the joint assertion of the two statements.

So, the metaphors employed in the discussion of creation are likenesses and metaphors that give expression to truth, not falsehood. It is not false to say the day arose out of the night because the saying involves a metaphor. It is a true statement that employs a metaphor to express the truth. It prompts us, however, to understand the truth communicated through the image and the use of the imagination. Similarly, to say of a being that is created that it changed from a condition of nonbeing to being is not false because it involves a metaphor. It expresses something metaphysically true with a metaphor.

Thus, the fact that we assert that in creation a being was changed from the condition of nonbeing to being does, according to Aquinas, assert something true about divine mercy by employing a metaphor. Take Edith Piaf. She once existed. But

[36] *STh* I, q. 1, a. 9, ad 2.

[37] In this paragraph I have paraphrased what Aquinas writes about metaphor and analogy in *STh* I, q. 1, aa. 9-10; and q. 13, aa. 3-6. For the specific point about literal statements involving metaphors see *STh* I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 3. For the point about metaphor involving an image and analogy not employing one, see *STh* I, q. 13, a. 3, ad 1.

she need never have existed. We can say of her that she need not have been. Yet she did exist. A way of *marking* this, her contingent existence, is to think of her as not existing prior to her existence and to assert that by creation she was changed from nonexistence to existence. However, to be clear, that is a manner of speaking or understanding that marks or signifies Edith Piaf's actual existence as dependent upon God's creative act. She is not sufficient unto herself for her own existence. The statement does not posit an individual subject identical and continuous between two conditions, nonexistence and existence.

That Edith Piaf is not sufficient for her own existence is a *defectus*, considered in relation to God, who is sufficient unto himself for his own existence. In her existence, like any creature she falls away from or apart from God's perfection of being sufficient unto himself for his own existence. In this context, however, *defectus* does not mean a fault or failure. Unfortunately, "defect" in English typically implies failure or fault. The contrast term is "perfect" which typically suggests no failure or fault. However, *perfectus* in Latin simply means complete, particularly complete as the term of a process. It can also simply mean complete or full in being without a preceding process. That is the way in which God is perfect, according to Aquinas (*STh* I, q. 4). But then it can also be used comparatively, as one might say that God is more perfect than the angels and the angels are more perfect than human beings, because more complete or full in the actuality of being. However, in not being as perfect as God, angels are not imperfect, flawed, or failed gods, nor are human beings imperfect, flawed, or failed angels. Thus, the notion of being less perfect or "falling away from" the completeness of something, which etymologically is what "*defectus*" means, need not imply fault or failure either. It can simply mean not as actual, not as full of being or actuality. And in developmental beings, it can also mean not yet complete as the type of being that it is, without suggesting failure of fault.

In this context then, "*defectus*" simply means a falling away from the perfect infinite existence of God. For Aquinas, to say that God is perfect is to say that he possesses, indeed *is* the fullness of being or existence without limit. Comparatively,

creatures are not thus perfect, because they are finite, that is, limited imitations of divine perfection.[38] They "fall away from" the infinite perfection of divine being. But an angel, human being, or worm, is not a failed god for falling away from the perfect actuality of God.

In addition, when a creature fulfills its own species-specific capacities for being (traditionally called "second act" by Aristotelians), fulfills capacities had by nature though not actual simply by nature, it pursues perfection as the kind of being that it is—perfection within its kind, not across kinds or comparatively. That God enables a creature to pursue and complete that perfection for itself is an expression of divine justice, because, as discussed above, it is fulfilling God's will, wisdom, and goodness in creating it as the kind of creature it is. However, when such a creature cannot pursue the perfection of its capacities, what is ordinarily simply a *defectus*, a lack of complete being for it, becomes a *malum*, a *defectus* that is a suffering, a lack of being that ought to be present. *Misericordia*, human or divine, addresses that *malum* by providing the being with the assistance it needs to overcome the *malum* and pursue the perfection.

However, none of this *misericordia*, human or divine, involves the effect of creation itself, since it presupposes the actual existence of the creature as the type of creature it is. In that respect this *misericordia* presupposes divine *iustitia*, the *iustitia* whereby God fulfills for his creatures what he commits to in creating them. We have seen, however, that Aquinas argues that the effect of divine *iustitia* in creation presupposes the effect of divine *misericordia* that is the creation of the creature. So, one can make a distinction of reason between the effect of *misericordia* subsequent to divine *iustitia* and the effect of divine *misericordia* that is creation as such.

We have seen that Aquinas, in order to assert that that effect, creation, is truly the effect of divine *misericordia*, thinks it is necessary to use the metaphor of being changed from nonbeing to being. So, what does that metaphor prompt us to try to

[38] *STh* I, q. 4, *passim*.

understand about the effect in creation that is *misericordia*? Consider that in the ordinary case of a capacity presupposing the existence of the creature with that capacity, the creature in fulfilling its capacities for more complete being, often assisted by the *misericordia* of others, including divine *misericordia*, participates more in being than it otherwise does when those natural capacities exist merely in potentiality ordered toward fulfillment. For example, a human being with an intellect moves from potentially understanding X to actually understanding X. In that way, the fulfillment of a substance's capacities for development moves it closer to God, who is being itself subsisting—that is, it increases its participation in the being and goodness of God.[39] A capacity or power as an existing thing is in one respect being, but as in potentiality to fulfillment in act it is in that respect nonbeing—it is, as it were, a mix, or better a medium between being and nonbeing that allows for development and completion in being by becoming fully actual, including becoming fully actual through its own proper operation. Aquinas holds that a potentiality, like a power for some actuality but also for the generation of a substance, stands as it were midway between nonbeing and actuality, a kind of being as existing that is not yet fully actual, and so a being that is also relative nonbeing.[40] So, the *misericordia* that assists in completing and perfecting the relative nonbeing of a capacity, or power, draws the being with that capacity closer to God, draws it closer to God from its condition of relative nonbeing. Metaphysically speaking, *misericordia*, whether human or divine, draws a creature closer in being to God.[41]

Now, however, we can see the necessity of the image in the effect of creation of the creature itself, the image of changing it

[39] See *STh* I, qq. 4-6; *ScG* II, cc. 18-20; *De Pot.*, q. 21, a. 4.

[40] "Ens enim in potentia est quasi medium inter purum non ens et ens in actu." See I *Phys*., lect. 9; also, *STh* I, q. 11, a. 2, ad 1. For the best current discussion of this midway status of a power, between pure nonbeing and being in act, see Gloria Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 84-89.

[41] See *ScG* III, cc. 19-20; also *STh* I, q. 44, a. 4.

from nonbeing to being. Here we can no longer speak of *misericordia*, whether human or divine. The effect of creation in a creature is an expression of divine mercy *tout court*. To express that truth Aquinas employs the metaphor of being changed from nonbeing to being, because it is necessary to signify that in creation God draws the creature as such to himself. In the ordinary case, divine *misericordia* addresses a *defectus* that is a *malum*, some aspect of being that the already existing creature ought to have in virtue of what it is with the capacities it has. The *defectus* is a *defectus* in a pre-existing subject, the substance and the particular capacity for development that exists in it as a subject. The capacity for development is in a state of relative nonbeing and through *misericordia* is brought to a state of being, a state of actuality where before there was only potentiality for that actuality. Through that *misericordia* God draws the creature closer to himself by bringing it to a more complete state of being that is proper to it as the kind of being it is—a subject in a state of relative nonbeing is brought to the fullness of being for it, which is good for it, overcoming some *malum* for it. This *misericordia* is that which follows divine justice toward a creature already in existence.

However, this ordinary case provides the image for the extraordinary case of creation, the *misericordia* that precedes and is the foundation of divine justice in creatures. *Misericordia* brings a creature closer to the fullness of being that is God. Though strictly speaking (*proprie*) there is no pre-existing subject that changes in creation, nonetheless, considering some actual, that is, existing creature, and imagining it in a state of nonexistence, and then changing by creation, captures the *ratio* of *misericordia* as that which brings a being closer to the fullness of being that is God. The very existence of the subject now, the being of the substance itself, and not simply the relative nonbeing of a capacity not yet actualized, is the first effect of divine *misericordia* whereby the creature itself in its entire substantial existence is brought into being and thereby primevally brought closer to God by God alone, the effect alone of the divine mercy. It is for this reason that the effect of divine mercy in creation is prior to the effect of divine justice in

creation as discussed earlier, and explains why, as we saw above, the effect of divine justice is that all things are proportioned and ordered by God's wisdom to God as their end. In other words, the effect of divine justice in creation is the fulfillment of the prior effect of divine mercy in creation, as Aquinas does in fact argue in that discussion.

Thus, not only is there no contradiction in Aquinas's arguing that divine mercy involves a *mutatio* whereby a creature is changed from nonbeing to being, but for Aquinas the metaphor involved in asserting that there is such a change communicates to us a very important truth about God that we would not otherwise consider, much less seek to understand. It communicates to us that because all that exists other than God, in every manner in which it exists, is the effect of divine creation, all that exists other than God, in every manner in which it exists, is the effect of divine mercy. However, even though Aquinas uses a metaphor to talk about the *effect* of divine mercy in creation, it remains the case that mercy as attributed to God, not to God's effect, is not metaphorical. The metaphor is said of the effect, not the cause. Unlike attributing justice to God himself in the act of creation, which does involve metaphor, attributing mercy to God in that act does not.

CONCLUSION

Far from embodying a contradiction or incoherence in Aquinas's thought, his use of the metaphor of a change from nonbeing to being gives expression to the metaphysical truth that all that exists subsequent to the effect of creation, including the effect in us of divine justice, is founded upon this primeval effect of divine *misericordia*. "Reminiscere miserationum tuarum Domine et misericordiarum tuarum quia a saeculo sunt."[42] Divine mercy is not simply the Omega of existence, but originally its Alpha. Divine mercy is all in all.

[42] Ps 24(25):6: "Remember O Lord your mercies, your mercies that are from the beginning of the ages."

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MAN'S CAPACITY FOR ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

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AS A COROLLARY of the truth that Christ is the only way to the Father,[1] that Jesus is the only name given to mankind by which we must be saved,[2] the Christian faith has always held that the Church is likewise necessary for salvation.[3] The Second Vatican Council, adhering to this tradition, taught that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, the sign and instrument of the salvation wrought in Christ.[4] For her part, the Church has received a missionary mandate from her master; she cannot but work for the salvation of souls. Human beings for their part are called to be incorporated into

[1] John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." All biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

[3] To provide but one example, consider this teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), reflecting the words of St. Cyprian: "There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful outside of which no one at all is saved" (Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed., ed. Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], 266 [§ 802]).

[4] One thinks most immediately perhaps of *Lumen Gentium* 1: "Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men—she here purposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth, as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission." Texts from the Second Vatican Council are taken from Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (rev. ed.; Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), unless otherwise indicated.

Christ's mystical body. They cannot be lukewarm to the call of the Church any more than they can be indifferent to the radical claims of her founder and spouse. "Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it."[5] The Church is meant for all men, and all men are meant, by the grace of God, for the Church.

The truth of the necessity of the Church for salvation presupposes that human beings are susceptible of becoming members of Christ's mystical body, that they are *capable* in some sense of ecclesial communion. We might call this a capacity or passive potency.[6] But what is the nature of this potency? My argument is that obediential potency is the principle in human nature whereby man is capable of ecclesial communion.

We will begin with a brief defense of obediential potency as central to the Thomistic understanding of the nature-grace relation.[7] Second, we will discuss man as a social animal, for it is only because human nature has a natural inclination and natural passive potency for social life that it has an obediential potency for ecclesial life. This will involve a discussion of friendship, both natural and supernatural. Third, after briefly examining the Old Testament people of God as prefiguring the Church, we will examine the Church herself and human nature's capacity for ecclesial membership. Charles Cardinal Journet will be of service to us at this stage, since he seems to posit that man has a hidden, inward, mysterious capacity for ecclesial membership. Finally, we will explore the consequences of this thesis for the Church's evangelical work. I will argue that the traditional[8] Thomistic understanding of the nature-grace relation, which has

[5] *LG* 14.

[6] It is a potency also in angels, who are likewise members of the mystical body. See *STh* III, q. 8, a. 4.

[7] For a fuller account, see Steven A. Long, "Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1997): 45-63; and Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2010), 101-65.

[8] See below, n. 36.

obediential potency as a central feature, serves to bolster the Church's missionary activity.

I. Obediential Potency as Central to the Nature-Grace Relation

A) A Biblical and Augustinian Principle

The term "obediential potency" (*potentia obedientiae* or *obedientialis*) seems at first blush to be abstruse Scholastic jargon,[9] and many today are hesitant to face the contemporary world with what they judge to be ill-fitted tools.[10] The term, however, arose to give voice to the simple notion that all creatures stand open, docile, *obedient* to whatever God may will to do in or through them.[11] Explained in this way, we may say with some confidence that this is a "thoroughly biblical notion."[12] To provide but one example, in Matthew 8:27,[13] Jesus

[9] That is not to say that *potentia obedientiae* is the only suitable term for this principle. Long, for instance ("Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God," 51), uses the language of the human intellect's "natural spiritual translucence" to the divine light. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange speaks about an "obediential or elevable capacity" (*capacitas obedientialis seu elevabilis*). See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, vol. 1, trans. Matthew K. Minerd (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2022), 573-616.

[10] Jean Daniélou famously said about Thomism (or "Scholastic theology" more generally) that it is inadequate, in its concepts and in its language, to the task of speaking to modern man. See Jean Daniélou, "Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse," *Études* 249 (1946): 5-21 (Eng. trans. by Anna Mathie Lenshek in Jean Daniélou, S.J., "Present Orientations of Religious Thought," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18 [2011]: 51-62).

[11] While we do not discuss it below, this "through them" is significant, especially for sacramental theology. See IV *Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 3, ad 4, where St. Thomas uses obediential potency to explain sacramental instrumentality. See also Reginald Lynch, O.P., *The Cleansing of the Heart: The Sacraments as Instrumental Causes in the Thomistic Tradition* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), esp. 128-43.

[12] Lawrence Feingold makes this claim in "Man as Imago Dei and Capax Dei: Man's Specific Obediential Potency," in *Reason and the Rule of Faith: Conversations in the Tradition with John Paul II*, ed. Christopher J. Thompson and Steven A. Long (New York: University Press of America, 2011), 197-215, at 198.

miraculously calms the storm and the sea, to the amazement of those aboard the ship. Saint Thomas Aquinas thinks that this pericope testifies to the capacity of creatures to be moved by God *ad nutum*, at God's command or nod. Just as the body obeys the soul and moves immediately at its nod, so do all things obey their creator. "*For the wind and sea obey him*, because every creature obeys its Creator,"[14] St. Thomas says. We have here the constitutive elements of obediential potency, namely, (1) God's active agency, whereby God can bring about in his creation whatever he wills, and (2) the creature's profound capacity to obey at once the word of its creator. Florent Gaboriau keenly observes that St. Thomas's commentary on Matthew 8:27 can be read alongside other texts (e.g., *STh* III, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3) in which St. Thomas likewise uses the phrase *ad nutum* to explain creaturely obedience in the context of human nature's capacity for the hypostatic union.[15]

Obediential potency is also arguably of Augustinian provenance. In *De Genesi ad litteram*, St. Augustine begins by speaking about the natural order that God has created, an order in which human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and created male and female (Gen 1:26-27).[16] He wants to identify the potency or capacity in Adam's rib that allowed it to be transformed into a woman, Eve. Is it according to what he calls *rationes seminales*? The natural order has its own laws, "according to which both the spirit of life which is a creature has drives and urges . . . and also the elements of this material world have their distinct energies and qualities, which determine what each is or is not capable of, what can or cannot be

[13] "And the men marveled, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?'"

[14] *Super Matt.*, c. 8, lect. 3: "*Quia venti et mare obediunt ei*: quia omnis creatura suo Creatori obedit" (Marietti ed.; trans. Jeremy Holmes and Beth Mortensen [Lander, Wyo.: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013], no. 729).

[15] Florent Gaboriau, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin en dialogue* (Paris: FAC éditions, 1993), 52.

[16] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 9.17.31 (trans. Edmund Hill, *On Genesis*, Works of St. Augustine I/13 (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2002).

made from which."[17] As Gerald Boersma explains, "Augustine describes the innate structures or 'natural laws' woven deeply into the fabric of creaturely existence."[18] Lawrence Feingold is justified, then, in saying, "St. Augustine's use of the notion of 'seminal reasons' (*rationes seminales*) here is basically equivalent to 'natural potency' in the vocabulary of St. Thomas."[19] These *rationes seminales*, as Boersma says, "allow for the unfolding of contingent being according to its nature and teleology."[20] We are speaking here of the natural order and the natural perfection or "unfolding" of creatures. But is the transformation of Adam's rib into Eve an instance of such natural creaturely unfolding?

Not content to speak only of *rationes seminales* in this context, St. Augustine proceeds to speak of things that God can work in creatures above their natures, above the natural order he has made:

> But over and above this natural course and operation of things, the power of the creator has in itself the capacity to make from all these things something other than what their seminal formulae [*rationes seminales*], so to say, prescribe—not however anything with which he did not so program them that it could be made from them at least by him.[21]

This quotation evinces the same truth we saw in Matthew 8, namely, that all creatures obey their creator, that God can work in a way that does not pertain strictly speaking to the natural potency (*ratio seminalis*) of the creature. Indeed, God can work above the order of nature to do the miraculous, to bring about the wonders we see in sacred Scripture: the budding of Aaron's rod, the gift of a child to a barren Sarah or Rebekah, the gift of speech to Balaam's ass. More proximate to St. Augustine's

[17] Ibid. 9.17.32.

[18] Gerald P. Boersma, "The *rationes seminales* in Augustine's Theology of Creation," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 18 (2020): 413-41, at 430. Saint Thomas also says in III *Sent*., d. 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4 that natural potency pertains to the seminal reason ("*pertinet ad rationem seminalem*").

[19] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 108 n. 22. See *STh* I, q. 115, a. 2.

[20] Boersma, "*Rationes seminales*," 430.

[21] Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.* 9.17.32.

concern, it is this potency that explains the capacity of Adam's rib to be miraculously transformed into Eve.

Lest one think that St. Augustine limits this capacity in the creature to the miraculous, he extends the point to the working of grace:

> So, then, God has in himself the hidden causes of certain deeds and events, which he did not insert in things he had made; and he does not activate them by that work of providence by which he set up natures in order for them to be, but that work of providence by which he administers as he may wish the natures he established as he wished. Among these causes too is the grace by which sinners are saved.[22]

God moves creatures in accord with their natures to some natural perfection. But creatures also have an openness whereby they can receive whatever God wills, even something above their natures. Feingold sees in this text the basic substance of the doctrine of obediential potency. He comments,

> St. Augustine has clearly enunciated the notion of obediential potency without giving it a technical name. Nevertheless, the way he describes it already suggests the technical name that will be given it in the thirteenth century, for he characterizes it as a *potency in the creature to obey the will of God above the natural order* constituted by the "seminal reasons" that God has inserted into nature.[23]

We can add to Feingold's observation that St. Augustine's language here of "*ut voluerit . . . ut voluit*," by which the latter intends to highlight the divine freedom in creation and re-creation in grace, will be an essential part of the definition of obediential potency.

Following St. Augustine are various medieval recipients of the idea who expressed it in terms of a *potentia obedientiae*, among whom are Philip the Chancellor, Alexander of Hales,

[22] Ibid. 9.18.33.

[23] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 109.

and St. Albert the Great.[24] Saint Thomas is the inheritor of an intellectual tradition.

B) Obediential Potency in St. Thomas

Saint Thomas himself uses "obediential potency" in his corpus, as Thomas Joseph White puts it, "in a myriad of fluid and analogical senses, to denote far more than the miraculous domain of God's working."[25] Admittedly, the Angelic Doctor does use obediential potency to explain the creature's capacity for the miraculous.[26] He does not, however, thereby restrict it to the miraculous. Rather, as an examination of the over twenty instances[27] in which St. Thomas uses the principle bears out, he uses it both to explain various miracles and to explain man's capacity for essentially supernatural realities such as grace and glory. A single text will suffice for our purposes.

Question 1, article 10 of the disputed questions *De Virtutibus* asks whether there are infused virtues. An objector

[24] Saint Albert teaches in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names* that, just as prime matter has an obediential potency for the form of glory, so does the human intellect have an obediential potency for the beatific vision. See *In Div. nom.*, c. 1, n. 27, ad 7 (*Opera omnia*, vol. 37/1, ed. Paulus Simon [Münster Monasterii Westfalorum Aschendorff, 1972], 13b, ll. 58-64).

[25] Thomas Joseph White, O.P., "The Enduring Significance of the Dominican Doctrine of Grace: The Case of Obediential Potency," in *Dominicans and the Challenge of Thomism*, ed. Michal Paluch and Piotr Lichacz (Warsaw: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2012), 143-56, at 146.

[26] Saint Thomas follows his predecessors in using obediential potency to account for things such as the transformation of Adam's rib into Eve (III *Sent.*, d. 2, q. 2, a. 2, qcla. 3, ad 3), wood into a calf (III *Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1), and even bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ (IV *Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 3, ad 4).

[27] I *Sent.*, d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, ad 4; II *Sent.*, d. 15, q. 3, a. 1, ad 8; d. 18, q. 1, a. 2; d. 19, q. 1, a. 5; III *Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4; d. 2, q. 1, a. 1; d. 2, q. 2, a. 2, qcla. 3, ad 3; d. 3, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1; IV *Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 3, ad 4; d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qcla. 3, ad 3; d. 17, q. 1, a. 5, qcla. 1, corp. and ad 1; d. 48, q. 2, a. 1 ad 3; *De Verit.*, q. 8, a. 4, ad 13; q. 8, a. 12, ad 4; q. 12, a. 3, ad 18; q. 29, a. 3, ad 3; *De Pot.*, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1 and ad 5; q. 6, a. 1, ad 18; *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 13; *STh* III, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3; q. 11, a. 1. Jorge Laporta points out these distinct examples in an appendix to his *La destinée de la nature humaine selon Thomas d'Aquin*, Études de philosophie médiévale 55 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1965).

mounts a formidable argument, namely, that since the *potentia* we possess to receive supernatural virtues is in us *before* their acquisition and not by way of infusion, neither are the virtues themselves which actualize our potency infused.[28] The operative principle here can be found in Aristotle's *Physics*: act and potency are in the same genus. A further explication of this principle is the truth, consistently affirmed by St. Thomas, that to every natural passive potency there corresponds a natural active potency, a natural agent capable of actualizing it.[29] To this formidable objection, which employs a true and universal principle, St. Thomas responds:

> It should be said that when something passive is fashioned to acquire different perfections from different ordered agents, there is a difference and order of passive powers in the recipient responding to the difference and order of the active powers of the agents, because the passive power responds to the active. Thus, it is that water or earth have a potency according to which they are moved by fire, and another insofar as they are fashioned to be moved by a heavenly body, and yet another according to which they can be moved by God. For water or earth can become something in virtue of a supernatural agent that they cannot become by the power of a natural agent. For this reason we say that in every creature there is an obediential potency, insofar as every creature obeys God in receiving whatever God wills. There is in the soul [*Sic igitur et in anima*] a potency fashioned to be actuated by a connatural agent, and in this way it is in potency to acquired virtues. In another way there is a potency in the soul which is fashioned to be actuated only by the divine power, and in this way the infused virtues are potentially in the soul.[30]

[28] *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, obj. 13: "Praeterea, homo ante acquisitionem virtutis est in potentia ad virtutes. Sed potentia et actus sunt unius generis: omne enim genus dividitur per potentiam et actum, ut patet in III *Physic.* Cum ergo potentia ad virtutem non sit ex infusione, videtur quod nec virtus ex infusione sit."

[29] See Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 123-31.

[30] "Ad decimumtertium dicendum, quod quando aliquod passivum natum est consequi diversas perfectiones a diversis agentibus ordinatis, secundum differentiam et ordinem potentiarum activarum in agentibus, est differentia et ordo potentiarum passivarum in passivo; quia potentiae passivae respondet potentia activa: sicut patet quod aqua vel terra habet aliquam potentiam secundum quam nata est moveri ab igne; et aliam secundum quam nata est moveri a corpore caelesti; et ulterius aliam secundum quam nata est moveri a Deo. Sicut enim ex aqua vel terra potest aliquid fieri virtute corporis caelestis, quod non potest fieri virtute ignis; ita ex eis potest aliquid fieri virtute supernaturalis agentis quod non potest fieri virtute alicuius naturalis agentis; et

There are two main readings of this text.[31] The first is to read obediential potency as referring only to miracles. This interpretation can be seen in figures such as Henri de Lubac,[32] Jorge Laporta,[33] and the later Étienne Gilson.[34] Another

secundum hoc dicimus, quod in tota creatura est quaedam obedientialis potentia, prout tota creatura obedit Deo ad suscipiendum in se quidquid Deus voluerit. Sic igitur et in anima est aliquid in potentia, quod natum est reduci in actum ab agente connaturali; et hoc modo sunt in potentia in ipsa virtutes acquisitae. Alio modo aliquid est in potentia in anima quod non est natum educi in actum nisi per virtutem divinam; et sic sunt in potentia in anima virtutes infusae" (*Disputed Questions on Virtue*, trans. Ralph McInerny [South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1999]).

[31] A third is provided by Jacob W. Wood in *To Stir a Restless Heart: Thomas Aquinas and Henri de Lubac on Nature, Grace, and the Desire for God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 2019), 346. Though Wood's account is certainly worth engaging, I do not consider it here because it involves a reworking of St. Thomas's doctrine of obediential potency.

[32] De Lubac argues that Cardinal Cajetan, who considers obediential potency of great import in explicating the nature-grace relation, ultimately "reduces the case of the supernatural destiny of created spirit to a particular instance of miracle" (Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed [New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998], 143).

[33] Laporta is strong in his denial that St. Thomas ever used obediential potency to describe man's capacity for essentially supernatural perfections. "Never did Thomas cite grace and glory as examples of the realization of an obediential potency" ("Jamais Thomas n'a cité la grâce et la gloire comme exemples de la réalisation d'une puissance obédientielle") (Laporta, *La destinée de la nature humaine*, 144).

[34] Gilson's eventual reduction of obediential potency to susceptibility to miraculous transmutation is especially disheartening in light of his beautiful and quite profound defense of the principle in his earlier work. See Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (Gifford Lectures 1931-1932)*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 381: "Since they are created they can still obey the will of their Creator if it pleases Him to enlarge their destiny; and it is precisely the nature of the intellect to be able to be thus enlarged without any alteration in its essence, nay, rather, with fulfilment of its essence. The capacity that lies in human nature for beatific vision is thus something more than a word; the capacity is part of human nature itself made to the image of God, from Whom it derives its power of knowing. The capacity for grace is also something more than a word; if human souls were not susceptible of grace God Himself could not bestow it. But when all is said we must observe the limits of nature. It will obey *ad nutum* if God so commands, but it can do no more than obey. There is nothing in it at all that already belongs to the supernatural, nothing to attract it, still less anything that demands it; the obediential power, no matter how real it may be, remains absolutely passive; above all, it expresses the distinctive character of a Christian nature, open that is to say towards its Creator."

interpretation, represented for our purposes by Mark Johnson, sees obediential potency as the principle whereby the soul is capable of essentially supernatural perfections such as infused virtues. Johnson writes, contra Laporta,

> It is unlikely that St. Thomas does not intend here to explain man's potency for the infused virtue as obediential. Indeed, St. Thomas rather seems to think that the notion of obediential potency is the *best* way to answer the difficulty, for, having explained that passive potency corresponds to the active power, he is able to detect in man a passive potency whose corresponding agent is God alone. He is thus able [to] assert that man is in potency to the infused virtues without having to posit the infusion of the potency for those virtues, for being a creature, man is immediately subject to the *virtus divina*, and can be acted upon by God, the most active of all agents.[35]

This became the dominant view in the Thomistic tradition,[36] namely, that grace and other essentially supernatural[37] perfections such as the theological virtues are educed from the obediential potency of the soul. God can bring about in human beings whatever he wills. The only thing limiting this obedience to divine power is contradiction.[38] While this obedience pertains to

[35] Mark F. Johnson, "St. Thomas, Obediential Potency, and the Infused Virtues: *De virtutibus in communi*, a. 10, ad 13," in *Thomistica*, ed. E. Manning, Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, supplementa, vol. 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 34.

[36] Garrigou-Lagrange considers the traditional Thomistic position to be that "grace is neither created nor concreated but is educed from the obediential potency of the soul" (Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace: Commentary on the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas, Ia IIae, Q. 109–114*, trans. The Dominican Nuns of Corpus Christi Monastery [St. Louis: Herder, 1952], 307). He says that this understanding is based on various texts in St. Thomas, but principally *STh* I-II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 3; q. 113, a. 9; *De Verit.*, q. 27, a. 3, ad 9; and *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 2 and ad 13.

[37] This language of the essentially supernatural (*quoad substantiam vel essentiam*) is used in the Thomistic tradition to distinguish that which exceeds the nature and natural powers of every created or creatable thing, and that which is supernatural only with respect to the manner of its production (*quoad modum*). The former is obviously what concerns us here. See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Sense of Mystery: Clarity and Obscurity in the Intellectual Life*, trans. Matthew K. Minerd (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 209.

[38] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 106: "Is there a limit to this potency? It is as wide as God's omnipotence itself. God's omnipotence stretches to all being. However, even God's omnipotence cannot realize something contradictory, for such a 'thing' cannot be.

every created being, human beings are unique among God's creatures. They are, in virtue of the intellectual nature, made in God's image.[39] They are capable of entering into relationships of knowledge and love with other created persons and with God.

Just as man has a natural passive potency for the acquired virtues, so too does he have an obediential potency for those virtues that bring supernatural perfection to him, and which can be educed or drawn forth only by the God to whom the intellectual creature is obedient in a more profound manner than is the lower creation.[40]

Before proceeding to the next section, two points need clarification. The first concerns the relationship and distinction between natural passive potency and obediential potency. The second concerns the analogical use of obediential potency to indicate either a capacity existing in every created thing or a capacity specific to intellectual or spiritual nature.

Thus the only limit to obediential potency in general is contradiction. All creatures are open to receive, above their nature, whatever is not intrinsically contradictory." Helpful at this point are the distinctions St. Thomas makes in *De Pot.*, q. 1, a. 3 between the various senses of the possible and the impossible. See Emmanuel Durand, O.P., "God's Power and the Impossible: Who Delineates Them?," *Nova et vetera* (Eng ed.) 20 (2022): 159-78, esp. 172ff., where he speaks of obediential potency.

[39] See *STh* I, q. 93, a. 3, where St. Thomas says that the *imago* chiefly consists in the intellectual nature.

[40] Long makes a helpful point concerning a more proper sense of "obedience" to God in the intellectual creature: "The aforementioned mode of created obedience to divine power seems a deeper and more proper sense of 'obedience.' To obey merely in the sense of being transformed, so that the original subject of obedience no longer exists, is clearly an inferior form of obedience. . . . While the sensible examples of the lower stratum of 'obediential potency' proliferate, it bears recollecting that, for Thomas, there are more species of angels than of physical things and that the sense of 'obedience,' for Thomas, is interior motion conforming to intellective command (command is an act of the intellect and not of the will). Thus, obedience properly speaking is not a voluntarist posit, and so it would be strange were 'obediential potency' to be reducible to the lowest instance of obedience wherein things are miraculously transformed to other things (a use of 'obedience' seemingly by extrinsic attribution) rather than interiorly elevated through their passive potency to activation by a nobler principle" (Steven A. Long, Creation *ad imaginem Dei*: The Obediential Potency of the Human Person to Grace and Glory," *Nova et vetera* [Eng. ed.] 14 [2016]: 1175-92, at 1187-88.

We have already mentioned, however obliquely, the relationship between natural passive potency and obediential potency. Both are passive potencies, and thus there may be a temptation to confuse them. Nevertheless, St. Thomas carefully differentiates them, saying of the former that it always corresponds to a natural active potency;[41] that its actualization brings natural perfection to the creature involved;[42] and that it is always fulfilled, at least as far as the species is concerned.[43] Obediential potency, on the other hand, corresponds to the divine power, which can work anything in the creature that is not a contradiction;[44] its actualization either effects miraculous change or brings supernatural perfection to a creature;[45] and it need not be fulfilled by God, and thus if it is fulfilled this is at God's good pleasure.[46] One can see readily enough how positing a natural passive potency in man for grace and the beatific vision might imply that grace and glory could be effectuated by some natural agent, that these would constitute natural perfection for the human person, and that these would be owed to human beings. Clearly articulating the relationship and distinction between natural passive potency and obediential potency, therefore, is of great import.

Regarding the analogical use of obediential potency, we can speak first of a potency for the miraculous. Again, myriad examples were employed by St. Thomas's predecessors and by the Angelic Doctor himself. The only limiting principle here, because God is infinitely powerful, is contradiction. God can miraculously transform Adam's rib into Eve, but not without the rib ceasing to be a rib.

[41] See III *Sent*., d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, qcla. 1.

[42] See *De Verit*., q. 8, a. 4, ad 13, which operates on the understanding that the angelic intellect would be (naturally) imperfect if the whole of its natural passive potency were not actualized.

[43] See III *Sent*., d. 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4.

[44] See *STh* I, q. 25, a. 3.

[45] See *STh* III, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3.

[46] See *STh* III, q. 11, a. 1, where St. Thomas speaks about the natural passive potency and obediential potency proper to Christ's soul being perfected by infused knowledge.

There is next what in the Thomistic tradition came to be called "specific obediential potency," that is to say, obediential potency proper to particular natures. If generic obediential potency accounts for the creature's susceptibility to miraculous transmutation, specific obediential potency "refers to a specific range of actuation that the active agency of God can bring forth from a nature."[47] For intellectual nature, whether in angels or in humans, receiving supernatural gifts such as grace and infused virtues poses no contradiction, whereas it would pose a contradiction for a rock, or for any subhuman creature. Non-repugnance or noncontradiction in this context is not a wholly negative principle. Obediential potency is indeed formally a nonrepugnance, at least according to the traditional Thomistic conception, but "by reason of its subject and materially, it is completely identified with the essence of the soul and its faculties, whether passive or active, which can be elevated to the order of grace."[48] A dog cannot even in principle become a sharer in the divine nature, whereas for human beings this is possible with God's gracious help. Thus specific obediential potency, central to the mystery of divine grace, accounts for how grace can be at once something freely given and something that renders us pleasing to God. Though the obediential potency of the soul from which grace is educed is nothing more than a nonaversion according to its formal reason, materially it is the essence of the soul itself *as capable of being elevated*, caught up into the eternal life and love of God.

II. Man as a Social Animal

A) Natural Potency for Social Life

Saint Thomas teaches that man is naturally open to, and inclined toward, social life. He appropriates Aristotle's teaching that man is ζῷον πολιτικόν,[49] a city-dwelling animal, a political

[47] Long, "Creation *ad imaginem Dei*," 1186.
[48] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 309.
[49] Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1.1153a2-3.

being, though he generally speaks of man being a *social* animal (*animal sociale*).[50] This teaching is explained well in the following text from the *Summa contra gentiles*:

> Man is naturally a civil or social animal [*animal politicum, vel sociale*]. This is evident from the fact that one man does not suffice for himself if he lives alone, because the things are few in which nature makes adequate provision for man, since she gave him his reason by means of which he might provide himself with all necessaries of life, such as food, clothes, and so forth—for the production of which one man is not enough. Hence man has a natural inclination for social life.[51]

Though man is not constituted by his relations to other persons,[52] he is perfected by them. "Since man by nature is a social

[50] For example, in *STh* I, q. 96, a. 4. See Edgar Scully, "The Place of the State in Society according to Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 407-29, at 407. Saint Thomas owes much also to Cicero, both in the latter's account of *inclinatio* more generally and in his account of the natural inclination to social life more particularly. See chapter 17 of Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995). "Thus," writes Cicero, "we are disposed by nature to form groups, assemblies, cities. The world . . . is somewhat like a city or commonwealth shared by men and gods, and each one of us is a part of this world" (Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, 3.19, as quoted in Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 406).

[51] *ScG* III, c. 85: "Homo naturaliter est animal politicum, vel sociale. Quod quidem ex hoc apparet quod unus homo non sufficit sibi si solus vivat, propterea quod natura in paucis homini providit sufficienter, dans ei rationem, per quam posset sibi omnia necessaria ad vitam praeparare, sicut cibum, indumenta, et alia huiusmodi ad quae omnia operanda non sufficit unus homo. Unde naturaliter est inditum homini ut in societate vivat" (trans. Vernon J. Bourke [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975]).

[52] With regard to the human person as constituted by his relativity toward the other, one thinks among other things of Joseph Ratzinger's article, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17 (1990): 439-54. There are reasons to think, however, that if a divine person signifies a relation as subsisting (see *STh* I, q. 29, a. 4), it is otherwise for a created person. For, as Long says, "to have being from another necessarily presupposes *having being*—for there is no real relation without the being of the things really related. Lacking the being of the creature, there is simply nothing to be related. Thus the relation of the creature to God is an *effect* of the creature's being, not something *prior* to it: because, prior to the creature, there is only God who has no real determined relation to the creature" (Steven A. Long, "Pruning the Vine of La Nouvelle Theologie in the Garden of Thomism: Regarding the Thomistic Corrective to 'La

animal," St. Thomas says, "he needs assistance from other men in order to obtain his own end."[53] Human beings are not meant to be alone, nor can they secure properly *human* flourishing without others.

Man has a natural inclination for social life because he possesses powers of intellection and volition that allow him to enter into relations of knowledge and love with other persons. As evidence that man is a social animal, we may point to an operation proper to him: speech. Man is able by his operation to be in touch with intelligible truth, for which purpose he was given intelligence and reason both to discern and to discover the truth, as well as sensitive powers to assist in this discovery. "Also," St. Thomas says, "to him is given the use of speech, so that by making use of it, one who has conceived the truth in his mind may be able to impart it to another, so that men may thus assist one another in the knowledge of truth even as in other necessaries of life, since man is by nature a social animal."[54] It is necessary for human flourishing that men communicate or declare the truth to one another. This communication makes possible the formation of communions of life and love. All human beings possess a natural capacity to form such communions. The more proximate example is the family, a communion of life and love necessary for human flourishing and for the continuance of the human race.[55]

Nouvelle Theologie,'" *Angelicum* 93 [2016]: 135-55, at 142). In short, we are not constituted even by our relation to God; we are constituted by *God*.

[53] *ScG* III, c. 117: "Cum homo sit naturaliter animal sociale, indiget ab aliis hominibus adiuvari ad consequendum proprium finem."

[54] *ScG* III, c. 147: "datus est etiam ei loquelae usus, per cuius officium veritatem quam aliquis mente concipit, alteri manifestare possit; ut sic homines seipsos iuvent in cognitione veritatis, sicut et in aliis rebus necessariis vitae, cum sit homo animal naturaliter sociale."

[55] Relevant here is the relation between private or individual good and common good. See *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 10, ad 2, which relates individual human flourishing to the family and state. "It can be demonstrated," Pinckaers says, "that this inclination [to live in society] finds its first realization in family affection, extends to other communities, and finally gives birth to the love of the human race, the *caritas generis humani* of which Cicero speaks (*De finibus bonorum et malorum* 5.23)" (Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 433-34).

Neither can political society be preserved without honest communication between men. Saint Thomas teaches this when explaining that truth is a part of justice: "Since man is a social animal, one man naturally owes another whatever is necessary for the preservation of human society. Now it would be impossible for men to live together, unless they believed one another, as declaring the truth one to another. Hence the virtue of truth does, in a manner, regard something as being due."[56] A social relational context, a *communicatio*, which always includes the declaration of truth, is essential for establishing friendship.[57] It will be helpful to look at friendship in order to see more concretely how human beings come together socially. Indeed, friendship is vital not only for holding political society together, but also, in the case of supernatural friendship or charity, for holding the Church together. The Church is, after all, as Guy Mansini says, "the communion of friends with and in Christ, the communion of charity."[58]

B) Saint Thomas on Friendship

As with his teaching on man as a social or political animal, St. Thomas appropriates the Philosopher's teaching on friendship, contained primarily in books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[59] The latter begins by explaining that friendship is neces-

[56] *STh* II-II, q. 109, a. 3, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod quia homo est animal sociale, naturaliter unus homo debet alteri id sine quo societas humana conservari non posset. Non autem possent homines ad invicem convivere nisi sibi invicem crederent, tanquam sibi invicem veritatem manifestantibus. Et ideo virtus veritatis aliquo modo attendit rationem debiti." Quotations from the *Summa theologiae* are taken from the Leonine edition and the translation by Laurence Shapcote, O.P.; edition and translation revised by the Aquinas Institute [Lander, Wyo.: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012]).

[57] There is some debate as to the precise meaning of *communicatio* vis-à-vis friendship in the thought of St. Thomas. See Joseph Bobik, "Aquinas on *Communicatio*, the Foundation of Friendship and *Caritas*," *Modern Schoolman* 64 (1986): 1-18.

[58] Guy Mansini, O.S.B., *Ecclesiology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 201.

[59] One can hardly overstate the importance of his doctrine. As Michael Pakaluk explains, "Aristotle's treatment of friendship, like his treatments of so many other

sary, not only for individuals[60] but for societies. It is valued above every kind of material gain. Those who have acquired power and wealth need a way to exercise beneficence, as well as friends to help safeguard their prosperity. Those in poverty take refuge in friendship when they have nothing else. Young and old alike need it, the former so that they might remain on the right path, the latter so that they might be ministered to in their weakness. It exists among family members and among citizens of a state. Legislators prize friendship above justice, for it holds men together and expels faction. In addition to being necessary for individuals and for the proper functioning of the social order, friendship is something good and noble. We praise those who love their friends and celebrate those who have acquired many.[61]

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subjects, constituted a great advance over anything produced by his predecessors and was to serve as a kind of reference point for future work on the subject. Much of the subsequent work on friendship in the Western tradition can be understood either as building upon and supplementing Aristotle's views or as reacting against them" (Michael Pakaluk, *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991], 28). As an example of Aristotle's considerable influence, consider Cicero, whom we mentioned above because of his contributions to the discussions of natural inclination and friendship. Cicero had read Plato's *Lysis*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and had studied in some depth a work on friendship written by Theophrastus, Aristotle's chief pupil. See the introduction to *Laelius: On Friendship*, in *Cicero: On the Good Life*, trans. Michael Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 173.

[60] Saint Thomas teaches that even the happy man (*felix*) needs friends, not because he needs to make use of them, nor because he requires them for his own delight, since he has this in the operation of virtue. He needs them, instead, so that he might be able to do good to them, see them do good, and be aided by them in the exercise of virtue. *STh* I-II, q. 4, a. 8: "felix indiget amicis, non quidem propter utilitatem, cum sit sibi sufficiens; nec propter delectationem, quia habet in seipso delectationem perfectam in operatione virtutis; sed propter bonam operationem, ut scilicet eis benefaciat, et ut eos inspiciens benefacere delectetur, et ut etiam ab eis in benefaciendo adiuvetur." Daniel Schwartz comments: "The happy life demands the permanent availability of the resources which allow virtuous operation. Friendship is said to be one such resource: without friends the continuity of virtuous operation would be impaired; one would be likely to lose enthusiasm for and interest in the activity of virtuous living" (Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship*, Oxford Philosophical Monographs [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007], 4).

[61] See Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 8.1.1155a3-28.

There is, however, uncertainty regarding the nature of friendship. Aristotle notes that some see friendship as established on the basis of likeness; others say the contrary, that between similar individuals there is mutual opposition. Some try to ground friendship in nature, asserting again that like seeks after like, while others are convinced that harmony results from opposites. Finally, some philosophers posit but one kind of friendship.[62]

Saint Thomas sees in Aristotle's response to these questions an explication of the definition of friendship. He identifies four parts of the definition. First, the aforementioned questions can be clarified by reflecting on the object of love, which is something lovable. Here Aristotle makes a threefold division: (1) that which is good in itself, (2) that which is pleasurable, and (3) that which is useful. The last seems to be ordered to the good in itself or to pleasure; it is a means to an end. Saint Thomas explains that "these do not differ in kind as three equal species of a genus but are classified by priority and posteriority."[63] The kinds of friendship will correspond to this threefold division of things lovable.

The second part of the definition identifies two essential qualities of friendship. Aristotle uses the example of wine to show why it cannot be an object of friendship. First, because wine is not capable of loving in return. Second, because we do not will good for the wine as such, nor for any other inanimate thing. If we desire that the wine be preserved, it is not for the sake of the wine itself, but for our own sake. We want to imbibe the wine, and for this reason want it to be preserved. Friendship, on the contrary, involves willing another's good, a good that corresponds to his nature.

The third part of the definition refers to a change in the one loved. It is possible to be benevolent toward another without friendship resulting. What is required is what the wine mentioned above cannot provide: love in return. Saint Thomas ex-

[62] See ibid. 8.1.1155a-b16.

[63] VIII *Ethic.*, lect. 3 (trans. C. I. Litzinger [Notre Dame, Ind.: Dumb Ox Books, 1993], no. 1563).

plains further, "The reason is that we say friendship is benevolence with corresponding requital inasmuch as the one loving is loved in return, for friendship has a kind of exchange of love after the manner of commutative justice."[64] Friendship requires mutuality, reciprocity.

Friendship cannot be established if benevolence is hidden. This, then, is the fourth part of the definition. Mutual knowledge is a condition for mutual love. Perhaps Socrates hears of some just man far away. Socrates has love for the just man, wishes him well, and the like. While we might call Socrates benevolent, we cannot call him a friend of this stranger.

Aristotle concludes by putting together the parts of the definition: "Therefore, it is necessary for friendship that men wish good to one another, that this fact be recognized by each, and that it be for the sake of one of the reasons previously mentioned [namely, the good itself, pleasure, or utility]."[65] Friendship can thus be established on the basis of three lovable things: the good itself, pleasure, or utility, yielding friendship of virtue, friendship of pleasure, and friendship of utility respectively.

Our focus here will be on virtuous friendship, the kind established between virtuous men. This Aristotle calls "perfect friendship." This kind of friendship is stable, founded as it is in virtue, which is a permanent habit.[66] A friend is loved for his own sake, not for any perceived benefit or pleasure. Virtuous friendship takes whatever good is present in the imperfect forms of friendship and perfects it. As Aristotle explains,

> It is reasonable for such friendship to be long lasting, because absolutely all the qualities necessary for friendship are joined together in it. Every friendship is for the sake of good or pleasure, either absolutely or to the one loving and according to a kind of likeness. But all the preceding qualities are found in this friendship essentially; and those who are alike according to this friendship have the remaining goods too, because what is without qualification good is also unreservedly pleasurable.[67]

[64] VIII *Ethic*., lect. 2 (Litzinger, trans., no. 1559).

[65] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 8.2.1156a3-5 (as quoted by Aquinas in VIII *Ethic*., lect. 2 [Litzinger, trans.])

[66] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 8.3.1156b11-12.

[67] Ibid. 8.3.1156b17-23.

Perfect friendship contains things that are most lovable, and thus most intensely loved. This friendship, therefore, is the noblest. Unfortunately, friendships of this kind are rare. Virtuous men are scarce, and without virtuous men this perfect friendship cannot be established. Moreover, friendship takes time and familiarity. One person must judge the other to be lovable and trustworthy.[68] The desire might arise quickly, but the friendship itself is not so easily achieved.[69]

The time and intimacy requisite for virtuous friendship entails communicating, gathering around a common good, and sharing in a common life. It is for this reason that St. Thomas calls living with one's friends the principal act of friendship.[70] Friendship involves, as we said above, *communicatio*[71] and *communio*.

While friendship can evidently be found among equals, Aristotle says that it may also be found at times among unequal persons: a father with a son, an older person with a younger person, a husband with a wife, a ruler with his subject. Unity is fostered in these cases when love is given proportionately. Thus, a ruler must be loved more than he loves his subject. Unlike justice, the goal of which is equality, friendship must begin with some kind of fundamental equality.[72] If the disparity between two persons is immense, therefore, there can be no friendship. For Aristotle, this means that friendship between man and God is impossible, unless perhaps some *communicatio* be given that

[68] Ibid. 8.3.1156b25-29.

[69] Ibid. 8.3.1156b33-35.

[70] VIII *Ethic*., lect. 5 (Litzinger, trans., no. 1600).

[71] Bobik ("Aquinas on *Communicatio*," 13-14) explains three uses of *communicatio* in St. Thomas's teaching on friendship: "There is, first, 'communicatio' as designating a social relational context which is the foundation out of which friendship arises (or, at least, can arise). Secondly, there is 'communicatio' as designating the activities of friendship. Thirdly, there is 'communicatio' as designating the activity of offering a gift which provides a foundation (where there was none) out of which friendship can arise. Without this provided foundation, friendship could never arise. Indeed, without a foundation, no friendship can arise."

[72] See VIII *Ethic*., lect. 7 (Litzinger, trans., no. 1632).

can serve as a foundation for friendship. By nature, however, there is no proportion.

C) Charity as Divine Friendship

Saint Thomas begins his discussion of charity in the *Summa theologiae* by identifying it with friendship.[73] He grounds his teaching especially in John 15:15, "I will not now call you servants . . . but my friends." Because Christ says this by reason of charity, charity must be friendship. Saint Thomas gives a summary of Aristotle's doctrine in book 8 of the *Ethics*. Friendship is love that is accompanied by benevolence, willing the good of the other for his own sake. If we cannot will good to the other, as in the case of wine or a horse, then friendship cannot be extended to it. But willing good to another is insufficient. Friendship must be founded on some kind of *communicatio*. It is at this point that St. Thomas makes a claim that would be quite incredible to Aristotle. The latter ruled out friendship between men and God on account of the (infinite) ontological distance between them. Saint Thomas writes,

> Accordingly, since there is communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor. 1:9): "God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son." The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.[74]

Saint Thomas's *communicatio* here is comparable to Aristotle's *koinonia*, and pregnant with the elements we explicated:

[73] See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 2, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 45, where he claims that "Thomas was the first to formally identify charity as friendship."

[74] *STh* II-II, q. 23, a. 1: "Cum igitur sit aliqua communicatio hominis ad Deum secundum quod nobis suam beatitudinem communicat, super hac communicatione oportet aliquam amicitiam fundari. De qua quidem communicatione dicitur I ad Cor. I, *fidelis Deus, per quem vocati estis in societatem filii eius*. Amor autem super hac communicatione fundatus est caritas. Unde manifestum est quod caritas amicitia quaedam est hominis ad Deum."

persons gathered around a common good, communication, and sharing a common life. "This," according to Jean-Pierre Torrell, "entails what Thomas calls a *conversatio* (*cum versari*: 'live with'), a certain common life in which the essential characteristic of friendship is present."[75] We share a common life with God when he communicates his beatitude to us. If friendship is vital to human communities, like a glue holding the social order together, supernatural friendship or charity, founded on God's gracious *communicatio* in Christ, is the very life and soul of the Church, the (created) principle of her unity.

III. The Church and Man's Membership therein

A) Israel as Prefiguring and Anticipating the Church

Though the natural potency for social life pertains to human nature as such, prescinding from consideration of its concrete condition or state, we exist in an order in which human nature is fallen and in need of restoration and healing.[76] We are all too aware that human relationships and communities can and do fall prey to sin and selfishness; all too frequent is the experience of man, in tyrannical fashion, subordinating the common good to his own private good.[77] The first couple's fall could have

[75] Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 48.

[76] Saint Thomas discusses the effects of sin on human nature in *STh* I-II, q. 85.

[77] See *De Regno* I, cc. 2 and 4. Regarding the fundamental relation and order between particular good and common good, see *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 10, where St. Thomas says that a man's will is not right (*recta*) in willing a particular good unless he refer it to the common good. Indeed, the notion of the common good is fundamental and formal as we consider natural and supernatural community. For the notion of the common good, see Charles De Koninck, *La primauté du bien commun, contre les personalistes* (Québec: Éditions de l'Université Laval, 1943), trans. and ed. Ralph McInerny in *The Writings of Charles De Koninck*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009). Helpful also are the following articles, both inspired by St. Thomas and De Koninck: Steven A. Long, "Understanding the Common Good," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 16 (2018): 1135-52; Aquinas Guilbeau, O.P., "What Makes the Common Good Common? Key Points from Charles De Koninck," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 20 (2022): 739-52.

signaled the end of the story, had God not deigned to pursue us mightily with offers of his grace.

Throughout salvation history we see God establishing covenants with sinful human beings in order that he might bless them and show forth his mercy. He becomes the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and elects a *people* for his own possession.[78] God establishes a nation that is set apart from all others as his servant, son, and friend. The Bible, then, is concerned not merely with individuals (Abraham, Moses, David, and the like), but with the entire people God has chosen.[79] Individualism is foreign to the biblical narrative.

The Old Testament displays the notion of corporate personality,[80] and consequently of corporate election. The foundation for Israel's corporate election is human nature: that nature has a natural potency for and inclination toward social life, but beyond that we see that the entire people is elected and destined for covenant friendship with God. This friendship exists on account of the *communicatio* made by God in the law and the

[78] For more on this notion of "people" in sacred Scripture, see chapter four of Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, O.P., *Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

[79] Helpful here are Guy Mansini's reflections on the antecedent probabilities of revelation and a Church. The latter probability is bound up with the social or political nature of man. Mansini, *Ecclesiology*, 20: "Do we think that God would, or even could, deal with us one by one? Ahistorically? Atemporally? Each man taken as a pure monad, unrelated to any other? He does not deal even with the angels in that way, but illumines one through another. No. We must expect some society, constituted by the word of God and enduring through the ages to the end of the world. A patriarch may do for a family, as we see in the last half of the Book of Genesis. For a people, however, we want a prophet, and the organized people he speaks to. For a people, we want something like Moses." In proffering arguments *ex convenientia* for God bestowing the Old Law at the time of Moses, St. Thomas says that household precepts were fitting at the time of Abraham and his kinsmen, but law, since it is a general precept (*praeceptum commune*), was appropriate when Abraham's descendants had multiplied and become a people under Moses. See *STh* I-II, q. 98, a. 6, ad 2.

[80] For more on corporate personality, see H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981); idem, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1952 [1913]), esp. 87-91; Jean de Fraine, S.J., *Adam and the Family of Man* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1965).

prophets. It is not the perfect *communicatio* of God's truth and happiness made available in Jesus Christ and his Church,[81] but God does set Israel apart as his elect people, as his first-born son.[82] Furthermore, Israel is gratuitously elected unto being a sign and instrument of salvation for all.[83]

Thus we have in the Old Testament a plan of communal salvation, founded on the human capacity for social life and friendship. Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole puts it well: "God brings men together with himself and, as a necessary corollary, with one another. Salvation is the recovered unity of the human race, and being established as a People is a very expressive sign of this."[84] But the human race is not being restored merely to a natural unity, compromised by the sin of our first parents, however wonderful this natural restoration might be. Human beings are ultimately meant to share a supernatural unity. This supernatural unity is prefigured and anticipated by Israel. The Church is the new people of God, inheriting in greater measure the dignity and vocation of Israel.[85] The promise is received by Israel, but it is perfectly fulfilled in Christ and gives birth to the Church.[86]

[81] One thinks here of Heb 1:1-2, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

[82] See, for instance, God's words to Moses in Exod 4:22, "And you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me'; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.'"

[83] We see this early in the biblical narrative with the threefold promise made to Abraham (Gen 12:1). Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham through whom the Abrahamic promises are fulfilled, the offspring through whom all peoples are blessed. Saint Paul argues on this basis in Gal 3:16, "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ."

[84] La Soujeole, *Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, 210.

[85] Consider 1 Pet 2:9, which takes God's words to Israel and applies them to the Church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

[86] La Soujeole, *Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, 211.

B) The Church as Israel Fulfilled

When it comes to the New Testament people of God, there is a rich interplay of continuities and discontinuities with Israel. The Church, like Israel, is elected or chosen gratuitously by God. But the Church is not limited to a particular nation; the whole human race is chosen. Nor does the Church prepare human beings for a salvation yet to come, but announces and communicates the salvation already won in Christ.[87] Like Israel, the Church has a vocation or mission: to witness to the one true God. But the Church proclaims the one true God taking flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. The Incarnate Word is the Messiah and has already accomplished our salvation. The Church's mission is to communicate Christ's salvation to the whole human race. Finally, the Church, like Israel, is bound to God in a covenant. But the Old Covenant was conditional and required the fidelity of the people. Israel's fidelity, however, was inconstant. As La Soujeole explains,

> Now Israel's history is the history of its infidelities, or, if one prefers, the history of an impossible fidelity. It is an entirely different matter with the new (not "renewed") covenant concluded by Christ in his Blood. This is an eternal (Heb 13:20), unfailing (Mt 16:18 and 28:20) covenant with "the many" or the multitude (Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28), that renders the first one void.[88]

There is thus continuity amidst radical newness. There will be no "new" people of God after the Church. The Church is the eschatological people of God, the definitive messianic community of salvation. The race, having begun in one man, is now restored and elevated in one man, the new Adam, and the communion of salvation he establishes.

[87] *STh* III, q. 61, a. 4: "As the ancient Fathers were saved through faith in Christ's future coming, so are we saved through faith in Christ's past birth and Passion" ("Sicut antiqui patres salvati sunt per fidem Christi venturi, ita et nos salvamur per fidem Christi iam nati et passi").

[88] La Soujeole, *Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, 212.

C) Obediential Potency and Ecclesial Communion

In light of the foregoing, I propose the following way of understanding man's openness to ecclesial membership. Human beings are by nature political or social animals. The social nature of the human person "folds back into" or proceeds from the substantial rational nature and its order toward common good (and, speculatively, toward universal truth). We are in the realm here of *natural* potencies. Furthermore, there are more determined orderings of the human person which imply particular *obediential* potencies. For example, the natural institution of marriage, the natural marital relation, constitutes a specific obediential potency for the *sacramentum*. Marriage has existed from the beginning as an institution uniting man and woman, making of two "one flesh." In Christ, this natural institution is raised to the level of a sacrament whereby the baptized couple enters into a covenantal union that represents and participates in the union between Christ and the Church. Likewise, there seems to be a sense in which the social nature of man proceeding from the embodied intersubjectivity of a rational creature is a distinctive obediential potency for membership in the Church.

We find further evidence to support this thesis in question 65, article 1 of the *Tertia pars*, where Saint Thomas shows the fittingness of seven ecclesial sacraments, which correspond well to human nature, to the good of man that is both personal and communal. Saint Thomas writes, "Now a man attains perfection in the corporeal life in two ways: first, in regard to his own person; second, in regard to the whole community of the society in which he lives, for man is by nature a social animal."[89] In the supernatural order, five sacraments pertain to man's spiritual life and health. Two sacraments pertain more directly to man's perfection with regard to the whole community: holy orders and matrimony. The former bestows power on men to

[89] *STh* III, q. 65, a. 1: "In vita autem corporali dupliciter aliquis perficitur, uno modo, quantum ad personam propriam; alio modo, per respectum ad totam communitatem societatis in qua vivit, quia homo naturaliter est animal sociale."

rule the community and to exercise public acts; the latter allows for the procreation and upbringing of children, human persons called like their parents to enter the Church and to build up the kingdom of God. The whole *ratio* of this article is that there exists some likeness (*conformitatem*) between the natural human life, both personal and political or social, and the supernatural life, both personal and communal, of those who are members of the Church. The openness that human beings possess to enter the Church and be perfected by her sacraments, both personally and with an eye to the order of the community, is not simply speaking natural but obediential.

D) Corroboration from Cardinal Journet

Charles Cardinal Journet teaches about man's obediential potency for ecclesial membership in his *L'Église du Verbe incarné*.[90] For example, when speaking about man's twofold motion toward God, namely, through the temporal community and through the spiritual community, he cites St. Thomas's words to the effect that man is not ordained to the political community according to everything he is or has, but all that man is and does and has ought to be referred to God.[91] Journet comments:

> Without quitting the plane of philosophy it thus becomes evident that the civil community is of itself unfitted to rule the entire being of the men it brings together; it rules only their life as citizens and the inner reserves of their

[90] Charles Journet, *L'Église du Verbe incarné: Essai de théologie speculative*, Œuvres completes de Charles Journet, vols. 1–5 (Saint-Maurice: Éditions Saint-Augustin, 1998-2005). Volume 1, which concerns the apostolic hierarchy (*La hiérarchie apostolique*), was published in English as Charles Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate: An Essay in Speculative Theology*, trans. A. H. C. Downes, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Hierarchy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955). Translations from volumes other than the first are my own. In addition, there exists in English an abridgement of the first two volumes of *L'Église du Verbe incarné*: *The Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szczurek, O. Praem (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004). Originally published in French as *Théologie de l'Église* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958).

[91] *STh* I-II, q. 21, a. 4, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod homo non ordinatur ad communitatem politicam secundum se totum, et secundum omnia sua. . . . Sed totum quod homo est, et quod potest et habet, ordinandum est ad Deum.

nature lie beyond its grasp. It is precisely in virtue of this part of themselves, the part that remains inaccessible to the civil community and by which they are capable of God by grace, that men are called to enter into a higher community. The same men, composed of soul and body, whom the State, on account of their natural capacities, claims for civil life, are claimed by the Church, on account of a more inward obediential capacity, for the life of the heavenly city, the life of "this Jerusalem, whose Prince is God, whose citizens are the angels and all the saints whether reigning in glory in their fatherland or still pilgrims on earth, according to the word of the Apostle [Eph. ii. 19]: 'You are fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God'." It is a supernatural city which Christ has begun to gather up around Himself and incorporate into His own Body, a visible extension of His being, of which He remains to-day the Head though He is ascended into Heaven and cannot corporeally touch our miseries (save under the eucharistic veils).[92]

Man has a natural capacity for civil life and an obediential capacity for life in the city of God, the kingdom of God present even now in mystery.[93] Men possess an obediential potency for life in the Church on earth, which is a foretaste and down payment of that perfect life in the heavenly Church.

Journet also explicates the difference between natural passive potency and obediential potency.[94] The former, as we said, can be actualized by a natural agent, whereas the latter can be actualized by God alone. We are meant for a certain natural perfection and for life in civil society. But God has also called us

[92] Journet, *Church of the Word Incarnate*, 198. The quote employed by Journet is from *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 9.

[93] This last clause employs the language of *LG* 3: "To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. . . . The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world."

[94] These, as we said above, must be clearly distinguished, and indeed they are in St. Thomas. Natural passive potency, he teaches, has its very nature (*ratio*) from its relation to the pertinent natural active principle (see *STh* I, q. 80, a. 2), whereas obediential potency has its very *ratio* from its relation to the first agent, who can do with the creature whatever he wills. Man's obediential openness is thus only analogously *potentia*. For again, while natural passive potencies indicate orderings to proportionate goods, obediential potency does not. Instead, obediential potency is simply a creaturely openness to whatever God may deign to do in the creature; it has reference to the divine power and not to any particular good or act.

above these natural goods to supernatural perfection in his grace and life in the heavenly city. Journet writes,

> It is enough to respect the depth of the mystery in man to understand that he has to move towards God in two different ways. By reason of his natural powers, actualized by his acquired virtues, he will move towards his connatural ends, and will therefore enter into civil communities. By reason of the obediential power of his spirit, actualized by grace and the infused virtues, he will acquire wings on which he may rise to the city of the angels, of Christ, and of the divine Persons.[95]

This celestial city is already present, as Journet himself admits, in the Church here below, the pilgrim Church.[96] Journet seems to be saying, therefore, that the very principle that renders man susceptible of receiving supernatural grace and infused virtue is the principle whereby he is able to enter into the Church. A natural analogue exists in the civil communities to which man is ordered by reason of his natural powers. It is on account of his natural capacity for human society that man stands obediently open, under God's active agency, to the supernatural or divine society of the Church.

Drawing out the aspects of the relationship between civil society and the Church, Journet says that to both may be applied the term "perfect society" (*société parfaite*), though "certainly not in a univocal manner, but in a proportional and analogical manner." He continues,

> There is only a similitude of proportionality and analogy: a) between the spiritual common good of the life of grace and glory, which alone is the ultimate end, and the temporal common good of culture, which is only a less valuable, provisional end; b) between the supernatural virtue communicated to Christ and the apostles to found and sustain the Church, in which the fallen world is reconciled with God, and the natural virtue communicated to men in order to found and sustain their cities; c) between fully Christian charity, the internal bond of the Church, and the convergence of wills in view of purely human interests, the internal bond of the State; d) between the natural passive

[95] Journet, *Church of the Word Incarnate*, 200.

[96] Hence, belonging in some manner to the Church on earth is necessary for salvation. See Charles Morerod, O.P., "'No Salvation outside the Church': Understanding the Doctrine with St. Thomas Aquinas and Charles Journet," *The Thomist* 75 (2011): 517-36.

potency of man with regard to human happiness, and the passive obediential potency or passive capacity to be elevated, if God wills, to heavenly beatitude.[97]

If human beings constitute both societies, the natural and the supernatural, they can be called the material cause of both, though in different respects. Journet makes the requisite distinctions, saying of the material cause of the Church, "[it is] not the natural passive capacity of men to be gathered together into territorial communities in view of their momentary interests, but their obediential capacity to be gathered together into a unique community, intrinsically aterritorial, in view of their ultimate happiness."[98] For Journet, then, obediential potency is the capacity whereby men (and angels)[99] are capable of becoming members of the Church, of building up the body of

[97] Journet, *L'Église du Verbe incarné*, 3:1919: "Il n'y a qu'une similitude de proportionnalité et d'analogie entre: *a)* le bien commun spirituel de la vie de la grâce et de la gloire, qui seul est fin ultime; et le bien commun temporal de la culture qui n'est qu'une fin infravalente et provisoire; *b)* entre la vertu surnaturelle communiquée au Christ et aux apôtres pour fonder et soutenir l'Église, en qui le monde déchu est réconcilié avec Dieu; et la vertu naturelle communiquée aux hommes pour fonder et soutenir leur cités; *c)* entre la charité pleinement chrétienne, lien interne de l'Église, et la convergence des volontés en vue d'intérêts purement humains, lien interne de l'État; *d)* entre la puissance passive naturelle de l'homme à l'égard du bonheur humain, et la puissance passive obédientielle ou capacité passive de l'homme d'être élevé, si Dieu le veut, jusqu'à la beatitude céleste."

[98] Ibid., 3:1922: "est non pas la capacité passive naturelle des hommes à être rassemblés en communautés territoriales en vue de leurs intérêts d'un moment, mais leur capacité obédientielle à être rassemblés en une communauté unique, intrinsèquement aterritoriale en vue de leur beatitude suprême." Journet's use of "aterritoriale" here should not be taken to mean that the human beings themselves that constitute the Church can participate fully in her life without being members of a particular church (a parish, say, which itself is ordered to the life of the diocese, and so on), nor as a denial of the relationship between visible and invisible elements in the Church. Here again the notion of the common good is formal, as well as the mysterious relation between the particular church and the universal Church. See chapter 8 of Journet's *Theology of the Church*.

[99] Journet (*L'Église du Verbe incarné*, 4:303-4) teaches that obediential potency is that whereby both men and angels are able to receive the influx of Christ and be gathered, despite their natural differences, into the one mystical body of Christ.

Christ.[100] This obediential potency obtains because there is analogical community between human society and the supernatural society that is the Church; it exists because human beings are already naturally constituted as intellectual creatures meant for communion.

Granted that "human society" is not a unitary organism, it does comprise "natural" relations among persons and thus may be said to constitute an obediential potency for the grace of belonging to the Church. This obediential potency to which we are referring is not a capacity to be incorporated into simply any communion of grace-filled persons, which presumably could exist even before or without the Word assuming human flesh.[101] It is an obediential openness to be received into the communion mediated by the Incarnate Word.[102] For again, Christ is the new head of the human race; it is into his mystical body that the whole human race is called. We noted above that obediential potency involves a creaturely openness to whatever God may deign to give, assuming there is no contradiction, and that it concerns the power of God, which alone can actualize this mysterious potency. Human beings of any order would possess obediential potency, since "what constitutes the obediential potency for grace and glory in man is in fact what principally constitutes the *imago Dei*—namely, the intellectual nature itself."[103] However, there is in this order not the same latitude to add the qualifier, "should God deign to give." For indeed, we

[100] See ibid., 3:1570.

[101] Journet says (*Theology of the Church*, 16) concerning the communion of grace before the fall (in the "age of the Father," as he calls it), "The grace of the age of the Father, the grace of the first Adam, the grace of innocence, would have been, in a certain sense, better than ours, and the first state of the people of God preferable to the Church. But, in a wider perspective, one sees that it is our grace that is the better, and the Church, assembled around the Second Adam, will surpass in splendor the first state of the people of God, who were assembled around the first Adam."

[102] Fittingly, St. Thomas teaches that there is an obediential potency in human nature to be assumed into personal union with the Word, as well as an obediential potency to receive habitual grace (which, in the case of Christ, is also in the humanity assumed). See Journet, *L'Église du Verbe incarné*, 2:52, where he speaks about our mysterious obediential potency to become members of Jesus Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit.

[103] Long, "Creation *ad imaginem Dei*," 1175.

know through divine revelation that God *has* given, he *has* freely bestowed his grace upon us and elevated human nature. More than this, God *has* become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and called us into his mystical body. This is the Good News. Furthermore, even now Christ possesses a human nature, which is the instrument of his divinity,[104] and stands as head of the human race. Christ, as the new and perfect Adam, reveals of what human nature is capable with God's gracious aid, namely, the life of grace and the theological virtues, also entering the Church which is the enduring sociological sign of this supernatural life.[105]

E) Obediential Potency and Human Religiosity

Our proposal is consonant with, and inextricably related to, the truth of human religiosity. Human beings are by nature re-

[104] See *STh* III, q. 7, a. 1, ad 3.

[105] One thinks here of *Gaudium et Spes* 22: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear." Feingold (*Natural Desire*, 443-44) comments in a way quite germane to our discussion: "Christ reveals man to himself above all by revealing the hidden dimension of his specific capacity to obey a divine call—a call to be elevated to a supernatural image and likeness of God, and to a supernatural communion with Him. Christ reveals to man his specific obediential potency to 'ascend higher,' and he calls him to ascend. Philosophy can never discover the mysterious dimensions of our obediential potency to be raised up to share in the divine life, nor, much less, God's plan to actually fulfill that potency. What it can do, however, is investigate the natural dimensions of our being made in God's image: our natural ability to know and love God, our social nature, our capacity for communion, our natural religiosity, our free will, and our natural desire to see God. These serve as *praeambula fidei* with regard to supernatural anthropology." For more on this conciliar text in light of Thomistic theological anthropology, see Thomas Joseph White, O.P., "The 'Pure Nature' of Christology: Human Nature and *Gaudium et Spes* 22," *Nova et vetera* (Eng ed.) 8 (2010): 283-322. A modified version of this article appears in chapter two of *The Incarnate Lord: A Study in Thomistic Christology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

ligious beings.[106] That is to say, they are meant to render in justice what is due to God, not for his benefit or perfection but for theirs. True, in this vale of tears concrete religious expressions are often incomplete or even perverse. Nevertheless, man possesses an ineffaceable religious inclination, a capacity for religion and its acts. This "religious dimension of the human person," as Thomas Joseph White says, "is intrinsically open to an elevation to a higher form of divine life that derives from supernatural grace. In other words, human religiosity is inherently capable of being elevated 'passively' or 'obedientially' so as to enter into a life of *graced* religiosity."[107] Human religion, furthermore, whether natural or supernatural, is communal. Man has an obediential potency for the grace of belonging to the Church because he is by virtue of his spiritual nature a social and religious animal. He is called to communion with his fellow human beings and with God.

All human beings, insofar as they constitute one human race, are in a natural potency to form a communion or communions of life and love. Human beings have a natural inclination for social life and are perfected precisely in being in communion with other persons. We saw this concretely in the example of friendship. The aforementioned potency subsists in individuals, but only according as they are understood as related to one another in knowledge and love. In the supernatural order, all human beings, insofar as they constitute one human race, are in obediential potency to being members of the communion of the Church. This obediential potency subsists in individuals, but only according as they are understood as called to be in relation to one another in faith and charity. This obediential potency can therefore be predicated of humanity as such. Obediential potency is thus a category immediately and not just proximately relevant to understanding the Church and ecclesial membership. In Christ, the new and perfect Adam, human beings are called

[106] For St. Thomas's view of religion, which he considers to be a potential part of justice, see *STh* II-II, q. 81.

[107] Thomas Joseph White, O.P., "Sacraments and Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 575-89, at 579.

into the unity of his mystical body and, because they are social and religious beings in virtue of their intellectual nature, they possess an obediential potency for ecclesial membership. This is an extension of the notion of obediential potency, but one certainly congruent with what we established above.

IV. Consequences for the Church's Missionary Activity

A) The Church's Mission and Its Post-Conciliar Waning

This understanding of the human person and his openness to ecclesial communion has consequences for the Church's evangelical work. As we said above, the Church is bound by the commission of her Lord and head to make disciples of all nations and to bring them into the household of God through the sacrament of baptism. Human beings for their part have need of the Church, for she is the universal sacrament of salvation.[108] The Second Vatican Council taught that Christ and his bride are necessary for salvation.[109]

> Basing itself upon scripture and tradition, it teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation; the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it.[110]

The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, mentions the Church as a universal sacrament of

[108] Indeed, where Christ acts, so too does the Church act. If every human being who is saved is saved through Christ, it is true to say also that they are saved through his Church. See Thomas Joseph White, "The Universal Mediation of Christ and Non-Christian Religions," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 14 (2016): 177-98.

[109] See Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., "Nature, Mission, and Structure of the Church," in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25-36.

[110] *LG* 14.

salvation from the very start.[111] The Church is intrinsically missionary, missionary by virtue of the foundation and commission she received from the Lord.[112]

> Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be "the universal sacrament of salvation," the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder (Mk. 16:15) and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men. The apostles, on whom the Church was founded, following the footsteps of Christ "preached the word of truth and begot churches." It is the duty of their successors to carry on this work so that "the word of God may run and be glorified" (2 Th. 3:1), and the kingdom of God proclaimed and renewed throughout the whole world.[113]

Despite this intention of the council to emphasize the universal mission of the Church, evangelical efforts waned significantly in the postconciliar period. This is a multifaceted problem. Nevertheless, one factor undoubtedly at play is the appropriation of doctrines that, however implicitly and unintentionally on the part of their proponents, work to undermine the Church's missionary efforts. In short, there are ways of conceiving the human person and the Church that make it rather difficult to see why the former should be ordered to the latter.

We will examine two figures whose doctrines seem to lead to doubt concerning whether belonging to the Church makes any real difference before God. Our goal here is to show that Thomistic theological anthropology works to serve and bolster, rather than to forsake and undermine, the missionary activity of the Church. More specifically, we will see that obediential potency helps to safeguard what we ought to maintain about human beings vis-à-vis the Church, namely, that each and every human person, if he is to find salvation, must draw near to the head and the body, bridegroom and bride, the sacrament of the

[111] See Francis Cardinal George's reflections on *Ad Gentes* in Lamb and Levering, eds., *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, 287-310.

[112] See Andrew Meszaros, "The Thomistic Underpinnings of *Ad Gentes*," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 13 (2015): 875-901.

[113] *AG* 1.

divine life in its source and the sacrament of the divine life communicated.[114]

B) Karl Rahner

Mansini explicates a difficulty that comes from the theological anthropology of Karl Rahner.[115] He begins by recalling Rahner's explication of *Vorgriff*, "a 'pre-apprehension' of being as a transcendental condition of the possibility of knowing any of the beings in our experience and of which being we speak in categories or concepts of which we are conscious."[116] Furthermore, insofar as this "pre-apprehension of being in its unlimited breadth . . . is also at the same time an always operative ordination unto absolute being, unto God," knowing "the things of the world involves some kind of knowing or being-unto God as one of the conditions of this knowledge."[117] In like manner, when we respond to some finite good in the world, we are always necessarily responding to the absolute Good, to God.

But because in this concrete order God willed to bestow eternal life upon human beings, there is a further consideration, a further condition on our subjectivity. Mansini explains:

> This divine decision, according to Rahner, conditions our subjectivity, our knowing and loving, from the first instant we exist. This *a priori* conditioning of subjectivity (that is, a conditioning prior to any exercise of our mind and will) as ordered to the God of grace Rahner calls the "supernatural existential." The supernatural existential is not conceived in the old scholastic categories of grace, habitual and actual, prevenient and consequent. It is conceived after the pattern of the "existentials" that Martin Heidegger recognized, such factors determining the exercise of our freedom as "thrownness" (our originally already being conditioned by a determinate place and time not of our own choosing) or "being unto death" (our always

[114] This is the language of Charles Journet in "Le mystère de la sacramentalité: Le Christ, l'Église, les sept sacrements," *Nova et vetera* 49 (1974): 161-214.

[115] Mansini explains the works of Jacques Dupuis and Hans Urs von Balthasar as well, but his treatment of them is not quite germane to our discussion.

[116] Mansini, *Ecclesiology*, 282.

[117] Ibid.

subliminal awareness of our mortality). The supernatural existential amounts in practice to a constant offer of grace that conditions our human freedom, an availability of grace ready to be given to us.[118]

The supernatural existential for Rahner is not habitual or actual grace, though it does have some likeness to the former inasmuch as it is steady and enduring, "in contrast to the punctual and intermittent character of actual graces. Rahner comes to describe the existential as God's self-communication, or grace itself, but *in the mode of offer*."[119] Because human existence has this abiding structural feature, man is always the event of God's self-communication.[120]

These notions of *Vorgriff* and the supernatural existential are also intimately related to Rahner's notion of obediential potency. In *Hörer des Wortes* it appears as the capacity to receive a possible revelation from God.[121] To his credit, Rahner emphasizes the gratuity of God's speaking, should he deign to speak, and the ontological humility of the human recipient. But even here there are articulations (of obediential potency as an *orientation* toward the historical event of a revelation,[122] say, or as "a positive openness for an eventual revelation of God")[123] that may trouble one committed to the traditional Thomistic notion of obediential potency as not only wholly passive but, at least formally, a nonrepugnance to God's active agency.

Rahner identifies obediential potency with human nature as such.[124] To be human, to be spirit in the world, means to be

[118] Ibid., 283.

[119] Christopher Malloy, "Rahner's Supernatural Existential: What *Is* It?," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 63 (2016): 402-21, at 409.

[120] See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 127.

[121] Karl Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes: Zur Grundlegung einer Religionsphilosophie* (Munich: Verlag Kösel-Pustet, 1941). The first edition is available in English as *Hearer of the Word*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994).

[122] Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 9.

[123] Ibid., 19.

[124] See John P. Galvin, "The Invitation of Grace," in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 72. Consider Rahner's words about obediential potency in the context of the hypostatic union in *Foundations*, 218:

oriented toward Infinite Mystery. Hence obediential potency's connection to *Vorgriff*, the preapprehension of being that makes possible all knowing and willing. Our nature is unrestricted openness toward being, as affirmed in the absolute range of the *Vorgriff*, and thus obediential potency for the offer of grace.[125] Obediential potency is also most proximately an openness to this offer of grace, to the supernatural existential, which so determines human being and experience that the human person is always already awash in God's grace.

In order to avoid what he perceives to be errors in Henri de Lubac and like thinkers, as well as the supposed "extrinsicism"[126] of many traditional Thomistic articulations of the nature-grace relation, Rahner posits the aforementioned supernatural existential, in conjunction with the correlative doctrines of *Vorgriff* and obediential potency. Stephen Duffy explains:

> For Rahner, simply to view human openness, the obediential potency for grace, as more than a mere nonrepugnance, but as a yearning or velleity for God, is not sufficient. Rahner sees the openness as a conditioned orientation to grace, a natural existential. It is this transcendental orientation of humanity

"Anyone who understands correctly what an obediential potency for hypostatic union means, and what it really means to say that human nature can be assumed by the person of the Word of God, and what such a capacity to be assumed consists in, and anyone who understands that it is only a spiritual and personal reality that can be assumed by God, he knows that this obediential potency cannot be an individual potency alongside other potencies in the structure of human being, but rather is objectively identical with man's essence." Rahner's use of "obediential potency" vis-à-vis the hypostatic union is also a topic ripe for discussion, especially since he thinks, contra the Thomist tradition, that (1) human nature alone could be assumed by God and (2) the Word alone of the divine persons can assume human nature. See chapter 5 of Dylan Schrader, *A Thomistic Christocentrism: Recovering the Carmelites of Salamanca on the Logic of the Incarnation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021).

[125] Galvin, "Invitation of Grace," 73.

[126] For a response to the accusation of nature-grace extrinsicism in the preconciliar period, see David L. Augustine, "Extrinsicism?: Revisiting the Preconciliar Theology of Nature and Grace," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 18 (2020): 791-816.

as such that provides the point of insertion for the supernatural existential of historical humanity.[127]

One can grasp, then, the relation between these ideas of *Vorgriff*, supernatural existential, and obediential potency in Rahner, even if aspects of it remain underdetermined. And his anthropology has implications for man's relationship to Christ and his Church.

For Rahner, man accepts God's grace, always and necessarily on offer, when he responds properly to some finite good, "for then he is necessarily also responding to the God of grace, the God as Christians know him to be, even if he knows nothing of this God expressly and conceptually. When he does respond in a morally upright and conscientious way to a created good, he becomes really if anonymously and unbeknownst to himself a Christian."[128] One can see rather easily the implications of Rahner's anthropology in this context.

Granted, Rahner does maintain that Jesus Christ is the fullest categorical expression of God's saving truth.[129] In Christ we find the harmonious meeting of our categorical and transcendental responses to God. Nevertheless, Mansini explains the difficulty with Rahner's understanding here:

Rahner tended to hollow out the necessary connection between an adequate and saving "transcendental" response to God and its "categorical" expression

[127] Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 91 n. 14.

[128] Mansini, *Ecclesiology*, 283. "If it be true that the man who is the object of the Church's missionary endeavor is or can be already prior to it a man who is on the way towards his salvation and finds it in certain circumstances without being reached by the Church's preaching, and if it be true at the same time that the salvation which he achieves is the salvation of Christ, because there is no other, then it must be possible to be not only an anonymous 'theist', but also an anonymous *Christian*, and this (since the Church of Christ is not a purely interior reality) not in any merely intangible way, but also with a *certain* making visible and tangible of the anonymous relationship" (Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger [Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969], 390-98, at 391-92).

[129] Rahner (*Foundations*, 195) thinks that the Savior "constitutes the climax of God's self-communication to the world." The whole of history moves toward this goal or climax of categorical revelation.

in Jesus of Nazareth. It is possible to make an adequate response to the saving God in the absence of any conceptual knowledge of and conscious commitment to Jesus. We can make an adequate transcendental response to the Christian God of grace through the categories of Hinduism or Buddhism and even as an atheist.[130]

A human person can respond in a transcendentally adequate way to the God of grace simply by following his own conscience, even if this conscience be erroneous. Mansini thinks that Rahner is unduly optimistic about the salvation of non-Christians. This optimism can be seen in two presuppositions Rahner explicates when giving his account of how Jesus is present in non-Christian religions.[131] The first is the supernatural salvific will of God operative in the world. "This implies," writes Rahner, "the possibility of supernatural revelation and faith everywhere, and hence throughout the whole length and breadth of the history of the human race."[132] The second is that "when a non-Christian attains salvation through faith, hope and love, non-Christian religions cannot be understood in such a way that they do not play a role, or play only a negative role in the attainment of justification and salvation."[133] If Rahner styles himself as a faithful interpreter of *Lumen Gentium* 16, which speaks of the possibility of salvation for those who are invincibly or inculpably ignorant of Christ and his Church but nevertheless cooperate with God's grace, he is arguably neglecting the council's Pauline teaching in the same paragraph that "very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and served the world rather than the Creator (cf.

[130] Mansini, *Ecclesiology*, 284.

[131] For a fuller treatment, see "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions," 97-134, in Karl Raher, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966).

[132] Rahner, *Foundations*, 313.

[133] Ibid., 314.

Rom. 1:21 and 25)." The council does not share Rahner's undue optimism.[134]

Rahner may not have intended to undercut the Church's missionary activity, but this is regrettably what happened, and it is not difficult to see why. Mansini puts it well:

> Part of the appeal of Rahner's proposal resided in the very genius of that appellation, "anonymous Christian." "What's in a name?," we may ask. If one can be anonymously and namelessly a Christian in a non-Christian religion, is it so important to name God the way Christians do, to name the Trinity and Christ, and bother with evangelization and the church? Still, that does not completely explain why Rahner's theology had the negative impact it did on missionary activity, while Pius IX's teaching did not. Are they not both assertions of the bare possibility of the salvation of non-Christians? That is what Pius's assertion is. But Rahner's theory, *grounded in his anthropology*, rather introduced the idea that being an anonymous Christian is the default position for human beings. The infinite mystery of God has come so close to us transcendentally in grace that we are, as it were, already home. It does not matter that Rahner himself did not intend to unplug the missionary activity of the church. But in fact, that is what happened, and the popular reception of Rahner amounted to a view in which all religions are more or less equal as vehicles of salvation, even if not as adequate expressions of the truth of revelation.[135]

If most human beings are already Christians, albeit anonymously, if they are "already home," then what need do they have of the Church and her sacraments? Rahner's views, far from being limited to professional philosophers and theologians, have enjoyed a popular reception as well. Putting aside his intentions, his work is in part responsible for "unplugging" the missionary activity of the Church.

B) Henri de Lubac

De Lubac's nature-grace thesis is likewise in danger of undermining the Church's evangelical mission. De Lubac in no way intended to dampen the Church's missionary zeal. On the

[134] See Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012).

[135] Mansini, *Ecclesiology*, 285-86 (emphasis added).

contrary, he saw the Church as of vital importance for the human person. Indeed, one might perhaps be more inclined to think that de Lubac so absolutizes the Church that no purely human society is possible. But we will see that there is something analogous to the problem we saw above in Rahner's theological anthropology.[136]

After the Second Vatican Council, it was a fairly ubiquitous judgment that de Lubac and company had carried the day, and that the council itself bore authoritative witness to this fact. De Lubac's thought was so influential and convincing, however, that problems soon emerged after the council. Edward Oakes says it well:

> After Vatican II, grace came to be seen as so intrinsic to man that the supernatural gifts of revelation, the Church, and the sacraments seemed, at best, merely symbolic reminders of an already realized redemption. Clearly the time has come, after the doldrums of the post-Vatican II Church, for a reassessment of *Surnaturel*.[137]

That is our intention here, namely, to show how de Lubac's nature-grace thesis implicitly undermines the Church's universal mission and to set forth the traditional Thomistic position as the reasonable and desirable alternative.

As with Rahner, we can only explicate de Lubac's teaching briefly.[138] For de Lubac, man has but one end, one essential or ontological finality: the beatific vision. "My destiny is some-

[136] It is worth noting that Rahner was responding and reacting in part to de Lubac and the nature-grace debate, even if the former's supernatural existential likely had its origin in his Christological reflections. See Henry Shea, "Internal Difficulties in the Theology of Karl Rahner," *Modern Theology* 37 (2021): 637-61, at 640. Furthermore, while it is not altogether rare to see authors accuse Rahner of undermining the Church's evangelical efforts (as we have seen in Mansini), it is not as common to see an analogous claim made about de Lubac.

[137] Back-cover endorsement of *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams and revised by Matthew Levering (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2009).

[138] See ibid.; also, for a helpful introduction to the life and work of de Lubac, especially on nature-grace issues, see David L. Schindler's "Introduction" to De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*.

thing ontological," he avers, "and not something I can change as anything else changes its destination."[139] Moreover, this supernatural finality is deeply rooted in human nature. He goes so far as to say that it is imprinted or inscribed upon man's being prior to the reception of divine grace: "My finality . . . is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God's will, I have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of 'seeing God.'"[140] Man's supernatural finality is, then, determinative of human nature. Feingold points out that this is a fundamental philosophical principle for de Lubac, namely, that "the actual finality of a thing is necessarily something which ontologically determines the nature of the thing."[141] Indeed, de Lubac thinks that those who posit a natural destiny for man have a distorted understanding of finality.[142] They posit man's supernatural finality as a *superadditum*, something rather extrinsic, not inscribed in the very depths of man's being.

If man for de Lubac has but one supernatural finality, the so-called *natural desire* is an expression of this finality; we possess this desire precisely because God has deigned to call us to the beatific vision. As soon as man comes into this world, he has a desire for what alone can constitute his ultimate end. De Lubac explains:

> As soon as I exist, in fact, all indetermination vanishes, and whatever might have been the case "before," or whatever might have been in any other existence, no other finality now seems possible for me than that which is now really inscribed in the depths of my nature; there is only one end, and therefore I bear within me, consciously or otherwise, a "natural desire" for it.[143]

[139] De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 62.

[140] Ibid., 55.

[141] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 298.

[142] De Lubac often targets Cajetan on this score. For a response, see chapter 3 of Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

[143] De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 55-56.

De Lubac goes to great lengths to highlight how intimately this desire is bound up with man's nature. He calls it not only a *desiderium naturale*, but, drawing on St. Thomas's language (in *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1) a *desiderium naturae*, a desire of human nature. The desire is thus not elicited but innate, "the innate inclination of the faculty of the will itself (or of spiritual nature itself)."[144]

For de Lubac, this natural desire is not some "accident" in the human person, nor some historical contingency, nor something resulting from man's "deliberate will." It is instead the divine "call" to supernatural beatitude. This call, which exists in each individual man because God has willed to call humanity, constitutes man's being. De Lubac had communicated this conviction to Maurice Blondel years earlier in strong language: "How can a conscious spirit be anything other than an absolute desire for God?"[145] He never abandoned this thesis, incurporating it into *Surnaturel* and his subsequent works.[146] "L'esprit est donc désir de Dieu," he writes in *Surnaturel*,[147] and he expresses essentially the same teaching in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, saying, "The desire to see him is in us, it constitutes us, and yet it comes to us as a completely free gift. Such paradoxes should not surprise us, for they arise in every mystery; they are the hallmark of a truth that is beyond our

[144] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 302.

[145] Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 184. One can hardly overestimate the impact Blondel had on de Lubac. For an account of Blondel's teaching on natural desire, see Ryan A. Longton, "A Reconsideration of Maurice Blondel and the 'Natural' Desire," *The Heythrop Journal* 56 (2015): 919-30. Longton considers Blondel's position to be a middle path between the neo-Thomist and Lubacian positions and thus a potential way forward in the nature-grace debate.

[146] That is not to say that there are no developments in de Lubac's thesis. See Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart* for de Lubac's influences from the so-called "Aegidian tradition." Wood argues that, in his mature work, de Lubac follows Fulgence Lafosse, O.E.S.A. (1649-84).

[147] "The spirit is thus the desire for God" (Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques*, new ed., ed. Michel Sales, S.J. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 483.

depth."[148] It is difficult to determine precisely what de Lubac understands by this, but we may look to the implications of this doctrine. De Lubac posits (with some ambiguity, as Feingold points out)[149] that a man in an order of providence in which he is not called to supernatural beatitude would possess a nature different from ours. "It only demonstrates . . . that in another universe a being other than myself, *with a nature similar to mine*, could have been given this humbler destiny. But, I repeat, what has this other being really to do with me? What have I to do with him?"[150] This claim seems to call immediately into question the gratuity of grace, but it follows from what de Lubac says regarding the natural desire that constitutes human nature.

Though de Lubac is not as explicit as Laporta[151] and others,[152] it follows from his thesis concerning a natural desire for the beatific vision that man also has a natural passive potency for this supernatural end. This is because natural passive potency and natural desire[153] are correlative. Wherever

[148] De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 167.

[149] See Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 306.

[150] De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 62 (emphasis added).

[151] Laporta thinks that the actualization of an obediential potency never brings essential perfection to the creature. Thus any supernatural perfection in the creature must be due to the actualization of a natural passive potency; see Laporta, *La Destinée*, 143.

[152] See Étienne Gilson, "Sur la problématique thomiste de la vision béatifique," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 31 (1964): 67-88, at 87, in which he is articulating what kind of potency the creature has for the supernatural. He first mentions "natural passive potency" (*puissance naturelle passive*) but does not seem totally comfortable with the attribution. Neither will he admit, of course, that it is an obediential potency, since he reduces obediential potency to susceptibility to miraculous transmutation. Some, such as Nicholas Healy, want to grant something like a specific obediential potency in human nature, but without thereby granting that it is a nonrepugnance. "At the heart of created nature," he admits, "there is a kind of receptive readiness, which we could call a 'specific obediential potency,' except that it is not merely a passive non-repugnance, even though it is not a Rahnerian *Vorgriff*" (Nicholas J. Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate," *Communio* 35 (2008): 535-64, at 562).

[153] In addition to desire, we may speak of natural inclination or appetite, assuming we are speaking of something that precedes apprehension and knowledge. For more on these terms in St. Thomas, see Sean B. Cunningham, "Natural Inclination in Aquinas" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2013).

there exists a natural potency in the human soul, for instance, there exists a natural inclination to some good.[154] If de Lubac can posit a natural passive potency for the supernatural without much trepidation, it is because he thinks that the correspondence between natural passive and natural active potencies obtains only in the subhuman world.[155] On the contrary, for St. Thomas the principle seems to be universal, to pertain to all creatures.[156]

In addition to the concern that de Lubac's position is not in fact St. Thomas's, it should be manifest why some find the former's nature-grace thesis problematic. A natural passive potency for the beatific vision would seem to make that supernatural vision due. A natural ordering to a supernatural object would seem to forfeit the gratuity of grace and confuse the natural and supernatural orders. Drawing out its implications further, de Lubac's thesis would seem to make man naturally deific. These are all implications of de Lubac's teaching for human nature as such, and for individual human beings. There must surely be further consequences for the human race as a whole, or for human beings as called to be members of the community of renewed humanity that is the Church.[157]

Just as de Lubac intended to secure the gratuity of grace and the proper distinction between nature and the supernatural, so did he intend to secure the necessity of the Church for salvation

[154] See *STh* I, q. 80, a. 1, ad 3.

[155] See De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 143, in which he accuses Cajetan of reducing the case of the supernatural destiny of "created spirit" to a particular instance of miracle and of reducing human nature to the subhuman.

[156] See, for instance, *ScG* III, c. 45.

[157] Interesting in this regard are these words from Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole about de Lubac and his work on nature and the supernatural: "Fr. de Lubac's study only marginally includes properly Christological data, and ignores the ecclesiological perspective" (Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, "The Debate about the Supernatural and Contemporary Ecclesiology," in Bonino, ed., *Surnaturel: A Controversy*, 311-24, at 311.

and the urgency of the Church's evangelical mission.[158] One might consider, for example, the seventh chapter of his *Catholicism*, in which he is addressing the problem of salvation through the Church. He does not go the route of Rahner and speak of a supernatural existential and of anonymous Christians. He seems to avoid an undue optimism for the salvation of non-Christians and to be aware of its dangers:

> In any case we cannot but admire the attempts of so many missionaries to show us, by dint of human and divine sympathy, the elements of true religion which ennoble the cults even of the most inferior peoples. But if these elements, though mingled with others, are found on all sides, if the darkness, in certain cases at least, is so full of light, where is the obligation to seek the additional light that the Church bestows on her children? If an implicit Christianity is sufficient for the salvation of one who knows no other, why should we go in quest of an explicit one? In short, if every man can be saved through a religion that he unwittingly possesses, how can we require him to acknowledge this religion explicitly by professing Christianity and submitting to the Catholic Church?[159]

It is de Lubac's conviction that the Church is the general help and only normal way of salvation that prompts him to say, "As long as the Church has not covered the whole earth and bound all souls together, to increase is a very necessity of her nature."[160] The denial of her missionary mandate would be a denial of her very being, of her "Idea," to speak in Newman's terms.[161]

De Lubac speaks of the Church's necessity in terms that will be appropriated in some manner by *Lumen Gentium*.[162] He

[158] For a helpful treatment of key themes in de Lubac's ecclesiology, see Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

[159] Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, O.C.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 221. This work, as Susan Wood says rightly (*Spiritual Exegesis*, 2), "contains in seminal form the major themes of his theological career."

[160] De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 227.

[161] Ibid.

[162] For more on de Lubac's influence on Vatican II, see Aaron Riches, "Henri de Lubac and the Second Vatican Council," in *T & T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 121-56.

posits, for instance, a "positive" formulation of the ancient dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: "And if it is thought that in spite of all these considerations the formula 'outside the Church, no salvation' has still an ugly sound, there is no reason why it should not be put in a positive form and read . . . 'it is by the Catholic Church alone that you will be saved.'"[163] He goes so far as to say that the Church is the "'natural place' to which a soul amenable to the suggestions of grace spontaneously tends."[164] He clearly intends to affirm the missionary nature of the Church and her connection to human nature and its perfection. It is all the more unfortunate, then, that his theological anthropology undermines his intention. For indeed, as he himself admits, a correct understanding of the nature-grace relation must undergird our understanding of the Church and her role.[165]

Even Rahner, who eventually rejected the traditional account of obediential potency, saw the danger in positing an innate natural desire and a natural passive potency for the supernatural:

> The paradox of a natural desire for the supernatural as a link between nature and grace is conceivable and necessary if by "desire" is understood an "openness" to the supernatural, and it is taught in every type of Catholic theology, even if this often interprets the *potentia obedientialis* in too purely formal and negative a way as a mere non-repugnance. But a "desire" which is natural and at the same time, even if only objectively, inevitably attracts grace to itself (the desire itself, not just God's wisdom and his promise but the latter through the former!), is a desire which "demands" grace, demands precisely because it would otherwise be meaningless. But this is incompatible with the unexactedness of grace.[166]

[163] De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 236.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Br. Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 109: "A correct idea of the distinction between nature and the supernatural and of their unity is also necessary for an understanding of the Church and her role."

[166] Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1961), 297-317, at 309-10.

Rahner recognizes that a natural desire for a supernatural object seems to make grace due to the creature. De Lubac's account arguably forfeits the gratuitousness of grace and the *visio Dei*; we lose something of the uniqueness and transcendence of God and are in danger of making man naturally deific. For who can be ordered to God's inner life naturally save God alone? The traditional Thomistic account, on the contrary, emphasizes the humility of the creature and the absolute gratuity of his graced ordering to supernatural beatitude. Of his nature alone man is ordered to an end proportioned to this nature, to a real, albeit imperfect, beatitude. The beatific vision is due in no way to imperfect beings, finite beings subject to defect.[167]

Further, the Church promises to those who approach the font of baptism a new life in Christ, a new ordering to God, and a new desire for him. Feingold explains,

> An absolute and abiding desire for the beatific vision is the birthright of those who have been constituted sons and daughters of God through the grace of Baptism, and thus can yearn after their celestial inheritance, and the face of their Father. How can one who has not yet become a son of God through justification have an innate appetite for an inheritance that does not yet belong to him? Thus the exclusion of an innate inclination for the beatific vision better manifests the necessity of the sacraments and the supernatural virtue of charity.[168]

What becomes of our evangelical efforts if we cannot coherently retain the necessity of the Church and her sacraments?[169] Drawing out the implications of de Lubac's theological anthropology, there is a danger of seeing the Church as nothing more than a

[167] Nor would it be due to naturally indefectible creatures. The common reading of St. Thomas's teaching about the angels is that, on account of receiving perfect intellective species, they are not capable of defect in the natural order, whereas, vis-à-vis supernatural revelation which infinitely transcends any finite species, they are defectible. See Raymond E. Marieb, "The Impeccability of the Angels regarding Their Natural End," *The Thomist* 28 (1964): 409-74.

[168] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 442-43.

[169] We are not arguing that de Lubac himself denied the necessity of the sacraments (as explicated by St. Thomas, e.g., in *STh* III, q. 61), but that his understanding of the nature-grace relation has dire consequences for sacramental theology and for a host of other things (e.g., ecclesiology).

community of persons very much in the same state as those outside the Church, insofar as all are ordered by their very natures, by a desire constitutive of their very being, to the beatific vision.[170] In the traditional conception, on the other hand, human nature possesses an obediential openness to God's active agency. The *imago Dei* is susceptible of being supernaturally perfected and elevated, the human person capable of deification.[171] The Church, consequently, is the communion of all those who, not on account of merits but because of God's mercy, have been elevated and perfected by the grace of Christ unto salvation. The faithful are characterized by a new, graced desire for God, one whose trajectory, as it were, radically exceeds that of their natural desire, though the former superabundantly perfects and fulfills the latter.

It is not difficult to imagine how de Lubac might respond to our accusation that his position undermines the Church's mission. If the whole world naturally desires God in the way he understands, and if the Church alone can aid in the fulfillment of this desire, then surely this is the strongest possible ground for the necessity of the Church. The Church is so necessary for human beings, in fact, that it is the "'natural place' to which a soul amenable to the suggestions of grace spontaneously tends."[172] Despite this insistence, however, it is not altogether surprising that the appropriation of de Luabc's theological

[170] Again, so as to dispel all ambiguity, this is contrary to de Lubac's ecclesiological vision. The Church is for him the locus of human unity, both natural and supernatural. Consider these words from his *Catholicism*, 53: "Humanity is one, organically one by its divine structure; it is the Church's mission to reveal to men that pristine unity that they have lost, to restore and complete it." And he says earlier (ibid., 25), "The supernatural dignity of one who has been baptized rests, we know, on the natural dignity of man," and, furthermore, "the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race." This demands, however, that we explicate the natural and supernatural unities aright and carefully articulate their relationship, and it is here that de Lubac arguably muddies the waters.

[171] For more on this, see Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2015).

[172] De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 236.

anthropology might undermine the Church's missionary efforts. Indeed, as Oakes says in the quotation above, such appropriation arguably sheds light on aspects of the waning of evangelical zeal after Vatican II. After all, de Lubac's understatement of man's ontological poverty vis-à-vis grace has consequences. Because his account renders the ordination toward the supernatural to be unequivocally present without or apart from the intercession of the Church, it conditions the view of the Church's mission itself.

De Lubac's thesis carries with it the danger of feeding into a mentality that sees salvation as contingent upon merely natural goodness. As Feingold relates,

> This view debases heaven by naturalizing it. We have to discover ever again a radical wonder at the inconceivable dimension of the gift of our supernatural vocation, which carries with it a true divinization, enabling man to enter into the divine friendship, into a spousal relation with the Holy Trinity, into the beatitude proper to God Himself. We must continue to repeat with Isaiah and St. Paul (1 Cor. 2:9): "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him."[173]

The traditional Thomistic account is capable of eliciting this radical wonder, whereas de Lubac's account ultimately is not. For what precisely, drawing out the implications of de Lubac's view, does the Church offer to man? What, when we are preaching the gospel to all nations, can we identify as ecclesial riches such that the evangelical recipient is moved to seek them in the Catholic Church? We cannot include a desire for the heavenly homeland and for a supernatural inheritance, since each person possesses this desire naturally. Nor can we include an appetite or inclination for the inner life of God, for the Trinitarian communion; this already constitutes him as a human being. Is it merely a more distinct knowledge of man's supernatural destiny that we are offering? If so, is this a sufficiently strong ground to support the Church's mission, a proposition compelling enough to attract all men to her?

[173] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 443.

We quoted Mansini above saying that Rahner's theological anthropology makes God come so close to human beings that they seem to be already home. Something analogous is true here with de Lubac. Human beings seem already to be participating in the very reality of salvation that the Church is and exists to communicate. Again, this is *contra intentionem*. Nevertheless, the missionary activity of the Church is compromised.

Conclusion

What is the vision of the Church's missionary activity with obediential potency at the heart of the nature-grace relation? It is one that affirms at once man's ontological humility vis-à-vis divine salvation and his mysterious ontological *openness* to it. Notwithstanding the abovementioned difficulties in Rahner's articulation of obediential potency, he was right in *Hearer of the Word* to posit an obediential potency in human nature to receive God's free self-disclosure or revelation. By the natural light of the human intellect, man can come to some analogical knowledge of God as first cause of created realities and common good of the universe. It is precisely because man is naturally constituted as a knowing creature that he has an obediential openness to be elevated to a participation in divine knowledge.[174] Thus persons hearing the Gospel at once hear something that resonates with human nature and calls them to a radically new fulfillment in Christ. If the Church has the mission of mediating to human beings the truth of Christ,[175] human beings for their part have the capacity to receive it. Having heard the word of Christ[176] that calls them to con-

[174] Ibid., 445: "Our natural capacity to know God 'through the things that are made' is the natural foundation for our specific obediential potency to become 'hearers of the Word' when God supernaturally reveals Himself to us. The capacity to receive the theological virtue of faith is rooted in our intellectual nature, which can naturally grasp the *praeambula fidei*."

[175] For more on this, see Guy Mansini, O.S.B., "Ecclesial Mediation of Grace and Truth," *The Thomist* 75 (2011): 555-83.

[176] Mansini says that, just as we are touched by Christ in the sacrament more than we are by any priest, so in the proclamation of the Church and her ministers it is primarily

version, human beings are capable of receiving the grace that heals and elevates and perfects them. This grace orders them to the heavenly homeland and perfect beatitude.

Furthermore, human beings, as social and religious creatures, have an obediential potency for ecclesial communion.[177] The Church, in Christ, stands as the means of supernatural perfection and superabundant fulfillment for each person and for the entire human race. The Church truly is the human race renewed and reconstituted in the new Adam. Our incorporation into this communion of renewed humanity is not a given of our nature nor something to which we are naturally ordered. Nevertheless, having been graciously invited by Christ, human

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Christ whom we hear: "Just as the sacramental doings of the Church are such that they can properly be the doings only of God, so the teachings of the Church are such that they can properly be the teachings only of God. We should therefore say that when the gospel is proclaimed, we hear Christ more than we do some evangelist" (ibid., 564).

[177] In *STh* III, q. 8, a. 3 ("Whether Christ is the head of all men?"), St. Thomas uses act and potency to speak of human persons related to the Church. Some are members of the mystical body only in potentiality and will never be reduced to act, while others are reduced at some time to act (according to the threefold class of faith, charity in this life, and the fruition of the life to come). Those who are unbaptized, therefore, though not actually in the Church, are in the Church *in potentia*. Saint Thomas says that this potency is founded on two things: the power of Christ, sufficient to save all men; and free will, by which they freely accept God's offer of loving union (at least in the case of adult converts). Obediential potency certainly seems implicit and necessary here, even if St. Thomas is content to refer simply and generically to *potentia*. Journet (*L'Église du Verbe incarné*, 3:1737) is more explicit in identifying this potency as obediential. He says in the context of sacramental and oriented charity (i.e., charity directed by the teaching authority of the Church), which is for him the created soul of the Church, that the Church is fully actualized (*en acte achevé*) where the obediential potency of the human subjects is fully actualized (*pleinement actualisée*).

For another application of obediential potency to the question of ecclesial membership and salvation, see Lawrence Feingold, *Touched by Christ: The Sacramental Economy* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2021), 641, where he is speaking of the possibility of salvation for infants who die without baptism: "Every human being, including the unborn child at any stage of development, is *capax Dei* on account of being made in the image of God. All babies have a specific *obediential potency* proper to the rational creature to obey God if He chooses to elevate them and calls them: 'Friend, go up higher' (Luke 14:10). We can hope therefore that God, by extra-sacramental means, will give sanctifying grace to infants before they die without Baptism, such that they will not die with original sin and thus will not be deprived of the vision of God for eternity."

beings have the capacity to partake of this mystical union between Christ and his Church.

With this view of the Church and of the human person, faithful children of the Church ought to be motivated to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. There is nothing in human nature as such that calls for or demands supernatural grace, nor is there anything that brings the divine mystery so close to man that he seems already to be within the bosom of the Church and perhaps even in the heavenly homeland. Instead, in the depths of human nature there exists an ontological openness to God's agency, so that with his gracious aid a stranger may become a friend, a slave may become a son, a member of the body politic may become a member of the mystical body of Christ. This is a compelling evangelical message, namely, that the truths about human nature, investigable by human reason, while possessing an integrity and intelligibility even prescinding from the supernatural order, serve as preambles of faith and preparations for ecclesial life. There is thus a natural foothold, as it were, for the goods of the supernatural order. More than this, however, we are called to these goods of the supernatural order as to goods entirely exceeding any proportion to our nature. In the words of the Apostle: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him."[178] This message safeguards the gratuity of grace and the ontological humility of man while at the same time revealing the unimaginable heights man can reach in Christ. The classic Thomistic understanding of obediential potency, therefore, serves to safeguard and bolster rather than to compromise and undermine the missionary activity of the Church.

[178] 1 Cor. 2:9, Douay-Rheims. This verse was a favorite of St. Thomas, and for good reason, since it highlights the gratuity of grace and the wonders of the divine generosity.

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ON THE GENEALOGY OF ORTHODOXY: A RESPONSE TO THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *THE TRINITY*

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THIS IS A BOOK of whose fundamental purpose I approve. I take that fundamental purpose to be not only a defense of St. Thomas Aquinas's Trinitarian theology as a rational and persuasive articulation of the biblical witness and as a still persuasive engagement with the philosophical questions that classical Trinitarian theology delivers to us, but also a thoroughgoing exploration of why classical Trinitarian theology thrives only with a deep attention to divine transcendence, simplicity, and aseity. From beginning to end—from the initial chapters which focus on ways in which the Scriptures speak of God, to the final chapters' questioning of some persistent emphases in modern Trinitarian theology—we see the flowering of reflection on the God who contains all but is uncontained (to speak in second-century terms). "Persuasive" is an important adjective here; throughout, Fr. Thomas Joseph provides us with an exercise as much in apologetics as in dogmatics. But I sense that "apologetic" here seems to involve the production of a rational account that removes objections and provides reasons that may stimulate assent; to the character of appropriate apology I will return.

At the same time, I approve of the book for its directness. A beautiful example is provided by the discussion of the modern trend to speak of "immanent" and "economic" trinities. Father Thomas Joseph peers over the top of the lectern at an aula full of modern theologians—Rahner, Moltmann, and Balthasar are sitting in the front row—as they nervously explain to him that they have this wonderful new terminology which will make us all

more attentive to Scripture, to the economy of revelation, and to the divine self-limitation. Listening carefully, our lecturer points out to the room that such language actually offers little help, and actually causes multiple problems both for Trinitarian theology and for a rightly ordered conception of the relations between Creator and creation (Bulgakov has been hiding in the second row, but now finds himself questioned quite severely). We are pointed back to the traditional language of processions and missions as a tried and tested way of approaching the matter, and told just to stop it. One might certainly argue that a more extensive account of the philosophical shifts that lie behind modern Trinitarian "revivals" would have helped the case, but this section of the book offers us a clear and powerful undercutting of so much that is often swallowed by "systematic" theologians as supposedly necessary medicine.

And yet, I admit that I am now going to transgress in a typical fashion: responding to an author by suggesting that he or she should have written something different. I do so because I think the questions I pose are important for promoting the very theological revival that Fr. Thomas Joseph seeks in all that he writes. The more I delved into the book, the more two concerns forced themselves upon me. First, the style of genealogy offered here runs the risk of being one built too easily around Thomas's sufficiency. Second, this style of genealogy (and the style of exposition found in the nongenealogical sections of the book) also runs the risk of speaking insufficiently of that which remains mysterious, and consequently of failing to produce a sufficiently clear apology for an essential dimension of good theological reasoning. Taken together I worry that the style of the book does not take full advantage of how theological genealogy may stimulate dogmatic attention.

Not surprisingly, my basic question is one that patristic scholars should perennially ask of Thomists: what is the status of patristic thought in relationship to the synthesis of Thomas (or to the synthesis of any other of the great medieval figures)? In this particular case, a good number of chapters are devoted to sketching the key developments of the period between Nicaea

and Dionysius (110-76), but with a clearly expressed, limited objective: Fr. Thomas Joseph's goal is only to show "that there is a fundamental intellectual and historical continuity between the New Testament revelation of the apostolic age and the subsequent doctrinal definitions of the Catholic Church" (110). Nevertheless, one may ask how that should best be accomplished. For many of those for whom Thomas's thought is the *terminus ad quem* it becomes very easy to view the patristic period as offering primarily foundational materials that either need or at least greatly benefit from the philosophical precision applied within Latin Scholastic culture. Similarly, it becomes easy to make central those aspects of early Trinitarian thought that most closely reflect the topics one finds developed in Thomas. But doing so may hide from us a richness and diversity that is itself an apology for traditional Trinitarian theology.

We can usefully pose the question as one about the character of what I will term the genealogy of orthodoxy. We tend to speak of genealogy when we seek to uncover the origins of something deserving of our suspicion if not rejection—genealogy unveiling the repetition (or transfigured repetition) of an earlier evil. Into this category fall, to give a recent example, Cyril O'Regan's monumental attempts to uncover the repetition of Gnostic (and Marcionite) intellectual structures as intrinsic to modernity's reasoning. Such uncovering and naming is both (as O'Regan has described it) an act of intellectual honesty and one of prophetic resistance to that which has become the simply assumed.[1]

I suggest that we should also speak, in a positive tone, about the genealogy of orthodoxy. By this I mean an account of the intellectual and doxological history that constitutes the history of Trinitarian orthodoxy. But *how* one should perform such a genealogy in the context of modern historical forms of consciousness without descending into the sort of relativism which

[1] O'Regan has explored this theme across a number of volumes, but for short introductions see his "Balthasar and Gnostic Genealogy," *Modern Theology* 22 (2006): 609-50; and "Historiographic Sophistications: Marcionism as a Genealogical Category," *Church Life* December 29, 2020: https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/marcionism-as-a-genealogical-category/.

sees different theologies as primarily expressive of different cultural moments has been one of the most contested methodological questions in modern Catholic thought for centuries. Thus, how one should "curate" the Church's tradition is a topic of vital importance for any theological revival in our day.[2]

Even sketching an adequate practice of theological genealogy is too vast a topic for this response to Fr. Thomas Joseph's book. Nevertheless, allow me to make a few very general observations. I suggest that a good genealogy should display the richness and complexity of the intellectual traditions engaged and adapted through the course of theological history. A good genealogy should also resist modern forms of *Tendenzkritik* wherein power is the universal human driver; it should be attentive to the interplay of intellectual traditions in Christian thought (and reject simple oppositions between, for example, the "Greek" and the "Jewish"). A good genealogy should also be willing to embrace the tension between identifying the particular positions evident in a text and the wider narrative into which such particulars may also be bundled. This last sentence opens on to a complex hermeneutical topic. Good genealogical practice must involve offering an account of the intelligibility of the cosmos, of continuities in the nature of the human person, and a theological account of God's maintenance of meaning over time, of the Church's faithfulness. Thus, any "good" theological genealogy must take full advantage of the intellectual resources modern forms of historical consciousness offer, even as those forms are adapted for the needs of Christian thought. (Father Thomas Joseph makes a similar point when he rightly notes the impossibility of any "neutral" historical study of the Scriptures [66].)

I offer these brief remarks because I think good genealogy is itself an apologetic exercise, showing Christian intellectual seriousness and the intellectual force and depth of the Christian

[2] I have attempted to explore the theme of curation a little further in "Of Slowness and Distance: Reflections on Philology and the Curation of Tradition in Catholic Theology," in Anthony Briggman and Ellen Scully, eds., *New Narratives for Old: The Historical Method of Reading Early Christian Theology. Essays in Honor of Michel René Barnes* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 27-44.

tradition. But, at the same time, good genealogy may also be a means of promoting attention to the mysteries that lie at the heart of Christian faith. Understanding how these two concerns may intertwine—good genealogy as apologetic and good genealogy as a revealing of attention to mystery—will bring us back to Fr. Thomas Joseph. There is much rather naïve romanticisim about premodern theologians in Balthasar's famous early essay "Theology and Sanctity," but his instincts are surely right when he points to the perennial value of those whose writing is thoroughly dogmatic *in that* it is focused above all on the contemplation and elucidation of what has been revealed in Christ, on drawing people to the riches of that gift, and on conceiving human (and created) existence in the light of the revealed mystery.[3] The dogmatic writer is one whose intellectual powers are turned toward these tasks above all, and yet one who knows that as mysteries these realities are ultimately beyond our grasp and to be adored more than understood. It is this that constitutes Balthasar's "theology at prayer [now] superseded by theology at the desk." Although Balthasar's own presentations of historical figures do not always exemplify attentive uncovering of the particular questions that gave their texts birth, and the particular forms of expression and thought central in such texts,[4] he did grasp that genealogies which draw out the different attempts of the great theologians to attend to and speak appropriately of Christianity's central mysteries may have great dogmatic power.

In attending to changing articulations of the basic principles of the Church's Trinitarian faith through the centuries of the patristic and medieval periods we see different forms of attention to the inexhaustible mysteries concerning which we have been given to speak. Common themes—at the heart of which are principles defined by the conciliar tradition or in the penumbra of that tradition—constitute a golden thread along which

[3] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209.

[4] I am not at all convinced by Balthasar's early account of how one should engage the Church's tradition, especially as it is found in the famous foreword to his *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942).

different articulations (and traditions of articulation) may be located. These changing articulations, in their deepest forms, also express the principle that the mystery of the divine life must be shown to surpass our ability to grasp if we are to speak about it well. Thomas's place in such a story is, I would suggest, not so much as the universal culminating rational synthesis, but as a peculiarly rich illustration of this attention to mystery, and a peculiarly rich intersection and synthesis of authorities and ideas that we should now be invited to explore alongside his own vision, and in the light of modern historical scholarship (with due attention to the ways in which Thomas both incorporates those authorities and sometimes misconstrues them).[5] For some Thomas will and should certainly stand as the model of theological reasoning; for others he may stand as a particularly rich model alongside others. A richer genealogical procedure would open both these possibilities to the reader.[6]

I am not saying that Fr. Thomas Joseph's book somehow fails to show historical sensitivity, but that it shows historical sensitivity of a certain kind, a kind that permits the drawing of a genealogy in which Thomas is the apex and all those before are

[5] I hope that I will not be taken here as advocating for some sort of patristic fundamentalism, treating the patristic authors as never open to supplementation (such a position could hardly be sustained by a Catholic theologian), but rather as advocating for a particular mode of holding up patristic theology as a necessary part of our theological conversation. I have provided some pointers towards such an account in my "Seven Theses on Patristics and Catholic Theology," *Modern Theology* 38 (2022): 36-62.

[6] In this sense good genealogy should take forward what was once *theologia positiva*, understanding this, however, not as an exercise preliminary to dogmatics but as part of it. Such a discipline need not involve any rejection of the principle that the Church teaches with continuity and certainty. On this latter topic, Thomas Joseph White, O.P., "The Precarity of Wisdom: Modern Dominican Theology, Perspectivalism, and the Tasks of Reconstruction," in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 92-123, rightly criticizes ways in which Chenu (and others) tended towards a view of theology as conditioned by history insufficiently able also to account for the stability of the Church's teaching across generations. Congar's attempts in *La tradition et les traditions* to do so meet with far more success, I would argue, yet are somewhat marred by his failure to address the question head on. I do not mean that all dogmatics should be genealogical, but that such a form of dogmatic attention has a great deal to contribute at this point in the history of theology.

preliminary to and provide building blocks for the great synthesis. This is also a form of historical attentiveness that seeks above all for the continuity across the centuries of a particular set of rational (and gradually flowering) arguments. Such an approach places perhaps too little emphasis on the attentiveness to the mystery of Christ revealed through the course of this history.[7] There are a number of places in this volume where I felt that a more expansive genealogy would have shown better continuity in attention to divine mystery across different forms of theological expression. I will point to three.

A first example may flow from reflection on the manner in which figures such as Basil of Caesarea and Augustine (to name just two) consider the divine unity against the background of a particular Pythagorean/Platonic metaphysics that asserts true unity to precede number of any kind. It is against such a background that it becomes possible to say that while number *appears* to obtain when one moves from Father to Son to Holy Spirit, we are mistaken if we allow ourselves to think thus. Such arguments (arguments rather different from those found in Thomas—see, e.g., *STh* I, q. 30, a. 3) provide a point of departure rooted in a very particular metaphysics which starkly distinguishes Creator and creation. Attending to the differences between Nicene strategies may help us to explore both continuities and the sort of slow shifts that are intrinsic to the continuing vitality of intellectual traditions. When we consider the differences between the strategies of Thomas and Basil or Augustine (or, later, but sharing a similar interest in the metaphysics of number, Cusanus) we should see similar intersections between the propositional claims inherent in Nicene theology and the realities of divine mystery as these theologians take fundamental beliefs and try to articulate them within related but distinct metaphysical contexts.

Something similar would be found were we to question in a genealogical mode the modern fascination with the attempts to define the difference between common and particular. It is a

[7] I have not yet read Fr. Thomas Joseph's new *Principles of Catholic Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023), where these questions may be treated more directly.

common tactic in modern Trinitarian summary to present the discussions in the Cappadocians and Augustine of *ousia*/*hypostasis* or *persona*/*natura* as preliminary to and fulfilled in medieval discussions. What such modern accounts miss are the questions that flow when one notes how infrequent those discussions are in the Cappadocians and Augustine. What functions do these discussions actually perform? How do relevant patristic writers manage without such terminologies? What advantages and disadvantages follow from this practice? How far is this practice necessarily succeeded by more developed late patristic and medieval accounts? My goal here is not to answer such questions, but to suggest that, once again, answering them would draw us to the intersections between the propositional claims inherent in Nicene theology and the realities of divine mystery, and force on us hard but important questions about what it means to conceive the individuality of Father, Son, and Spirit as "persons"; this is not a matter somehow resolved by the account one finds in Thomas precisely insofar as the mystery of the one and the three remains beyond our grasp.

Third, I want to turn to a particularly helpful aspect of Fr. Thomas Joseph's argument: his presentation of a certain "psychological analogy" as intrinsic to Trinitarian reflection from pre-Nicene authors onward. Readers of modern Trinitarian reflection have become so used to thinking in terms of an opposition between "social" and "psychological" analogies that they find it hard to attend to what patristic and medieval theologians actually say. Father Thomas Joseph is following a far more helpful line of argument when he presents reflection on the inherent resources of the term *Logos* as enabling presentation of the "Word" as God's rational power and activity from the earliest beginnings of Christian Trinitarianism (see, e.g., 115-19, 133-35, 167ff.). My quibble begins with the observation that in this treatment the trajectory of all use of such "psychological" language is a full account of the two processions conceived with the resources offered by the terminology of love and knowledge. Thomas's use of such language is the apex of reflection, both because of the systematic manner of his usage, and because he

writes subsequently to Dionysius's thoughts on analogy which provide a clearer framework for Thomas's account of theological language. But what if we were to diversify our appreciation of the tradition by noting that while this tradition of reflection is certainly a constant, it takes multiple forms dependent on shifting visions of how one should draw likenesses between features of created rational existence and the divine? Exploring this tradition thus would open for us a great deal of complexity within a common (and developing) tradition, a diversity that might help us reflect on the complexity of how the mystery of the divine life is best approached by the human mind.

Father Thomas Joseph's work draws on scholarship across a truly impressive range. I do not intend to suggest that he is inattentive to historical development, but that much value may be found in a rather different way of presenting the tradition, one that itself may have great apologetic value in displaying both the complexities of development and the constant movement of theological speech toward a formed silence. Theology does not move constantly thus because it has taken on too much, but because, by displaying the reaching out of reason toward divine mystery, theology reveals the very character of the world's intelligibility, the character of reason, and the interplay between thought and worship. Here, I think, we find one of the most important aspects of theological reason for which an apology must be offered in late modernity: theology's recognition that it is called to go on struggling to speak rationally of that which of necessity exceeds the grasp of created rationality.

In this vein I will end by returning to the beginning of Fr. Thomas Joseph's book. His discussion of what he terms the "basic touchstones for Trinitarian doctrine" (67) in the New Testament is useful and subtle—especially in the way that he shows us a range of themes in the presentation of Christ pointing us toward key aspects of later formed Trinitarian doctrine. I also found helpful his insistence on the importance of both attending to the fruits of modern biblical scholarship and reading the Scriptures in the light of tradition. Yet the discussion we are given restricts itself to this, to showing us the Scriptures (and Christ's

own self-presentation) as the point of departure for later reflection, and as consonant with that later tradition. There is very little in this massive volume that discusses the ways in which patristic and medieval writers read their Scriptures, how classical Trinitarian theology flowered in an exegetical culture steeped in meditation on Christ's titles, and in meditation on the metaphorical and terminological resources provided by the Hebrew Scriptures—power, wisdom, word, name, light, and so forth. These writers (in a variety of interrelated exegetical and speculative traditions) show us that through grace, through the gift of faith, Christians are called to plumb the depths of Scripture, and that in so doing they exhibit patterns of thought that are rational, and yet that end in recognition of the divine mystery. For my part, the best apology for Christian teaching and reasoning is one that makes more central the subtle art and exact science of speaking towards mystery.

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TRINITARIANISM AND THE "MYSTICAL": A RESPONSE TO THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *THE TRINITY*

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IN MY HIGHLY appreciative commendation in advance of the publication of his new book, I described Fr. Thomas Joseph's extraordinary volume on the Trinity as "learned, wide ranging, and deeply provocative."[1] It is indeed all those things, and more. But suffice it to say that the book becomes all the more exciting and provocative on second and third readings. Not only are its core arguments a great deal more original—some would say even at points idiosyncratic—than one might at first realize,[2] but the book also evidences some

[1] See the back cover of Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022). In what follows I shall give pagination from this volume in simple parentheses, and, in the spirit of friendship, refer to the author as "TJ."

[2] I shall allude to some of these intriguing "provocations" in what follows, but one might mention here at the outset, in particular: (1) the presumption of a "false starts and approximations" historiography of the Trinity from the biblical sources on, such that a later Thomistic norm implicitly controls the (highly selective) discussion from the outset (and despite what is concessively said about such a "normativity" at the very end of the book [672-73]); (2) the concomitant presumption of the *filioque* as an essential and originary feature of this "back-projected" vision of Trinitarian origins; (3) the core normativity also given to Augustine's "psychological analogies" for the Trinity (even despite Augustine's own notable hesitancy about the adequacy of *any* such analogies by the end of his *De Trinitate*); (4) the use of Aquinas's teaching on *analogy* as a normative lens for explicating the (proposed) historic superiority of his own Trinitarian teaching—both on the divine unity and on the "persons" as "subsistent relations"; (5) the imposition thereby of a quasi-Hegelian genealogy of (purportedly errant, and dialectically related) forms of Trinitarianism in *comparison* with the "Thomistic," in both Scholastic and modern eras. This last feature of the book represents its most

remarkable lacunae—not immediately obvious, again, on first reading—that are as revealing as they are curious.[3] One cannot of course write about everything in the historic Trinitarian traditions of the churches, even in a book as long and learned as this one. But in what follows in this brief review I shall focus on what I see as just one particular "blind-spot" in the book, which I believe is not merely a contingent omission in relation to the historical story of Trinitarian thought, but a matter of ongoing and systematic importance in contemporary Trinitarian discussion as well.[4] That is the role of "mystical theology" in its relation to historic Trinitarian thinking and believing—not just in the "Eastern" Christian tradition, but by extension also in its

creative, exciting and original contribution, as I see it, but also the most "provocative" dimension of its underlying historiographical and genealogical propulsion.

[3] Under this category of "lacunae" might be listed, again succinctly: (1) the almost complete neglect of Greek/Orthodox sources from after the era of the Cappadocians (despite the short section on Dionysius [171-76], and the very brief allusions to later Greek and other Orthodox authors [499-501], in relation to the *filioque* problem); (2) the lack of any substantive discussion of the Council of Constantinople of 381 (it merits only one passing allusion in the early historical narrative [150], and another in the discussion of the Holy Spirit [490]), which means that the issue of the *filioque* is not squarely and foremost faced as a problem of *conciliar* obedience (despite one brief sentence on this matter [491]); (3) the demotion of focus on the painstaking ecumenical attempts of recent decades to forge a new understanding between "Eastern" and "Western" views of the Trinity to a very short and programmatic discussion (497-503), itself made subservient to TJ's account of the Spirit according to Aquinas; (4) the surprising lack of interest in pursuing what, if anything, is brought to the history of Trinitarianism, both "East" and "West," by a specifically "mystical" and contemplative approach to the Trinity (the focus of this short contribution).

[4] I shall come back to this point at the end of this brief reflection: has TJ occluded a strand in historic Trinitarianism that might have particular interest and application to contemporary theological aporias about the Trinity? What we see at the moment, across the ecumenical and international spectrum, is a confusion of conflicting voices on the Trinity: some reasserting the popular "social Trinitarianism" of the 1980s and 1990s, in the name of a preferred "Eastern" perspective on personal Trinitarian "communion"; some reiterating Vladimir Lossky's polemical view that the "Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church" is somehow intrinsically superior to a "Western," Scholastic, alternative (this is not to be confused with my own position, adumbrated here); some avidly reasserting a "pro-Nicene" view that conjoined the "East" and "West" in the early centuries; some—like TJ—re-exploring the Western Scholastic tradition and giving it new exposition and support; and others vehemently rejecting, in neo-Schleiermacherian mode, any speculations at all about the inner life of God.

crucial assimilations into the West. What is at stake here, I want to ask, and in particular what might this mean for the core themes of TJ's remarkable study?

I pick on this issue for a number of connected reasons which, we may note, are already signaled by TJ himself in his volume as intrinsically important for his own undertaking. Let me then start by adumbrating those key points, for they show us that TJ is perhaps himself already aware of some implicit issue here in need of further discussion.

First, TJ chooses to open his entire study (1-5) with a reminder of the "three forms of wisdom" assumed and outlined by Aquinas: that pertaining to philosophy, that to theology (the exposition of revelation), and finally that to the "mystical" grace of infused encounter with God through the Spirit.[5] While in one sense this triad is obviously arranged in an *ascending* order of participatory response to God, the three "regulatory functions" are, it is argued here, also mutual and in some sense *égal* in relation to each other—for each constrains the others (3).[6] In other words, one cannot kick away the ladder of philosophy when doing the work of theology; nor, by the same token, can the "mystic" ever rise above the need for both of these two other forms of wisdom (4), since—according to TJ—the "mystics" are perennially subject to "religious delusion" (ibid.). What the mystic does crucially provide, however, as TJ himself acknowledges, is a distinctive "witness" to the transformative power of God, and thereby the mystic "holds the theologian *accountable* to the mystery of the living God" (ibid.,

[5] TJ explains, of the third: "The gift of wisdom teaches us to learn—from the heart of Christ, from the heart of God—who God is, and what he wills" (3). It is noteworthy that TJ associates this "third" wisdom exclusively with love/*affectus*, given that Aquinas's own (quite dispersed) theory of "contemplation" is more complex than this and also gives a notable pride of place to the passive *intellect*: see Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), *seriatim*, but esp. 126-46. Later in this essay I shall examine the threefold ascent of Pseudo-Dionysius, which locates "mystical" encounter with the Trinitarian God in the "ecstatic" *nous*, going out beyond itself (*hyper noun*).

[6] Aquinas's own renowned "mystical" encounters at the end of his life might of course suggest slightly otherwise: as reported to his *socius*, Reginald of Piperno, all that he had heretofore written fell away into insignificance, as if "straw."

emphasis added). It is this thought that I wish to pursue further in what follows, not least because TJ himself so importantly opens up this idea at the outset of his study.

Second, the entire architectonic structure of TJ's book depends (or so I would urge), on how an understanding of the "mystical" (or "ineffable") apprehension of the divine implicitly impinges on Aquinas's theory of analogy itself, and thus on TJ's particular rendition of the importance of his Trinitarian teaching according to this crucial rubric. For TJ's assertion of the intrinsic "normativity" of Aquinas's approach to the Trinity involves systematically applying his doctrine of analogy both to the question of the unity of the divine substance and to the question of the tripersonality of the divine "subsistent relations." This is really the core, and innovative, argument of the book (which most ingeniously justifies—and further bolsters—Aquinas's own rendition of the Trinity in *STh* I, qq. 27-43, from the earlier resources of *STh* I, q. 13); and from this core argument spiral out, in TJ's narrative, the various negative or positive assessments of both earlier and later forms of Trinitarian thinking with which it may be compared. Now, this analogical understanding (in Aquinas's sense) of how we must speak "properly" of divine oneness and threeness of course involves both a confidence about analogical "literalness" (in the Thomist sense of language which is applied first and foremost, and so *proprie*, of God), and a suitable acknowledgment of our human incapacity fully to grasp that which is God at all (on account of his essential, uncreated ineffability). According to TJ's ingenious genealogy, then, Trinitarian theologians working either before or after Aquinas, both Scholastic and modern, go wrong precisely when they veer either towards univocity or towards equivocation (and/or Kantian nescience) in this analogical balancing act; if they do so, he argues, they thereby miss the mark altogether.[7] So here we see, once more, and secondly, that the "mystical" apprehension of God's ineffable transcendence is not a mere aside in TJ's genealogy of Trinitarian thinking, but seemingly at the core of its validity:

[7] See 15-18, prospectively, and then 373-408, and the whole of part IV, 547-66.

without its lessons, we are likely to veer perilously off the Trinitarian rails in one direction or the other.

Third, then: it thus becomes important (at a certain turning-point in his genealogical narrative of the history of Trinitarian thinking [171-76]) for TJ to bring in the celebrated early sixth-century author Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (author of the first text named *Mystical Theology*) to support his view that "mystical theology" fully aligns with this appropriately "analogical" approach to the Trinity—or at least to claim that Dionysius's works anticipate this Thomist adage in some important way. So Dionysius is a hero for TJ, ostensibly, as a forerunner of Aquinas's more developed views on analogy. To be sure, TJ also needs to jump forward chronologically, in the same chapter, to the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 to effect another of his "dialectical" balancing acts in order to prepare the reader for the Thomistic insights to follow: first he covers (his own rendition of) Dionysius, and then he complements his views with the lessons of Lateran IV's rejection of Joachim of Fiore, in order to prepare for Aquinas on analogy and prospectively indicate how "apophaticism" and Trinitarianism can be fully and fruitfully combined.

But herein lies the rub—and we have now reached the systematic point I want to focus on in this short article: Is it really the case that Pseudo-Dionysius represents merely an insightful foretaste of Aquinas's doctrine of analogy? Or does Dionysius perhaps, and alternatively, represent a rather *different* approach to the nexus of divine ineffability, theological language for God, the Trinity, and the significance of the "mystical," which—far from being simply subsumable into Aquinas's later account of him—stands as a commanding alternative to the rather different view that TJ propounds throughout his volume? And if so, what might this mean for the fascinating typology of later Scholastic and modern "errors" in Trinitarian thinking on which TJ discourses throughout his book?

Let me lay just three considerations about the Dionysian corpus very briefly on the table. To be sure, these points are nowadays rendered bewilderingly problematic and contestable by the multiple vying renditions of Dionysius's "apophaticism"

produced in the late modern period, which (to my mind) have been overly distorted by unconscious importations of either Kantian or Derridean philosophical tropes to the Dionysian texts.[8] Happily, however, I do not read TJ himself as falling into any of these particular traps, given his own clarity about the dangers of eliding patristic and Scholastic views of ineffability with Kantian and post-Kantian views of *noumenal* nescience. What is less clear is whether TJ has not himself erased Dionysius's very distinctive view of *analogia* (in the Greek) in order to elide it with Aquinas's different, and later, theory of "analogy" as espoused in question 13 of the *Prima pars*.

Let me then propose just three aspects of the teaching of the Dionysian corpus that appear to me to be distinctly different from the later teaching of Aquinas, despite the unquestionable and profound later influence of Pseudo-Dionysius upon Aquinas. I am focusing here on those points which especially make a difference to how Dionysius understands the precise relation of "mystical theology," the Trinity, and the rules of theological language.[9]

First, does Dionysius propose a theory of analogy consonant with the later position of Aquinas? Overall, the answer is surely no. Nonetheless, Dionysius does make some initial and important distinctions between different kinds of language which we apply to God, at different levels of "ascent," and these we must

[8] Particularly important here, amid recent secondary literature, is Timothy D. Knepper, *Negating Negation: Against the Apophatic Abandonment of the Dionysian Corpus* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014), which provides good reason to expose many false modern and postmodern readings of Dionysius along these lines, including influential readings by John Hick and Denys Turner in particular: see esp., ibid., 1-4, 69-71.

[9] I am not of course the first person to attempt to clarify these differences, but my short rendition here is a little different from some earlier, and more celebrated, discussions: Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of* Aquinas (1992; repr. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, trans. J. Murray and D. O'Connor (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1999); Gregory P. Rocca, O.P., *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

take carefully into account.[10] Thus it is true that Dionysius's careful exposition in *The Divine Names* (chaps. 1-2)[11] of the relation of the one and the three in the Trinity broadly follows the Cappadocians in explaining how God can be uniquely and inexpressibly one, and yet at the same time distinguishable in the Trinitarian "persons" in number and relation. Moreover, he takes it as read, from both his pagan philosophical and his Christian forebears, that the particular attributes for God called "divine names" are those which fall into the special category of the so-called intelligible attributes. But notably he underscores that these "names," no less than any other ways of talking about God, are only to be authoritatively commended to us by *Scripture*, rather than intrinsically generated philosophically by the very idea of God; neither are they hypothesized—as in Aquinas—as "pure perfection" terms that apply first and foremost to God.[12] The genre of careful argumentation about the basic oneness and threeness of the Trinity that Dionysius applies here in the opening sections of the *Divine Names*, along with his exposition of the "intelligible" attributes of God, needs further to be distinguished from his accompanying teaching—manifest not only, *en passant*, in the *Divine Names* itself,[13] but more emphatically in his *Mystical Theology*[14]—that since God is, in his terms, "beyond being," the best language for God overall is that which insists on the *dissimilarity* of any

[10] The best brief (and recent) philosophical clarification of these different types of theological language ("Theological Representations," "Divine Names," "Mystical Theology"), according to Dionysius, is to be found in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article, 'Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite', by Kevin Corrigan and L. Michael Harrington (2019), esp. 3-6.

[11] Although I have drawn on the standard modern English translation of the Dionysian corpus, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK, 1987), it is well known that the translation is questionable at many points, and must be used with care. The contemporary Greek edition is Beate Regina Suchla, ed., *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita*, vols. 1 and 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990, 1991).

[12] See *Divine Names*, 1.1, 1.2.

[13] See *Divine Names*, 1.6, 2.4: God is both completely ineffable, "beyond every assertion and denial," and yet best described by the use of "every name."

[14] *Mystical Theology*, 3.

comparisons or images for God from their creaturely application, rather than any supposed *similarity*.[15] Far from recommending any developed doctrine of "analogy" in the later Thomist sense, let alone carefully distinguishing "analogy" and "metaphor" as Aquinas does, Dionysius appears to be supremely commending what Aquinas would himself call "metaphor" in the naming of God,[16] to the point that Dionysius particularly applauds those biblical tropes in which some proposed divine behavior or characteristic is most obviously *inappropriate* to God (e.g., even speaking of God as having a "hangover").[17] The more bizarre and inappropriate the language for God, the better we are reminded of the intrinsic divine ineffability and our incapacity successfully to approach it linguistically or conceptually. Thus even when we introduce mutually corrective, or mutually bombarding, images of this sort to help us understand the doctrine of the Trinity,[18] the same lesson applies: none of these images will be more appropriate than any other. It must be true, then, according to Dionysius's teaching—as also in some texts of the Cappadocians[19]—that there is more than one

[15] *Mystical Theology*, 2. This principle applies even to the intelligible divine names, since they too—although given to us by the authority of Scripture (*Divine Names* 1.2)—also fall far short of the divine; they are not therefore more "proper" than other forms of naming (see also *Celestial Hierarchy*, 2.3).

[16] But not in the modern form of "recession from reality" (as Alvin Plantinga memorably termed this post-Kantian temptation), or of correlative anti-realist "pan-metaphorism" (as William Alston jibed): this is where John Hick and others have misread Dionysius most seriously, as if he were merely an anticipation of a Gordon D. Kaufman or a Sallie McFague (in the projectionist spirit of Feuerbach). We are not free to "project" onto the deity whatever metaphors seem to us timely and relevant, since the whole linguistic project in Dionysius is undergirded by a chastening spiritual journey into true, divine reality, guided from the outset by the authority of Scripture and its revelatory demands on us. See again Knepper, *Negating Negation*, esp. 1-4.

[17] *Mystical Theology*, 3, alluding to Psalm 78:65.

[18] E.g., "light," "circle," "seal," used as "examples" in *Divine Names*, 2.4-2.6.

[19] This is perhaps insufficiently commented upon in the standard textbooks (or indeed at all in TJ's *The Trinity*): see my recent exposition of Gregory of Nyssa's treatment of the Trinity in his late work, the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which introduces numerous fascinating dimensions of his Trinitarian teaching that are not present in his earlier dogmatic discourses: Sarah Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa on Spiritual Ascent and Trinitarian Orthodoxy: A Reconsideration of the Relation between

genre of theological thinking that is required when explicating the doctrine of the Trinity: there is the basic, lean, explicatory account of how a God who is radically one, and to whom all the "intelligible names" apply, can also be three "persons," as intimated by Scripture and authoritatively given in the creeds (at the level of "affirmation"); but there is also a necessary profusion of other "comparisons" or images for the Trinity (more strictly "metaphors," in the later Thomist sense), which by definition can never adequately penetrate the mystery of the Godhead, but serve their unique purpose even as they are then serially discarded (here we are at the level of "denials"). But what Dionysius never says is that the former task involves "analogical" thinking and the latter "metaphorical." In short, Dionysius's is ultimately a linguistic theory of self-corrective metaphoric profusion, undergirded by scriptural and credal authority, rather than by a strict doctrine of analogy in the Thomist sense.

Second, there is a profound underlying metaphysical reason for this position, as already noted. Because it is intrinsic to Dionysius's position (contra Aquinas) that God is "*beyond* being," as opposed to being "Being" itself, there are implications that immediately follow for his semantic theory of divine naming, which apply no less (as I have argued here) to his understanding of how to speak of God as Trinity. Thus it is that Dionysius can famously urge, in his *Mystical Theology*, that we must not only deny the positives we first affirm when we attempt to speak of God, but more importantly also *deny our denials*.[20] This adage apparently goes even beyond the

Doctrine and *Askesis*," in Giulio Maspero and Miguel Brugarolas, eds., *Gregory of Nyssa's "In Canticum,"* XII International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 360-75.

[20] *Mystical Theology*, 1.2. There is much debate about what Dionysius means by a "denial," and significantly he uses two different Greek words for this: here, *aphaeresis*, but elsewhere also *apophasis*, the former having the overtones of "thinking away from," the latter of directly "saying no." See again Knepper, *Negating Negation*, 35-68, for an important recent discussion of the meaning of these terms in Dionysius, again challenging much that has been written on this topic from a modern, post-Kantian, perspective. The point is that if we misread Dionysius's "apophasis" as a straightforward logical negation, we can make no sense of his "denial of a denial" except as a return to

recommendation of Lateran IV (also strongly influenced by Dionysius) that our denials should be more emphatic than our affirmations (see TJ, *The Trinity*, 180), for there is a third moment hereafter, on which everything depends retroactively, so to speak—and that is the possibility of an "ecstatic" moment of direct contemplative encounter with God in Godself.[21] In trying to understand how the *practice* of "contemplation" assumed here undergirds and sustains Dionysius's linguistic theory of affirmations and negations, we go astray if we do not see this threefold process as an actual *journey* of ascent (as opposed to a mere linguistic theory), in which the mind (*nous*) ultimately goes out beyond itself (*hyper noun*).[22] Much hangs here, of course, on what Dionysius means when he speaks of linguistic "denial" in the first place: if we mistakenly read this as a straightforward logical denial ("p" erased by "not p"), then we miss the point about the spiritual practice involved in systematically "thinking away" (*aphaeresis*) from affirmations, and indeed also from their denials, *en route* to something higher yet: the direct encounter with God-as-Trinity itself.

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an affirmation; nor can we comprehend how this *linguistic* theory of denials is part of a contemplative journey into direct *encounter* with the "ineffable" God.

[21] *Mystical Theology*, 1; *Mystical Theology*, 3. And this *is* the Trinity (*Mystical Theology*, 1) for Dionysius, not some place beyond it, as has often been hypothesized. See the excellent article by John N. Jones, "The Status of the Trinity in Dionysian Thought," *The Journal of Religion* 80 (2000): 645-57, on this important exegetical point, which is admittedly extremely hard to adjudicate within the Dionysian corpus. But Dionysius in the *Mystical Theology* (1, 3) does indeed ask us to embrace the paradox of a simultaneous (trans-noetic) encounter with the Trinity itself and the complete inexpressibility of such an event.

[22] *Mystical Theology*, 3. Note that this contemplative ecstasy is not described in "affective" terms in Dionysius, but in the form of the *mind's* going out of itself. (On this compare TJ, *The Trinity*, 3, as cited at the start of this essay, who insists that such states are *only* "affective": this I would respectfully challenge.) The tradition of so-called affective Dionysianism in the medieval West was indeed later to disjoin will (love) and intellect, and to align contemplative and ecstatic states with the former; but that was not the only possible reception of the Dionysian heritage in the West: St. John of the Cross, for instance, locates contemplative infusion in the passive intellect (following Aquinas here), but further teaches that sustained union involves the integrated response of *all* the faculties (memory, understanding, and will).

Third, and finally, it follows that there is an important intrinsic connection, and yet also distinction, within Dionysian thinking between the task of explicating a complex theory of rules for speaking about God (both positively and negatively), on the one hand, and the direct revelatory encounter with the inexpressible triune reality, on the other. The reason is that these occur at different levels of the three-stage ascent. But the third stage not only transforms the "mystic's" perception of what the mind is capable of (in rising even "beyond" itself); it also gives further justification to Dionysius's view that *anything* said of God must not only be formally "affirmed" and "denied," but also be transcended even beyond that very denial. Such is the basis on which he propounds his linguistic theory of what I have called mandatory "metaphoric profusion." And this founds, I believe, a rather specifically theorized tradition of "mystical speech," the authority of which continues to be debated.[23]

I have said more than enough now to indicate why I believe that the work of Pseudo-Dionysius should not be regarded merely as an enticing anticipation of Aquinas's theory of analogy, and also—by extension—why I cannot see him as proposing the sort of systematic application of analogical thinking (again in Aquinas's sense) to his own Trinitarianism.

The more systematic, and final, question I want to raise in closing this short response to TJ is whether the alternative approach that I see Dionysius (and his various "mystical" descendants) as representing cannot allow for a rather particular sort of speech about the Trinity that is *not* bound by Thomist

[23] Mention must be made briefly here of Vladimir Lossky's well-known claim, in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern* Church (1944; repr., Cambridge: James Clarke, 1968) that Dionysius's "Eastern mystical theology" is intrinsically superior to that of the "West," and specifically to the work of Aquinas, because it does not simply balance affirmative and negative ways (as Lossky presumes of Western "negative theology"), but moves "mystically" (and "apophatically") beyond them. I hope it is clear that Lossky's view is *not* the one I am proposing here, given that Aquinas's position also witnesses vibrantly to the (third) "via eminentiae." What I am drawing attention to, however, is that TJ's rendition of this "third way" seemingly reduces it merely to an "affective" state, and thus draws nothing from it of substantive revelatory significance for our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, whether historically or in our own day.

analogical rules, nor limited solely to the technical credal Trinitarian language that it also takes for granted, but is more freely produced in response to the life of contemplative practice itself. It is clear, I hope, that there are many "mystical" authors in the broadly Dionysian tradition, both East and West, who have discoursed freely on the Trinity, and sometimes indeed with serious suggestions of heterodoxy, in this mode. Here we enter the ambiguous realm of what TJ calls both the necessary "witness" of the saint to the transforming "mystery of God," and at the same time the dangerous potential of mystical "delusion." My question, in concluding these reflections, is why TJ does not regard such writers as worthy at least of some sustained attention in his grand Trinitarian genealogy? Is it that these "mystical" Trinitarians can tell us nothing suggestive, creative, and even theologically content-laden for the history of Trinitarian thought, and especially for today's contentions about it?

Surely there can be no doubt that many and various "mystical" inheritors of the Dionysian corpus, both East and West, do indeed witness in this way to forms of speech about the Trinity that escape TJ's core dialectical Scholastic trajectory of analogical (good) versus univocal or equivocal (bad)?[24] And indeed—to complicate matters further—some of the texts that belong in this "mystical"/Trinitarian category are written by

[24] We may perhaps include in this "cloud of witnesses" at least the following, in all their diversity of expression and either assumed (or questioned) "orthodoxy": in the West, the Victorines (Hugh and Richard of St Victor, Thomas Gallus), Bonaventure, Isaac of Stella, the Rhineland and Flemish mystics (Marguerite Porete, Eckhart, Tauler, van Ruysbroeck), the English mystics (*The Cloud*, Julian of Norwich), the reforming Carmelites (Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross); in the East, John of Scythopolis, Maximus Confessor, John of Damascus, Gregory Palamas. This list is far from exhaustive: see Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang, eds., *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopgatie* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), for a more extensive account of Dionysius's rich reception in East and West. One should also add that there is arguably a pre-Dionysian tradition of substantive reflections on the Trinity arising from the context of prayer, contemplation, and scriptural meditation which stand alongside more formal accounts of doctrinal exposition of the Trinity by the same authors: e.g., Origen's *De oratione*, *Commentary on John* and *Homilies and Commentary on the Song of Songs*; and (as already mentioned) Gregory of Nyssa's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.

authors who, when employing other genres of writing, are quite capable of expounding the doctrine of the Trinity in ways that TJ finds easier to fit into his own preferred genealogy.[25] But that fact, in itself, should give us pause: for is it not incumbent on a contemporary exegete to consider the full range of any particular author's reflections on the topic at stake (in this case, the Trinity), and indeed the genre of it, and not simply on his or her more "Scholastic" expositions? *Is* the "mystic" approach, then, finally dispensable (not to say, at times, "delusive"), or can it not be the necessary pinnacle of some important revelatory insights?

This is of course an issue with which the Church has long struggled, and it comes with inevitable ecclesiastical and political baggage. But in the contemporary theological scene, especially, as we see the recent fashion for "social Trinitarianism" widely riposted, and East/West ecumenical advances on the *filioque* seemingly stalled, and new forms of mandatory post-Kantian nescience about the inner-Trinitarian life reasserted with some vigor, is there not every reason to reassess the full range of historic genres of Trinitarian insight available to us before casting a vote about the way forward? It has been the burden of this short paper to suggest that, even on TJ's own best principles, and in the face of his remarkable creation of a new and contemporary "Thomist" perspective on the Trinity, "Dionysian" traditions of Trinitarianism, in particular, should not be ignored, nor should they merely be subsumed into the "Thomistic." Indeed, as TJ himself avers at several points in the book, other stories than his about Trinitarianism have been, and should still be, told afresh.[26] In the spirit of that proposed future Trinitarian "ecumenism," I have in this short response to a remarkable book attempted to reopen up a particular space

[25] I think particularly here of Bonaventure, who, in his *Itinerarium*, draws freely on Dionysian themes and "metaphors," in contrast with his more formal accounts of the Trinity (critiqued by TJ) in his commentary on the *Sentences*. The same point might perhaps also be raised in the modern period in relation to the Trinitarian work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who is also profoundly influenced by the Dionysian tradition, via Maximus Confessor.

[26] See 7, 671-72.

where East and West have met "ecstatically" in the past, and indeed continue to engage in ways that arguably transcend the bogged-down intra-ecclesiastical problems of the *filioque*: that is, in that arena of claimed "mystical" encounter in which the life of the Trinity comes to look different, not because it is released either from credal and conciliar norms, or from philosophical and theological "wisdom" in explicating their force, but because in one important sense it is freed from being in any way *constraining* of the life that flows from the Trinity itself. As TJ himself puts it, the "mystic" holds the Church accountable to its own Trinitarian truth.

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REFLECTIONS ON THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *THE TRINITY*

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THIS MASSIVE BOOK—nearly seven hundred pages of text—is essentially an exposition and analysis of the doctrine of the Trinity to be found in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is prefaced by nearly one hundred fifty pages of historical introduction, conceived in terms of the development of Trinitarian doctrine up to Dionysius the Areopagite, with a final hop to the Fourth Lateran Council, before embarking on Aquinas himself. Aquinas's Trinitarian doctrine is discussed in two parts—each a little short of two hundred pages—the first on the mystery of the divine nature, an exposition of his doctrine of the one God (*de Deo uno*: *STh* I, qq. 1-26, though White concentrates on qq. 1-14), the other on the "immanent communion of the Persons," on the doctrine of the threefold (or Trinitarian) God (*de Deo trino*: *STh* I, qq. 27-43) The book concludes with another long section (nearly one hundred fifty pages), reflecting on challenges to a traditional Trinitarianism such as Aquinas's in twentieth-century theology—primarily those of Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Sergii Bulgakov, with discussion as well of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg—in which White sets out to defend the principles of classical, and especially Thomist, Trinitarianism against modern misgivings. This is, in fact, one of the best parts of the book, despite the demands of concision: White seeks to show in his robust defence of Aquinas—with palpable success—how the Angelic Doctor's account provides an adequate response to the problems faced by modern thinkers, without calling into question

fundamental aspects of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity (e.g., the unity of the divine essence, or a coherent notion of what distinguishes the persons from each other).

There is, however, a more general question that I want to pursue in this essay, which tracks a worry that I had from the first pages of White's book, or indeed, from the subtitle of the book: "On the Nature and Mystery of the One God." Although the term "mystery" occurs frequently in the book, White gives little or no attention to clarifying what he means by the term. The word frequently occurs as part of a hendiadys, for example in the subtitle, and the trouble with hendiadys as a figure of speech is how the two components relate: sometimes they seem quite distinct—as in "nature and mystery"—and one wants to know how they complement each other (in this case, what does mystery add to nature, and vice versa?); but sometimes the words are either synonyms, or one has a very undefined meaning, in which case nothing is really added by the hendiadys, except possibly a gesture to a kind of aura, enhancing, but not adding anything very clear. There is another, seemingly related hendiadys, not infrequently encountered in White's book: "apophatic and mystical." "Seemingly" related, for "mystical," though from the same root as "mystery," is not exactly an adjective derived from the noun—that would be "mysterious," which has rather different connotations.

On the first page of the introduction White discusses Aquinas's doctrine of the three forms of wisdom, which pertain to philosophy, theology, and the mystical life of union with God. Each is unique and has its own integrity; they are also hierarchical, compatible with one another, and inform or inspire one another. Philosophy explores what can be discovered by reason. Theology, as a study of revelation, goes beyond this, for God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as a mystery of three persons, and theology seeks to understand this. A third form of wisdom "pertains to the mystical grace of wisdom," defined as "a special gift of the Holy Spirit," through which we "come to know the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in an intimate way, in the darkness of faith, by a deep union of love" (2). It seems clear that "mystery" is not confined to the mystical life, for

White is explicit in speaking of the "mystery of the Trinity" as explored by theological wisdom. Elsewhere he makes clear that even philosophical wisdom enters into the heart of "mystery": arguments for God's existence, which consider the transcendental origins of the world, lead one to "a mystery at the periphery of ordinary reality—or in the depths of this reality—that calls out to our reason and reveals to us that reason itself terminates in mystery" (210). In the passage we began with, White goes on to speak of revelation offering to the philosopher "*new information*" about God, and moreover asks if the mystery of God is intrinsically intelligible—which seems a rhetorical question, for White's answer is that it certainly is. Indeed, somewhat later on in the book, White speaks of the "rational character of Christian mystery," saying that the "mysteries of faith . . . are genuine realities of the highest explanatory value, but precisely because our knowledge of them depends upon the gift of grace, we acquire access to them uniquely on account of the noetic act we call supernatural faith" (347). This seems to mean that revelation provides further premisses (not available to reason alone), from which human reason can deduce further knowledge about God, how he is constituted (as three persons in one divine nature, and the nature of their relationships—the *filioque*, for example, is something that can be deduced from these revealed premisses), and his relationship to the world. It is, then, not at all clear to me what the term "mystery" is intended to convey, at least in the cases of philosophical and theological wisdom. Another place where the question of the status of revealed truth is raised occurs when discussing analogies in relation to the derivation of the persons within the Godhead: "knowledge of God's internal mystery as Trinity is accessible to us only in virtue of divine revelation" (411); nevertheless "revelation is intrinsically intelligible" (411-12).

Nevertheless, the notion of mystery seems intrinsic to White's exposition of Trinitarian theology. As well as occurring in a hendiadys, it frequently occurs in the form of "mystery of X." We have (this is not exhaustive): "mystery of divine nature," paralleled with, or revealed in, the "threefold personal mystery" (217), or identified with the "mystery of divine simplicity" (243),

or beginning with divine simplicity (410). Further examples include mention of the "mystery of the divine nature, which is immaterial" (430), the "mystery of Trinitarian persons" (451), perichoresis as related to the "mystery of God's inner communion of persons" (514), and the way "the mystery of creation is intimately linked to the mystery of divinization or sanctification by grace" (535). In the discussion of the Incarnation, the term "mystery" occurs several times. "The Lord's being among us as a human being instantiates a new and perpetual presence of God in history, in holiness and mysterious hiddenness" (630); the "mystery of spiritual agony" of the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane (634); the "mystery of the crucifixion" (635, 643); the way "the unchanging God of love manifests his eternal mystery of interpersonal communion even here, at Golgotha, as a mystery of re-creative love" (648); the "mystery of the cadaver of the Word" on Holy Saturday, and related to that White's profound reflection that "Holy Saturday is not primarily a 'day' in human time . . . [but] as a Trinitarian event, continues to unfold *in its effects*, even after the resurrection and exaltation of Christ" (652). In these latter examples, we seem to sense the term "mystery" gravitating towards its use in the "mysteries of the Rosary."

All this leaves me none the wiser about what is meant by "mystery"; it seems entirely accessible to reason, which can on its own border on the realm of mystery and needs no more than premisses provided by revelation to enter into the realm of theological mystery. From my own perspective, as a scholar of the Greek Christian East, and as an Orthodox priest, something seems to be missing here. In the latter half of the last century, theologians were sometimes drawn to Gabriel Marcel's distinction between "mystery" and "problem": a problem is a challenge to reason—once solved, the problem vanishes; a "mystery" cannot be "solved," it demands my engagement with it, a seemingly inexhaustible engagement. White's notion of "mystery" seems rather to be an exalted problem, engaging reason. What is meant by "mystery" was explored in Louis Bouyer's reflections on the meaning of μυστήριον ("mystery"),

and the related adjective, μυστικός ("mystical").[1] Although this terminology finds its origin in the ancient Greek mysteries, Christian usage is governed by the apostle Paul's reference to the "mystery of Christ" (e.g., Col 4:3), a mystery now revealed in the life of Christ, his death and resurrection. This is the hidden, or inner, meaning of the Scriptures, for which the term *mystikos* came to be used. Soon another meaning emerged, referring to the inner reality of the Christian sacraments (in the East "the mysteries," also to the Eucharist specifically). The word also came to refer to the inner meaning of Christian discipleship: the "life hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). Bouyer argued that these meanings are interrelated, the scriptural meaning being fundamental, the sacramental based on it, and the personal sense dependent on both. Furthermore, this is not a tidbit of ancient teaching, but characteristic of much modern Orthodox theology. White makes little reference to Orthodox theology; he discusses Bulgakov, and mentions in connection with the *filioque* Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Stăniloae; there is also an acerbic footnote on Zizioulas (508 n. 6), with which I largely concur.

Lossky is, however, important for the notion of mystery and the nature of the mystical, which is central to the only book he published in his lifetime, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.[2] Although Bouyer had yet to write about the mystical—even his preliminary article—his ideas seem foreshadowed in Lossky's book. Lossky introduces his notion of the mystical by speaking of "personal experience of the divine mysteries,"[3] the term "mysteries" bearing at least two connotations: both the sacraments of the Church and mysterious truths about the Godhead. That is no chance homonymy: the two meanings are closely related for Lossky, and for the Orthodox Church, because

[1] See Louis Bouyer, "'Mystique': Essai sur l'histoire d'un mot," *Supplément de la Vie spirituelle* 9 (1949): 3-23; English trans.: "'Mysticism': An Essay on the History of a Word," in *Mystery and Mysticism* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1956), 119-37; expanded into a book: *Mysterion: Du mystère à la mystique* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1986).

[2] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957; French original: 1944). In my quotations I have changed "mysticism" to "the mystical," as better representing the meaning of the French *la mystique*.

[3] Ibid., 8.

the mysterious truths about God are experienced and celebrated in the divine mysteries, or sacraments, of the Church. Experience of divine mysteries is not necessarily strange or unusual, but involves "a profound change, an inner transformation of the spirit."[4] Lossky sees this experience as lying at the heart of the dogmas of the Church:

> The main preoccupation, the issue at stake, in the questions which successively arise respecting the Holy Spirit, grace and the Church herself . . . is always the possibility, the manner, or the means of our union with God. All the history of Christian dogma unfolds itself about this mystical centre, guarded by different weapons against its many and diverse assailants in the course of successive ages.[5]

Furthermore, Lossky asserts:

> In the Church and through the sacraments our nature enters into union with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Son, the Head of the mystical body. Our humanity becomes consubstantial with the deified humanity, united with the Person of Christ.[6]

The mysteries, in both senses of the term, are concerned with an experienced union with God in Christ, mediated by the sacraments, or mysteries, and felt in the heart. Note, however, that this experienced union is founded on "our humanity becom[ing] consubstantial with the deified humanity . . . of Christ": it is not experience that gives a conviction of reality, but experience of a—dogmatically defined—union, in this case expressed by the assertion found in the Chalcedonian definition that Christ is ὁμοούσιος ἡμῖν, consubstantial with us, just as he is ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρί, consubstantial with the Father. It is this that makes what Lossky says about union with God sound so different from what is generally associated with mysticism in the West: it is not detached from dogma, but founded on the dogmatic truths of the Christian tradition; it is not indifferent to Church organization, hierarchy, and sacraments, but rooted in the structured life of the

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 10.
[6] Ibid., 181.

Church; it is not individualistic, but grows out of the experience of the Eucharistic community.

Central to Lossky's understanding of the mystical is the apophatic, the place of negation or denial in Christian theology. White speaks in his book of the "apophatic," but in quite a different way from Lossky. White follows a widespread misinterpretation of Dionysius the Areopagite by speaking of three ways, *triplex via*: the way of affirmation (or causality), the way of denial of negation, and the way of eminence (*via causalitatis, via negationis, via eminentiae*); three ways easily assimilated to another, much more securely ancient, *triplex via*: purification, illumination, and union. White's (and Aquinas's) *triplex via* is based on the Latin version of Dionysius's *Divine Names*, book 7, chapter 3, which speaks of ascent to God *per causalitatem, per remotionem, per eminentiam*—mangling the Greek, which speaks of our ascent to God "in abstraction and transcendence of all and in the cause of all" (just two ways, which is the burden of the whole of *Divine Names* 7.3). This "three ways" tradition suggests that the way of affirmation (of the cause of the effects) is qualified by abstraction (elsewhere called apophasis, or negation), and finally yields a resolution of "eminence" or transcendence, that is, an affirmation purified by denial. Lossky insists that kataphatic and apophatic theologies are not to be understood as equal and opposite (as he argues they are understood in the West), as if affirmative theology and negative theology are to be held in balance—or, to change the metaphor, constitute a kind of tacking, as in sailing, to keep one's thought about God on track. Rather, apophatic theology is more fundamental: it does not so much correct affirmative theology as actually undergird it, for the deepest truth is that God is ineffable, beyond name and concept. Lossky comments:

> Indeed, not only does he [the theologian, the one who seeks God] go forth from his own self . . . but he belongs wholly to the Unknowable, being deified in this union with the uncreated. Here union means deification. At the same time, while intimately united with God he knows Him only as Unknowable, in other

words as infinitely set apart by His nature, remaining even in union, inaccessible in that which He is in His essential being.[7]

Lossky clearly understands the apophatic in a rather different way from White, who seems to see the apophatic as qualifying a kataphatic mode in much the way Lossky rejects; note his recurrent use of the expression "moderately apophatic" (653, 671, 688, etc.). Furthermore, Lossky's understanding of the apophatic has, too, a distinctly existential quality, as is evident from the following passage:

> We have had again and again, in the course of our study of the mystical theology of the Eastern Church, to refer to the apophatic attitude which is characteristic of its religious thought. As we have seen, the negations which draw attention to the divine incomprehensibility are not prohibitions upon knowledge: apophaticism, so far from being a limitation, enables us to transcend all concepts, every sphere of philosophical speculation. It is a tendency towards an ever-greater plenitude, in which knowledge is transformed into ignorance, the theology of concepts into contemplation, dogmas into experience of ineffable mysteries. It is, moreover, an existential theology involving man's entire being, which sets him upon the way of union, which obliges him to be changed, to transform his nature that he may attain the true *gnosis* which is the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. Now, this "change of heart," this μετάνοια, means repentance. The apophatic way of Eastern theology is the repentance of the human person before the face of the living God.[8]

White's book is a fine example of apodeictic theology, that is, a theology that seeks to demonstrate what is entailed by God's revelation of himself in Christ. Such apodeictic theology can be traced back to the very beginnings of Christian theology. Nevertheless, in the early centuries it was not the only mode of theology. The great theologians of the patristic period—Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, and, in the West, Ambrose and Augustine—were all trained rhetors and brought their rhetorical expertise to their homilies and treatises. Such discourses were intended to instruct and demonstrate, but they were also intended to move the hearts and wills of those who heard them. Later Greek theologians were less concerned to

[7] Ibid., 38.
[8] Ibid., 238-39.

demonstrate—the major controversies were largely in the past, or at least the Orthodox line was not in much doubt—as to celebrate, to bring the minds and hearts of their hearers to awe before the mysteries of the faith. This tendency became more pronounced from the sixth century onward: Dionysius the Areopagite was instrumental in cultivating it. He was followed by St. Maximus the Confessor and St. John Damascene, especially when it came to speaking of the mystery of the Trinity. While the terms and concepts they employed hewed closely to the synodical definitions of the faith, their language came to take on a certain liturgical amplitude. Speculative theology came to seem quite out of place in the presence of these mysteries evoked by the accounts of these later Fathers. Overwhelmed by the mystery and majesty of God they had no inclination to develop from the premisses of revelation a structured system of theological knowledge. So St. John Damascene introduces his account of Trinitarian theology in his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* by asserting in these words, largely apophatic (note the recurrent alpha-privative) and redolent of the language of the Eastern Eucharistic liturgies:

> that God is without beginning, without end, eternal and everlasting [αἰώνιός τε καὶ ἀίδιος], uncreated, unchangeable, unalterable, simple, uncomposed, bodiless, invisible, untouchable, uncircumscribed, infinite, ungraspable (ἀπερίληπτος), incomprehensible, inconceivable, good, just, almighty, creator of all creatures, ruling over all, all-seeing, caring for all, exercising authority, judge: [all this] we both know and confess. And that God is one, or rather one being, and that he is acknowledged and exists in three *hypostases*, Father, that is, and Son and Holy Spirit.[9]

Later on, in a long chapter devoted to the Trinity, the Damascene closes his exordium, also in a markedly apophatic vein, by turning to a crucial moment in the divine economy, the risen Lord's last encounter with his disciples, as recorded by St Matthew:

> [We believe in] one being, one godhead . . . acknowledged in three perfect *hypostases* and venerated with a single veneration, believed in and worshipped by every rational creation, united without confusion and distinguished with no

[9] *Exp. fid.* 2.

separation—which is a paradox. In Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in which we are baptized. For so the Lord commanded the apostles to baptize, saying "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."[10]

All this, for St. John, was but a way of gesturing towards something beyond any human comprehension.

Western Scholasticism, however, culminating in Aquinas, refined a mode of theology at the heart of which was apodeictic proof. This is a worthy tradition, to which White belongs. The exploration of mystery in this essay—evoked, I have suggested, somewhat haltingly in White's *The Trinity*—seeks to draw attention to another, and I would contend more fundamental, mode of theology that puts mystery at the center: the mystery of Christ, responded to and engaged in through prayerful adoration of the Trinity, a mystery lived out in love of others. Standing before the mystery of Christ is to be realized pre-eminently in the Divine Liturgy, as a personal experience, "costing not less than everything," but personal, rather than individual, for we participate in the liturgical worship of the Church, not as individuals on our own, but as sharing in the communion, *koinonia*, of the Holy Spirit, as members of the body of Christ, caught up by the Son, as sons and daughters in the Son, in his eternal act of return to the Father.

[10] *Exp. fid.* 8.

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BEING TRINITARIAN: A RESPONSE TO THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *THE TRINITY*

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THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE, O.P., does not write small books. In his dogmatic treatises (he has also written a commentary on Exodus, as well as a general introduction to Catholicism), he treats large topics—the Trinity in the present case, incarnation and natural theology in earlier monographs—and wants his readers to appreciate their depth and scope. Yet if his books are demanding in terms of the time required to move through them, the journey is eased by a clear structure and a fluid, lapidary style. And while his exercises in Thomistic *ressourcement* entail in every case sharp and serious critique of modern Western theology both Protestant and Catholic (as well as parallel streams in Eastern Orthodoxy), opponents are taken seriously as raising important theological concerns that they address with passion and ingenuity. Father White's contention is simply that careful engagement with the broader Catholic tradition—and with the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas in particular—addresses these concerns in a way that is both apologetically more effective and theologically richer than modern alternatives.

Within this basic framework, *The Trinity* functions on two levels. First, it is a magisterial exposition of the Trinitarian thought of Thomas Aquinas as laid out in the first part of the *Summa theologiae*, including the treatise *de Deo uno*, which is no less integral to Thomas's Trinitarianism than is the subsequent *de Deo trino*. As this last clause suggests, the book is, second, also a critique of those Trinitarian theologies in the past

century that have rejected the need for independent reflection on the one divine nature found not only in Thomas, but also in the great systematic treatises of Protestant Orthodoxy and early modern Catholicism. Focusing especially on Barth, Rahner, Bulgakov, Balthasar, and Moltmann, Fr. White contends that these theologians' near-exclusive focus on the divine economy as the source of knowledge of God leads to a Trinitarianism that is at once impoverished by a failure to draw on the riches of patristic and medieval thought and ultimately incapable of providing precisely what its proponents want: a soteriologically coherent account of the triune God. In line with the perspective evident in his earlier studies of natural theology and the incarnation, Fr. White counters that a proper metaphysics is a crucial component of the exposition of *sacra doctrina*. In the case of Trinitarian doctrine, its absence (or, more accurately, its displacement by the historicized metaphysics of German idealism) ultimately makes it difficult to distinguish the persons of the Godhead from their economic manifestations, resulting in a theological drift toward either modalism or tritheism.

Father White's exposition of Thomas is unfailingly clear and persuasive. Likewise, his critique of the idealist-influenced theologies characteristic of the "Trinitarian renaissance" seem to me both fair and decisive, though not unprecedented. Indeed, given that both Kathryn Tanner and Katherine Sonderegger have developed doctrines of the Trinity in similar opposition to the Hegelian tendencies of much late twentieth-century Trinitarianism (the latter deliberately restoring the *de Deo uno-de Deo trino* sequence in the first two volumes of her *Systematic Theology*), lack of engagement with their work was for me the one noteworthy lacuna in this otherwise encyclopedic text.[1] Still, with respect to the four theses defended in the book's four parts (viz., the need to develop Trinitarian theology in its fully Catholic context, the importance of a Trinitarian theology of

[1] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2001); and idem, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of God*, and vol. 2, *The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Processions and Persons* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2015-20)

the divine nature, the utility of the understanding of "person" as "subsistent relation" in Trinitarian doctrine, and the necessity of a proper distinction between the economy and the immanent life of the Godhead) I have no significant disagreement.[2]

Yet while I have no quarrel with the content of Fr. White's particular dogmatic conclusions, I find his overall approach to the topic problematic. Partly this is simply a matter of style. In his initial review of the development of Trinitarian doctrine in the patristic period, Fr. White identifies two approaches to the doctrine of God among pre-Nicene theologians: the first he calls "monological" because it focused on the transcendent Creator acting through the Son and the Spirit, who "are depicted as truly distinct, eternally pre-existent principles of God's internal identity"; the second he characterizes as "'economic Trinitarianism', in which the Son and the Spirit are distinguished clearly from the Father as personal agents who are God, but who are also described . . . principally in relation to their economic state." [3] He argues that what eventually

[2] The one substantive dogmatic point where I was not persuaded by Fr. White was his Thomistic defense of the *filioque*. I do think he is absolutely right to argue that apart from some account of oppositional relations between the Son and the Holy Spirit (viz., such that one proceeds from the other), the two persons cannot be distinguished in properly Trinitarian terms (i.e., without the implication that they are distinct in substance and thus not *homoousioi* with each other). At the same time, however, I do not think he successfully answers the Orthodox critique that the Catholic position entails the transfer of a personal property (viz., spiration) from the Father to the Son in a way that violates the distinction between incommunicable hypostatic and communicated essential properties in the Godhead. It seems to me that we are confronted here with a genuine Trinitarian aporia: on the one hand, a genuinely monotheistic Trinitarianism demands that the Son and the Spirit be distinguished by a relation of mutual opposition between themselves as well as the Father; on the other, honoring the distinction between person and nature blocks the only apparent conceptual means for defining such a relation (viz., the Father's communication of a notional property—i.e., one not shared by all three divine persons—uniquely to the Son). While the confession that the Spirit procedes *through* the Son provides a possible strategy for dogmatic rapprochement, detailed explication of the force of this preposition seems likely to veer in either a Catholic or Orthodox direction, such that the aporia remains.

[3] Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 114.

distinguished Nicene theologians from various rivals was the ability "to articulate the compatibility and mutual coherence of these models."[4] This seems to me a fair analysis, but it arguably remains the case that any given Trinitarian theology will favor one or the other approach. Precisely because of his concern to emphasize the unity and transcendence of the divine nature over against the tendency of so many modern Trinitarian theologies to render the economy not simply revelatory but actually constitutive of the divine identity, Fr. White's exposition of the Trinity turns in a decidedly "monological" direction in a way that seems to me to overcompensate for the errors he rightly seeks to correct and, indeed, tends to reinscribe those very features of classical Trinitarian doctrine (viz., its tendency to suggest an abstract and undifferentiated monotheism) that stimulated the development of those theologies he seeks to oppose.

Again, this unease arises within the context of broad-ranging agreement with Fr. White's Trinitarianism. Not only do I agree that emphasis on divine transcendence (and thus discussion of the divine nature) is vital to the coherence of Trinitarian doctrine, but I find his Thomistic treatment of these matters in part 2 of the book fully convincing. Moreover, I think his account of the participation of the persons in the economy is theologically compelling in its deft balancing of the principle of the Trinity's undivided external operations with due regard for the distinctness of each divine person's distinct mode of participation in those operations.[5] In this context, he makes astute use of the doctrine of appropriation, as well as of the distinction between processions and missions on the one hand and the two natures of the incarnate Word on the other, to provide a framework within which he is able to take the revelation of the Trinity in the economy with full seriousness without eliding the difference between God's economic activity and immanent life.

[4] Ibid., 115.

[5] The discussion of Jesus' incarnational activity in relation to the Father and the Spirit (ibid., 623-26), is especially well done.

Yet if Fr. White's claims about the economy are unimpeachable, the role the economy plays in his exposition seems underdeveloped in light of his own insistence (following Thomas) that the doctrine of the Trinity is a truth that is and can be known only by revelation—that is, by reference to the economy. From this perspective, it seems odd that explicit discussion of the economy comes only in the final—and much the shortest—of the book's four parts, with the explanation that "once we have thought about the mystery of God's immanent life as Trinity, it makes sense to 'return' to the data of revelation and to think anew about how we encounter the Trinity in creation and salvation history."[6] This seems to me precisely backwards, since it is only by virtue of our encounter with the Trinity in salvation history that the doctrine arises in the first place. But while references to the biblical data are certainly not absent from the book's first five hundred pages (most obviously, chaps. 4-7 provide a summary of the New Testament foundations for Trinitarian thought), it is only once the character of the relations between the persons has been established on other grounds that we come to the (again, very fine) accounts of how the shape of Jesus' ministry in relation to the Father and the Spirit reflect the triune reality of God.

Father White is very explicit about his reasons for this ordering of topics: "we can understand the economic activity of the Trinity only in light of the eternal communion of the persons of the Trinity in their transcendence and unity of

[6] Ibid., 545. Something of the problem here is visible in the following sentence: "the Trinity can be revealed in a particularly profound way in and through the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ" (ibid., 631). Surely "is revealed," not "can be revealed" is the proper formulation here, for where else can the Trinity be revealed except in and through the events of Christ's life, since it is precisely the incarnation of the second person that renders the Trinitarian relationships knowable to human beings? Obviously, Fr. White does not mean to suggest otherwise (and, moreover, gives a much better formulation on the very next page, where he writes that "only because the Son is man can his human actions of willing communicate and manifest the divine will to us"); but the slip does seem to me to reveal something of the problems with rhetorical framing of the book as a whole, in which the economy often comes across as secondary to and merely illustrative of a knowledge of the Trinity acquired elsewhere.

action."[7] At one level, this claim is unimpeachable and has value as a prophylactic against accounts of the Trinity where focus on God's activity in the world eclipses the priority of God's immanent and eternal triunity. Nevertheless, this (in itself quite proper) point about the ontological priority of the divine *ordo essendi* cannot be allowed to displace the basic features of the Christian theological *ordo cognoscendi*, which demands a corresponding insistence that it is only in light of the economic activity of the Trinity that we can speak of the eternal communion of persons in their transcendence and unity of action.

Obviously, in the actual composition of a theological treatise one or the other element must come first, so once it is conceded that reflection on God's one nature provides a vital and necessary context for Trinitarian thought there can be no objection in principle about beginning an exposition of the doctrine with the treatise *de Deo uno* rather than *de Deo trino*. My disagreement with Fr. White is therefore not in his ordering of the treatises.[8] In fact (and as already noted) I am largely in agreement with his account of the one divine nature.[9] My concern has rather to do with his treatment of the divine threeness and, more specifically, the way in which the account of the Trinitarian relations in part 3 is developed largely in abstraction from the kind of attention to the texture of the biblical narrative displayed in part 4. Here again, my concern is less with content than with emphasis, especially with respect to Fr. White's stress on the role of the "psychological analogy" in a proper articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. In much Trinitarian discourse the phrase "psychological analogy" is used

[7] Ibid., 573.

[8] Of course, strictly speaking Fr. White (unlike Thomas) does *not* begin with *de Deo uno*, but rather with an account of the development of Trinitarian doctrine that includes specific attention to the texts of the Old and New Testaments. Nevertheless, this material functions primarily as background that explains the genesis of Trinitarian doctrine rather than contributing directly to the case for its coherence and intelligibility.

[9] While I differ with Fr. White regarding the role that philosophy plays in Christian reflection on the one God, since we agree that the Old Testament depiction of God has "a dense and rich intellectual content" that "invite[s] us to theological reflection" on the divine nature (ibid., 64), differences over the possibility and place of metaphysics as prolegomena to theology would not seem decisive here.

to refer to the series of triads (e.g., lover, beloved, love; mind, knowledge, love; memory, understanding, will) that Augustine floats in the latter half of his *De Trinitate* as images of the intradivine relations in human experience—all of which he ultimately judged to be unsatisfactory.[10] Father White's deployment of the phrase is rather different. Referring specifically to the procession of knowledge and love in the mind, it draws on one of the Augustinian options, but Fr. White plays it for much higher stakes, arguing that the analogy "provides us with a unique resource for right thinking regarding the inner life and mystery of the Trinity"; indeed, because the Trinitarian relations must be immaterial and immanent in God, "there is no adequate alternative analogy."[11] "Without the psychological analogy . . . Trinitarian theology is compromised in its essential nature."[12] Why? Because an adequate Trinitarian doctrine is one that allows us "to know truly, if imperfectly, who God is in himself eternally,"[13] and only this analogy "allows us to explain how God is truly revealed in the economy without being constituted by the economy."[14]

This is a very strong set of claims, none of which seems to me to be compelling. It is one thing to join Augustine in suggesting—with an appropriately light touch—a range of ways in which the relations between the divine persons might be imagined in terms of intramental processes, but quite another to suggest that any one such analogy is indispensable to Trinitarian theology. As one who stands more in what Fr. White describes

[10] "Among all these things that I have said about that supreme trinity. . . . I dare not claim that any of them is worthy of this unimaginable mystery" (Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.6.50 [*The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), 434]).

[11] White, *The Trinity*, 14; cf. 422: "If . . . we are bound to think of God by analogy to immanent activity, we can do so only from a similitude to immaterial procession, since God is not material. . . . However, there are only two immaterial activities in human creatures, those of understanding and love."

[12] Ibid., 424.

[13] Ibid., 407.

[14] Ibid., 452; cf. 439, where it is claimed that the divine processions "can be understood properly only by resemblance to the immaterial life of knowledge and love in human beings."

as the school of "nominal minimalism," I am much charier than Fr. White with respect to claims about knowing the inner life of God. Thus, while there are a number of particular features of his psychological analogy that might give one pause (e.g., the fact that "Love," his analogous term for the Holy Spirit, unlike "Word," is nowhere in Scripture used as a name for a divine person; or that in human understanding assimilation of the truth precedes generation of a mental "word" and thus stands in profound disanalogy with the begetting of the divine Word), the more fundamental problem with the whole approach is that it is subject to the same charge of anthropomorphism that Fr. White levels against "economic" accounts. If the latter easily tend toward tritheism, does not the model of a human subject knowing and loving equally suggest subordinationism, given that within the human mind word and love alike are accidental actions of the human hypostasis rather than themselves distinct hypostases? If Fr. White responds (in line with the decrees of Lateran IV) that his positing of a similarity between the human and divine presupposes a still greater dissimilarity, surely the same appeal is open to Balthasar, Barth, or Rahner. At least in their case the attempt is being made to ground claims about the Trinity's inner life directly in the "data of revelation" rather than in speculation about God's inner life conducted at considerable remove from the biblical narrative.

In setting out his case for the psychological analogy, Fr. White makes the following observation: "any theology that makes use of economic and historical features of the humanity of Jesus to determine the inner content of the distinction of persons is risk-laden" because it risks anthropomorphism and univocal predication.[15] This is without question true, but it has two obvious rejoinders. First, how does one even begin to talk about the Trinity without referring to economic and historical features of Jesus' humanity? Even the most explicit of Jesus' teaching about his relation to the Father and the Spirit are, after all, historical features of his humanity. Second, what way of talking about the Trinity is *not* risk laden? The psychological

[15] Ibid., 531.

analogy is not without risks—indeed, the very same risks White identifies with respect to economic approaches: anthropomorphism and univocal predication! These risks are not limited to various forms of "economic Trinitarianism"; they are risks associated with *any* talk about God.

Notwithstanding his critical engagement with postwar Continental Trinitarianism, Fr. White's aims in *The Trinity* are fundamentally constructive: to find a means of rendering the inner life of God intelligible as a necessary condition of coherent confession of the Trinity. In line with Karen Kilby's now classic article, "Perichoresis and Projection," I find this aim problematic. At the conclusion of her devastating critique of social Trinitarianism (which anticipates in many respects Fr. White's objections to recent Trinitarianism more broadly), Kilby ventures the following: "My own proposal . . . is not that one should move from the social back to, say, a psychological approach—this would simply be to look for a different insight [into God's inner life]—but renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine is to give insight into God."[16] For Kilby and myself (in line with the stance of "nominal minimalism"), the point of Trinitarian doctrine is primarily regulative—"how to deploy the 'vocabulary' of Christianity in an appropriate way."[17] On this low-flying view, "as long as Christians continue to believe in the divinity of Christ and the Spirit, and as long as they continue to believe that God is one, then the doctrine is alive and well."[18] Nothing further is needed. Kilby acknowledges what I take it would be Fr. White's immediate rejoinder: "surely . . . if I am told that God is three persons in one substance, I will inevitably try to make sense of this."[19] Kilby grants the point, but responds that while there is certainly nothing wrong in making the attempt, it is a secondary question—and one that will always carry the risk of anthropomorphism and projection (i.e., univocal predication), whether

[16] Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 956 (2000): 443.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 444.

or not the starting point is economic or monological. It follows that the task of being Trinitarian is not a matter of finding the right analogy for the inner life of God, but of recognizing that all analogies will cause one's Trinitarian theology to list in certain heretical directions, thus calling for a constant exercise of correction in which both monological and economic perspectives have a role to play.

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ON THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *THE TRINITY*

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THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE'S *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* deserves all the praise that it has thus far garnered. It has been referred to as "magisterial," "a theological feast," "in a class of its own," as "encyclopedic." All of these attributions are justified and absolutely appropriate with regard to a text that demonstrates extraordinary philosophical and theological talent. To present a fuller bouquet of plaudits I would like to add "laser-like focus," "analytic precision of the highest order," and "relentless consistency in argument." All of these gifts serve the complex task—I am almost inclined to say evangelical mission—of

(a) presenting a rich account of the Thomistic doctrine of the Trinity that will prove persuasive in our time of confusion (parts 2 and 3);
(b) doing justice to Nicaea and Constantinople and the theological tradition (part 1); and
(c) functioning as a rebuttal of the "economic turn" in Trinitarian theology that has held sway for decades and which has functioned to exclude philosophical considerations of God independent of revelation and refusing to allow them a role in Trinitarian theology (part 4).

I would like to open my remarks by recognizing the achievements of parts 1-3, on the one hand, and also make the claim that while my focus on part 4 will hardly come as a surprise, given my background, still I would like to put on the record my judgment that while on the surface part 4 represents something of an *applicatio* of the *explicatio* of the Thomistic Trinitarian theology and its bases provided in and by the first three parts, that part 4

is far more important than this and in a sense fuels the entire text that is intended to be a theological intervention in theological space much in the same manner as was White's book on Christology. In this respect, this book, as well as his previous colossus, is a species of polemical theology.

As one might expect from a Thomist, White does not share the allergy of modern contemporary theologians with regard to the history of the formulation and interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity—especially in its Western forms—largely because he does not think that philosophy functions as a free radical setting the terms for particular theological outcomes. Rather, philosophy—whether East or West, whether Gregory of Nazianzus or Augustine—functions in an ancillary capacity, albeit at once an extraordinarily useful one in terms of clarification and explication, but also a kind of testing of the limits of the standard use of reason, given its transcendent object that can neither be fulfilled perceptually nor exhausted conceptually. In part 1 White makes sure to indicate the primacy of revelation and the necessity of biblical interpretation, something that will also be to the fore in his account of *sacra doctrina* in Aquinas in part 3. For White, it is nothing short of slanderous to deny that for Aquinas revelation is the *prius*. Of course, the reading of Scripture throughout the theological tradition itself leads to Trinitarian conclusions that are contested, as well as Trinitarian emphases that do not achieve consensus. Yet, for White, the capacity for dialogue of faith and reason is illustrated throughout the broad theological tradition, both East and West. This means that whatever the situation in the late medieval period, whatever the diagnosis of de Regnon at the end of the nineteenth century, and whatever the prohibitions against philosophical reflection on or preliminaries to the doctrine of the Trinity in contemporary forms of Trinitarian thought, Aquinas's *de Deo ut uno* is not out of alignment with the broad tradition. In fact, it represents the high-watermark of the Trinitarian tradition with respect to conceptual precision and reflective mindfulness regarding the responsible use of philosophy when dealing with the God of Jesus Christ. If in one sense White's defense of *de Deo ut uno* is unsurprising, the extensiveness of its elaboration in part 2 is, and definitely distin-

guishes *The Trinity* from Gilles Emery's classic work on Aquinas and the Trinity. While in a text such as *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (2007), Emery's account broadly proceeds according to White's interpretive model of *analogia entis* being inscribed within *analogia fidei*, Emery more nearly performs the model than makes it explicit. And though it turns out that it is the divine attributes of unity, knowledge, and love that will be called on to do the most work in an explicitly Trinitarian context, eternity, simplicity, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, and impassibility all have their own relevance when it comes to filling out the theological picture of God as consisting of one essence and three persons, entirely replete yet reaching out to what is other in creation, redemption, and sanctification of the world.

Part 4 is as much the telos of the entire text as an application meant to redress the contemporary theological situation in which, inside as well as outside Catholic theology, when not sidelined, the classical model of the Trinity, especially as exemplified in its two main representatives, Augustine and Aquinas, has been the object of vituperative criticism on systematic, historical, and pastoral grounds. In this part of the text White operates in the mode of intervention and more specifically in the mode of redress. What compels the intervention can be spoken of as the paradigm shift in contemporary Trinitarian theology that essentially involves (a) the forfeiture of classical Trinitarian grammar that received its most precise and nuanced formulation in Aquinas by uncoupling the missions of the Trinity from the Trinity *in se* and insisting on their absolute prerogatives and/or (b) more particularly a compromise of the classical two-nature Christology that can be regarded either cause or consequent of the Trinitarian shift, and in any event the pivot and rivet of the Trinitarian turn. Thus, if the overall horizon of concern is the reduction of the Trinity to its operations, the narrower focus on the fate of the classical two-nature Christology, especially as that Christology has been further defined as a two-will Christology in the theological tradition and comes to be a central component of Aquinas's own Christology. Undoubtedly, the Christological focus of *The Trinity* recalls—sometimes in detail—both what

White's prior book on Christology positively advances as the Thomistic position as well as his critique of contemporary positions such as those of Barth, Rahner, and, first among equals, von Balthasar.

Now, while the modern or contemporary theologians whom White critically engages in the text, which include Rahner, Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Bulgakov, and von Balthasar, are plausibly guilty of both problems identified above, part 4 concentrates on Rahner and Barth more nearly as examples of the paradigm shift to the economy—though on the basis of his book on Christology they deviate also from the classical Christological model—with Moltmann, Pannenberg, Bulgakov, and von Balthasar guilty of both albeit to very different degrees. It is not unfair to say that White regards Rahner's *Grundaxiom*, to the effect that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity and *vice versa*, as theologically mischievous. It is so, on the one hand, insofar as it is ambiguous: its criticisms regarding the priority afforded the Trinity *in se* in the classical view can with some justification be read either as a prohibition against talking about the essence and persons of the Trinity or more venially as a methodological shift of emphasis towards God for us without necessarily proscribing discussion of the Trinity as the foundation of the missions. In the latter case, at a minimum we are talking about being encouraged to abide with the missions and only after a great deal of deferring proceed to make judgments about the grounds of divine action in the triune God. White does not explicitly mention—as he well might have—Catherine LaCugna's *God for Us: God and the Christian Life*—which reads Rahner as foundational for her own proscription against the immanent Trinity *and* incoherently also Zizioulas's relational ontology. LaCugna (a) mainstreams Rahner's diagnosis that in the Catholic Church the Trinity has ceased to hold the imagination and excite the intelligence and that Catholics are effectively "monotheists" and (b) elaborates on hints in Rahner's footnotes that the cause of this forgetting may not simply have been the neo-Scholastics whom he lamented, but the two magisterial Western Trinitarian thinkers, Augustine and Aquinas. Here she seems to perform something similar to what Heine is getting at when he says that

the gift (poisonous) of German philosophy is its ability to transform French *aperçu* into a system. Theology, it appears, has the same gift.

White does not seem either to accept or reject Rahner's reflections on contemporary conditions of reception—perhaps thinking that such sociological accounts are only marginally theologically pertinent—but he definitely rejects the theological proscription of discussion of the Trinity *in se*, which is more pointedly categorical in LaCugna than in Rahner himself. On methodological grounds White dismisses as jejune such causal projections on Western figures such as Augustine and Aquinas being poisoned sources of an inability to think Trinitarianly. On substantive grounds Rahner/LaCugna fail also by not grasping that philosophical reflections on divine unity common to Augustine and Aquinas are intended to assist Christian thinkers in articulating a notion of the Trinity that holds divine unity and three persons together without compromising the unity or the integrity of the persons who, of course, are constituted by their relations to each other. White's rejection of the proposal that Augustine and Aquinas are ultimately responsible for the "defeat" of the doctrine of the tradition is indicated in his lavish treatment of Aquinas's Trinitarian thought and, arguably, the privileging of Augustine as an influence on Aquinas over other Trinitarian precursors, even if, on White's account, in his treatment of the Trinity Aquinas integrates the best insights of the Trinitarian tradition both East and West. White does not go into detail regarding Rahner's very small but incredibly influential book on the Trinity. He does not discuss, for example, the last two chapters of the four-chapter book where Rahner outlines an economic form of Trinitarianism in equal parts beholden to transcendental philosophy and the givens of revelation. Presumably, the ground for such avoidance is that detailed discussion of Rahner's influential text are not necessary for grasping White's basic point about the shifting of Trinitarian paradigm of which Rahner represents the basic sponsor rather than the final, more sophisticated, and more ramified result. In addition, White can take for granted prior critiques of Rahner from a more Thomistic point of view.

If it is Rahner who most clearly points to the paradigm shift in twentieth-century theology, Barth essentially anticipated it in his discussion of revelation in volume 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, enacted it throughout the subsequent volumes, and set the terms for Trinitarian theologians in the Protestant tradition thereafter and posed a challenge for a Catholic theologian such as von Balthasar who wanted to give the *analogia fidei* its due. A lesser theologian than White might have felt inclined to trace all the problems that come in train consequent to the effective shift of paradigm back to Barth. This he does not do. Though he does suggest that there is more than a fair share of Hegelianism in volume 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, he recurs to Hegel as an independent source of the paradigm shift, focusing in the main on *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. This is just the right move, for three reasons. First, while three out of four of White's major twentieth-century Trinitarians in fact engage Barth, Bulgakov does not. Second, while Moltmann, Pannenberg, and von Balthasar engage Barth, they regard their engagement with Hegel as basically independent, and in the case of Moltmann and Pannenberg at least the engagement with Hegel serves as a corrective of their debts to Barth. Third—and this is a point that White could have made, though he does not in fact do so—the Trinitarian paradigm shift is already stated, enacted, and philosophically justified by Hegel in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and was in fact entertained by a number of Catholic theologians as perhaps a way forward beyond classical Trinitarianism which did not seem to have sufficient cultural purchase, only to be rejected by most Catholic theologians as a species of pantheism or panentheism. Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800-1856), who came to see that the promises of the paradigm shift were entirely illusory, is the crucial figure of enthusiasm and repentance. White's relation to Hegel is more straightforward than that of Staudenmaier and involves no history of fascination. In this respect, one could say that White finds a model more in Staudenmaier than in Josef Kleutgen (1811-83), who from the beginning of his career failed to see the attraction to speculative forms of German thought and advocated in the contemporary

sphere for a spirited promotion of Aquinas in both the systematic and apologetic spheres.

In part 4 the main problem, for White, with regard to Hegel's account of the Trinity is that the Trinity *in se* is constituted by, and not simply expressed in and through, creation, redemption, and sanctification. This fundamentally inverts the standard order of priority between the Trinity and the economy on the ontological level and disqualifies divine aseity and, obviously in train, attributes such as immutability and impassibility. Given the fact that creation and redemption (especially in the aspect of Cross, not resurrection)—are now internal Trinitarian moments, White reasonably thinks that Hegel's figuration of creation and Cross are disclosive of two important consequences of Hegel's Trinitarian shift, though perhaps in equal part causative with respect to it. Of the two specifiers of Hegelian malfeasance creation gets considerably less coverage in *The Trinity* than the theology of the Cross. Nonetheless, the basic objections to Hegel's view of creation are clear and are in line with both nineteenth-century and contemporary Catholic critiques: while Hegel thinks of creation as expressive of the eternal Trinitarian realm, he denies its status as a free creation and upends the classical philosophical principle of asymmetrical dependence, that is, that the created world depends on God, God does not depend on the world. Though Aquinas provides perhaps the most succinct expression of this philosophical principle (*STh* I, q. 13, a. 7), the principle is expressed in various ways throughout the theological tradition. Athanasius and Augustine abide by it. So also does Bonaventure. In addition, whatever the problems of theological voluntarism in Scotus, so also does Scotus. In the nineteenth century Staudenmaier in fact rebuts Hegel's articulation of the new principle of reciprocal dependence in two different registers, the first a kind of internalist, non-Thomistic critique in his great 1844 text on Hegel, *Darstellung und Critique des Hegelschen System* and later in his *Dogmatik* in the 1850s, by which time he had made his way back to Aquinas.

Far more important to White in *The Trinity* is Hegel's Christology. For White, Hegel's dramatic Christology focused in the Cross is superlatively kenotic and equally agonic. Given the

Trinitarian horizon of his Christology, this has retrogressive consequences regarding his understanding of the Trinity, while raising concerns as to the extent to which the classical model of the Trinity and the Christology it subtends have been subverted. White's conjectures to the effect that Hegel's kenoticism may be a version of that of Protestant Scholasticism is likely off base, since it is clear that Hegel's knowledge of Protestant theology is quite fragmentary. Nonetheless, if the point is that Hegel's view of kenosis pertains to essence rather than to form, as is the case with nineteenth-century German kenoticists such as Frank and Thomasius who come after him, then one can only concur. This brings me to White's judgment that Hegel's Christology represents a form of "inverted monophysiticism." This seems to me to be a perspicuous characterization of Hegel's Christology. Simply put, unlike monophysiticism in the early Church, where the human nature of Christ tended to be supplanted by the divine nature, we find in Hegel and, of course, subsequently in modern and contemporary theologies influenced by Hegel, precisely the opposite phenomenon, that is, that the divine nature is compacted into the human nature. Although White does not hoist Hans Küng on this petard, he could not be more guilty. Though Küng is better known as a Catholic theologian who endorses the Enlightenment and its critique of the Church and the theological tradition, one of his first publications is a huge book on Hegel which, if it demonstrates no great scholarly ability, underscores at the very end an essentialist view of kenosis in which the divine is compacted into the human.

White is neither a Hegel scholar, nor he is interested in Hegel per se. What he is interested in is Hegel as a point of origin for modern and contemporary understandings of the Trinity, and derivatively theologies of creation and Christology with which it bears relations of interdependence. He deems this influence in modern and contemporary Trinitarian theology to be entirely noxious not only because as a matter of fact it leads to the subversion of the classical Trinitarian model, but also because it provides a view of the Trinity that is no more adequate to a plausible and defensible doctrine of God, than adequate to a plausible and defensible doctrine of creation and/or Christology.

When it comes to the Hegel of *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, if anything, White is far more benevolent regarding Hegel's Trinitarian crimes and misdemeanors than he deserves. Certainly, a nineteenth-century Catholic critic of Hegel such Staudenmaier and a twentieth-century Orthodox critic such as Iwan Iljin are not only far harsher, but pick out deviances from the Trinitarian tradition not mentioned by White. One of criticisms is that problems come into view already at the level of the Trinity *in se*, and not simply at the level of the relationship between the Trinity *in se* and the economy. For both of these critics the divine Trinity that Hegel endorses is Sabellian, though it might be said, following White's talk of "inverted monophysiticism," that we are talking about an inverted species of Sabellianism, given that the ontology it exhibits is developing rather than static, as is the case in ancient species of Sabellianism: the divine essence moves through lack to fulfillment, potentially to actuality, towards a single personhood (*Persönlichkeit*). In keeping with Hegel's notion of reciprocal dependence between God and the world, this personhood is provisional and is not fully actual here and requires the development of the freedom and knowledge of the human community across time and history. My purpose here is not to dispute what White says about Hegel and the Trinity—I think it is accurate as far as it goes—nor even to supplement him. Rather I make the point because of the palpable irony illustrated by some of those theologians who according to White are caught in the Hegel's line of influence. Just taking the two most obvious examples of Moltmann and Pannenberg, in both cases there is self-conscious correction for Hegel's tendency towards Sabellianism by insisting upon the tripersonal nature of the Godhead. In the case of Moltmann, this correction is an over-correction and laced with anti-Western Trinitarian prejudice, such that his construction of the Trinity moves towards tritheism.

The Trinity is a hugely important book. Obviously, it will find acclaim in Thomist circles. It will also be applauded more among theological circles that have grown tired of the easy dismissal of classical Trinitarian doctrine, and the Western version of the classical doctrine in particular. Though the book exemplifies a high level of civility, one gets the sense that there is little patience

regarding self-inflected Catholic guilt regarding the Western version of classical Trinitarian doctrine. While not a card-carrying Thomist—I more nearly figure myself as Augustinian—I can endorse all of this. Still, this brilliant book invites any number of questions, all of which circulate around the meta-question of whether the book is hampered by its discernible, albeit low-key, triumphalist tone. Let me put on the table five questions:

(1) Are *all* of Rahner's criticisms of the proclivities of *De Deo ut uno* without merit?
(2) Granting the Hegelian paradigm shift in contemporary Trinitarian theology and granting also that it is lexically marked by making the economy constitutive of the Trinity *in se*, is it fair to speak of all forms of Trinitarian theology in dialogue with Hegel and think of the economy as expressive of the divine Trinity as demonstrating a paradigm shift with regard to the Trinity?
(3) Relatedly, with regard to those suspected of "inverted monophysiticism," which presumably convicts them of ignoring divine immutability and impassibility at the level of the Trinity *in se*, is it sufficient for conviction that their Christology is kenotic, even if kenosis is formal rather than essentialist and goes hand in hand with an embrace of a two-nature and even two-will Christology, as is clearly the case in von Balthasar and perhaps also the case in Pannenberg?
(4) Allowing for the commitment to truth, what is the extent of the rule of charity for forms of Trinitarianism that are not Thomistic, but which evidence a clear commitment to the conciliar tradition?
(5) With due admiration extended to the mastery of the Trinitarian tradition evinced in *The Trinity*, the luminous nature of its presentation of the relation between *de Deo ut uno* and *de Deo trino* in Aquinas, and the obvious merits of much of the critique of modern forms of Trinitarian theology, does the commitment to consistency not get in the way of the commitment to completeness?

I will further specify each in turn.

With regard to (1), I open by reminding that I have sustained much of White's criticism of Rahner's text on the Trinity, particularly as this was developed by LaCugna, who may have done Rahner a disservice by translating his more or less pastoral recommendation that more attention be accorded the economy into a competitive relation between the Trinity *in se* and its economic expression. Still, one wonders why White wants to defend the view that it is logically possible that any of the three persons could have been incarnated over against Rahner's view that it necessarily had to be the Son. Here both White and Rahner

are playing a modal logic game in which there are no winners. Rahner risks aligning himself with Hegel and German Idealism in general, and White with the theological voluntarism which he cannot abide. Here is an example of where White's interest in maintaining that all of the divine attributes are operative when one moves from *de Deo ut uno* to *de Deo trino* takes a step too far in insisting that they will be in play in precisely the same way as they have operated in their original natural theology or metaphysical context and not subject to recalibration within the entirely new context of a God who comes to us in the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

(2) When talking about his suspects regarding the shift in Trinitarian paradigm away from the Trinity *in se* and towards the economy with respect to which Hegel represents the supreme instance (others include process theology and various forms of political theology), White ambiguates between the terms "constitution" and "expression." Of course, as Hegel has laid down in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, but also in the *Phenomenology*, and his discussion of the religious and philosophical syllogisms in the *Encyclopaedia*, the economy cannot be constitutive of the Trinity unless it is first an expression of it. Nonetheless, expression and constitution are not the same. With the possible exception of Moltmann, it is not evident to me that any of White's other suspects, despite their obvious desire to bring the immanent Trinity into closer alignment with the economy, actually suggest the Trinity *in se* depends on the economy to be all that it can be. I single out von Balthasar in particular here, since he is by far the most self-consciously traditional of the group that includes himself, Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Bulgakov.

(3) I have indicated already that I consider White's concept of "inverted monophysiticism" to be enormously useful. Whether it is going to be useful in fact, however, depends upon its deployment which in turn depends on two things: (i) the decision to consider kenosis in the context of Christology, which both illustrates and conditions a theologian's interpretation of the Trinity as concerning the essence of the divine rather than its form; and (ii) there is no express commitment to a two-nature

Christology or even more particularly a two-nature Christology as further specified by a two-will Christology. While, of course, it is possible that despite a commitment to a formal view of kenosis and a commitment to a two-will Christology that a Christology might, nonetheless, be indicted as monophysite, nonetheless, the bar is significantly raised. White does not set the bar this high, and ignores the cases where the form of kenosis invoked is formal and a two-will Christology is in operation. This is plausibly the case in Barth. It is certainly the case in von Balthasar. The rule of charity does not seem to be operating at the absolutely highest level.

(4) Obviously, there is nothing wrong with consistency in theological argumentation. There is simply not enough of it in evidence in the contemporary theological landscape and White is anxious to remind us of Aquinas's gifts in this respect as well as to exhibit this virtue in his own recommendation of Aquinas's Trinitarian thought. I have already pointed to one case in which consistency (as well as fidelity to Aquinas) leads White astray, but in part 4 there are any number of occasions on which White comes near to suggesting that the purpose of revelation is less God's miraculous and unstinting love than illustrating the relations between the divine persons in the economy. This is a step too far. Surely, this is not the purpose of revelation, even if God coming towards us will disclose these relations. In addition, I wonder whether there is a lack of theological finesse illustrated in the defense of the Augustinian-Thomistic view of the appropriations which has unfairly been vilified in contemporary Trinitarian theology, and where the contempt has in some measure taken up residence in contemporary Catholic Trinitarian theology. The doctrine of appropriations serves the necessary theological function of ensuring that any act of the divine Trinity involves all three persons even if it is concentrated in one. Still, while necessary, is the Western position fully sufficient to the actual missions as they are disclosed in Scripture? Is there no further thinking to be done? Is the doctrine of appropriations more a heuristic than a positive theological doctrine?

(5) Finally, but in line with (4), I would like to raise the question of the relation between consistency in theological

discourse and the aim at a form of theological completeness that would be adequate to the reality (here the Christian God) that inspires Christian theological discourse. Now, presumably not simply in fact, but in principle, completeness eludes us. This is something von Balthasar says, but in this he has Augustine as well as Aquinas—indeed, the entire theological tradition, both East and West—on his side. As a one-time philosopher who more than dabbled in formal logic, I am reminded of Gödel's theorem about the impossibility in mathematical logic of reconciling consistency and completeness in a formal system: if consistent, then not complete; if complete, then not consistent. Since I am not going to tease out the fine points of analogy I am putting into play, I will simply confess that Gödel's theorem is functioning as a trope. Yet to remind as well as provoke: does Aquinas in his extraordinary consistency not insist on epistemic humility when it comes to our knowledge of God? And are not von Balthasar's gestures at completeness that sin against consistency necessary also in a Church in which the aim cannot simply be to replace error by truth, but to convert the heart, affections, and imagination?

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ON WISDOM, MYSTERY, AND THE TRINITY: A REPLY

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I WOULD LIKE to thank the editors of *The Thomist* for the privilege of the exchange they have initiated here on my recent book on the Trinity, and I would like to thank especially the various contributors who have provided a wide range of insightful and erudite remarks. Each of these scholars possesses in his or her own way a degree of learning and an historical expertise that I do not, so that the invitation to respond to them all constructively in a succinct format is inevitably daunting. I will limit myself here, then, to three themes: Wisdom and Mystery; Genealogy and Thomism; and Knowing and Experiencing the Trinity in History. In this way, I seek to respond in some substantive way to the concerns of each of the above authors, in regard to both their general themes and some of their specific inquiries. I am grateful to them for their theological magnanimity and studiousness, and hope to imitate, albeit imperfectly, each of them in this regard.

I. ON WISDOM AND MYSTERY

Defined in a very general way, a mystery is something that awakens our intellectual desire for greater understanding, explanation, and contemplation—not only because it is imperfectly understood by us, but also because it is superintelligible, that is to say, it transcends our limited capacity for understanding as something intrinsically profound in intelligibility, and even inexhaustibly so. The signs in us of the perception of mystery are intellectual wonder and loving admiration, in the

sense that when we come to know better something that is intrinsically mysterious we also grow in admiration and wonder. We can speak in this sense of the "mystery of life" to indicate that even while we come to understand the intelligibility, beauty, and goodness of human existence, we also wonder and admire many elements of it that exceed our comprehension.

This all being said, the New Testament employs the term "mystery" in a very distinct sense. Saint Paul speaks of this mystery in Colossians 1:25-28, and correlates it to the notion of wisdom:

> I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.

This text suggests several interconnected senses of mystery: (1) God in himself: the eternal Father who is revealed in his Son and in his Spirit; (2) the incarnation of the Son and the filial adoption in grace that is communicated by God to the saints; (3) the glory of beatitude that results from this filial adoption, for which we hope in this life.

Speaking in more formal theological language, then, we can speak of the mystery of God that is unveiled to us in the incarnation of the Word made flesh, and that is communicated to us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Of course, this process occurs principally through the Church, her liturgy, and her sacraments. It is also something that has the power to possess our entire life in both its contemplative and active dimensions, as a journey into God.

It is significant that Paul purposefully aligns this sense of the encounter with the mystery of God (the inner life of the Father, his Son, and the Holy Spirit) with the quest for wisdom. He indicates here simultaneously the fulfillment of both the ancient Hebraic-biblical concept of wisdom (creation as an emanation from the uncreated wisdom of God), and the wisdom of

Hellenistic philosophy (the rational and contemplative search for ultimate explanation), while claiming that what both initiate and aspire to imperfectly is only found perfectly and gratuitously in the revelation of the Father, made known to us in the Son made man, Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit.

Both patristic and Scholastic authors of East and West made generous use of this Pauline coordination of the twin notions of mystery and wisdom.[1] The search for wisdom terminates in the encounter with the mystery of God, and God alone can fulfill by grace the interminable human desire for contemplation and for perfect understanding of what is ultimate in the order of being. Far from being a divisive idea, this notion, found in Aquinas's thought, provides a sound basis for a historically inclusive and broad-minded ecumenism of East and West.

That being said, there are notions specific to the Thomistic tradition for thinking about wisdom in distinct ways, that is, as (1) philosophical, (2) theological-doctrinal, and (3) mystical. The three are irreducibly distinct but also inseparable within a unified Christian life. This distinction of forms of wisdom is not arbitrary, for reasons that I take to be indisputable. Evidently, we wish to affirm that there is an incomprehensible mystery at the ground of all being that we rightly name the Holy Trinity, and that our genuine knowledge of this mystery is imperfect but nevertheless real. Furthermore, let us grant that this knowledge is dynamically unitive, that is to say, related to ongoing growth in the love of God, and a contemplative desire for the vision of God, as indeed it should be. The affirmation of a genuine philosophical wisdom regarding God is implied necessarily by this idea, since what we receive in faith (the direct encounter with

[1] To take one prominent example, consider Gregory of Nyssa in *Against Eunomius* 3.2, where he seeks to coordinate an analysis of God's pre-existent wisdom with the mystery of the incarnation as a manifestation of divine wisdom. Similar examples abound, many of which are at least remotely similar to ideas one finds in Aquinas. See also *Against Eunomius* 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 2.11, which clearly denote the central mystery as that of the Holy Trinity, but see it as something manifest in the "mysteries" of the incarnation, the Cross, and the communication of grace to human persons (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, trans. H. C. Ogle and H. A. Wilson; ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace [Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893]).

the wisdom of God in Christ, and the mystery of the Trinity) cannot be sheerly external or unnaturally violent with regard to our native desire to know the truth about being. Just because we are capable of grace, so too we must be capable of asking the question of what is ultimately underived in reality. The mystery of the Trinity can only be revealed to a personal created being that is capable of understanding even philosophically that life is wonderous, or "mysterious," and that the "mystery" of being (its beauty and goodness) can be received in contemplation, and not merely comprehended or dominated by human cognition. The human quest for explanatory wisdom is one that ascends toward what is "above" the human intellect, as explanatory of all else yet incomprehensible in itself, and this is the sign also (for theologians) that we are able to receive from God, without violence to our nature, something we could not procure by our own powers or understand merely on our own terms: the epiphany of the inner life of God. Consequently, there exists something like an innate aspiration to philosophical wisdom that is proper to our rational nature, no matter how much we may ignore it or thwart it, individually or collectively.

Nevertheless, this cannot be all, since we possess, by divine revelation, true knowledge of what and who God is in himself, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This insight into the mystery of God in himself occurs by grace and within faith but it truly does attain in faith to the *res* or inner reality of God in himself (cf. *STh* II-II, q. 1, a. 1). Even if we see through a glass darkly, we do see, and this insight of faith receives its focus from Scripture, read within sacred tradition, including in conciliar definitions or dogmatic enunciations. These doctrines matter precisely because they allow us to focus our gaze, through Scripture and the liturgy, above the horizon of merely natural knowledge, so as to gaze into the mystery of God in himself, as he has revealed himself to us, in the prophecies of Israel, and in the apostolic teaching, concerning the human life, death, and resurrection of God incarnate. Theology, then, has an inward contour and "scientific" integrity as a body of knowledge regarding the mystery of God as best we can come to know it in this life, over time. This "science" is sapiential because it seeks to pass through

arguments and explanations into contemplation of the mystery of God in himself, by way of greater understanding, always in the service of love and unitive contact with the Holy Trinity.

As this last comment intimates, theology when practiced well in the Church must be open to mysticism, that is to say, to a greater experiential and nonexperiential union with God that anticipates the higher mode of knowledge of God that will come to fruition after this life. In our current embodied state as rational animals, we only come to know God as sensate, cultural-linguistic creatures who think abstractly, who are dependent upon the visible historical mediations of the Church, her language, liturgy, and traditional notions, as well as the sacraments (mysteries) instituted by Christ himself for our sanctification. Nevertheless, through all these we *tend* toward a higher mode of union. This occurs through love, but also in special forms of knowledge, which can be called mystical, since they incline our being and our spiritual powers more deeply into anticipatory eschatological union with the mystery of God even in this life.

On this point, Aquinas appeals in particular to the significance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[2] These seven gifts are given in baptism, as a dimension of grace, along with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Prior to the gifts, the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love already are infused habits that orient us in this life toward a stable and ever-growing contemplative union with God.[3] These theological virtues are intrinsically oriented toward and come to fruition in the beatifying vision of God, in the life to come.[4] What the gifts of the Holy Spirit add is a mode of perfection and intensification of the exercise of the theological virtues. With them, we see better or more deeply, and we are able to love more profoundly, by unitive intensity. Here we can mention only two that pertain especially to contemplation: understanding (*intellectus*) and wisdom (*sapientia*), both of which have mystical

[2] See *STh* I-II, q. 68.

[3] *STh* I-II, q. 62.

[4] See *STh* II-II, q. 1, a. 1; q. 4, a. 1; q. 17, a. 2; q. 23, aa. 1, 6, and 8.

connotations. "Understanding" for Aquinas is likened by similitude, in the supernatural order, to Aristotle's notion of *nous* or insight (from *De anima* 3.6).[5] The Holy Spirit can elevate the gaze of the intellect *through* Scripture and ecclesiastical doctrine (as well as liturgical prayer) into a deeper gaze upon the reality of the mystery of Christ, and of the Trinity. The Spirit alights upon the soul to elevate it into friendship with God in a special way that cannot be maintained by the soul's own power, but that is a sheer gift. This gift can in turn leave an abiding impression upon the soul and perhaps also augment the intensive perfection of the habit of faith over time, in a general way, so that the agency of the gifts translates into a more intensive spiritual savoring or touching of the soul with God by union, over time.[6] Likewise, the movement of the mind that is given by this form of insight is often accompanied by a deeper union of love with the mystery known (in *sapiential* charity). This *sapientia* is something Aquinas compares with Aristotle's notion of connatural love: we become like our friends because our will becomes conformed over time to theirs and theirs to ours, in a shared life. This in turn affects our judgments about how to live wisely in accord with love.[7] So too, in a shared life with God the Father, and by friendship with Christ, the soul becomes conformed more perfectly by love and sound judgment to the eternal Word made flesh, by the inward promptings of the Holy Spirit, who resides within the saints of God's Church (John 14:23-26).

All of this suggests that the mystics (who live by the inward promptings of the Holy Spirit in an especial way) have need of the scriptural, liturgical, and doctrinal teaching of the Church as a precondition for their lives in Christ, and thus they remain "accountable" to the common faith of the Catholic Church and the official dogmatic and theological articulations of the faith.

[5] *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1.

[6] See *STh* II-II, q. 8, aa. 6-8.

[7] *STh* II-II, q. 23, a. 5; q. 45, aa. 1, 2, and 4. In q. 23, a. 5 Aquinas references Aristotle on the notion of conformity to friends in various forms of common life in *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.12. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3 as it pertains, seemingly, to *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2, as well as *STh* I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3.

The membership of the theological guild meanwhile also seeks unitive love with Christ, and can find inspiration from and be challenged by the mystical authors. Philosophers are invited by both to remain vulnerable to yet-more-ultimate explanations of the mystery of life received from divine revelation, while those who are inspired from above by the Holy Spirit remain accountable to the tasks of serious human reasoning, including philosophical reasoning about God.

II. On Catholic Sacred Doctrine, Historical Genealogy, and Thomism

On the view of theology I have just indicated, the theologian should seek to understand and explain the Christian faith in fidelity to Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium, in such a way as to remain open to the use of natural philosophical resources (including knowledge stemming from thorough historical study and the modern sciences), and should do so while remaining open to and oriented toward experiential and interior union with God. Some might conclude (erroneously) that, based upon these Thomistic criteria, only those who are Thomists might be considered genuine Catholic theologians. However, Aquinas affirms something contrary to this in the first *quaestio* of the *Summa theologiae* (*STh* I, q. 1) where he considers *sacra doctrina* as both a science and wisdom of God, the Holy Trinity. There he observes that the first principles of the science of theology are derived from Scripture read by the Church collectively, as enunciated especially in the Nicene creed. (He says something very similar in the *Compendium of Theology*.[8]) Aquinas also notes in the same *quaestio* that theology is sapiential, that is to say, oriented toward contemplative union with God, and that it must respect the integrity of philosophical arguments (especially regarding God and human nature) and may make use of them within theology, as a higher science may integrate the principles and conclusions of a lower

[8] See *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 246.

science into itself.[9] On this reading, anyone engages in genuine theological discourse who seeks to understand in faith the mystery of Christ that is given to us in divine revelation and safeguarded by the Church, her Tradition, and her pronouncements, so long as the theologian in question seeks also to be attentive to the inherent exigencies of natural reason (philosophical, historical, scientific) and the unitive or mystical aspirations of theology. Thus any exercise in "Thomistic" theology must, by Aquinas's own criteria, assume that there are non-Thomistic theologies, and that Thomistic contributions to the theological search for God take place within a wider ecclesiastical estuary of theological traditions and spiritual practices that seek genuine knowledge and love of the Trinity.[10]

This perspective, however, does not lead to relativism in regard to the various schools of theology—at least, it need and should not. There is a native impulse in human nature toward school-thought, and indeed we find schools of religious thought not only in Catholic Christianity but also in other ecclesial Christian traditions (for example, Palamitism, or Reformed Scholasticism) and indeed in non-Christian religious traditions (for example, theistic Vedantism, or Hanafism in Sunni Islam). The specific character of a Catholic school of theology stems from the fact that it seeks a particular way of combining (1) a responsible reception and interpretation of Catholic doctrinal intellectual traditions with (2) a profound and truthful philosophical vision of God, creation, and humanity and (3) an orientation toward the practical spiritual life of union with God. It must do so inevitably while also (4) engaging constructively with other ecclesiastical schools and their great figures, to seek to negotiate what either should be retained or disputed, in regard to their alternative or convergent theological or philosophical assertions.

[9] *STh* I, q. 1, aa. 1, 5, and 6.

[10] I discuss this idea at further length in my recent book *Principles of Catholic Theology*, book 1, *On the Nature of Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

Theological schools of the kind just designated are numerous, but we might mention Augustinianism, Cappadocianism, Coptic Cyrillianism, versions of Byzantine Scholasticism (such as that found in Maximus, Damascene, or Palamas), Bonaventurianism, Thomism, Scotism, Suarezianism, Rahnerianism, or the thought of the *Communio* school characterized by figures like de Lubac, Ratzinger, and von Balthasar. Many other instances could be named.

At this juncture it is helpful to make two important observations. First, virtually everyone who over time promotes a unified vision of Christian theology tends toward participation in a certain school of thought. Certainly those just listed are highly defined and *many if not most* theologians might refuse to avail themselves of explicit alignment with any of them. But just to the extent that a person is committed to normative doctrinal claims and associated ways of interpreting these claims theologically, however apophatically, in alignment with a series of judgments about philosophy, history, and the spiritual life, one is acquiring a kind of universal view of theology, its inward contours and possibilities, as a science and as a wisdom. Even those who advance the position that "most or all classical schools over-interpret on their own terms the doctrines of the faith in ways that are epistemologically unwarranted" fall back inevitably upon more fundamental views that they do think must be maintained, based on the force of tradition, liturgy, personal spiritual intuitions, or other adjacent criteria. Minimalistic schools are not only still schools, but are in fact often aligned to form a kind of socially interminable pressure point upon more maximalist schools to seek uniformity of a more generic kind against what are perceived as the dangers of too highly specific (i.e., epistemologically unwarranted and potentially divisive) forms of theological reasoning. There can be good ecclesiological reasons for this, but the dynamic can also arise for other reasons, including intellectual haziness, spiritual fear of the unknown, or the triumphalist or jingoistic desire to be right.

Advancing *something like* the thought of a school, thus, is in some ways inevitable, but it is also important to note here a

second point. To advance theologically *in a school* as a kind of subtradition within the Christian intellectual tradition does not imply that one advocates for the eradication of a plurality of schools or approaches to theology, nor should one imagine that it could be thus. Clearly there are things that everyone needs to agree upon, and there are also contributions specific theologians make within the tradition that become virtually normative within the common Tradition, such as Cyril's teaching on the hypostatic union or Aquinas's teaching on the Eucharist, coming out of the Catholic tradition. Nevertheless, there is always a de facto pluralism of theological traditions in the Church, and this has to be taken into account by all who seek to find unity and truth in Catholic theological work. At the same time, precisely because there is also a common ground of unity in theological science, it is possible to seek greater unity and consensus by privileging certain doctors or references (like the thought of Augustine, or Aquinas) as potential sources of convergence or as figures who help us make discernments. This process will lead to inevitable disagreements, but that is fine. The Church contains internal theological disagreements and regulates these from above over time by way of either clear magisterial pronouncements or practical magnanimity by permitting her children to seek the truth through a plurality of intellectual traditions and by way of a spiritual competition of arguments in the shared holy pursuit of the undifferentiated truth.

What should we say in this light about historical genealogy? Is it licit for a Thomist, or anyone else for that matter, to read figures such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Dionysius, or for that matter Aristotle, as teachers whose doctrines provide a possibility for or even an anticipation of the theological teachings of Aquinas? And can one justifiably make use in turn of Aquinas's "Thomistic principles" in order to make discernments about the value of ideas found subsequently in historical figures such as Luther, Kant, Hegel, Bulgakov, or Rahner?

Here we may make four brief observations.

First, in any historical genealogy that is to be placed in the service of theology, there is an irreducible role for historical

accuracy. Some historical interpretations contradict express evidence, while others do not, and some interpretations of historical texts are more probable or reasonable than others. Sometimes, however, texts are themselves inherently vague or open to various subsequent contrasting interpretations. Augustine provides a famous instance of this, as does Aristotle—there are many contestable forms of Augustinianism and of Aristotelianism.[11] Likewise, a figure like Augustine makes some affirmations that should be reinterpreted or rejected in light of the subsequent Catholic magisterium. But one can proceed in this way while both maintaining a passion for historical accuracy that allows the diversity and convergence of distinct theological authors and traditions to come to the fore, and seeking a greater unity in the faith among the great figures of the past.

Second, we inevitably select a limited number of sources in any genealogy, which already shows a set of value judgments about what matters most, and in any historical study we tell we provide normative views of what has emerged as the most important theological result of past developments. In short, no genealogy ever has been or ever could be innocent of theologically normative judgments, even if every genealogy also should seek to be historically accurate.

Third, the very idea that some notions are true and that some schools of thought are preferable (in their principles, analysis, conclusions, or spiritual practice) inevitably leads to normative views of genealogy. Everyone has ideas of what really matters most in theological history and these do not arise from

[11] Many of Aquinas's readings of Aristotle are *both* highly contestable *and* textually defensible, and the same can be said of alternative readings of Aristotle found in Averroes, a point of which both Aquinas and his contemporaries were very aware. The texts of Aristotle are often in mere obediential potency to Thomism, historically considered. And this can be said in other ways of the texts of Augustine or Dionysius. Generally speaking, it is not wise to bet against Aquinas in his interpretation of ancient texts, as he can provide surprisingly plausible readings, even by the standards of contemporary historiography. Anecdotally, Anglican tutor in Oxford, a classicist who had no ideological inclinations in this regard, once told me that he was inclined to think that Aquinas had provided some of the clearest and best commentaries on Aristotle ever to exist.

one's historically attention to texts per se, but from one's view of what is true about reality, especially in regard to God, Christ, and divine revelation. However, here a subtle point emerges. Many past figures and their theological texts are in partial or complete obediential potency to a variety of subsequent readings. One can read Aristotle, Augustine, or Dionysius, for example, in the way Aquinas does or in the way Bonaventure does. The point is not *primarily* about which of these two great medieval doctors reads these three past figures more accurately (though this also matters), but about the *two distinct synthetic, doctrinal ways* that each of them appropriated past masters and their insights, restating them in (arguably) yet more profound and novel ways than had existed hitherto. One observes in this process of interpretation and synthesis, as well as original actualization, that there is both fidelity to the past and a newly emergent, developmental vitality of insight. Likewise one can seek to appropriate Aquinas or Bonaventure today as do various theologians, such as Scheeben, Rahner, Ratzinger, or a variety of contemporary Thomists.

What emerges from this historical process is a diversity of "collections" of wisdom traditions in the Church. Again, this should lead not to relativism but to more intensive, if respectful, debate. In fact, one must debate about the truth (historical, theological, philosophical, spiritual, and moral) precisely to help adjudicate and advance the insight and spiritual acumen of the life of the Church from within. The ancients debated, the medievals did so, and the moderns continue to do so. A theology that is primarily either didactic or spiritual in aspiration must also be at times polemical or dialectical in orientation, so as to seek to provide new pathways toward the truth, and new ways of advancing the theological heritage of traditions respectfully and rightly received from the past. In all of this we should also mention the ecumenical context of Catholic theological work. The search for the truth in Catholic theology presupposes a common conversation with all baptized Christians regarding the truth of Christianity, and a common baptismal life of shared discipleship of all those who seek to know and love God the

Holy Trinity, in whom we share a common baptism, and a common ecclesial existence.

III. On Knowing and Experiencing the Trinity in History

This brings me to the final point, which is less methodological and more formally doctrinal. It is concerned with our knowledge and experience of the mystery of the Trinity within the economic sphere of human history. I take it that the eternal processional life of the Holy Trinity is the ontological precondition for the temporal missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Son can only be sent into the world by the Father because he is, first and foremost, the eternally begotten Son and Word of the Father. The Holy Spirit can only be sent into the world by the Father and the Son because he is the eternally spirated Spirit of the Father and the Son (proceeding through and from the Word). The eternal relations of origin precede the missions ontologically, and are not constituted by the latter. The missions, however, do manifest, or render present within history, the very persons in their eternal mutual relations. As Aquinas notes, a mission just is an eternal procession with the addition of an external effect.[12] When the eternal Word becomes flesh, it is the very *Word* who becomes flesh, that is to say, he who is eternally from the Father, as his only-begotten Son.

In addition to this statement about the ontological priority of the processions to the missions, however, I would like to add a statement about the *epistemological* priority of the processions to the missions, for us, in our coming to understand the Trinity. It is undoubtedly true that we only come to know the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit personally, even quasi-experientially (through the illumination of faith, hope, and love), *because* the Father has first sent the Son and the Spirit into the world. The Trinitarian missions are the presupposition of our coming to know the Trinitarian God in himself. Nevertheless, it is only when we gain understanding or insight in faith that Jesus Christ

[12] See *STh* I, q. 43, a. 2, ad 3.

is true God and true man, and that in his person he is uncreated, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, that we can in turn also understand *who* has been sent, and *what* is present among us. That is, we can come to understand that it is the eternal Son and Word of the Father who is present among us, and that he is God and Lord. And it is only really when we first come to understand this that we can in turn understand that the Word is hypostatically distinct from the Father (a distinct divine person) and that he is one in being and nature with the Father, just as it is only when we come to understand that the Holy Spirit is an eternal person distinct from the Father and the Son, who is also Lord and God (worshipped and glorified), that we come in turn to understand that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each personally distinct and that they are each truly the one God.

To begin to think like this is made possible by the primary principles of insight into Scripture's most basic "givens," which are expressed in creedal understanding, and it is from these most basic insights that there begins to emerge Trinitarian reflection, including the clear distinction (originating with Augustine, based on his reading of Scripture) of eternal processions and temporal missions.[13] It is not an accident that the clear theological distinction of eternal processions and temporal missions first arose conceptionally *after* the Council of Nicaea and within the context of anti-Arian polemics by pro-Nicene thinkers. It is the very admission that the Son and the Holy Spirit are each truly God and are truly personally distinct from the Father that gives rise to the eventual intelligibility of the doctrine of the temporal missions, and not the inverse.

Furthermore, we do not come to know the Holy Trinity only by way of the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These mysteries—coupled with the revelation of the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost—*do*

[13] Augustine sets out to develop the distinction in *The Trinity*, books 1-4 (trans. E. Hill, ed. J. E. Rotelle [Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991]). For a thematic consideration of Augustine's notion of divine sending, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181-87, 233-50.

constitute the central and most essential way we come to know the Holy Trinity. However it is important to note that we *also* come to know the Trinity by: (1) the teachings of the Old Testament, which the Fathers rightly noted contains a great deal of proto-Trinitarian revelation that is brought to completion and explicit clarity by the New Testament revelation; (2) the verbal teachings of Jesus regarding the Father, himself, and the Holy Spirit, and not merely his passion and resurrection; (3) the teachings of the apostles, whose inspired words need not and do not always correspond precisely to closely parallel antecedent words or actions of Christ; (4) the sacraments and liturgical traditions of the Church, which are of apostolic origin or derivation; (5) the theological, spiritual, and mystical writings of the saints, who typically assimilate the revelation most intensively; and finally (6) creation itself insofar as it can be "reread" in light of divine revelation to give us some insight into the Trinitarian creator, who has created all things in the intelligibility of his Word and the goodness of his Holy Spirit.

Given what I have just stated, it seems to me correct and necessary to affirm, even today in light of the prevalence of metaphysical skepticism on all sides, that the human person, with the help of God's grace, can reflect in coherent and true ways on the immanent life of God, based on what God has revealed about himself in these various formats. Here I would defend the significance and centrality of the divine names (the attributes rightly ascribed by analogical reasoning to the divine nature, such as simplicity, goodness, eternity, and so on), and the notion of eternal relations of origin in God (from the Cappadocians and Augustine).

One could just stop there, and many do, resulting in a highly apophatic but still distinctly Trinitarian theological form of reflection. One can note that there is a unity of three persons who are distinguished by relations of origin of some pre-existent, eternal kind, which we know only very imperfectly. This minimalistic standpoint is entirely permissible, doctrinally and historically speaking, but if we survey the Catholic doctors of the Church, including most Eastern Fathers, it is not a majority standpoint. It is also anything but a *required*

standpoint, as if one were obliged to reject the explorations of Athanasius, Damascene, Anselm, Bonaventure, or Aquinas in order to remain theologically more insightful than they were. (We may think helpfully here about what Chesterton said regarding the democracy of the dead.)

I am, then, in the camp of those who think it is possible and salutary to go further than those I would characterize as "minimalist," by considering anew the medieval Western exploration of Augustine's psychological analogy (the twin eternal processions of the Son and Spirit as pertaining to a similitude of knowledge and love respectively). Indeed, I argue that this similitude is significant precisely for the reason I have denoted above. It is only if we have some way of understanding the immanent eternal life of God as a truth of revelation (no matter how apophatically, how opaquely) that we can coherently articulate a notion of the God of revelation, the Trinity of persons who are the one God, according to an order or *taxis* of relations, Father, Word, and Spirit. Simply to affirm the reality of eternal relations of origin and to enshrine it in a series of metaphors is permissible but it is also intellectually and mystically anemic. Anselm, Bernard, Bonaventure, Albert, Aquinas, Catherine, Scheeben, Newman, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Ratzinger, and others think that we can see further here, with the use of the psychological analogy, and I follow them in this.

The aim here is definitively not to construct some immanentistic fortress of self-satisfied human logic (which is a laughable aim), but merely to articulate better our revealed and mysterious knowledge of God the Holy Trinity, a knowledge that is realistic. I take it that Aquinas does this with his proper theological analogies of eternally generated *Verbum* and eternally spirated *Amor*. These in turn help us gain insight into the persons themselves, disposing us theologically to the reception of the gifts of understanding and wisdom, which impel us toward yet deeper intuitive and loving union with God. Mysticism without intellectual content is as dangerous a thing as arid speculation without love. It is in fact one very distinct thing to point back to a number of profound theological texts, patristic or modern. It is quite another thing to say

something that is true in a constructive way, one that is consistent with sound natural reasoning and intrinsically open to and at the service of the inner spiritual life of Christian believers.

Let me complete this section with a few more punctuated thoughts that are logically related.

First, given what I have said above, the question Karl Rahner poses of whether it is sheerly impossible for the Father or the Holy Spirit to become incarnate is of some real consequence.[14] What is at stake in this question is more than human fantasies about possible worlds, or a logical game about human ways of conceiving the divine essence and the divine will. Instead, I think the question touches upon the very nature of God, and the mystery of the Trinity itself. Consider in this regard that the very mystery we celebrate and reverence is a mystery of the free expression of God in history and of the gratuitous initiative of God to save us by his own designs of wisdom and love through the sending of his Son in our flesh. It is also a mystery of God in himself, of God who reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three who are one in their transcendent lordship and in all that pertains to the nature of God. But if God the Holy Trinity really is revealed in the incarnation of the Son, as one God in three persons, and if God freely undertakes this initiative gratuitously (by the divine power or in virtue of the power of his creative love), then it follows necessarily that this divine power of love is present equally and identically in all three persons, who are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Indeed, one of the first things we must conclude from the incarnation is that the Father has the loving power to effectuate the incarnation by sending the Son into the world. Thus, even though only the second person has become incarnate, due to divine fittingness, it is also true that the Father and the Spirit possess the same power to effectuate the mystery of the incarnation as does the

[14] See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (London: Continuum, 2001), 28-30; cf. Aquinas, *STh* III, q. 3, aa. 5 and 8. See also the important speculative and historical consideration of this question by Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Son, and indeed they must, precisely because he has become incarnate and because he who has become incarnate is one in being and power with them. However, precisely because this last statement is true, *it necessarily follows that the Father and the Holy Spirit possess the power to incarnate by love.* Indeed, to deny this claim is very close if not equivalent to the denial of the unicity of the three persons, insofar as they all possess one incomprehensible and transcendent nature in common as God. If the Son reveals to us that he is one of the Trinity, crucified (see John 8:28), he can only do so because there is a ground of unity that he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit, present precisely in the human crucifixion of the second person.

Why in the world then would Rahner argue that only the Son has the power or capacity to incarnate and that the Father and the Spirit do not? The answer is I think quite simple. Rahner interprets the notion of "Word" to be attributed to the eternal Son principally (and not secondarily, as the Scholastics did) so as to denote the Son's relation to creatures.[15] "Word" thus signifies principally and primarily the Father communicating himself to what is not God and within that which is not God. This position is evidently very close to that of Hegel and has I think unambiguously Sabellian overtones. The eternal Word is always, already by definition for communication, for incarnation, and for God's self-communication to human nature. Thus the Word as Word from all eternity is always, already "on the verge" of the economy, as the almost necessary moment of God's Trinitarian self-revelation in what is not God. As Rahner also notes, logically, it follows that if God creates, he must incarnate in human nature, and the human being simply is what God creates when he wishes to create in order to perfectly realize his own self-communcation.[16] Humanity appears, then,

[15] See Rahner, *Trinity*, 29-33, contrasted with Aquinas in *STh* I, q. 34, a. 3.

[16] Rahner, *Trinity*, 32-33: "Human nature in general is a possible object of the creative knowledge and power of God, because and insofar as the Logos is by nature the one who is 'utterable' (even into that which is not God); because he is the Father's Word, in which the Father can express himself, and, freely, empty himself into the non-divine; because, when this happens, that precisely is born which we call human nature. . . . Man is possible because the exteriorization of the Logos is possible."

as a moment within the temporal unfolding of the life of God, who eternally expresses himself in his Word by way incarnation. The immanent Trinity just is the economic Trinity, and so on. Of course, Rahner does not posit this divine unfolding in history as something necessary, in the way Hegel does, but he does remove the conditions of possibility for any real intelligibility of the immanent Trinity apart from, transcendent of, or antecedent to this historical life of divine self-expression. The Trinity that transcends the economy of human divinization becomes literally unthinkable, or something very close to it. To me this produces a very unhappy result and a dead end for modern Trintarian theology.

What, then, about the Barthian or Balthasarian counter-alternative? Kenoticism without Hegelianism is certainly possible. Calvin and Luther provide us with nontrivial instances of it in early modernity, and there are Catholic counter-alternatives. Barth clearly aspires to this possibility of a non-Hegelian kenoticism in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, and seeks to find an alternative expression of kenotic Trinitarian Christology, one that does not historicize God, or oblige God to sunder or surrender divine natural properties as a condition for the incarnation.[17] To do so he decides to place the preconditions for kenosis in the eternal life of God himself, so that what happens to Christ in time, in the dereliction and descent into hell on the Cross, is expressive by analogy or similitude of what God always already was and is, in the eternal life of the Father and the Son. I take it that von Balthasar also follows in this path, albeit with greater indebtedness to the implausible Sophia ontology of Bulgakov.[18] God then is timeless and eternal, transcendent of history. Yet there exists something in

[17] See the profound analysis of the problems arising from Hegel in nineteenth-century Lutheran kenoticism in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-75), IV/1:179-210.

[18] See in this regard Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 313-15, 323-38, which follows Bulgakov and goes beyond Barth toward a more radical form of intra-Trinitarian kenosis.

God's eternal processions that anticipates or provides the foundation for Christ's human obedience, suffering, death, and descent into hell.[19] These latter human actions are not identical with the eternal life of the Trinity and do not constitute it, but they do render present a similitude of it in human form. The humanity of God crucified is the living icon, to so speak, of the eternal processional life of God. The inevitable question that arises here, however, is whether Barth and von Balthasar glide inadvertently (despite their clear affirmations and intentions to the contrary) toward a reductively univocal conceptualization of the divine and human natures and the two wills of Christ. For now there is obedience not only in Christ as man, but also in the eternal life of God, and also something like suffering or separation, or kenosis, or self-emptying, or a history of mutual freedom and consent. Are we confronted here with radical new insights, never before evoked so clearly by the Catholic intellectual tradition, or are we dealing with creative modern theological thought experiments, which may entail problematic anthropomorphic depictions of the inner life of God? In the wake of precedent theological tradition it is not only fair to ask the question, but even morally responsible.

[19] See for example the vivid series of statements about intra-Trinitarian kenosis made in *Theo-Drama*, 4:331: they begin from eternally kenotic generation and spiration, as anticipatory of the kenosis of God in the creation of human freedom, in the covenant with Israel, in the incarnation, and in the Cross and resurrection. Von Balthasar writes: "if Jesus can be forsaken by the Father, the conditions for this 'forsaking' must lie within the Trinity, in the absolute distance/distinction between the Hypostasis who surrenders the Godhead and the Hypostasis who receives it. And while the distance/distinction between these two is eternally confirmed and maintained ('kept open') by the Hypostasis who proceeds from them [the Holy Spirit], it is transcended in the Godhead that is the absolute gift they have in common" (ibid., 4:333). This statement provides an emblematic example of the ambiguity that can be found in some of Von Balthasar's writing. It is possible to read such a phrase as a traditional restatement of Trinitarian processional eternity, in which the three persons partake equally and identically of the Godhead, and the various forms of Trinitarian benevolence or kenosis are various expressions of eternal Trinitarian interpersonal communion and divine self-communication. But it is also equally plausible to read the same passage as the positing of an eternal kenotic life in God that redefines each and every traditional notion in light of the separation of the Cross, so that the economic human expression of the Son's suffering is appropriated so as to reconfigure radically all previous theological discourse.

There are pathways toward differentiated consensus that are available. The two natures and the two wills of Christ are not only distinct (as Barth and von Balthasar each affirm). They are also similar and dissimilar, or analogous (which again they both affirm). The question is how one can come to an understanding of the various ways in which the human actions and sufferings of Christ resemble by proper similitude his eternal person and the divine nature. To respond to this query, I maintain the importance of the instruments of the tradition, such as the Dionysian-Thomistic notion of analogical predication, the divine names or attributes of the one divine nature, the use of the notion of eternal relations of origin, and the carefully constructed analogical similitude of the psychological analogy: all of these have an essential role to play in adjudicating how to address this issue. Note that these are not distinctly Thomistic points. They refer to principles common to the classical tradition, both East and West, and I follow Aquinas, who provides only one highly coherent and insightful form of thinking, as a way to maintain and advance understanding of these principles. Meanwhile, I think it is fair to say, as a point of textual accuracy, that while Barth and von Balthasar are immeasurably learned men they basically have little time for the systematic use of the traditional notions just mentioned.[20] I admit that despite my admiration for both of them, I do consider this to be a significant deficiency in their thought. In fact, they both combine what I might characterize as a powerful dose of apophatic insistence on the unknowability of the divine essence with a vivid Christological, human-centered depiction of the epiphany of the inner life of God. This results in a historicization of God that is possibly more profound than that of Rahner, since now the inner life of the eternal Son is only "envisagable" in a cruciform way. I say this even while maintaining, as mentioned above, that for these authors what is revealed in the Cross and

[20] Perhaps I should be convinced otherwise on this point, but what I read in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, *Truth of God*, trans. A. J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 125-70 seems to remove any doubt about his speculative convictions in this regard.

the descent into hell is what is always, already eternally true in God. The paradoxical tensions that emerge from this position are genuinely intriguing, and perhaps even more profound than that of any other school of thought that has hitherto emerged. However, like many others in the theological guild, I still fail to find them persuasive.

All of this being said, my own very limited theological reflection on the Trinitarian revelation of Christ, his incarnation, human action, suffering and death, and resurrection, should be read as a kind of Thomistic homage to Barth and von Balthasar, even if it is genuinely polemical in many respects. This may seem strange to say, or artificial, but it is nevertheless quite true. This homage comes not in the form of an attempt to agree with these figures on foundational principles, as I think they have side-stepped key resources from the classical tradition of Catholic Trinitarian theology. Nevertheless, I am undertaking, in what I hope is a respectful way, to reenvisage in Thomistic terms what I think their theologies rightly aspire to, and to do so in a way that few Thomists before me have sought to do. How is it, after all, that the mysteries of the life of Jesus reveal the most Holy Trinity? How is the Trinity made known to us in the suffering, death, descent into hell, and resurrection of Christ? If one does not follow the path of Barth and von Balthasar past Golgotha, what other paths might be available to encounter that event, even ones from which we might eventually gain a better perspective into the mystery of God crucified? And how can the mysteries of the life of Christ place us, thus, in direct contact with the inner mystery of the Holy Trinity and invoke in us a development of contemplative knowledge and love in the service of union with God?

Beauty and goodness in our world are a manifestation of an uncreated beauty and love, and it is true that only a participation metaphysics of *esse* can fully acknowledge this, as both Aquinas and von Balthasar assert. But this means that there has to be a sense of what God is immanently, as he is in himself, as a precondition or a dimension of our understanding of what derives from God and as a condition for our understanding of God as he is present in the world, in the missions of the

persons-in-procession, manifest in Christ. This new presence of God in his Son, incarnate, crucified, and resurrected, is beautiful and good, and is an invitation to mystical experience "here below" of the inner life of God. It is one that concords with doctrinal truth, and with an aspiration even to know God more perfectly in the beatific vision and in the fullness of filial adoption by grace. My aim in seeking to study the economic mission of the Son incarnate in Trinitarian terms, then, does not stem simplistically from a rejection of the modern Germanic theological tradition. Rather, it accepts Barth's and von Balthasar's new questions and invitations, reconceived in Thomistic terms. In that sense it is an homage to their aspirations, if not to the thought-form of either as such.

Conclusion

Let me finish where I began, with a word of thanks to the interlocutors in this symposium. Their reflections testify to a shared life in service to the common good of the Church, especially in the important domain of academic theology. The Thomistic tradition has its place in this common life, and indeed I believe we can even still speak rightly when we denote Aquinas as a "common doctor" within the Western theological tradition. Even for those who conscientiously choose not to follow him consistently, in the name of a wider universalism of investigation, it can be readily noted that his thought has the power to preserve many key insights that we have received down through the ages, and to explain and advance understanding of core principles of Christian philosophy and of Catholic theology, understood as *sacra doctrina*, that is to say, as both science and wisdom. Modern Thomists provide us with a range of resources to think about how this process of reflection might continue in our own historical epoch, as we encounter new questions or advances from various modern scientific, philosophical, theological, or historical domains. It is helpful in this regard to have people in the Church, and in the theological guild, who maintain a deeper historical and contemporary intellectual commitment to the study and promotion

of Thomism. However, Aquinas can also only function as a common doctor (in the qualified and nuanced way to which I am alluding) if his thought is employed by his students and disciples as a vehicle for conversation and common truth-seeking, not only with those convicted of his insights, but also and perhaps especially with all those who participate in the wider common search for Christian wisdom, both Catholic and non-Catholic. I hope that despite my own limits, this exchange can be one example of such a form of theological conversation in the search for common truths. If we can speak together constructively regarding God, the very mystery of the Holy Trinity, then it would seem that we should be able in turn to speak together regarding everything else, as seen in light of God. This "catholic" or universal aspiration would seem to be a very salutary one for all theologians, united across their distinct traditions, within the *kairos* to come.

BOOK REVIEWS

Eternal Life and Human Happiness in Heaven: Philosophical Problems, Thomistic Solutions. By CHRISTOPHER M. BROWN. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 487. $75.00 (hard). ISBN 978-0-8132-3414-4.

This book's stated task is to demonstrate how St. Thomas Aquinas's teachings can "provide the basis for solutions" to four apparent philosophical problems with Christian teaching on eternal life by "calling into question common contemporary theological or philosophical presuppositions" (1). Employing the tools of analytic philosophy, the book has four "Parts." After the front matter and introduction, part 1 (7-85) offers an account of the aforementioned four problems. Next, there is a detailed and extensive presentation of Thomas's teachings on the life of the blessed in heaven, subdivided into the saints' "essential" reward (part 2, 89-193) and their "accidental" reward (part 3, 197-387). Part 4 (391-448) then shows how Thomas's positions address the specific challenges presented by the four apparent problems, closing with a brief, overall conclusion. There is a selected bibliography (449-60), an index of Scripture references (461-62) and a general index (463-87) including both names and subjects. There is no index of the citations from Thomas's writings, which is unfortunate but understandable, due to the large number of them. A summary of the contents of the four main sections follows.

The treatment in part 1 of four principal kinds of problems with the Catholic Christian teaching on eternal life is not a merely hypothetical collection of such difficulties, since, for each type, Brown presents one or two writers from recent decades who have articulated the problem and have proposed a solution. He summarizes their views and deals with them in earnest. The four problems (with their respective proponents) can be broadly expressed as the difficulty of conceiving of heaven as: (a) both mystical/individual and social/communal (Germain Grisez and Katherin Rogers); (b) at once other-worldly/spiritual and also this-worldly/bodily (Lynne Rudder Baker); (c) both perfect and dynamic (Eric Silverman and Paul Griffiths); and (d) everlastingly nontedious (Bernard Williams and Brian Ribeiro).

In parts 2 and 3, the author covers Thomas's teaching on the final beatitude of the saints. The "essential" reward (part 2) primarily and fundamentally is constituted by the soul's direct vision, by divine assistance, of God himself,

involving a concomitant participation in divine eternity, the proper accidents of delight, joy, love, and right willing, and a perfect cognition of creatures. The "accidental" reward (part 3) includes embodiment, the communion of saints, and the aureoles and fruits (merited rewards for graced, virtuous acts). Brown suggests that holding that animals and plants, as well as artifacts, may exist in a new heavens and (or) new earth along with the blessed, as part of their reward, might be consistent with Thomas's principles (though he is also forthright about Thomas's texts that would not allow for such existence).

In part 4, Brown, making references to his explanations in parts 2 and 3, then explains a "how a Thomist can fruitfully respond" (391) to each of the four problems presented in part 1. The following briefly sketches just some of the conclusions of those explanations (despite the inevitable over-simplification). Regarding the first apparent problem of heaven (reconciling its individual and communal aspects), Brown shows that Thomas's view that the essential beatitude of the souls of the saints consists in the mystical/individual union with God through the beatific vision (which Brown calls the "Augustinian intuition") is fully compatible with their desire for bodily completion in resurrection and for communion with the other saints not yet in heaven. That is because, in Thomas's mature teaching, these latter desires are necessary not for the essence of beatitude but for its well-being (*bene esse*); thus, they are accidental, rather than essential, to the saints' beatitude. Further, the proper accidents of this beatific vision (including "volitional aspects" such as love, joy, and delight), as well as the human operations of knowing, willing, and even sensing (for those resurrected), which come into play in interrelation with others, are all compatible with that *visio Dei*. The second apparent problem—the purported difficulty of recognizing the continuity between a spiritual, eternal, bodily life and the bodily life we now experience—is answered (in part) by Thomas's insistence (a) that human persons are both aeviternal (in that their souls once created never cease existing) and temporal (in their corporeality and in certain intellectual operations), and (b) that their bodily persistence is due to God's grace elevating and maintaining their nature in existence. One answer to the third apparent difficulty—conceiving of heaven as both perfect and dynamic—is that because, for Thomas, God's perfection is not static but perfectly and supereminently dynamic, the saint's beatific vision of that perfection likewise is not something "static," even considered in itself. But even were one for the sake of argument to concede such an operation to be "static," Thomas nevertheless holds that the saints may engage in other operations, including intellectual operations and bodily operations (for the risen), that are compatible with (though distinct from) the beatific vision, operations that are expected as part of the reward of heaven. The fourth and final apparent problem is that heaven would eventually become tedious unless human persons were so radically changed in their nature that it is impossible to conceive of them as the same kinds of creatures they were before such a transformation. Brown shows how Thomas's teaching about receiving sanctifying grace and growth in the spiritual life takes into account the truth that at least some

transformation is needed in this life, namely, by grace, for human persons to be fit for happiness in the next.

As is typical of the analytic method, Brown's expositions of arguments (whether of recent philosophers or of Thomas) are provided in painstakingly enumerated, logically structured sequences of premises, subconclusions, and conclusions, with each sometimes spanning up to a page or more. The arguments are then analyzed, with various parts being addressed on their merits, as needed. Typically, the author does not find fault with the logical structure of an argument but rather explores or calls into question one or more of the premises or the presuppositions behind them. Although the use of the jargon and symbols of logic is limited, the reader should be ready occasionally for an unexplained technical expression (e.g., "*modus tollens*" [38]) or logical operator (e.g., "∼" [9 and 31]). The author often refers back to arguments only by an initialism or to parts of arguments by number, usually requiring the reader to look back at paragraphs on previous pages. While this style can allow for clarity and economy of expression for analyzing intricate logical puzzles, it also makes demands on the reader to be an active participant in tracking the argumentation. While the presentation is necessarily painstaking, Brown's approach is not narrowly stolid or merely mechanical. He can occasionally be penetrating in investigating Thomas's teaching on a concept across various texts (for example, when he speaks about the "subtlety" of the resurrected body [294-97]).

While the book is primarily philosophical in its approach, it also engages with what would ordinarily be considered theological sources. For example, Brown will occasionally cite Catholic magisterial documents—and a few times, the views of venerable figures in the Catholic tradition (e.g., Augustine)—as lending support to Thomas's position. He counts the consistency of Thomas's thought with the Catholic Christian tradition as a point in its favor (446). Nevertheless, Brown makes appeals to such sources not as invocations of religious authorities, but as articulations of classic or standard Catholic teaching and belief.

As already mentioned, the book is, in part, an engagement with contemporary ideas and challenges concerning Catholic Christian teaching on heavenly life. It does not aim at discovering the history or genesis of those ideas and challenges, or at tracing how they may have developed. Similarly, when describing Thomas's teachings, Brown's treatment does not explain their historical antecedents or consider what concrete circumstances might have occasioned developments in them over the course of his career. However, Brown occasionally acknowledges such developments, as, for example, when discussing Thomas's ideas about the saints' participation in eternity (175ff.). Nevertheless, the exposition focuses chiefly on a detailed, organized, formal presentation of the Angelic Doctor's thought. In doing this, Brown refers to textual evidence directly from Thomas's own writings, often citing several instances, sometimes from across the Common Doctor's oeuvre. Overall, the book cites a total of at least thirty-eight of Thomas's works. There is only

sporadic reference to secondary literature as ancillary explanation of Thomas's positions; however, when there is mention of a present-day controversary or area of scholarly attention, Brown duly cites sources for reference. Such citations of secondary literature, it may be remarked, whether in footnotes or the selected bibliography, are all of works written in the English language (with the exception of citations of Thomas's works).

Overall, I offer one caution concerning Brown's treatment of Thomas's thought, which is largely terminological. He states repeatedly that the separated soul is a human person, and uses the term "human person" consistent with that position: "although Saint Thomas makes it clear throughout his career that the human person is not—never is—identical to the human soul, he thinks that a human person S can be—and is during the interim state—composed of S's soul alone" (201). Brown explains that he holds for a "survivalist *development* of Saint Thomas's thought" (202 n. 15; emphasis added), admitting that this is a "controversial" interpretation in a current scholarly discussion on the "ontological status of human persons in the interim state." Those familiar with this survivalist versus corruptionist debate may not be surprised that a purportedly Thomistic philosopher designates the separated soul as a "human person." This is not to say that Brown (or Brown's Thomas, as it were) holds the human person to be "identical to the human soul." However, Brown's version of survivalism leads him to expressions that seem as though he is affirming such to be the case. In particular, he frequently refers to the body as a part of the "accidental reward" of the blessed, according to Thomas. It is true that, for the mature Thomas, the body is not essential to the blessed *soul*'s ultimate reward. Yet Brown also states repeatedly that, for Thomas, the body is not essential to the *human person*'s heavenly reward. While this too may be a defensible expression in accord with the principles of Thomas's thought as Brown develops it, such an expression nevertheless leaves unstated that, for Thomas, the body is essential to the human *person*. This is unstated by Brown, because it seems that his version of survivalism would not grant such a statement. All this does not vitiate his results; it just means that readers must thoroughly account for his development of Thomas's thought, and its terminological consequences, in their interpretation of Brown's work.

In employing the thought of Thomas to respond to the four specific challenges to Catholic belief, Brown succeeds in the task he set for himself, showing how Thomas's thought offers a plausible, thorough, and nuanced account of eternal life, which both anticipates the apparent conundrums raised and provides abundant resources for addressing them. However, although it covers many topics in Thomas's eschatology, the book would not serve as an overview of it, even from a philosophical viewpoint (nor does it claim to do so). For example, the topic of the final judgment (whether general or particular) appears in only a few places. Nevertheless, the book could be a useful text as part of a philosophy (or theology) course on matters of eschatology wherever the Christian tradition is of interest. Professors, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates should be able to profit from it. Those who study any

of the four apparent problems considered, or Thomas's teaching on eternal life, will be well served to consult Brown's logical dissections and analyses. The book may also be a useful resource for anyone attempting a sophisticated and thorough apologetical project on Christian views of the afterlife.

Those already familiar with Thomas's writings, whether on these questions or others, will not be surprised at how often they provide resources for addressing current challenges to Catholic Christian conceptions of the life of the world to come. Brown's analysis and conclusions will not convince every reader to accept Thomas's thought on heaven. Furthermore, not all those who study Thomas will be persuaded by the more adventurous of Brown's developments of Thomas's doctrine. Nevertheless, the author's efforts offer contemporary scholarship a thoughtful exploration and useful application of Thomas's teachings on the life of the blessed.

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Summistae: The Commentary Tradition on Thomas Aquinas' "Summa Theologiae" from the 15th to the 17th Centuries. Volume 58 of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy–Series 1. Edited by LIDIA LANZA and MARCO TOSTE. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021. Pp. vii + 447. €120.00 (hard). ISBN 978-9-4627-0262-2.

This book makes a valuable contribution to a field of study that has not always received the attention from scholars that it merits. The editors have assembled a series of learned essays that treat specific instances in the "Thomist" commentatorial tradition. "Thomist," according to the editors' usage, refers to figures who have commented on the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. Otherwise put, "Thomist" is taken in its material sense. Thirteen chapters are divided into two parts: part 1 is titled "Framing the Commentary Tradition"; part 2 is "Discussions in the Commentary Tradition." The editors have chosen to limit their research and the research of their contributors to the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. This time frame includes a period that once went by the name "Second Thomism," although current scholarship prefers to view the commentatorial tradition on Aquinas as a body of literature that begins after his death and continues to the present moment. The contributors to the volume represent a broad sampling of international scholars whose university positions and other credentials give evidence of their standing in the fields of medieval and renaissance studies.

Since it is difficult to make general observations on a collection of selected essays, each chapter will be mentioned sequentially. The editors themselves admit that "the articles collected in the volume cover only a very small number of questions of the *STh*, but they bear witness to the philosophical and theological contribution of the commentaries to 16th- and 17th- century thought" (76). Overall, the contributors to this volume and its editors have accomplished their purpose with an excellence in research and presentation that makes the purchase of the book indispensable for both students of Aquinas and scholars of the late Middle Ages and the long Renaissance. One indication of the work's scholarly standards may be found in the bibliographical entries that accompany each chapter. For instance, the bibliography for the first chapter, "The Commentary Tradition of the *Summa theologiae*," runs from pages 77 to 93. The remaining chapters exhibit the same comprehensiveness with respect to both the primary sources and the pertinent secondary literature for each chapter's specific topic.

The editors inform their readers early on that not every one of the commentators mentioned in the volume adopted the same outlook with respect to Aquinas and his *Summa theologiae* as did John Capreolus (d. 1444), the fifteenth-century author of the *Defensiones Divi Thomae,* who has earned the epithet "Prince of the Thomists." Indeed, some of the commentators that appear in *Summistae* were not at all concerned with vindicating or defending the views of Aquinas. The question, however, of how much the commentators discussed in this book remain faithful to the *Summa theologiae* and to what extent they do so falls outside the scope of the editors' purpose. To pursue this latter inquiry, so the editors insist, "would be more appropriate in a volume on the history of Thomism" (10). So while the essays in part 2 treat various questions that arise within the Thomist commentatorial tradition, they reveal more about the general tenor of Scholastic theology in the stipulated time frame than they do about theological or philosophical positions that Aquinas does or does not hold in his *Summa theologiae.*

This feature of the work is not a deficiency. Ample scholarly work exists to help the contemporary student separate the Thomist sheep from the erring goats. Few would deny that Cardinal Cajetan (d. 1535) was a Thomist. Fewer, on the other hand, would argue that Durandus of Saint-Pourçain (d. 1332/1334) was. The essays in this volume reveal the rich content of academic debate within which the Thomist commentatorial tradition arose and to which it contributed. Even a cursory review of the Thomist commentatorial tradition confirms that the noneclectic commentators by and large defend the School's positions. When, on the other hand, a commentator otherwise loyal to Aquinas departed in a significant way from one of the Thomist positions, the reaction of Thomists was swift and sure. A good example of this minor eclecticism appears in the sixteenth-century Thomist, Ambrosius Catharinus (Lancelot Politi) who died in 1553. He demurred from Thomist teaching on the Immaculate Conception and followed the Scotistic argument. However, the pressure from his Thomist peers to conform resulted in his retreat from a full-scale defense of the Scotist views.

Other examples are found within the history of Thomism, broadly construed. One might consider the admittedly complex figure Tommaso Campanella (d.1639). His *Apologeticum in controversia de conceptione beatae Virginis* published around 1625 borrowed arguments from Catharinus to defend the Virgin's Immaculate Conception. His opinion won him the favor of the Spanish authorities under whose rule he was imprisoned in Naples for almost three decades, but not that of his Dominican Thomist brothers, who already possessed sufficient evidence from his writings on astrology and other occult matters to put Campanella outside of both the Thomist commentatorial tradition and perhaps the Dominican Order. The editors are correct not to try to establish a rule about what makes for an author being a Thomist. Instead, they chose those who have commented on the *Summa theologiae*, and have left to others the unenviable task of separating authentic followers of Aquinas from those well-meaning but eclectic authors who even may have flatly contradicted the views of the Common Doctor.

Part 1 continues with an essay by two scholars, M. Brinzel and C. Schabel, who provide a good sampling of the range of views espoused by *Summa* commentators. In their essay on the authority of Aquinas and his *Summa* in the late Middle Ages, they describe an episode in which some Franciscans entertained the opinion that the pope made a mistake in canonizing Aquinas and would likely be blamed for having made a heretic a saint. These Spiritual Franciscans expressed chagrin about the way Aquinas both described the poverty of Christ and took exception to the theological position that held that the true followers of the Lord are forbidden to own anything. The essay's authors grant that Aquinas grew in his status as an "auctoritas," an important classification in a Church that relies on teaching to present the message of salvation. At the same time, they observe that Aquinas has gained this status even in the face of controversies that seem to emerge from his writings. Furthermore, these scholars see purported ambiguity in Aquinas and various interpretations of his texts as an essential feature in generating a commentatorial tradition. I would grant that these factors may provide a material cause for the Thomist commentatorial tradition. They do not, however, explain the place that Aquinas holds in the Catholic Church's hierarchy of recognized authorities. In fact, overall in the volume, little is said about the role that the Catholic Church plays in establishing Aquinas as her Common Doctor, especially after the Council of Trent. Even references to Pope Pius V "who 'legitimized' Aquinas as the scholastic author per [*sic*] excellence" (32 n. 109) come with a reminder that this reforming pontiff was a Dominican.

In chapter 3, U. Zahnd inquires about the genesis of a genre, that is, the commentatorial tradition itself. This article contains valuable information about early Thomist commentators and discusses how the *Summa theologiae* gradually replaced both Peter the Lombard's *Sentences* as well as the commentaries this textbook generated. The movement from *Sentence* commentary to *Summa* developed differently in different parts of Europe. In chapter 4, M. Gaetano continues this exposition with a carefully annotated essay—five pages of

bibliography for twenty pages of text—that deals mainly with the teaching of the *Summa* at the University of Padua. These aforementioned authors do mention how, after the Council of Trent, academic authorities began to insist that the *Summa* provide a guide and textbook for theological lectures. This practice became known as theology done *in via Sancti Thomae*. At Padua, Thomists first engaged creatively the dominant humanism of the day, with the result that one can speak of a Renaissance Thomism, an engagement that considerably affected the overall tenor of Thomism. For instance, Cajetan, who studied at Padua, was influenced by the humanists, whereas the Salmanticenses, although Thomist authors of the seventeenth century, were members of a reform of Carmel that preferred austerity over typical Renaissance humanist values. This preference influenced their commentaries.

Part 2 examines certain select discussions in the commentary tradition. A review of this length can only signal the themes chosen. All in all, these various discussions reveal the richness of the Thomist engagement with theological and philosophical topics. I. Agostini writes on seventeenth-century Dominican "theology" and debates about the proofs for God's existence recorded in S. Mariale's *Bibliotheca*, a repertoire of Scholastic opinions. M. Mantovani discusses the same topic and the "Five Ways" as treated by the sixteenth-century Iberian commentators, most of whom were Dominicans. W. Duba investigates the *Lumen gloriae*, the distinctive perfection of the created intellect that enables it to see God without the aid of a psychic likeness (*similitudo*). Duba looks at three Jesuit commentators, Molina (d. 1600), Vázquez (d. 1604), and Suárez (d. 1617). The author insightfully exposes a feature of what some authors call eclectic Thomism: "Molina refutes every argument of Thomas and the Thomists, yet still claims to adhere to it" (264). In other words, he denies nothing and undermines everything. H. Hattab discusses the same early modern Thomists and their discussions on Aquinas's treatment of creation and subsistence. D. Novotný and T. Machula take up the topic of angelic location as discussed in sixteenth-century Dominican commentators. Jean-Luc Solère treats the evolution in moral theology from invincible ignorance to tolerance, again with reference to Jesuit teachers, Vázquez and Rodrigo de Arriaga (d. 1667). In brief, Solère shows their influence on the French Protestant skeptic and defender of religious tolerance, P. Bayle (d. 1706). A. Wagner opts for the theme of disbelief that Aquinas treats in question 10 of the *Secunda secundae* and explores how the text has been interpreted by his major commentators, both Dominican and Jesuit. M. Toste examines a sixteenth-century debate about self-preservation and self-sacrifice that provides a background to the later debates about person and the common good. L. Lanza discusses a very interesting question in moral theology. His essay exhibits various medieval and modern arguments on the question of whether a prisoner lawfully condemned to death may escape licitly from his punishment. This essay gives a good example of the way moral theology develops during the period of nascent casuistry.

Helpful indices of manuscripts cited in the text and authors, both before the nineteenth century and after, complete this scholarly achievement.

Overall, this collection of essays provides a sampling of the fruitful exchanges that *Summa* commentators carried on within the centuries indicated. As the editors stipulate, it is not a history of Thomism. To appreciate the Thomist commentatorial tradition formally considered, one would have to relate the material in this volume to the Leonine revival of Thomism (1879) and the papally approved Twenty-Four Theses issued in 1914. The work contained in *Summistae* provides ample evidence for the dialectical nature of Scholastic philosophy and theology. The aforementioned Roman documents, however, which shape a great deal of twentieth-century Catholic thought and teaching, clarify and set forth the principles and *determinationes* that make Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* the perennial guide for Catholic theology. To make this concluding observation in no way intends to detract from the scholarship that this worthwhile book exhibits. One suasion: Recall that the last complete English translation of the *Summa theologiae* dates from 1964 to 1973. The vast majority of the texts studied in this volume, as the Index of Manuscripts (427-30) indicates, remain in Scholastic Latin.

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The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology. By MATTHEW LEVERING. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021. Pp viii + 360. $45.00 (hard). ISBN: 978-0-8028-7950-9.

In *Rules: A Short History of What We Live By* (Princeton, 2022) Lorraine Daston examines the ancient connection between rules and imitation. Whether learning the arts or languages, or more importantly the moral rectitude and correctness of conduct, the paradigm or rule (*paradigma*, *regula*) is indispensable. While emulation is not undertaken in the absence of rules considered as prescriptions or laws, models of virtue worthy of imitation are keys to what the Romans called *humanitas*.

For Daston the Rule of St. Benedict is a case in point. It is organized into seventy-three chapters containing a plethora of precepts or prescriptions. Nonetheless, the proximate *regula* is the Abbot, who is a measured-measure under the light of Christ, but also a proximate measure in the order of imitation. Otherwise, the Rule would become congeries of what we might call rules and regulations. Indeed, such exhortations abound in New Testament, often in parables such as that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), but also in direct prescriptions: "Come follow me" (Luke 18:22); "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21); "A

new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you" (John 13:34); "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

Daston poses the important question. "Why did model and paradigm not only disappear from the list of synonyms for rule but actually become its antonyms? How did it become possible, indeed self-evident, to oppose rules and paradigms as immiscible ways of knowing, a leitmotif of twentieth century philosophy." She is somewhat lenient about casuistry since it preserves the need to model what is the same or different in various cases for the purposes of guiding conduct pertaining to judgment. In answer to her own question, she concludes: "In the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and other Enlightenment moral philosophers, conscience explicitly replaced casuistry." This, in turn, became the sanctuary of a rule that neither is heteronomous imitation, nor bends by casuistical reasoning.

Thus understood, conscience is deeper and more sublime than what is learned "by rote," an expression taken from the Latin word *rota*—a wheel of memorization. But what is conscience? Perhaps an intellectual light or a habit; or a treasury of precepts; or, in an "existential," vein as that which distinguishes one person's agency from that of another—the true self, so to speak. Where does this leave the other modes of formation?

This brings us to Matthew Levering's *The Abuse of Conscience*. He characterizes his work as a "short history of, or sourcebook to, twentieth century developments." Rather than providing a new account of conscience, his aim is "largely diagnostic," namely, to chart the course of what he calls a "failed revolution" in twentieth-century Catholic moral theology.

To make a long story short, from the sixteenth century on Catholic moral theology largely centered on conscience, law, obligation, and casuistry. It was an era of ever more abundant ecclesiastical law, as well as an urgent need to moderate laxist and rigorist extremes in matters pertaining to confession. Relying on the Scholastic, and mostly the Thomistic, tradition as it was understood in the post-Tridentine centuries, Levering shows how moral theologians were interested in the sources and channels of obligation as well as their mitigating factors in particular cases. Casuistry aimed in part to relieve conscience in some cases and but also to bind it in others by presenting a minimal obligation.

In the wake of the Leonine revival of Thomism, many moral theologians came to see that Thomas's more consistent attention was given to the natural and theological virtues in the moral life, which had been not so much ignored altogether but consigned to the periphery. The same can be said of Thomas's attention to the rich theological resources in sacred Scripture, the imitation of Christ, and in the eschatological mysteries. The issue was not the intrinsic defect of casuistry but rather its pedagogical insufficiency.

On a sound reading of Thomas, law and conscience cannot alone do the work of the virtues of prudence and charity. According to Levering, the two most important voices were those of Michel Labourdette, O.P. (1908-90) before the Second Vatican Council and Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, O.P

(1925-2008) afterward. But they were not alone. The council called for "the perfecting of moral theology" by means of more vivid contact with Scripture and the Christian mysteries (*Optatam Totius* 16). For Levering, this is the revolution that failed to happen. Especially in the mainline academic guild of moral theology "the new postconciliar morality integrated some relatively superficial discussion of Christ and the Holy Spirit into an even more conscience-centered moral framework, now with an emphasis on responsible freedom and human liberation from structures of oppression."

Levering wants to diagnose how the slow-moving but persistent effort to reform moral theology failed to achieve its goals. The first three chapters—"Conscience and the Bible," "Conscience and the Moral Manuals," "Conscience and the Thomists"—provide a condensed but very capable account of the reasons for renewing moral theology from within the tradition. As a bonus, Levering provides more than one hundred pages of notes that continue the story in more granular detail. The *pièce de resistance*, however, is chapter 4, "Conscience and German Thought," which is the longest and most interesting chapter. It is likely that readers of *The Thomist* are already familiar with the material in the first three chapters, namely, the main theologians who called for a reform within the scriptural, patristic, and Scholastic patrimony. It is in the final chapter that Levering explains why that reform ran into some very choppy waters.

In this chapter Levering treats Heidegger, Jaspers, Bonhoeffer, Barth, Rahner, Fuchs, Häring, and Ratzinger. Admittedly, this is a strange set of characters to hold together except by virtue their engagement in post-Nietzschean German thought. Levering treats them in chronological order even though three of the theologians (Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Ratzinger) are rather different from the others, and in the case of Ratzinger quite different from Bonhoeffer and Barth inasmuch as he insisted on preserving both the natural and the supernatural foundations of conscience.

Levering's overarching point is this. Had the reform of moral theology remained within the compass of tradition(s), which is where it began, the task was relatively easy to understand, namely, excavating coherently the full set of sources of moral theology and communicating a refurbished moral paideia to late-twentieth-century Christians. There was, however, an alternative program that shared some of the sources and concerns of the traditional reform party but aspired to deeper things. Levering characterizes it not merely as an authentic anthropology but an anthropology of authenticity. Spelled out in different ways by various theologians, conscience becomes more than a habit or an act of the moral life but the foundation and basal expression of the human person in his singularity and freedom.

Levering notes that in Heidegger's reworking of Existentialism, "conscience is an ontological reality, not something to do with intellectual judgment." It calls distracted *Dasein* to embrace the human being-thrown toward death. This is our deepest potentiality, one that for Heidegger "unsettles its being-at-home and makes conspicuous its singular being-in-the world." It is not moral appraisal

so much as acting with existential authenticity. As Jaspers explains: "Conscience is the basis on which I must recognize or reject what is to have being for me, the reality that interposes itself between my existence and my true self-being."

Neither Heidegger nor Jaspers were theists, much less Christians. Levering's inclusion of Bonhoeffer and Barth is interesting in this regard. For his part, Bonhoeffer reworks the premise that conscience is the human self in affirmation of its thrownness. Such conscience exhibits the post-*peccatum* and apostate approach to life by arrogating the place of God, as though by knowing the judging ourself "we might reunify our being." In a similar vein, Barth calls it a "mad autonomism." For Barth ordinary conscience has no morally constructive role to play until and unless it is awakened by God's command, in which case it has a witnessing function—reminding us of God's command directly addressed to us. If I understand Levering correctly, the problem is not the theonomic or Christocentric solution proposed by Bonhoeffer and Barth but rather that they allow unredeemed conscience to be mere self-possession, and thus by default merely natural. The ontologizing of conscience as selfhood remains undisturbed.

Levering's survey of Catholic theologians is fascinating. Regarding the early Rahner he writes: "Like Barth and Bonhoeffer, but without their insistent Christocentrism," Rahner suggests that we need to regard the individual human being as "the object and goal of a moral command which is not identical with the validity of general principles, but is a concrete, particular, individual obligation." Rahner identifies this not with prudence, which, on the basis of antecedent truths of morality, decides in the particular case, but rather with conscience. Hence, there is not only an expansion of conscience into the domain of the concrete and particular but also a distance from the objective truth provided by synderesis. Conscience, Levering observes, not only applies universal norms to particular situations "but also apprehends what I, as an utterly *unique* person, must do here and now." Because a person is utterly unique and unrepeatable the same holds for personal freedom. Conscience is the reflection of existential interiority. This is the mark of its dignity, and perhaps why conscience, for Rahner, cannot be equated or simply denominated as primordial habit (synderesis) or as an act but rather represents the whole of oneself in transcendental freedom.

In his postconciliar work Fuchs perhaps simplifies Rahner. He argues that no norms are revealed by God but rather all of them are derived from natural law as human norms. But these norms are actualized by the exercise of conscience, which is the person "totally present to himself." When the decision of conscience makes itself apparent it compels from "the very depths of our being." Concrete and general norms are helpful, to be sure. But the historicity and social complexities of every norm constitute limitations. Hard work must be done to reach objectively valid judgments. Conscience is the is the ineradicable personal dimension of this work, and it constitutes the hard-won and deeply interior quest for moral maturity. Have the cardinal virtues become otiose?

Such is not true for Häring, for whom prudence remains a principal virtue necessary for the application of conscience. Nonetheless, conscience is the principle of "the inner unity and completeness of the psychic powers." Häring certainly remains theonomic, and hence he underscores the fundamental option for or against God. Indeed, conscience is the heart moved by the Holy Spirit, and it is made whole by faith. He proposes that conscience properly understood as the living center of Christian ethics can make good on the work of the casuists, who depended too much on conventional and legalistic assumptions.

For his part, Ratzinger underscores the incessant conflict between freedom and authority, which in modern times renders the traditional morality of absolute moral norms a kind of prison. What better get-out-of-jail card than conscience, especially if conscience is understood as the very foundation of personal dignity and liberty? Ratzinger adopts the middle position, which is to hold that conscience receives truth from *synderesis* (which Ratzinger calls *anamnesis*)—the habit of first principles. Conscience pertains to the act of judging. In this sense, conscience serves prudence and the other virtues. Otherwise, as Reinhold Hütter has put it, the gift of truth received in *synderesis* is replaced by the "transcendental experience of freedom." Is there a way back to the middle position? Can we distinguish between the Rule of Self and Self-Ruling?

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Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas: Historical and Systematical Perspectives. Edited by PIOTR ROSZAK and JÖRGEN VIJGEN. Bibliotheque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses 189. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2021. Pp. 520. €78.00 (paper). ISBN: 978-2-5035-9320-3.

Recent years have seen a renewed appreciation and consideration of St. Thomas Aquinas's interpretation and use of Scripture in the scriptural commentaries themselves, as well as in his *summae*. Volumes offering collected essays on scriptural commentaries have emerged, and recently theologians such as Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen, working under the auspices of "biblical Thomism," have produced edited volumes such as *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas* (Brepols, 2015) and *Towards a Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology* (Eunsa, 2018). These contributions unpack Thomas's scriptural hermeneutics and interpretive tools for readers while observing the application of these approaches to particular

theological questions (e.g., Christ and the moral life). The works strive to overcome artificial distinctions between speculative theology and biblical exegesis, affirming instead the foundational and generative roles that Scripture plays in proper expressions of *sacra doctrina*.

Roszak and Vijgen's recent collection, *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas,* extends the aims of biblical Thomism to include Thomas's reception, interpretation, and use of the Church Fathers. Rather than seeing Thomas's engagement with patristic authors as belonging to an entirely different methodological order from his study of Scripture, the editors posit that "Scripture and the Church Fathers are distinct but not separate sources because it is through the Fathers that one is able to have access to the correct sense of the biblical text" (9). They observe that Thomas works from the premise that the Holy Spirit both authors sacred Scripture and inspires the interpreter to plumb its depth. In those instances where the Fathers succeed in transmitting the content of Scripture as received by the Church, their work itself, under the direction of the Spirit, is understood as authoritative. *Sacra doctrina* is thus tasked not only with elucidating Scripture; it must also convey the teachings of the *sancti doctores* who have already excelled in handing on the content of Scripture. Roszak and Vijgen conclude: "In other words, one cannot confine the function of Scriptures to a past event in the history of the transmission of the faith, which would then be followed by Tradition and the Church" (11). Rather, as directed the Spirit, the tradition handed on by the early Christian Fathers extends the communication of Scripture through its inspired interpretation.

Affirming the deep continuity between divine revelation in sacred Scripture and its patristic expression rests, according to the editors, on Thomas's rejection of a notion of revelation as a static event that does not require the active participation of its recipients. God's revelation, while itself a formal cause of the human knowledge of salvation, finds its end only through a kind of efficient and final causality wherein human beings are moved by grace to experience God's self-disclosure as a "participation in the knowledge of God and saints, a provident God, incarnated in Christ as Mediator" (12). The subsequent theological tradition is therefore not a series of accretions obscuring the pure form of the biblical text. On the contrary, it is "something embedded in Revelation—the product of faithful and integral responses to the authoritative work of the Holy Spirit" (108). The editors acknowledge that Thomas understands the Fathers as being *quasi proprie* and *probabile*; these human readers of Scripture sometimes err and they sometimes advance disparate opinions. Thus Thomas often sets the Fathers into comparative debates where he respects their expositions of the biblical text while nevertheless locating their discrete opinions within a wider theological field of vision. Roszak writes: "Treating them as teachers of the faith, Thomas does not wish to remain uncritical of their opinions but wants to evaluate them in literary terms, drawing attention to historical circumstances and theological context" (112). Such critical evaluation constitutes an essential part of a reverent reception of the

Fathers in elucidating the biblical text. The editors summarize Thomas's theological efforts as "at the service of accepting God's Word and developing its potential, in which the Fathers are helpful" (128). The collected essays in the volume further elucidate points at which Thomas finds the Fathers vital for understanding and handing God's revelation in sacred Scripture.

The volume's thirteen essays offer a wide variety of perspectives on Thomas's reception and use of the Fathers. As with many compendiums, a challenge of the volume is that it lacks explicit organization of topics by method, chronology, or topic, leaving the reader to discern his own way through its content (the editors do suggest an order [13-14]). Roszak's "How Is the Patristic Method Shaping *sacra doctrina* in Aquinas?" grounds the general purpose of the book and establishes Thomas's understanding of patristic authority, his evaluation of its diverse expressions, and its deployment in constructive theological arguments. The chapter sets the methodological direction of the volume, arguing that Thomas fundamentally approaches the work of theology *ad mentem Patrum*. The remaining chapters loosely treat either (1) Thomas's use of a particular Father, often on a specific question (Dahan on Jerome, Conticello on Theophylact of Bulgaria, Cuddy on Isidore and Augustine on the law, Harkins on the Damascene and Christ's knowledge, and McDonough on Augustine and Christ's headship of the Church); or (2) Thomas's application of the patristic tradition to a given theological question (Bonino on angelology, Sullivan on *habitus*, Wawrykow on grace, Klooster on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Hofer on religious life, Vijgen on penance, and Kromholtz on eschatology). It should not surprise the reader that Thomas's use of Augustine emerges as a lodestone in several essays; one might group the essays by Sullivan, Cuddy, Wawrykow, Klooster, and McDonough into a set that together provide a panoramic of Thomas's reception of various texts by Augustine, the development of Augustine's own thought, and the development of Thomas's theology based on his progressive encounter with Augustine's works (e.g., on *habitus*, grace, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit). An organizing principle such as Thomas's Christology and the grace that flows from Christ through the sacramental life of the Church might also give an order to the chapters. One could begin with chapters by Harkins and McDonough treating the patristic influence on Thomas's understanding of Christ's knowledge and headship; followed by discussions of grace, *habitus*, the gifts, and the law, by Wawrykow, Sullivan, Klooster, and Cuddy respectively; and then culminate with studies of religious life, the sacrament of penance, and eschatology by Hofer, Vijgen, and Kromholtz. Such an *ordo* might further highlight the ways in which Thomas sees the tradition of the *antiqui doctores* extending the content of Scripture into systematic insights concerning the saving action of God in and through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

In addition to Roszak's methodological essay, a number of contributions cultivate important new scholarship or consolidate gains through an integrative summary. For example, Conticello's chapter introduces the Latin medieval reception of Theophylact, noting that Thomas drew on his writings in preparing

the *Catena aurea*; the chapter underscores Thomas's generative reception of the patristic tradition for the sake of his own scriptural exposition. Bonino's treatment of Thomas's treatise on angels (*STh* I, qq. 50-64) establishes a working distinction between the way in which Scripture norms theological reflection on the articles of faith and the way in which the Fathers may be placed into theological debate on speculative questions such as the knowledge or grace of angels (139). Bonino concludes that Thomas approaches the work of the Church Fathers as a mirror and a model for the contemporary theologian; here again, there is continuity rather than rupture between his treatment of Scripture and patristic tradition (154). Hofer's chapter on the influence of patristic sources in his accounts of religious life provides a marvelous treatment of Thomas's rejection of anti-mendicant critiques of religious life. After establishing the parameters of the anti-mendicant controversies (1252-59 and 1268-71) and Thomas's responses in the polemics (including *Contra impugnantes, De perfectione*, and *Contra retrahentes*) Hofer explores Thomas's use of Jerome to demonstrate the deviation of William of Saint-Amour and Gerard of Abbeville from the patristic tradition and thus from Scripture. Jerome's denunciation of Jovinian and Vigilantius for setting the evangelical counsels of poverty and chastity on par with wealth and marriage give Thomas effective parallels to draw with the secular masters of his day; Hofer effectively traces this line of argument through Thomas's polemical works, sermons, and into the treatise in the *Summa* on religious life (*STh* II-II, qq. 186-89). Hofer also observes the roles of Augustine, Denys, and Gregory of the Great—sources deployed by William and thus engaged by Thomas, and he extends this to include Thomas's appreciation for Gregory and Origen in the *Summa*. Noting that Thomas looks to the lives of the saints as rationale for both the mendicant life and theological practice, Hofer quotes Thomas quoting Gregory: "In the life of the saints, we realize what we ought to understand in scripture" (334).

Taken as a unit, the chapters by Sullivan, Wawrykow, and Klooster offer strong insight into the life of grace, underscoring that Thomas thought and wrote *ad mentem Patrum*. For Sullivan, Thomas insists "that *habitus* is necessary for human perfection—in this life and in the next, even when we are united with God perfectly" (184). He concludes that Thomas's reception and integration of Maximus, Denys, and Augustine with an Aristotelian account of *habitus* enables the category to be used for an expansive vision of the moral life. Klooster's chapter on the gifts dovetails with Sullivan. His account explores the *Summa theologiae* treatment of the gifts and offers a complementary reading of the gifts in the Matthew and Galatians commentaries (283-88). Noting Thomas's emerging appreciation for the late Augustine and the challenges of semi-Pelagianism, Klooster suggests that Thomas's theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit "is Augustinian in its origins and that it becomes even more so in his mature theology of the *Summa theologiae*" (294). Klooster's conclusion parallels Wawrykow's comprehensive treatment of the roles of the Fathers in Thomas's understanding of grace. Wawrykow establishes that the *Summa*'s treatise on grace (*STh* I-II, qq. 109-14) is primarily indebted to Augustine, but

he distinguishes between those sources of Augustine reported by the Lombard which make their way into treatise on grace and those which Thomas identifies himself, primarily coming from *De correptione et gratia, De predestinatione sanctorum,* and *De dono perseverantiae* (248). These latter works exercise enormous influence in Thomas's understanding of grace, with new emphasis being given to the grace of *auxilium* and God's efficient movement of the graced person to union with God. Wawrykow connects this use of the late Augustine to Thomas's understanding of the grace of Christ, concluding that "in the case of Christ, the precedence goes to the grace of union; and the habitual grace of Christ follows on the grace of union, in accordance with God's plan for salvation through Jesus Christ and what the Word incarnate as human wills, suffers and does for human salvation" (267). Wawrykow concludes by noting that, while Thomas's understanding of the grace of Christ is both Augustinian and rooted in the Latin West, it is also informed by insights from Cyril of Alexandria, Denys, and the Damascene which distinguish it from other contemporary Christologies.

Wawrykow's chapter bridges the earlier discussions of *habitus,* grace, and gifts with treatments of Christ's life, preparing the reader for Harkins's discussion of Christ's beatific knowledge as an effect of his grace. Harkins credibly argues that Christ's beatific vision—which Thomas claims Christ enjoys from the moment of conception—follows from Thomas's reading of Scripture, as received through the Fathers and conciliar statements. Harkins notes that Christ's grace is twofold: (1) following from the union of natures in the person of the Word and (2) as capital grace or the grace of headship which make Christ head of the body, the Church (357). After careful attending to Thomas's use of Scripture (e.g., John 1:14, 16) and his reception of the Damascene, Harkins concludes that Thomas's understanding of Christ's beatific vision "entails His possessing the plenitude of grace and knowledge, as clearly revealed in Scripture and authoritatively developed in the patristic and conciliar tradition" (369). Here again, Harkins's position prepares readers for the arguments advanced by McDonough that Thomas's view of Christ's headship is thoroughly rooted in Augustine. McDonough offers helpful reviews of Thomas's scriptural commentaries and appreciation for I Cor 12:27 (in addition to Col 2 and Eph 1); he notes that Thomas progressively comes to categorize Christ's headship as a feature of his humanity, following the notion of Christ's humanity as a properly conjoined instrument of his divinity. McDonough notes that Thomas's increasing appreciation for the efficient instrumental causality of Christ's humanity allows him to "propose a thoroughly realist account of the 'infusion' or 'transfusion' of grace from Christ to his members, setting to one side entirely the Lombardian teaching that we receive a likeness of Christ's grace only" (402). Working in parallel with Harkins, McDonough affirms the personal plenitude of grace in Christ by which the Church receives grace; he concludes: "Thus, there is no real distinction between Christ's personal grace (by which humanity is made holy) and his capital grace (by which he makes us holy). The Church

truly receives *Christ's* grace, and *all* the grace that animates the Church comes from Christ" (403).

Perhaps the strongest achievement of *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas* is the methodological connection it makes between biblical exegesis and the use of the Fathers for *sacra doctrina*. Some chapters treat this explicitly and others simply exposit Thomas's seamless movement between these two vital dimensions of receiving divine revelation. The volume adds depth to the fields of biblical Thomism and Thomas's use of the patristic tradition. Students of either field will find value in this compendium. Further, if they take seriously Thomas's everyday tasks of commenting on Scripture and tracing its reception in the tradition, then those chapters treating systematic loci in Thomas's thought promise to add depth to studies of Christian anthropology, the moral life, grace, Christology, ecclesiology, and the sacraments. An additional asset of the volume is that a majority of the chapters survey Thomas's thought across theological genres—setting biblical commentaries, *summae*, sermons, as well as disputed and quodlibetal questions into conversation while also observing chronological development among them. This kind of careful contextualization achieves a more balanced approach to Thomas's life's work. In many ways, Vijgen captures the book's greatest value: "As such, these functions do not only show us St. Thomas' most admirable critical power but also are, more importantly, signs of a profoundly spiritual attitude of humble receptivity, necessary for doing theology" (428).

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