

“THE LIGHT OF THY COUNTENANCE, O LORD,
IS SIGNED UPON US”:
PSALM 4:7 AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
OF THE NATURAL LAW

KEVIN E. O'REILLY, O.P.

*Pontifical University of St. Thomas
Rome, Italy*

IN HIS INTRODUCTORY article on the natural law,¹ Thomas Aquinas explains that “the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is

¹ *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2. The full response reads thus: “Law, being a rule and measure, can be in a person in two ways: in one way, as in him that rules and measures; in another way, as in that which is ruled and measured, since a thing is ruled and measured, insofar as it partakes of the rule or measure. Wherefore, since all things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law, as was stated above (A. 1); it is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, insofar as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law. Hence the Psalmist after saying (Ps iv. 6): *Offer up the sacrifice of justice*, as though someone asked what the works of justice are, adds: *Many say, Who showeth us good things?* in answer to which question he says: *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*: thus implying that the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light. It is therefore evident that the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law.” All translations of Thomas’s texts, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Aquinas Institute website (aquinas.cc).

the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light.”² These comments about the light of natural reason are prefaced by a reference to Psalm 4:7.³ Thus, Thomas writes that “the Psalmist after saying (Ps. iv. 6): *Offer up the sacrifice of justice*, as though someone asked what the works of justice are, adds: *Many say, Who showeth us good things?* in answer to which question he says: *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us* [*signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui*].”⁴ Thomas quotes this answer, “*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us,*” in various other passages in the *Summa theologiae*, all of which illuminate his understanding of the natural law as a participation in the eternal law.⁵ One characteristic of the abundant literature on Thomas’s

² For a study of the theme of light in Thomas’s work, see David L. Whidden III, *Christ the Light: The Theology of Light and Illumination in Thomas Aquinas* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014). The argument of this book unfolds three interlocking theses. The first pertains to a proper understanding of illumination which for Thomas is a manifestation of truth and depends on God who is the primary truth. The second relates to the three kinds of illumination that participate in different ways in God’s light: the light of nature, the light of faith, and the light of glory. The third thesis builds on the first two and is the most important of the three. Whidden summarizes it as follows: “The central idea in this book is that the illumination of our minds is primarily the mission of the Son, who became incarnate for our sakes and who manifests the truth about God for our salvation. For Aquinas’s theology of illumination to be properly Christian, it must be rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of the overemphasis on the natural light of the intellect among Thomistic philosophers, this key aspect of Aquinas’s theology of illumination has been eclipsed. Yet when we attend to what Aquinas says in both the *Summa Theologiae* and in his scriptural commentaries, we will find that illumination properly understood is not the product of a vaguely Theistic God, but rather is found in the mission of the Son. Christ is the light” (ibid., 8). While the comment about Thomistic philosophers is harsh, given that properly theological considerations fall outside their purview, I agree with Whidden’s theses. The third thesis, in effect, forms part of my interpretation of Thomas’s account even of the natural law.

³ Unfortunately, the referencing of this text is not consistent in the translations consulted. For the sake of consistency, I will refer to Psalm 4:7, in keeping with the text of Psalm 4 in Thomas’s commentary on the Psalms; see <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Psalm> (accessed 05/14/2022). In this text the phrases “Offer up the sacrifice of justice” and “Many say, ‘Who shows us good things?’” belong to v. 6.

⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

⁵ See *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4; q. 84, a. 5; q. 93, a. 4; I-II, q. 19, a. 4. See also I *Sent.*, d. 3, q. 5, a. 1; II *Sent.*, d. 39, q. 3, a. 1, s.c. 1; and, *De Verit.*, q. 16, a. 3.

account of the natural law to date has been the almost complete absence of any consideration of the interpretative significance of this scriptural text.⁶ This article aims to make good that deficit. As will be borne out, Thomas's citation is strategic: the content of the wider passages serves to throw light on Thomas's Christological construal of the natural law as he introduces it here.

The first article for consideration is question 79, article 4 of the *Prima pars*, where Thomas argues that the active or agent intellect is something in the soul. This intellectual light, a participation in the divine light that is appropriated to the Son, illuminates first principles, both speculative and practical. The first principles of practical reason, which have been impressed on the rational creature and from which flow its specific inclinations to its proper acts and ends, are of course the precepts of the natural law. By them the rational creature is ruled and measured by the eternal law.

The agent intellect is the connecting link between this article and the next one to be examined, namely, question 84, article 5 of the *Prima pars*. While in the former article Thomas argues that this intellectual light, a participation in the divine light, illuminates first principles, in the latter he proposes that by virtue of this participation in the divine light the human soul can know all things in the Divine Ideas (*rationes aeternae*). The Divine Ideas, inasmuch as they are expressed in the Word, "the concept of the eternal Wisdom,"⁷ are in fact Christological in character. Reference to the Word brings our considerations into the realm of Trinitarian theology, which provides a link with

⁶ The one exception of which I am aware is Martin Rhonheimer, "Natural Dynamics of the Reason: The Epistemological Structure of the Natural Law," in *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 257-306. Stephen L. Brock comments briefly on this citation but does not engage in any prolonged exegesis. See Stephen L. Brock, *The Light That Binds: A Study in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Natural Law* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 57-58.

⁷ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8; translation slightly amended.

Thomas's doctrine concerning man as made to the image of God (*imago Dei*) or to the image of the Trinity on account of his possession of an intellectual nature. The *imago Dei* exists at three levels, namely, nature, grace, and glory. The first level, which is "a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God,"⁸ is perfected at the levels of grace and glory. Grace, whereby the image of God is actualized, is the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the soul. The intensification of grace entails greater illumination of the principles of practical reason by the light of the agent intellect. This illumination is attributed to the invisible mission of the Son, to whom the gifts that pertain to the intellect are appropriated. The most significant gift in this regard is that of wisdom, since it denotes a certain rectitude of judgment by connaturality according to the eternal law.⁹

Man, however, is made to the image of God not only by virtue of his possession of reason, whereby he has the capacity to know God, but also in virtue of his possession of will, whereby he can love God. The final appearance of Psalm 4:7 that we will consider occurs in question 19, article 4 of the *Prima secundae*, an article that deals with the goodness of the will, which depends proximately on human reason but ultimately and primarily on the divine reason, that is to say, on the eternal law. Disordered passions dim the light of the natural law in man, a defect that is remedied by imitation of the example of the incarnate Word, the concept of God's wisdom, "from Whom all man's wisdom is derived."¹⁰ The Christological ground of the natural law, which is "nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law,"¹¹ becomes apparent yet again.

⁸ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

⁹ See *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

¹⁰ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8.

¹¹ See *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 1.

I. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE AGENT INTELLECT IN THE DIVINE LIGHT

In question 79, article 4 of the *Prima pars*, Thomas discusses whether the active intellect, namely, the “power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions,”¹² is something in the soul. He begins by emphatically stating his conclusion: the active intellect is indeed something in the soul.¹³ The human soul of man nevertheless presupposes a superior intellect from which it acquires its power of understanding since “it is not wholly intellectual but only in part.”¹⁴ In order to appreciate this claim, one need only consider that in order to reach an understanding of truth, the human intellect must engage in a certain amount of reasoning and movement.¹⁵ Its understanding is, moreover, imperfect since it does not understand everything and, in the case of those things which it does understand, it must pass from potency to act. The fact that the intellectual soul of man is intellectual only in part requires the preexistence of an intellect that is wholly intellectual, in which the human intellect participates as a finite effect of the divine creative cause;¹⁶ the fact that it is mobile on

¹² *STh* I, q. 79, a. 3.

¹³ Thomas was aware that nearly all pagans believed the agent intellect to be a separate substance. See II *Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1: “Sciendum est . . . quod intellectus agens sit substantia quaedam separata.” Included among these philosophers are Alexander of Aphrodisias (*De intellectu*), Avicenna (*Liber de anima* 5.5), and Averroes (*Commentarium magnum de anima* 3.18-19). In addition to *STh* I, q. 79, aa. 4-5, Thomas argues against this position in his *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*.

¹⁴ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

¹⁵ For an explication of the distinction between intellect and reason, see *STh* I, q. 79, a. 8. For a study of this distinction, see Colm McClements, “The Distinction *intellectus-ratio* in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Critical Study” (Ph.D. diss., Université catholique de Louvain, 1990); for a brief account, in relation to Thomas’s theory of aesthetic perception, see Kevin E. O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 43-47.

¹⁶ Thomas writes at *In De hebdo.*, lect. 2, that “to participate is as it were to receive part [of something] [*quasi partem capere*]” (accessed 08/14/2019 at <http://>

account of discursive reason requires the preexistence of an immovable intellect;¹⁷ and the fact that it is imperfect requires the preexistence of a perfect intellect. Thomas concludes that there must be “some higher intellect, by which the soul is helped to understand.”¹⁸ In other words the soul possesses some power “derived from a higher intellect, whereby it is able to light up the phantasms”¹⁹ that have been delivered to it through the mechanisms of cognition that begin with sense experience.²⁰ Given the harmony that Thomas posits as obtaining between faith and reason, this higher or separate intellect is to be identified as “God Himself, Who is the soul’s Creator, and only

www.corpusthomicum.org/cbh.html#84829). Hence Thomas’s assertion that “it is not wholly intellectual but only in part” (*STh* I, q. 79, a. 4). As Rudi te Velde writes, “participation” implies that “the effect receives something from the cause in a diminished fashion. The effect falls short of its cause, receives only partly what the cause has fully and undiminished” (Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 92). When something receives in a particular way what belongs to something else in a universal manner, the former is said to participate in the latter. Here enters the notion of analogy as Thomas explains in *STh* I, q. 4, a. 3: “If there is an agent not contained in any genus, its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent’s form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.” As Cornelio Fabro writes, the notion of participation is essential to the Thomistic conception of the analogy of being. See Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo s. Tommaso d’Aquino* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1950), 189. On this point, see also te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 95-102.

¹⁷ See also *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 1: “All movements, both corporeal and spiritual, are traced back to the simple First Mover, Who is God. And hence no matter how perfect a corporeal or spiritual nature is supposed to be, it cannot proceed to its act unless it be moved by God; but this motion is according to the plan of His providence, and not by necessity of nature, as the motion of the heavenly body. Now not only is every motion from God as from the First Mover, but all formal perfection is from Him as from the First Act. And thus the act of the intellect or of any created being whatsoever depends upon God in two ways: first, inasmuch as it is from Him that it has the form whereby it acts; second, inasmuch as it is moved by Him to act.” See also the first proof for the existence of God at *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3.

¹⁸ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ For a good outline of Thomas’s account of the mechanisms of cognition, see Eleanore Stump, *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 244-76.

beatitude.”²¹ Thus, Thomas concludes, the human soul derives (*participat*) its intellectual light from God, “according to Ps. iv. 7, *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.*”²²

According to Thomas, reflection on experience confirms the existence of this intellectual light within us: we abstract universal forms from the material conditions of being in which they are individuated, thereby rendering these forms actually intelligible.²³ Notwithstanding the fact that this intellectual light is “derived from a higher intellect,”²⁴ one must accept that this power is something in the soul, since no being can posit an action except on the basis of some principle that formally inheres in it.²⁵ Thus the intellectual light whereby we abstract forms from the conditions of individual matter “is derived from [*participatur*] the supreme intellect,”²⁶ while at one and the same time it proceeds from the essence of the soul like the other powers that issue therefrom. As Jan Aertsen notes, “in the ‘intellectual light’ both originations [divine and human] concur.”²⁷ The function of the agent intellect, however, consists of more than the abstraction of forms from matter. It is through its light that we know first principles, which “are not acquired by any process of reasoning but by having their terms become

²¹ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4. On the immediate creation of the soul by God, see *STh* I, q. 90, a. 4; on the contemplation of God alone as that which renders a man perfectly happy, see *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 7.

²² *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

²³ See also *ibid.*, ad 3: “The active intellect is not an object, rather is it that whereby the objects are made to be in act: for which, besides the presence of the active intellect, we require the presence of phantasms, the good disposition of the sensitive powers, and practice in this sort of operation; since through one thing understood, other things come to be understood, as from terms are made propositions, and from first principles, conclusions.”

²⁴ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.* See also *STh* I, q. 76, a. 1.

²⁶ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4, ad 5; my translation.

²⁷ Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1998), 224. See *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5: “The intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal types [*rationes aeternae*].”

known.”²⁸ This epistemic immediacy presupposes and is predicated on memory, experience, and knowledge of the terms of propositions. Thomas explains that “memory is derived from sensible things, experience from memory, and knowledge of those terms from experience.”²⁹ In other words, the knowledge of principles is rooted in sense experience. Thus, when one has understood what is a whole and what is a part, one should also grasp that every whole is greater than a part of it. Yet, adds Thomas, “what is a whole, and what is a part—this he cannot know except through the intelligible species which he has received from phantasms: and for this reason, the Philosopher at the end of the *Posterior Analytics* shows that knowledge of principles comes to us from the senses.”³⁰ It is in this way that the principles of the arts and the sciences become known.

Elsewhere, in an article that deals with the precepts of the natural law, Thomas illustrates the importance of the knowledge that accrues from experience in illustrating the distinction between what is self-evident (*per se notum*) in itself (*secundum se*) and what is self-evident in relation to us (*quoad nos*).³¹ The

²⁸ IV *Metaphys.*, lect. 6. The fact that first principles are immediately known without a reasoning process might seem to undermine the force of Thomas’s argument that reason’s discursive nature points to the necessity of an immovable intellect. According to Thomas, however, first principles—both speculative and practical—serve to situate human nature immediately below angelic nature in the hierarchy of created being. He thus writes in *De Verit.*, q. 16, a. 1: “The human soul, according to that which is highest in it, attains to that which is proper to angelic nature, so that it knows some things at once without investigation, although it is lower than the angels in this, that it can know the truth in these things only by receiving something from sense.” In *De Ente*, c. 4, Thomas argues, however, that the angels or intelligences, as composites of form and existence, “have existence from the first being, which is existence alone, and this is the first cause, which is God” (accessed 04/22/2022 at <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~DeEnte.C4.6>). If the intelligences are thus dependent on God for their existence, one must posit the same conclusion in the case of human nature with regard to first principles, both speculative and practical.

²⁹ IV *Metaphys.*, lect. 6.

³⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 51, a. 1.

³¹ See *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2. For an extended and illuminating discussion of these two ways of being known *per se* (*secundum se* and *quoad nos*) in reference to *STh* I-II, q. 94, q. 2, see Kevin L. Flannery, S.J., *Acts amid Precepts: The Aristotelian Logical Structure of Thomas Aquinas’s Moral Theory* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 31-39.

self-evidence of a proposition, he explains, accrues from its predicate being contained in the notion of the subject. The self-evidence of a proposition is thus necessarily rendered opaque for anyone who lacks knowledge of the definition of the subject. Thomas uses the example of the proposition “Man is a rational animal” to illustrate this point. It is in its very nature self-evident (*per se nota*) since “who says *man*, says a *rational being*.”³² To anyone who does not know what a man is, however, this proposition proves not to be self-evident. There are nevertheless certain propositions or axioms that are universally self-evident to all (*per se notae communiter omnibus*), since their terms are known to everyone. As such they are known *per se quoad nos* without, as Kevin L. Flannery comments, “the knowers necessarily having a very scientific understanding of that which they have grasped in an initial way.”³³ Examples of such propositions are as follows: “Every whole is greater than its part” and “Things equal to one and the same are equal to one another.”³⁴ Such propositions enunciate a principle, that is to say, something that is known in itself and is immediately understood by the intellect.”³⁵

The operation of the agent intellect, however, is not limited to the speculative intellect. It is also the light by which we discern good and evil, as Thomas makes explicit in his disputed question *De spiritualibus creaturis*. There he cites the first chapter of Genesis to the effect that man is made to the image and likeness of God: “Let us make man to our image and likeness” (*faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*).³⁶ God, and not any separated substance, is alone the creator of the soul—hence it is clearly stated in Genesis that God breathed the breath of life into man’s figure (*facies*)—and

³² *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

³³ Flannery, *Acts amid Precepts*, 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See *STh* I-II, q. 57, a. 2.

³⁶ *De Spir. Creat.*, a. 10 (accessed 07/16/2020 at <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/qds.html#64338>).

it must therefore be maintained that the light of the agent intellect is immediately impressed in us by God.³⁷ After adding that it is precisely by the light of the agent intellect that we discern what is true from what is false and what is good from what is bad, Thomas argues that Psalm 4:7 speaks precisely of this reality: “*Many say: who will show us good things? The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.*”³⁸

According to Thomas, “the precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles.”³⁹ This analogy suggests that the light of the agent intellect also illumines the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of practical reason. Thomas, in fact, states this explicitly in his *De virtutibus in communi*. There he mentions three ways in which a man can be said to be a subject of virtue, namely, with respect to “intellect, will, and the lower appetite which is divided into the concupiscible and irascible,”⁴⁰ before considering the “susceptibility to virtue” (*susceptibilitatem virtutis*)⁴¹ and the active principle of virtue in each case. Turning to the intellect, Thomas mentions the possible intellect, which “is in potency to all intelligibles, in the knowledge of which intellectual virtue consists.”⁴² The possible intellect thus constitutes the intellect’s “susceptibility to virtue.” The agent intellect, on the other hand, furnishes the intellect’s active principle of virtue. In its light things are rendered actually intelligible, “some of which a man knows naturally from the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. The doctrine of man as made in the image of God, intimated in Thomas’s judicious use of this quotation at *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2, is also adumbrated at *De Spir. Creat.*, a. 10. Thus, the *imago Dei* regards both the divine nature and the Trinity of persons. Just as in the intra-Trinitarian life of knowing and loving the Word proceeds from the Speaker, and Love from both the Speaker and the Word (*STh* I, q. 28, a. 3), “so we may say that in rational creatures wherein we find a procession of the word in the intellect, and a procession of the love in the will, there exists an image of the uncreated Trinity, by a certain representation of the species” (*STh* I, q. 93, a. 6).

³⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

⁴⁰ *De virtut. in comm.*, a. 8.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

outset without study and inquiry.”⁴³ These first principles, Thomas adds, pertain not only to the speculative order but also to the practical order. As an example of a speculative principle, Thomas once again offers the notion that “every whole is greater than its part and the like.”⁴⁴ For a practical principle, he offers “evil is to be avoided and the like.” These naturally known things (*naturaliter nota*) provide “the principles of all subsequent speculative or practical knowledge which is acquired by study.”⁴⁵

We have seen that while the active intellect is indeed something in the soul, this power to light up phantasms is ultimately derived from “the soul’s Creator, and only beatitude.”⁴⁶ Hence the significance of Thomas’s quotation of Psalm 4:7, “*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us,*” since the intellectual light of the human soul is a participation in the divine light. The divine light is, however, appropriated to the Son, as the Word, “which is the light and splendor of the intellect.”⁴⁷ Thus, the Christological foundations of the natural law as a work of reason (*opus rationis*), begin to appear. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Thomas makes clear the universal reach of the splendor of the Word, which “shines in everyone’s understanding; because whatever light and whatever wisdom exists in men has come to them from participating in the Word.”⁴⁸ We have noted that this intellectual light illumines first principles, both speculative and practical, in a way that presupposes memory derived from sensible things, experience,

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

⁴⁷ *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8. For an extended discussion of the notion of appropriation, see Gilles Emery, O.P., *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 312-37.

⁴⁸ *In Ioan.*, c. 1, lect. 13. Translation taken from *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian Larcher, O.P., and James Weisheipl, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 3 vols.

and knowledge of the terms of proposition. Other texts, namely the disputed questions *De spiritualibus creaturis* and *De virtutibus in communi*, call attention to the notion that the light of the agent intellect illumines the precepts of the natural law, which furnish the first principles of practical reason. Thomas states the implications of his quotation of Psalm 4:7 thus: “The light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light.”⁴⁹

The next text in which we encounter our quotation is in question 84, article 5 of the *Prima pars*, an article that is concerned with the intellectual soul’s knowledge of material things in the Divine Ideas or *rationes aeternae*. In brief, the agent intellect, “the seal of the Divine light in us,”⁵⁰ participates in the divine light and, by virtue of this participation, the human soul can know all things in the *rationes aeternae*. A consideration of Thomas’s Trinitarian theology reveals that the *rationes aeternae* in fact possess a Christological character. They are expressed in the concept of God’s “eternal Wisdom.”⁵¹ Man’s participation in the divine light (which is appropriated to the Son), by virtue of the agent intellect, by which he knows material things in the *rationes aeternae* (which possess a Christological character), thus grants him a participation in the divine wisdom (which, again, is appropriated to the Son).⁵²

⁴⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

⁵⁰ *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5.

⁵¹ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8.

⁵² See *ScG* IV, c. 12: “Now in God wisdom must be referred to the fact that he knows himself. But, since he knows himself not by an intelligible species but by his essence—indeed, his very act of intelligence is his essence—therefore God’s wisdom cannot be a habit, but is the divine essence. Now it is evident from what has been said that the Son of God is the Word and concept of God understanding himself. Therefore, the Word of God is rightly called conceived or begotten wisdom, as being the wise conception of the divine mind. Hence the Apostle calls Christ *the Wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24). . . . Yet though the Son, who is God’s Word, is rightly called Begotten Wisdom, the name ‘Wisdom’ taken absolutely must be common to Father and Son, since the wisdom that shines through the Word is the essence of the Father, as we have said above, and the Father’s essence is common to him and the Son” (accessed 05/16/2022 at <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~SCG4>).

II. KNOWING THINGS IN THE *RATIONES AETERNAE*

It has already been noted that Thomas posits the existence of an intellectual light—namely, the agent intellect—within us. This agent intellect abstracts universal forms from the matter in which they are instantiated and individuated and renders them actually intelligible. While this agent intellect is “derived from a higher intellect,”⁵³ it is also something within the soul. In other words, while it derives from (*participatur*) the supreme intellect,⁵⁴ it also proceeds from the essence of the soul. This synthesis of the Platonic doctrine of participation with Aristotelian gnoseological principles undergirds Thomas’s account of the role played by the *rationes aeternae* (“eternal types”) in our knowledge of material things.⁵⁵ While his Aristotelianism compels him to reject a Platonic theory of Forms,⁵⁶ he

⁵³ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ad 5; my translation.

⁵⁵ See *STh* I, q. 84, a. 4, ad 1: “The intelligible species which are participated by our intellect are reduced, as to their first cause, to a first principle which is by its essence intelligible—namely, God. But they proceed from that principle by means of the sensible forms and material things, from which we gather knowledge, as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* vii).” On Thomas’s original synthesis of Platonism and Aristotelianism, see Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d’Aquino* (Segni: Editrice del Verbo Incarnato, 2005), 325–47. In brief, they are brought together into a living unity on the basis of their mutual complementarity (“vengono fatti convivere insieme secondo una mutua complementarità” [*ibid.*, 342]). W. Norris Clarke, S.J., writes in this regard that “St. Thomas has taken Plato—or, more accurately, Plato transformed by Plotinus—into so intimate a partnership with Aristotle that the metaphysical system of the Angelic Doctor can be legitimately described . . . either as an Aristotelianism specified by Platonism or as Platonism specified by Aristotelianism” (W. Norris Clarke, “The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism,” *The New Scholasticism* 26 [1952]: 166). He inclines to the view that “the latter is perhaps the more exact” (*ibid.*).

⁵⁶ As Paul DeHart writes, “Aquinas, operating under the imperatives of a theological doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* that was quite foreign to the Platonic philosophy in virtually all its forms, so radically and ingeniously reworked the divine idea framework that it amounted to a rejection of crucial assumptions and functions that were definitive within that philosophy” (Paul DeHart, “*Quaestio disputata*: Divine Virtues and Divine Ideas of Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 81 [2020]: 477). This article is a response to

nevertheless maintains that “the intellectual soul knows all true things in the *rationes aeternae*.”⁵⁷ In this regard he appeals to the authority of Augustine who held that the *rationes* of all creatures exist in the divine mind and that all things are made in themselves and are known to the human soul according to these *rationes*.⁵⁸

Central to Thomas’s construal of how we grasp the nature of bodies is Aristotle’s conviction that “the intellect has an operation which is independent of the body’s co-operation.”⁵⁹ This operation, belonging to the agent intellect, is responsible for the process of abstraction whereby the phantasms received from the senses are rendered actually intelligible. Thus, while sensible knowledge furnishes the material cause of intellectual knowledge in man, who is hylomorphically constituted, it cannot be the total and perfect cause of that knowledge.⁶⁰ We have already seen Thomas argue that the power “to light up the phantasms”⁶¹ proper to the agent intellect is derived from a higher intellect which Thomas identifies with “God Himself,

criticisms made by Benjamin DeSpain of an earlier article by DeHart. See Benjamin DeSpain, “*Quaestio disputata*: Aquinas’s Virtuous Vision of the Divine Ideas,” *Theological Studies* 81 (2020): 453-66; and Paul DeHart, “The Creature Makes Itself: Aquinas, the De-Idealization of the Eternal Ideas, and the Fate of the Individual,” *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 412-34. As will become apparent in what follows, DeHart’s contention that “any functional role of the ideas within human cognition is effectively eliminated,” (*ibid.*, 416), is mistaken.

⁵⁷ *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5, s.c. See Vivian Boland, O.P., *Ideas in God according to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996), 281: “Saint Thomas explains that the human soul does not know all things in the eternal reasons *sicut in obiecto cognito* in this life. But it does know all things in the eternal reasons *sicut in cognitionis principio* because the *lumen intellectuale* which, following Aristotle, he identifies with the *intellectus agens*, is a participation in the uncreated light.”

⁵⁸ See *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5. As Robert Pasnau explains, in preserving what he sees important in Augustine’s theory, Thomas in effect “is taking the first constructive step . . . toward answering the central problem of Q84: How does the intellect grasp the nature of bodies?” (Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of “Summa Theologiae 1a 75-89”* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002] 304).

⁵⁹ *STh* I, q. 84, a. 6.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*

⁶¹ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

Who is the soul's Creator, and only beatitude."⁶² This power is key to Thomas's interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of divine illumination.⁶³ The light of the agent intellect, described in article 10 of the disputed question *De spiritualibus creaturis* as being immediately impressed in us by God, is referred to in the *Summa* as "the seal of the Divine light in us,"⁶⁴ by which "all things are made known to us."⁶⁵

There are two ways in which the human soul can know all things in the *rationes aeternae*. The first is the preserve of the blessed, who see God and who consequently know all things in him "as in an object itself known."⁶⁶ Thomas compares this way of knowing all things in the *rationes aeternae* to seeing "in a mirror the images of things reflected therein."⁶⁷ The second way is a function of the agent intellect's participation in the divine light for, as Thomas writes, "the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a certain participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the *rationes aeternae*."⁶⁸ Elsewhere he writes in the same vein:

All things are said to be seen in God and all things are judged in Him, because by the participation of His light, we know and judge all things; for the light of natural reason itself is a participation of the divine light; as likewise we are said to see and judge of sensible things in the sun, i.e., by the sun's light.⁶⁹

⁶² On the immediate creation of the soul by God, see *ibid.*; on the contemplation of God alone as that which renders a man perfectly happy, see *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 7.

⁶³ Pasnau writes in this regard: "To understand the extent of Aquinas's empiricism . . . we must understand the pivotal role of the agent intellect. That, in turn, requires that we come to terms with 84.5, where Aquinas offers his interpretation of the famous Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination" (Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 304).

⁶⁴ *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5. This article deals with the question of whether the intellectual soul knows material things in the *rationes aeternae*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; translation slightly emended.

⁶⁹ *STh* I, q. 12, a. 11, ad 3. The remainder of the response reads: "Hence Augustine says (*Solitloq.* i, 8), *The lessons of instruction can only be seen as it were by their own*

It is this light of the divine countenance that “*is signed upon us*” that yields knowledge of the *rationes aeternae*.

It ought to be noted that God is both the efficient and the exemplary cause of the act of human understanding. These two kinds of cause correspond to the twofold principle of intellectual operation in any intelligent being: on the one hand there is “the intellectual power itself, which principle exists in the one who understands in potentiality”;⁷⁰ on the other hand there is “the principle of actual understanding, namely, the likeness of the thing understood in the one who understands.”⁷¹ Thus, as efficient cause God endows human beings with the light of reason (i.e., the power to understand), while as exemplary cause he furnishes the intelligible forms whereby they understand. As Thomas writes, God “moves the created intellect, inasmuch as He gives it the intellectual power, whether natural, or superadded; and impresses on the created intellect the intelligible species, and maintains and preserves both power and species in existence.”⁷² The Aristotelian aspect of Thomas’s doctrine of the Divine Ideas allows him to discern the secondary causality of created beings in communicating knowledge of them to the human mind. As John Rziha explains, “The divine ideas within God are the exemplary causes of all created beings. These created beings that can be known by the human intellect are then the secondary cause of the intellectual forms within the human mind.”⁷³

sun, namely God. As therefore in order to see a sensible object, it is not necessary to see the substance of the sun, so in like manner to see any intelligible object, it is not necessary to see the essence of God.”

⁷⁰ *STh* I, q. 105, a. 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions: Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 189. For an extended treatment of cognitive participation in the eternal law, see *ibid.*, 184-256. In concluding, Rziha writes: “Since God moves all things in accord with their form, the human intellect participates in the divine knowledge through apprehension, judgment (understanding), and reasoning. This participation is increased by perfecting the intellect by means of the virtues and gifts. . . . Because the intellect is perfected, it becomes more like the divine intellect in its ability to understand things, direct itself,

The *rationes aeternae* themselves pertain to the divine essence.⁷⁴ Thomas, however, rules out multiplicity within the Godhead: “In God, intellect, and the object understood, and the intelligible species, and His act of understanding are entirely one and the same. Hence when God is said to be understanding, no kind of multiplicity is attached to His substance.”⁷⁵ In support of the notion that the Divine Ideas regard the divine essence, Thomas argues that inasmuch as God knows his own essence perfectly, he does so “according to every mode in which it can be known.”⁷⁶ There are, in effect, two modes in which it can be known, namely, as it is in itself and as it is participated by creatures “according to some degree of likeness.”⁷⁷ Every

and direct others. Inasmuch as these virtues and gifts perfect the light of the intellect, they cause a greater participation in the divine light, the efficient cause of all knowledge. Inasmuch as they cause greater knowledge in the intellect, they cause greater participation in the divine exemplars: the divine ideas and the eternal law” (ibid., 255-56).

⁷⁴ The Latin terms *ratio* and *idea* are used interchangeably by Thomas. See, e.g., *STh* I, q. 15, a 2.

⁷⁵ *STh* I, q. 14, a. 4. The full body of the article reads: “It must be said that the act of God’s intellect is His substance. For if His act of understanding were other than His substance, then something else, as the Philosopher says (*Metaph.* xii), would be the act and perfection of the divine substance, to which the divine substance would be related, as potentiality is to act, which is altogether impossible; because the act of understanding is the perfection and act of the one understanding. Let us now consider how this is. As was laid down above (A. 2), to understand is not an act passing to anything extrinsic; for it remains in the operator as his own act and perfection; as existence is the perfection of the one existing: just as existence follows on the form, so in like manner to understand follows on the intelligible species. Now in God there is no form which is something other than His existence, as shown above (Q. 3). Hence as His essence itself is also His intelligible species, it necessarily follows that His act of understanding must be His essence and His existence. Thus it follows from all the foregoing that in God, intellect, and the object understood, and the intelligible species, and His act of understanding are entirely one and the same. Hence when God is said to be understanding, no kind of multiplicity is attached to His substance.” For a discussion of Thomas’s account of how, if God is a perfectly simple being, a multiplicity of ideas can exist in his mind, see Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 83-122.

⁷⁶ *STh* I, q. 15, a. 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

creature participates in the divine essence according to some degree of likeness by virtue of its own proper species (*species*). Insofar as God knows his essence as capable of being imitated by any creature, “He knows it as the particular *ratio* and *idea* [*idea*] of that creature; and in like manner as regards other creatures.”⁷⁸ As Bernard J. Lonergan, S.J., expresses this point, “The divine act of understanding primarily is of the divine essence but secondarily of its virtualities.”⁷⁹ This knowledge is a function of the divine creative causality for

whatever effects pre-exist in God, as in the first cause, must be in His act of understanding, and all things must be in Him according to an intelligible mode: for everything which is in another, is in it according to the mode of that in which it is.⁸⁰

Since God’s knowledge extends as far as his causality and since this causality extends to matter, his knowledge “must extend to singular things, which are individualized by matter.”⁸¹

According to Thomas, the divine understanding or intellection (in which are located the Divine Ideas) is logically prior to the procession of the Word, in whom the Divine Ideas are located and expressed.⁸² He argues that we ought to understand what is said of God by way of similitude with the highest of intellectual substances, though we are conscious of the fact that “the similitudes derived from these fall short in the representation of divine objects.”⁸³ In the act of understanding the

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Bernard J. Lonergan, S.J., *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 196.

⁸⁰ *STh* I, q. 14, a. 5.

⁸¹ *STh* I, q. 14, a. 11.

⁸² For a summary account of Thomas’s Trinitarian doctrine of the Word, see Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 63-66. This summary is based on Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 176-218. Legge signals four fundamental aspects of Thomas’s doctrine of the divine Word: “First, the central insight of Aquinas’s doctrine of the Word itself; second, the relation to creatures implied in the name “Word”; third, the theme of the Word as begotten Wisdom; and finally, the Word as intrinsically manifesting the Father” (*ibid.*).

⁸³ *STh* I, q. 27, a. 1.

intellect is made one with the object understood: “The thing actually understood is the intellect in act [*intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu*], because the likeness of the thing understood [*similitudo rei intellectae*] is the form of the intellect.”⁸⁴ This understanding is prior to the conception of the object understood. As Thomas writes:

Whenever we understand, by the very fact of understanding there proceeds something within us, which is a conception of the object understood, a conception issuing from our intellectual power and proceeding from our knowledge of that object.⁸⁵

This conception, signified by the word of the voice, is called the *verbum cordis* (“the word of the heart”):⁸⁶ “The concept itself of the heart [*conceptus cordis*] has of its own nature to proceed from something other than itself—namely, from the knowledge of the one conceiving.”⁸⁷ The procession of the Word in God is to be understood analogously, that is to say, “by way of an intelligible emanation, for example, of the intelligible word which proceeds from the speaker, yet remains in him.”⁸⁸ As Lonergan puts it, however, God is “an infinite and substantial act of understanding.”⁸⁹ In God to understand entails complete identity since in him “the intellect and the thing understood are altogether the same.”⁹⁰ The impossibility of ontological diversity in the divine understanding means that “the divine Word is of necessity perfectly one with the source whence He proceeds.”⁹¹

In his discussion of whether *Word* is the Son’s proper name, Thomas argues that the Son’s ontological identity with the divine substance means that to be intelligent belongs to him “in

⁸⁴ *STh* I, q. 85, a. 2, ad 1.

⁸⁵ *STh* I, q. 27, a. 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1.

⁸⁸ *STh* I, q. 27, a. 1.

⁸⁹ Lonergan, *Verbum*, 191.

⁹⁰ *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 3.

⁹¹ *STh* I, q. 27, a. 1, ad 2.

the same way as it belongs to Him to be God, since to understand is said of God essentially."⁹² Since the Son is begotten from the one who begets, it follows that "He is intelligent, not as producing a Word, but as the Word proceeding."⁹³ Again the divine simplicity demands that "in God the Word proceeding does not differ really from the divine intellect, but is distinguished from the principle of the Word only by relation."⁹⁴ A divine person—the Son in this context—signifies a relation as subsisting in the divine essence.⁹⁵ The relation of filiation corresponds to the relation of paternity as its opposite. This subsisting relation of filiation is the person of the Son.⁹⁶ It is precisely because the term *Word* (*verbum*) as it is employed strictly with regard to God also signifies something as proceeding from another that it "belongs to the nature of personal terms in God, inasmuch as the divine Persons are distinguished by origin."⁹⁷ Thus, concludes Thomas, "the term *Word*, according as we use the term strictly of God, is to be taken as said not essentially, but personally."⁹⁸ As Gilles Emery, O.P., emphasizes, it is "not just a metaphor or an image, but a *proper* name for speaking of the Son."⁹⁹

Correlative to the personal signification of the term *Word* is the idea that "to *speak*" (*dicere*) is also said personally and not essentially. Thus the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together cannot be regarded as one speaker since the Word is

⁹² *STh* I, q. 34, a. 2, ad 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ See *STh* I, q. 39, a. 1: "Relation as referred to the essence does not differ therefrom really, but only in our way of thinking; while as referred to an opposite relation, it has a real distinction by virtue of that opposition. Thus there are one essence and three persons."

⁹⁶ See *STh* I, q. 30, a. 2.

⁹⁷ *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1. See *STh* I, q. 27, aa. 3-5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid* *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 3.

⁹⁹ Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 187. Emery continues: "What is at stake here, with the Word as for the Father, is the rejection of Arianism. If one hold that the Son is the Word of the Father but reduces the name *Word* to a metaphor, one has taken the first step on a path leading to the denial of the consubstantial divinity of the Word with the Father (the same danger arises if one treats the name *Son* as a metaphor)" (*ibid.*).

not common to them. The Father who begets the Son is the speaker of the Word for “the Father, by understanding Himself, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and all other things comprised in this knowledge, conceives the Word; so that thus the whole Trinity is *spoken* in the Word; and likewise also all creatures.”¹⁰⁰ The Word of God, that is to say, God’s eternal concept (*conceptus*), is thus “the exemplar likeness [*similitudo exemplaris*] of all creatures.”¹⁰¹ The Father’s utterance of the Word thus imparts a Christological character to the Divine Ideas. Bearing in mind that idea and exemplar are the same thing,¹⁰² the Word uttered by the Father can be referred to as “the exemplar likeness of all creatures.”¹⁰³ Creatures are God’s handiwork fashioned “by the intelligible form of his art” (*per formam artis conceptam*),¹⁰⁴ according to this exemplar likeness. Thomas notes a particular agreement of the Word with human

¹⁰⁰ *STh* I, q. 34, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁰¹ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8.

¹⁰² See *STh* I, q. 44, a. 3, s.c.: “The exemplar is the same as the idea. But ideas, according to Augustine (QQ. 83, qu. 46), are *the master forms, which are contained in the divine intelligence.*”

¹⁰³ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* See Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 197: “The Son as Word is thus the Father’s *creative Art*. ‘Every artist acts through his art. And, as Augustine says, the Son is the *art of the Father*, full of the patterns of all living things: the Father acts through the Son’ [II *Sent.* d. 13, q. un., a. 5, contra 2; I *Sent.* d. 27, q. 2, a. 3, arg. 4, sol. and ad 4. Augustine, *De Trinitate* VI.X.11; cf. *Tractates on John* I, nos. 16-17]. This image of the artist is less naïve than one might think at first glance. All of the actions of an efficient cause (a cause which produces an effect within being) imply an exemplary cause. This is a metaphysical law of action. Actions tend to communicate determinate forms, fabricating this and that. If the form has not been determined, the action itself cannot take place, for the activity’s power vanishes into non-determination. Every agent acts with a determinate form in view. And the origin of the form cannot be found in the effect, because the effect did not exist before the action happened. So it exists in the subject who carries out the action, either in their natural being when it is a natural action, like a flame igniting another flame, or in the agent’s mind, when we are looking at an action performed freely and knowingly: and the artist illustrates such action. This analogy means that creation, God’s action in the world, is linked to God’s immanent activity, the personal procession of the Word. It thus exhibits the economic repercussions of Trinitarian faith.”

nature since “the Word is a concept of the eternal Wisdom, from Whom all man’s wisdom is derived.”¹⁰⁵ As made to the image of God by virtue of the possession of an intellectual nature, man is “like to the Supreme Wisdom.”¹⁰⁶ It is important to note that Thomas here refers to all human wisdom, not specifically to that wisdom which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Included in this global notion of wisdom is, for example, the wisdom of the medical doctor or of the architect. It pertains to wisdom to consider the highest cause and “by means of that cause we are able to form a most certain judgment about other causes, and according thereto all things should be set in order.”¹⁰⁷ While one can indeed refer to the wisdom proper to a particular genus such as medicine or architecture, wisdom understood simply pertains to divine things because “he who knows the cause that is simply the highest, which is God, is said to be wise simply, inasmuch he is able to judge and set in order all things according to Divine rules.”¹⁰⁸

This section has engaged with Thomas’s teaching concerning the *rationes aeternae*. In this context the agent intellect appears again as key to Thomas’s interpretation of Augustine’s theory of divine illumination. The agent intellect, while it issues from the essence of the soul, is ultimately derived from God, the soul’s creator and beatitude. It is in fact “the seal of the Divine light in us”¹⁰⁹ by which “all things are made known to us.”¹¹⁰ Expressed otherwise, by virtue of the agent intellect’s participation in the divine light the human soul can know all things in the *rationes aeternae*. The light of the divine countenance that “*is signed upon us*” affords us knowledge of the *rationes aeternae* or Divine Ideas, which pertain to the divine essence in a way that nevertheless rules out multiplicity in the Godhead. The *rationes aeternae* are located in the divine understanding, which is logically prior to the procession of the Word. The divine

¹⁰⁵ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8.

¹⁰⁶ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 2, ad 4.

¹⁰⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; translation slightly emended.

¹⁰⁹ *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

simplicity, however, means that the Word is not really different from the divine intellect but “is distinguished from the principle of the Word only by relation.”¹¹¹ Thomas argues that because the term *Word* signifies something as proceeding from another, it is a personal term. In speaking the Word, the Father speaks the whole Trinity as well as all creatures. The fact that the Word, God’s eternal concept, is the exemplar likeness of all creatures means that the Divine Ideas possess a Christological character. The Word has a particular agreement with human nature: man, on account of his intellectual nature whereby he is said to be made in the image of God, participates in the divine wisdom. All human wisdom is derived from the Word who “is a concept of the eternal Wisdom.”¹¹²

The next section considers question 93, article 4 of the *Prima pars*, which concerns the existence of the image of God in every man on account of his intellectual nature, which nature imitates God principally (*maxime*) inasmuch as “God understands and loves Himself.”¹¹³ The *imago Dei* in man, which thus pertains to man’s knowledge and love of God, is in man in three ways, namely, by nature, by grace, and by glory. Even at the level of nature it must be said that the image of God is in man according to the Trinity of persons, for there is in man a procession of the word in the intellect and a procession of love in the will. The actualization of the capacity to know and to love God requires grace. As the image is increasingly transformed by grace, man also enjoys a certain intellectual illumination, which is attributed to the invisible mission of the Son. Of particular note in this regard is the gift of wisdom since “wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law.”¹¹⁴ The first principles of the natural law, which is nothing but a participation in the eternal law, are

¹¹¹ *STh* I, q. 34, a. 2, ad 4.

¹¹² *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8.

¹¹³ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹¹⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

illuminated by light of the agent intellect which, as we have seen, participates in the divine light. The Christological ground of the natural law comes to the fore again, even in the absence of grace, in view of the fact that the divine light is appropriated to the Son as the Word.

III. THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL GROUND OF THE NATURAL LAW

Thomas ultimately grounds his doctrine of man as created in the image of God in his theology of creation. With regard to the creation of things, the divine persons have a causality “according to the nature of their procession.”¹¹⁵ Thomas argues¹¹⁶ that God is the cause of all things by his intellect and will respectively, just as a craftsman is the cause of things that he makes by his craft. Following through on this analogy, he maintains that just as the craftsman “works through the word conceived in his mind, and through the love of his will regarding some object”¹¹⁷ so too “God the Father made the creature through His Word, which is His Son; and through His Love, which is the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *STh* I, q. 45, a. 6.

¹¹⁶ *STh* I, q. 14, a. 8; q. 19, a. 4.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* For an illuminating study of the personal, proper mode of act of each of the divine persons in creation, see Gilles Emery, O.P., “The Personal Mode of Trinitarian Action in St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2007), 115-38. Emery concludes thus: “The three persons act in one same action, but each performs this action in the distinct mode of his personal relation, that is, according to his proper ‘mode of existing’ in accordance with the Trinitarian order. The Father acts as the source of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Son acts as the Word of the Father, the Holy Spirit acts as Love and Gift of the Father and the Son. . . . The proper mode of the persons’ acting . . . does not give rise to an exclusive action of one person in the world, but rather it concerns the hypostatic relation (the relation of divine Person to divine Person) always implied in the action that the Three perform in creating the world and saving humankind” (*ibid.*, 138). For an extended treatment of the role of the divine persons in creation, see Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 338-59. See also Gilles Emery, O.P., “Trinity and Creation,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 58-75.

On the basis of this theology of creation, it follows that the image of God in man is according to the Trinity of persons. This fact obtains not simply at the levels of grace and of glory; it characterizes the image as common to all men by virtue of the very nature of the mind. Just as the distinction of persons is suitable to the divine nature, so too “to be to the image of God by imitation of the Divine Nature does not exclude being to the same image by the representation of the Divine Persons: but rather one follows from the other.”¹¹⁹ This contention relies, of course, on the belief that God is a Trinity of persons. Absent this belief, it would be impossible to understand the triad in the mind as an image of the Trinity. Thomas quotes Augustine in support of this point: “*We see, rather than believe, the trinity which is in ourselves; whereas we believe rather than see that God is Trinity.*”¹²⁰ Trinitarian faith, however, allows us to see that the basis for the image of the Trinity in human beings is to be found in the acts of knowing and loving. These acts reflect, according to their finite mode of being, the divine processions:

As the uncreated Trinity is distinguished by the procession of the Word from the Speaker, and of Love from both of these, as we have seen (Q. 28, A. 3); so we may say that in rational creatures wherein we find a procession of the word in the intellect, and a procession of the love in the will, there exists an image of the uncreated Trinity, by a certain representation of the species.¹²¹

Thus the image of God in man manifests itself preeminently in the acts of the intellect and of the will, that is to say, in knowing

¹¹⁹ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, ad 3. Citation from *De Trin.* 15.6.

¹²¹ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 6. See also q. 45, a. 7: “Now the processions of the divine Persons are referred to the acts of intellect and will, as was said above (Q. 27). For the Son proceeds as the word of the intellect; and the Holy Spirit proceeds as love of the will. Therefore in rational creatures, possessing intellect and will, there is found the representation of the Trinity by way of image, inasmuch as there is found in them the word conceived, and the love proceeding.”

and loving, acts that reflect the eternal processions of Word and Love in the Holy Trinity.¹²²

On the basis of the fact that “the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves Himself,”¹²³ Thomas outlines how, in the words of David L. Whidden III, “The image of God is found in humans in the three-level hierarchy of lights of reason, grace, and glory.”¹²⁴ The first level pertains to the possession of “a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God.”¹²⁵ This aptitude, which “consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men,”¹²⁶ constitutes the natural substrate that is perfected at the two subsequent levels of grace and glory. As Anselm K. Min writes, human life is “a *process* in which our ‘natural aptitude’ is being actualized and perfected by grace for the end of glory.”¹²⁷ When the image is actualized by grace, man then “actually or habitually knows and loves God,”¹²⁸ albeit imperfectly.¹²⁹ Expressed otherwise, this second of the three-level hierarchy of lights entails the image being conformed to God by grace. The third level consists in man knowing and loving God perfectly, which perfection in knowing and loving is the preserve of those who enjoy the beatific vision. As Thomas puts it, “this image consists in the likeness of glory.”¹³⁰

¹²² Thus, as D. Juvenal Merriell comments, Thomas “conceived of the image of God as an ineradicable capacity for God in man, the foundation for man’s participation in the life of the divine Trinity to which man is called by God’s grace” (D. Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study in the Development of Aquinas’ Teaching* [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990], 4).

¹²³ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹²⁴ Whidden, *Christ the Light*, 177.

¹²⁵ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Anselm K. Min, *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 30.

¹²⁸ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹²⁹ For a book-length treatment of the epistemic transformation wrought by grace, see Kevin E. O’Reilly, O.P., *The Hermeneutics of Knowing and Loving in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Utrecht: Thomas Instituut; Leuven: Peeters, 2013). The conditions for this transformation, as argued in this book, are Christological, pneumatological, Trinitarian, ecclesial, and scriptural.

¹³⁰ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

One can discern in Thomas's brief delineation of the three ways the image of God is in man three junctures that mark man's journey to union with God. This journey is one of progressive divinization in which the faculties of intellect and will are increasingly transformed by grace.¹³¹ This progress of divinization entails increasing degrees of intellectual illumination.¹³² Fundamental in this regard is the gift of wisdom, which imparts right judgment about divine things on account of a certain connaturality with them. While the gift of wisdom, like all the gifts, is conferred by the Holy Spirit, who "is by His nature the first Gift, since He is Love,"¹³³ wisdom and the other gifts that pertain to the intellect—understanding, knowledge, and counsel—"are appropriated in a certain way to the Son."¹³⁴ It is in respect of these gifts, in fact, that we speak about the mission of the Son. Significantly, in his treatment of the gift of wisdom, Thomas writes, "Wisdom denotes a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law,"¹³⁵ bearing in mind that

¹³¹ See Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2015), 77: "The image's three stages of nature, grace, and glory (or creation, re-creation, and likeness) represent increasingly perfect participations of the divine likeness, in which the image is united in a progressively closer fashion to God. In this progression there is both a continuity—because the natural substrate that constitutes the likeness (capacity for intellectual operations of knowledge and love) remains the same—and a radical discontinuity—because in the more perfect image of grace and glory, the object of these operations is actually and not only potentially God. There is a movement, as the image becomes more God-like, from aptitude or potentiality for the knowledge and love of God, to the actual and perfect activity. Or, to look at it another way, God actualizes the creature's potential by causing it to participate more fully in God's own divine life of knowledge and love."

¹³² On this point, see O'Reilly, *Hermeneutics of Knowing and Loving*.

¹³³ *STh* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2. In this article, Thomas distinguishes between a twofold rectitude of judgment, on account of a "perfect use of reason," on the one hand, and on account of "a certain connaturality with the matter about which one has to judge," on the other. "Accordingly," he writes, "it belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about Divine things after reason has made its

among the other things expressed by the Word, “the eternal law is expressed thereby.”¹³⁶

Thomas concludes his discussion of the three ways in which the image of God is in man by quoting both Psalm 4:7 and a gloss thereon: “Wherefore on the words, *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us* (Ps 4:7), the gloss distinguishes a threefold image of *creation*, of *re-creation*, and of *likeness*.”¹³⁷ We have already seen that, in the disputed questions *De spiritualibus creaturis* and *De virtutibus in communi*, Thomas notes that the light of the agent intellect illumines the precepts of the natural law, which is not something different from the eternal law but rather “a participation thereof.”¹³⁸ Even at the level of creation and apart from grace—and thus even in the midst of great sin—the intellectual light participates in some way in the life of the Trinitarian God by means of the Word in whom the eternal law is expressed.¹³⁹ The first principles of the natural law, which are “altogether unchangeable,”¹⁴⁰ are illuminated by the light of

inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them.” For a treatment of the theme of knowledge through connaturality or inclination in Thomas, see Marco d’Avenio, *La conoscenza per connaturalità in S. Tommaso d’Aquino* (Bologna: Edizioni studio domenicano, 1992). See also Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P., *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 423-29; and, O’Reilly, *Hermeneutics of Knowing and Loving*, 275-81.

¹³⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2.

¹³⁷ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹³⁸ *STh* I, q. 91, a. 1, ad 1.

¹³⁹ See *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1 and 2. See also *STh* I, q. 93, a. 8, ad 3: “The meritorious knowledge and love of God can be in us only by grace. Yet there is a certain natural knowledge and love. . . . This, too, is natural that the mind, in order to understand God, can make use of reason, in which sense we have already said that the image of God abides ever in the soul; *whether this image of God be so obsolete*, as it were clouded, *as almost to amount to nothing*, as in those who have not the use of reason; *or obscured and disfigured*, as in sinners; *or clear and beautiful*, as in the just; as Augustine says (*De Trin.* xiv. 6).” The ontological identity of man is thus fundamentally constituted by the capacity to know and to love the Holy Trinity. On this point, see Thomas Hibbs, *Virtue’s Splendor: Wisdom, Prudence, and the Human Good* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 211-12.

¹⁴⁰ *STh* I, q. 94, a. 5.

reason which participates in the divine light, which divine light or splendor is appropriated to the Son as the Word, “which is the light and splendor of the intellect.”¹⁴¹ With grace is conferred a new mode of participation in the life of the Holy Trinity and thus a greater rectitude of judgment according to the eternal law as the *imago Dei* journeys towards the likeness of glory.

Man is made to the image of God on account of his possession of an intellectual nature which is “some likeness to God, copied from God as from an exemplar.”¹⁴² The image of God, which is “impressed on his mind,”¹⁴³ is according to the Trinity of persons, and by virtue of this image man has a natural inclination to eternal beatitude at the levels of nature, grace, and glory. The first level, which instantiates “a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God,”¹⁴⁴ is perfected at the levels of grace and glory. The perfection of the image by grace brings about greater degrees of intellectual illumination. This illumination is attributed to the invisible mission of the Son, to whom the gifts that pertain to the intellect are appropriated. The gift of wisdom, the most relevant in the present context, denotes “a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law,”¹⁴⁵ which is expressed in the Father’s utterance of the Word. The quotation of Psalm 4:7, “*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us,*”¹⁴⁶ along with a gloss that “distinguishes a threefold image of *creation*, of *re-creation*, and of *likeness*,”¹⁴⁷ serves to link the three ways in which man is made to the image

¹⁴¹ *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8.

¹⁴² *STh* I, q. 93, a. 1. For an elucidation of Thomas’s teaching concerning exemplarism and the development of this teaching throughout his career, see Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 2-23. See also *STh* I, q. 44, a. 3.

¹⁴³ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 6, ad 1.

¹⁴⁴ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹⁴⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

of God according to the Trinity of persons with the natural law. Even at the level of creation, and bereft of grace, the light of human reason that illumines the precepts of the natural law and attempts to figure out its demands in the concrete circumstances of life constitutes some kind of participation in that divine light which is appropriated to the Word.

To know God pertains to the intellect, while to love God is a function of the will. The final section of this article turns to a consideration of the phrase, "*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*" as it occurs in a context that deals with the goodness of the will. Since human reason—which participates in divine reason as an effect participates in some way in its cause—is the rule of the will, it follows that the goodness of the will depends ultimately on the eternal law. When human reason fails on account of sin, therefore, it is necessary to have recourse to the eternal law, which recourse is afforded us by Christ incarnate, the concept of God's wisdom made flesh. Natural-law reasoning is perfected by imitating his example.

IV. THE GOODNESS OF THE WILL

The final passage in the *Summa theologiae* in which the phrase "*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*" occurs is in question 19, article 4 of the *Prima secundae*, where Thomas discusses whether the goodness of the will depends on the eternal law. The overall concern of the question is the goodness and malice of the interior act of the will. A central motif of this question is the notion that Thomas enunciates in response to the objection that the will is good by nature and that its goodness does not therefore depend on its object. He writes: "Good is presented to the will as its object by the reason: and insofar as it is in accord with reason, it enters the moral order, and causes moral goodness in the act of the will: because the reason is the principle of human and moral acts."¹⁴⁸ In brief, "the will follows the apprehension of the

¹⁴⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 1, ad 3. See *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 5: "Now in human actions, good and evil are predicated in reference to the reason; because as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.*

reason or intellect.”¹⁴⁹ This position is completely reconcilable with the fact that the goodness of the will properly depends on its object,¹⁵⁰ since this object “is proposed to it by reason.”¹⁵¹ Since the will is a rational appetite the good understood (*bonum intellectum*) is its proportionate object. Saying that the goodness of the will depends on its object therefore amounts to saying that it depends on reason because, to repeat, “the will cannot desire a good that is not previously apprehended by reason.”¹⁵²

Having established the dependence of the goodness of the will on reason, Thomas is in a position to proceed to the next step, which is to prove that it also depends on the eternal law. This proof is grounded in an appeal to the metaphysics of cause and effect. According to the logic of cause and effect, wherever there is a series of causes subordinate to one another, any particular effect depends more on the first than on the second cause since “the second cause acts only in virtue of the first.”¹⁵³ We have seen above that although the agent intellect is certainly something in the soul, because of its imperfection—“it is not wholly intellectual but only in part”¹⁵⁴—one must necessarily posit the existence of a higher intellect by participation in which “the soul is helped to understand.”¹⁵⁵ Appealing both to his account of creation and to his treatise on beatitude, Thomas concludes that according to the teaching of the faith this

iv), *the good of man is to be in accordance with reason, and evil is to be against reason.* For that is good for a thing which suits it in regard to its form; and evil, that which is against the order of its form. It is therefore evident that the difference of good and evil considered in reference to the object is an essential difference in relation to reason; that is to say, according as the object is suitable or unsuitable to reason.”

¹⁴⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 10.

¹⁵⁰ See *STh* I-II, q. 19, aa. 1-3.

¹⁵¹ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, ad 1. On this point, see Michael S. Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 18-24.

¹⁵³ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 4.

¹⁵⁴ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

separate intellect “is God Himself, Who is the soul’s Creator, and only beatitude.”¹⁵⁶ The human soul’s derivation of its intellectual light from God is what is referred to by the words of Psalm 4:7, “*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.*”¹⁵⁷

This verse furnishes the answer to the immediately preceding question posed in Psalm 4: “*Many say: Who showeth us good things?*”¹⁵⁸ As Thomas explains, while human reason receives its rule and measure from the divine reason, that is to say, from the eternal law, this reason is in turn the rule of the human will. Elsewhere he writes: “There are two rules of the human will: one is proximate and homogeneous, viz., the human reason; the other is the first rule, viz., the eternal law, which is God’s reason, so to speak.”¹⁵⁹ The goodness of the will is thus measured by reason. The significance of Psalm 4:7 thus becomes clear: it is as though one were to say, “*The light of our reason is able to show us good things, and guide our will, insofar as it is the light (i.e., derived from) Thy countenance.*”¹⁶⁰

A point of capital importance follows from the conclusion that flows from Thomas’s argumentation, namely, that the human will depends more on the eternal law than it does on human reason—for “Wherever a number of causes are subordinate to one another, the effect depends more on the first than on the second cause: since the second cause acts only in virtue of the first.”¹⁶¹ Sin has a corrosive effect on human reason and, therefore, on the natural law. Knowledge of the natural law is obscured in those in whom “reason is perverted by passion, or evil habit, or an evil disposition of nature.”¹⁶² While

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 4.

¹⁵⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 71, a. 6.

¹⁶⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 4.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 4. Thomas continues: “Thus formerly, theft, although it is expressly contrary to the natural law, was not considered wrong among the Germans, as Julius Caesar relates (*De Bello Gall.* vi).” For a commentary on this example of erroneous perception of the good on the part of the vicious, see Kevin E. O’Reilly, “The Vision of Virtue and Knowledge of the Natural Law in the Thought of Thomas

the general principles of the natural law cannot be destroyed in the human heart, the natural law can be extinguished in the case of a particular action “insofar as reason is hindered from applying the general principle to a particular point of practice, on account of concupiscence or some other passion.”¹⁶³ In contrast to the general principles or primary precepts of the natural law, the secondary precepts can be blotted out from the human heart, “either by evil persuasions, just as in speculative matters errors occur in respect of necessary conclusions; or by vicious customs and corrupt habits.”¹⁶⁴ Thomas references Romans 1 in this regard where Paul, in Thomas’s words, “considers vices against nature, which are the worst carnal sins, as punishments for idolatry. . . . Furthermore, as idolatry became more widespread, these vices grew.”¹⁶⁵ Thomas instances theft as something that might not be deemed sinful on account of vicious customs and corrupt habits. Gregory Doolan offers the examples of “bride burning in India, hari-kari or ritual suicide formerly found in Japan, and polygamy in certain Arab countries.”¹⁶⁶ These failures with regard to the natural law are intimately linked with the obscuring effects of sin on human

Aquinas,” *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 5 (2007): 58-62. See also *STh* I-II, q. 77, aa. 2 and 3; q. 85, aa. 1 and 2.

¹⁶³ *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 6. See *STh* I-II, q. 77, a. 2. For a discussion of the negative influence of the passions on reason, see Elizabeth Uffenheimer-Lippens, “Rationalized Passion and Passionate Rationality: Thomas Aquinas on the Relation between Reason and the Passions,” *Review of Metaphysics* 56 (2003): 553-55.

¹⁶⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 6.

¹⁶⁵ *In Rom.*, c. 1, lect. 8. Translation taken from *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander, Wyo.: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2021).

¹⁶⁶ Gregory Doolan, “The Relation of Culture and Ignorance to Culpability in Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 105. Doolan concludes his article thus: “Thomas does not deny that a ‘widespread moral ignorance’ can be due principally to cultural influences. But neither does he deny the role of individual responsibility. A habit of false principles *can* be caused by perverse custom, but it can also be changed. Hence, according to Thomas, the false conscience inculcated by cultural mores does not excuse from sin altogether. Even when custom does prevail over an individual’s choices, the moral agent nonetheless remains responsible for his individual acts” (ibid., 124).

reason and, as Thomas writes in concluding his discussion of whether the goodness of the will depends on the eternal law, “When human reason fails we must have recourse to the Eternal Reason.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, knowledge of the eternal law must be secured “by some sort of additional revelation.”¹⁶⁸

This additional revelation is ultimately effected in the incarnation of the Word, in whom is expressed the eternal law.¹⁶⁹ The fact that the Word—the concept of God’s wisdom who is the exemplar of all created things, including human nature—assumed human nature constitutes his moral example as the supreme ordering force of divine wisdom for human beings. Christ’s absolute moral exemplarity is ontologically grounded in the procession of the eternal Word through whom all things were created.¹⁷⁰ By imitating the example of the incarnate Word, therefore, we are perfected in wisdom, participating in the Word of God who is the concept of eternal wisdom “from Whom all man’s wisdom is derived.”¹⁷¹ Here it is the gift of wisdom, conferred with grace, that is in question. This gift, which issues from knowledge of the Word, constitutes the most exalted form of wisdom as “a certain rectitude of judgment according to the Eternal Law,”¹⁷² which rectitude of judgment pertains to the natural law as the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law.

¹⁶⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 4.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ad 3.

¹⁶⁹ See *STh* I-II, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2; q. 91, a. 1, ad 2.

¹⁷⁰ For a treatment of Christ’s moral exemplarity, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 86-109. See also Thomas S. Hibbs, “*Imitatio Christi* and the Foundation of Aquinas’s Ethics,” *Communio* 18 (1991): 556-73; and, L.-B. Gillon, O.P., “L’imitation du Christ et la morale de saint Thomas,” *Angelicum* 36 (1959): 263-86.

¹⁷¹ *STh* III, q. 3, a. 8. For a discussion of participation in eternal wisdom by imitating the example of the incarnate Word, see O’Reilly, *Hermeneutics of Knowing and Loving*, 111-21. While it is the Word who imparts this teaching to us, it is the Holy Spirit—who as love is the first gift (*donum*) in virtue of which the other gifts (*dona*) are bestowed on us (see *STh* I, q. 38 a. 2)—who enables us to grasp it (see *In Ioan.*, c. 14, lect. 6). For a discussion of this theme, see Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 249-68.

¹⁷² *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

In this section we have considered the one instance of Thomas's citation of the phrase "*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*" that is related to the goodness of the will. Since the will depends on the reason and since the reason in turn participates in the light of the divine reason, that is to say, "God Himself, Who is the soul's Creator, and only beatitude,"¹⁷³ it follows that the will ultimately depends primarily on the divine reason. In other words, it depends on the eternal law. Disordered passions, however, obscure the reason, thereby undermining its participation in the divine reason. In other words, they obscure the light of the natural law in the rational creature. As a result, the will, in effect, lacks the direction of the rule of reason and of the divine law. It is instead intent on some mutable good and, as such, "causes the act of sin directly."¹⁷⁴ This defect is remedied by imitation of the example of the incarnate Word, by virtue of which the disciple participates ever more deeply in the eternal law and his natural reasoning is perfected.

CONCLUSION

This article has considered certain logical connections among the passages of the *Summa theologiae* in which Thomas cites Psalm 4:7, "*The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.*" These connections suggest that Thomas cites this verse with strategic intent to intimate the Christological foundations of the natural law as a participation in the eternal law. Thus, the light of the agent intellect, which illuminates the first speculative and practical principles impressed on the rational creature by the divine creative act, participates in the divine light, which is appropriated to the Son who, as the Word, is the light and splendor of the divine intellect.¹⁷⁵ It is in

¹⁷³ *STh* I, q. 79, 4.

¹⁷⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 75, a. 1.

¹⁷⁵ See *STh* I, 39, a. 8.

virtue of the agent intellect that we discern between good and evil inasmuch as it illumines the first principles of practical reason. The agent intellect is in effect “the seal of the Divine light in us”¹⁷⁶ since it participates in the divine light. This participation affords the human soul a knowledge of all things in the *rationes aeternae*, including “the very Idea [*ratio*] of the government of things,”¹⁷⁷ that is to say, the eternal law. This participation is, of course, the natural law. Further Christological connections are intimated by the fact that the *rationes aeternae* are expressed in the Word uttered by the Father. Thus, our knowledge of the natural law can be said to possess a Christological character since it cannot be construed apart from the eternal law but is rather “a participation thereof,”¹⁷⁸ and the eternal law “is appropriated to the Son, on account of the kinship between type [*ratio*] and word [*verbum*].”¹⁷⁹ The human will, on account of the debilitating effects of sin, depends for its part on the eternal reason or the eternal law. The will is rectified by the *imitatio Christi*, which effects the perfection of human wisdom, since Christ is divine wisdom incarnate. On account of the hypostatic union, to imitate Christ means to conform oneself to the divine wisdom and thus to judge with rectitude according to the eternal law.

To state the obvious, knowledge of the natural law is predicated on man’s possession of an intellectual nature, that is to say, on the fact that he is made in the image of God. It is in virtue of this nature that he has an inclination to eternal beatitude. Thomas maintains that the actualization of the image whereby a man forms an internal word and thence breaks forth into love requires grace,¹⁸⁰ which, as mediated by Christ’s humanity, bears a Christological impress.¹⁸¹ It is grace, moreover, that renders possible the attainment of beatitude. Thomas states the point negatively: “Man, by his natural

¹⁷⁶ *STh* I, q. 84, a. 5.

¹⁷⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 1.

¹⁷⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 1.

¹⁷⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2.

¹⁸⁰ See *STh* I-II, q. 93, aa. 4 and 7.

¹⁸¹ See *STh* I-II, q. 112, a. 1, ad 1.

endowments, cannot produce meritorious works proportionate to everlasting life.”¹⁸² The desire for beatitude is nonetheless deeply rooted in human nature. As Stephen L. Brock puts it, the *ratio* of the good—“*good is that which all things seek after*”¹⁸³—that grounds the first precept of the natural law, namely, “*good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided,*”¹⁸⁴ constitutes “an understanding that is proportioned to beatitude.”¹⁸⁵ Thomas himself writes that “the first principle in practical matters, which are the object of the practical reason, is the last end: and the last end of human life is bliss or happiness [*felicitas vel beatitudo*].”¹⁸⁶ The notion that grace is required for an adequate grasp of the natural law, that is, a grasp that guides one to eternal beatitude, is in fact suggested by Thomas in his commentary on Romans 2:14, “For when the gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature [*naturaliter*] those things that are of the law; they, having not the law, are a law to themselves.”

Thomas’s explanation—or rather explanations—of the expression, “by nature” (*naturaliter*) is noteworthy. It seems at first sight to smack of Pelagianism to think that man can by his own powers observe all the precepts of the law. Thomas counters a Pelagian interpretation of this expression by claiming that it “should mean nature reformed by grace [*per naturam gratia reformatam*].”¹⁸⁷ Paul, according to this explanation, has in mind the gentiles who have converted to the faith and who have begun to obey the moral precepts of the law “by the help of Christ’s grace.”¹⁸⁸ Thomas’s second explanation once again quotes Psalm 4:7, and it refers to the *imago Dei* as well as to the need for grace:

¹⁸² *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 5.

¹⁸³ *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Brock, *Light That Binds*, 155.

¹⁸⁶ *STh* I, q. 90, a. 2.

¹⁸⁷ *In Rom.*, c. 2, lect. 3.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Or *by nature* can mean by the natural law showing them what should be done, as in a psalm: *there are many who say, 'who shows us good things?' The light of your countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us* (Ps 4:7), i.e., the light of natural reason, in which is God's image. All this does not rule out the need of grace to move the affections any more than *the knowledge of sin through the law* (Rom 3:20) exempts from the need of grace to move the affections.

An engagement with the implications of this text for understanding Thomas's construal of the natural law must await further treatment. This much is clear, however: even natural reason apart from grace, as it illumines the basic precepts of the natural law, participates in some way in the splendor of the Word. As Whidden puts it, "even our natural light . . . is Christological, since it is based upon a participated light that is given to us in creation through the Word."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Whidden, *Christ the Light*, 122. I would like to thank the editor, Fr. Andrew Hofer, O.P., and the reviewers of *The Thomist* for very helpful comments on the first draft of this article.

DIVINE SPIRATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF
SS. GREGORY NAZIANZEN AND THOMAS AQUINAS

JOHN BAPTIST KU, O.P.

*Dominican House of Studies
Washington, D.C.*

GR^{EAT} SORROW and anger have afflicted the Church at times on account of disputes over the procession of the Holy Spirit—namely, how he is or is not from the Son. It is salubrious, therefore, to take note of the agreement on this point between theologians of the East and the West and of different epochs, provided that we do not impose a harmony alien to an author's thought so as to quench our personal anxieties.

This article will briefly compare St. Gregory of Nazianzus's understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit with that of St. Thomas Aquinas.¹ We will verify a profound basic agreement between these two saints but also clear differences. For instance, Nazianzen and Aquinas agree on the formulation that the Holy

¹ This article completes a consideration of the three notions of the Father—paternity, innascibility, and common spiration—in the thought of Gregory Nazianzen and Thomas Aquinas. See John Baptist Ku, "Divine Paternity in the Theology of Ss. Gregory Nazianzen and Thomas Aquinas" in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger Nutt (Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2019), 110-29; and idem, "Divine Innascibility in the Theology of Ss. Gregory Nazianzen and Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 85 (2021): 57-85.

For more on the Father in the theology of Aquinas, see John Baptist Ku, *God the Father in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013); and Emmanuel Durand, *Le Père, alpha et oméga de la vie trinitaire* (Paris: Cerf, 2008). For more on the Father in the theology of Nazianzen, see Domingo García Guillén, *Padre es nombre de relación: Dios Padre en la teología de Gregorio Nacianceno* (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2010).

Editions of quoted texts are noted in the appropriate footnotes, as well as any translations used. Translations of Latin and French are my own.

Spirit comes forth from the Father not by generation but by way of procession (ἐκπόρευσις, *processio*). However, unlike Aquinas, Nazianzen does not pursue a systematic and synthetic exposition of the Holy Spirit's procession; his argumentation is instead defensive in nature.² Also, whereas Nazianzen innovatively appeals to ἐκπόρευσις to name the Holy Spirit's coming forth in contradistinction to the Son's coming forth by way of generation, Aquinas's *processio* has both a generic and a specific sense. It can refer generally to any coming forth—namely, either to the Son's coming forth or to the the Spirit's coming forth—or properly and exclusively to the Spirit's coming forth; the Son's procession is named generation, and Holy Spirit's procession is named “procession.” Thus, ἐκπόρευσις and *processio* are not simple equivalents.³ Although, as A. Edward Sicienski observes, there is no indication in John 5:26⁴ that ἐκπορεύεσθαι is intended to distinguish the Spirit's manner of coming forth from the Son's manner of coming forth, after Nazianzen, ἐκπόρευσις comes to include not only the notion of coming forth, but the Spirit's coming forth from an unoriginate principle.⁵ With this definition established, a different verb—like ποιῆναί—would be necessary

² Christopher Beeley, “The Holy Spirit in Gregory Nazianzen: The Pneumatology of Oration 31,” in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, ed. Andrew McGowan (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

³ Nazianzen admits that he is innovating (καινοτομῆσαι) even though innovation was usually the accusation made against heretics. See *Oration 39* (Claudio Moreschini, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38-41, Sources chrétiennes 358* [Paris: Cerf, 1990], sect. 12 = PG 36:348, ll. 23-26): “The Holy Spirit is truly spirit, coming forth [προῖόν] from the Father indeed, but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by generation but by procession [ἐκπορευτῶς]—since I must coin [καινοτομῆσαι] a word for the sake of clarity” (Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἀληθῶς τὸ πνεῦμα, προῖόν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς, οὐχ ὕικῶς δέ, οὐδὲ γὰρ γεννητῶς, ἀλλ’ ἐκπορευτῶς· εἰ δεῖ τι καὶ καινοτομῆσαι περὶ τὰ ὀνόματα σαφηνείας ἕνεκεν). The English translation is by Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, taken from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

⁴ John 5:26: “But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds [ἐκπορεύεσθαι] from the Father, he will bear witness to me.”

⁵ See A. Edward Sicienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23.

for later authors, such as Cyril of Alexandria, to speak of the Spirit's coming forth from or through the Son.⁶

Now, the idea of a unique unoriginate principle of the Holy Spirit is not absent from the Angelic Doctor's account. Aquinas's term for the unoriginate principle in the Trinity is *auctor*: "But the word author [*auctor*] adds to the meaning of a principle that it is not from another; and therefore the Father alone is said to be an author, although the Son too is called a principle notionally."⁷ Aquinas does allow that the Son *has authority* with respect to the Holy Spirit, but the Son is not an *auctor* in the Trinity.⁸ Unfortunately, Aquinas's careful distinction here is passed over by much recent Trinitarian theology.⁹

⁶ Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), *Thesaurus de sancta consubstantiali trinitate* (J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)*, vol. 75 [Paris: Migne, 1857-66], 585A, l. 10); and *Commentary on John* (15:26) (P. E. Pusey, ed., *Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Joannis evangelium*, 3 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872], 2:607, l. 20. See Siecienski, *Filioque*, 49 and 81-85. Nazianzen will also use this verb, but for the Spirit's procession from the Father—for example in *Oration 30* (J. Barbel, *Gregor von Nazianz: Die fünf theologischen Reden* [Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1963]) sect. 19, l. 18.

⁷ *I Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 1: "Sed nomen auctoris addit super rationem principii hoc quod est non esse ab aliquo; et ideo solus Pater auctor dicitur, quamvis etiam Filius principium dicatur notionaliter." See John Baptist Ku, "Thomas Aquinas' Careful Deployment of *auctor* and *auctoritas* in Trinitarian Theology," *Angelicum* 90 (2013): 677-710.

All quotations from the first three books of the *Commentary on the Sentences* are taken from Mandonnet-Moos edition (*Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, vols. 1-4, ed. Mandonnet/Moos [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929-47]). Quotations from the fourth book of the *Commentary on the Sentences* are taken from the Parma edition. All other quotations of Aquinas are taken from the Leonine or Marietti editions, as noted.

⁸ *In Gal.* 3:5, lect. 2 (Marietti ed., 127): "And in this way, the Holy Spirit is given only by the Father and the Son insofar as they have authority over him, not indeed of dominion but of origin because he proceeds from both."

⁹ E.g., Siecienski, *Filioque*; Michelle Coetzee, *The Filioque Impasse: Patristic Roots* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2012); and Myk Habets, ed., *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). Siecienski (129) in fact asserts that Aquinas does call the Son *auctor* of the Holy Spirit, citing *Contra errores graecorum* II, cc. 13-15. However, there is no mention of the Son as *auctor* in this

In addition to agreeing that the Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father not by generation but by way of procession, both Nazianzen and Aquinas recognize that there is some kind of order between the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, whereas Aquinas expounds in detail how the Spirit is from the Father and the Son as from a single principle, principally from the Father, proceeding as Love and as a bond between the Father and the Son, Nazianzen refrains from saying that the Holy Spirit *proceeds from* or *through* the Son.¹⁰ Moreover, Aquinas names the Father “Spirator,” a word Nazianzen does not use.

While there is a danger of overinterpreting Nazianzen to find in him an early Thomist, it is also mistake to make a pre-commitment to bifurcate the East and the West, or the ancient and the medieval. An anxiety to show that the whole Church should embrace the *Filioque* must absolutely not be allowed to distort our interpretation of ancient Eastern theologians. Such a distortion would only undermine the effort to achieve ecumenical unity. As Aquinas has remarked, one of the worst things one can do for the truth is to support it with poor reasoning, for then skeptics might well dismiss the truth, thinking that it depends on the reasoning provided to support it.¹¹ Yet, on the other hand, if rejections of the idea that the *Filioque* can be found in Nazianzen are without basis, that should be exposed.

Here we will at least establish that those who hold that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone do not find support

passage. In *Contra Graec.* II, c. 23, Aquinas refers to a text attributed to Athanasius that asserts that the Son is the *auctor* of the Spirit; but when speaking for himself, Aquinas never calls the Son the *auctor* of the Spirit; rather, he explicitly joins *auctor* with inascibility.

¹⁰ By contrast, Basil of Caesarea allows that the Holy Spirit is one as he is conjoined “to the one Father through the one Son,” himself completing the Trinity. See Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto* (B. Pruche, ed., *Basile de Césarée: Sur le Saint-Esprit, Sources chrétiennes* 17 bis [Paris: Cerf, 1968], p. 408, c. 18, sect. 45, ll. 24-27): “Ἐν δὲ καὶ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, καὶ αὐτὸ μοναδικῶς ἐξαγγελλούμενον, δι’ ἑνὸς Υἱοῦ τῷ ἐνὶ Πατρὶ συναπτόμενον, καὶ δι’ ἑαυτοῦ συμπληροῦν τὴν πολυύμνητον καὶ μακαρίαν Τριάδα.” Gregory of Nyssa even refers to the Son as a cause of the Holy Spirit. See n. 28 below.

¹¹ *STh* I, q. 32, a. 1: “For when anyone brings forth reasons to prove the faith that are not compelling, he will fall into the mockery of unbelievers, for they will suppose that we rest on such arguments and believe because of them.”

in Nazianzen.¹² We will be able to conclude that, on one hand, Nazianzen seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit is in some way from the Son, but that, on the other hand, he simply does not consider the question of how the Holy Spirit's procession is ordered to the Son's generation.

This article comprises five sections. After (I) a perusal of some recent authors' interpretations of Nazianzen's understanding of the Holy Spirit's procession, four sections will follow concerning the Holy Spirit's procession according to: (II) some of Nazianzen's predecessors and contemporaries, (III) Nazianzen himself, (IV) John Damascene, and (V) Aquinas. Attention to Aquinas's more immediate predecessors and more recent reception is less necessary since his discussion, unlike Nazianzen's, takes place after the precise question has been vigorously debated, and his view is therefore fully developed and explicit. We include a section on Damascene because he was a source for Aquinas, and he relies far more on Nazianzen than on any other Father.

I. MORE RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF NAZIANZEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPIRIT'S PROCESSION

Interpretations of Nazianzen fall into three categories, namely, (1) that Nazianzen implicitly understands the Holy Spirit to be in some way from the Son, (2) that Nazianzen says nothing more than that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, and (3) that Nazianzen implicitly denies that the Spirit is in some way from the Son.

In the first group we find scholars such as A. Palmieri, Bernhard Schultze, and Deno Geanakoplos. Palmieri appeals to

¹² For instance, Vladimir Lossky maintains that "against the doctrine of procession *ab utroque* the Orthodox have affirmed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone—*ek monou tou Patros*" (*The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Trinitarian Doctrine* [Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1976], 78). He also states that Nazianzen is "the greatest theologian of the Trinity" in *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1978), 46.

Nazianzen's deployment of the analogy of a source, a spring, and a river for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in *Oration 31*—arguing that Nazianzen recognizes that as a river comes from a spring (which comes from a source), so the Spirit comes from the Son (who comes from the Father).¹³ Schultze then writes in response to Sergei Bulgakov's criticism of Palmieri's argument, where Bulgakov had highlighted Nazianzen's lack of satisfaction in any Trinitarian analogy:

But [in *Oration 31*] Gregory does not object to the comparison that the ray and light are so much outflows from the sun, that the ray comes second and the light third, because the ray mediates between the sun and light: the light comes from the sun through the ray; in other words, the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. Herein lies the core of the comparison.¹⁴

Schultze also sees the *Filioque* implied in *Orations 29* and *40*.¹⁵ Geanakoplos less explicitly presumes that Nazianzen's view is in harmony with the idea that the Spirit is from the Son, opining that “on this question of the *filioque* Erigena himself employed the expression *ex patre per filium*, a phrase undoubtedly based on the exposition of Dionysius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and especially Maximus.”¹⁶

The second category of authors—which includes Gregory Hillis, Lucas Mateo-Seco, Luis Ladaria, Philip Kariatlis, and Christopher Beeley—might be said to avoid interpreting Nazianzen on this question and instead simply to report

¹³ A. Palmieri, “Esprit saint,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1913), 729-31.

¹⁴ Bernhard Schultze, “S. Bulgakovs ‘Utešitel’ und Gregor der Theologe über den Ausgang des heiligen Geistes,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 39 (1973), 172: “Nicht aber beanstandet Gregor am Vergleich, dass Strahl und Licht dermassen Ausflüsse aus der Sonne sind, dass der Strahl an zweiter Stelle steht und das Licht an dritter, weil der Strahl zwischen Sonne und Licht vermittelt: das Licht kommt von der Sonne durch den Strahl; mit anderen Worten: der Geist geht vom Vater aus durch den Sohn. Hierin liegt ja der Kern des Verleiches.”

¹⁵ T. A. Noble, “The Deity of the Holy Spirit according to Gregory of Nazianzus” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1989), documents Palmieri's position (325) and Schultze's (325, 355, 358, and 366).

¹⁶ Deno Geanakoplos, “Some Aspects of the Influence of the Byzantine Maximus the Confessor on the Theology of East and West,” *Church History* 38, no. 2 (1969): 156.

Nazianzen's own words that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.¹⁷

The third group comprises Orthodox authors who seek support in Nazianzen for rejecting the *Filioque*. They find in him the idea, at least implicitly, that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son. Siecienski and Lossky are two such examples. Siecienski writes:

In fact, Gregory's emphasis on the Father's unique role as cause within the godhead later became the theological foundation upon which the East's rejection of the filioque was built. . . . It is therefore not surprising that Gregory's writings became a chief source for Orthodox Christians looking to refute the Latin teaching on the procession, and why, with a few exceptions, he was rarely found in Latin florilegia in support of the doctrine.¹⁸

Lossky relies on *Oration 42* to establish the "monarchy of the Father," thereby avoiding "the semi-Sabellianism of the Latins,"

¹⁷ The mere fact that these authors do not express in writing either the first or the third opinion (as far as I can ascertain) does not prove that they do not hold either opinion. Here I only document those places where they repeat Nazianzen's own words without further interpretation: Gregory Hillis, "Pneumatology and Soteriology according to Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 67/15, *Cappadocian Writers: The Second Half of the Fourth Century*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Paris: Peeters, 2013), 193; Lucas Mateo-Seco, "The Paternity of the Father and the Procession of the Holy Spirit: Some Historical Remarks on the Ecumenical Problem," in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Giulio Maspero and Robert J. Wozniak (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 92; Luis Ladaria, "Tam Pater nemo: Reflections on the Paternity of God," in Maspero and Wozniak, eds., *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, 457; Philip Kariatlis, "What Then? Is the Spirit God? Certainly!": St. Gregory's Teaching on the Holy Spirit as the Basis of the World's Salvation," *Phronema* 26, no. 2 (2011): 89; Christopher Beeley, "The Holy Spirit in the Cappadocians: Past and Present," *Modern Theology* 26 (2010): 102, 103, 109, 110.

¹⁸ Siecienski, *Filioque*, 42-43.

and he refers to *Oration 2* in discussing the Father as the “unique cause” in the Trinity.¹⁹

II. NAZIANZEN’S PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES ON THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A very brief review of the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Eunomius on the procession of the Holy Spirit will help to contextualize Nazianzen’s account. We will see that all six of these authors maintain that there is a relation of origin between the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁰

The first Latin Father, Tertullian (d. 220), asserts in his *Adversus Praxean* that the Spirit is “from no other source than the Father *through the Son* [*per Filium*]” and that the Spirit is “*from God* [the Father] *and the Son* [*a . . . Filio*].”²¹ Turning to the East, to direct influences on Nazianzen, we have the comments of Origen (d. ca. 253) on John—in what today would be recognized as unacceptably subordinationist language—that “the Holy Spirit is the most honored of all things made through the Word [διὰ τοῦ λόγου], and that he is [first] in rank of all the things that have been made by the Father through Christ [διὰ Χριστοῦ]” and that “the Holy Spirit seems to have need of the Son ministering to His hypostasis, not only for it to exist, but also for it to be wise, and rational, and just, and whatever else we ought to understand it to

¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 81-82.

²⁰ For a more extended treatment, see Brian Daley, “Revisiting the ‘Filioque’: Roots and Branches of an Old Debate,” *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001): 31-62; and *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001): 195-212. For instance, Daley documents that Hilary, Ambrose, and Epiphanius understand there to be a relation of origin between the Son and the Spirit.

²¹ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, c. 4, ll. 5-6 (ed. E. Kroymann and E. Evans, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 2 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1954]): “Hoc mihi et in tertium gradum dictum sit quia *Spiritum non aliunde puto, quam a Patre per Filium*”; *Adversus Praxean*, c. 8, l. 42: “Tertius enim est *spiritus a deo et filio*”; *Adversus Praxean*, c. 11, l. 52: “*spiritum loquentem ex tertia persona de patre et filio*.” (Emphases added)

be by participation in the aspects of Christ, of which we have spoken above.”²²

We also have Athanasius (d. 373) clarifying that “the Spirit does not unite the Word to the Father, but rather the Spirit receives from the Word [παρὰ τοῦ λόγου]. . . . For He [the Son], as has been said, gives to the Spirit, and whatever the Spirit has, He has from the Word [παρὰ τοῦ λόγου].”²³ For Basil (d. 379), a close colleague of Nazianzen, “the relation of the Spirit to the Son is the same as that of the Son to the Father. And if the Spirit is coordinate with the Son, and the Son with the Father, it is obvious that the Spirit is also coordinate with the Father.”²⁴ The Spirit is “conjoined as he is to the one Father *through the one Son* [δι’ ἐνὸς Υἱοῦ].”²⁵

²² Origen, *Commentary on John*, bk. 2, c. 10, sect. 75-76 (C. Blanc, ed., *Origène: Commentaire sur saint Jean, Sources chrétiennes* 120 [Paris: Cerf, 1966], 255-56): “τὸ πάντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου γενομένων τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα πάντων εἶναι τιμιώτερον, καὶ τάξει [πρώτον] πάντων τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ Χριστοῦ γεγενημένων. . . . οὐ χρήζειν ἔουκε τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα διακονοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῆ ὑποστάσει, οὐ μόνον εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἀλλὰ καὶ σοφὸν εἶναι καὶ λογικὸν καὶ δίκαιον καὶ πᾶν ὅτιποτοῦν χρή αὐτὸ νοεῖν τυγχάνειν κατὰ μετοχὴν τῶν προειρημένων ἡμῖν Χριστοῦ ἐπινοῶν.” The English translation, with light modifications, is from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, trans. and ed. Allan Menzies (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896); rev. and ed. for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101502.htm>, accessed 8/12/22).

²³ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 3.24 (K. Metzler and K. Savvidis, ed., *Athanasius: Werke* 1, *Die dogmatischen Schriften* 1/3 [New York: De Gruyter, 2000]): “καὶ οὐ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸν λόγον συνάπτει τῷ πατρὶ, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὸ πνεῦμα παρὰ τοῦ λόγου λαμβάνει. . . . αὐτὸς γάρ, ὡσπερ εἶρηται, τὸ πνεῦμα δίδωσι, καὶ ὅσα ἔχει τὸ πνεῦμα, ταῦτα παρὰ τοῦ λόγου ἔχει.” The English translation is taken from *Discourse 3 against the Arians*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald Robertson (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892), revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/28163.htm> (accessed 8/22/22).

²⁴ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, c. 17, sect. 43 (*Sources chrétiennes* ed.): “Ὡς τοίνυν ἔχει ὁ Υἱὸς πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, οὕτω πρὸς τὸν Υἱὸν τὸ Πνεῦμα. . . . Εἰ δὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα τῷ Υἱῷ συντέτακται, ὁ δὲ Υἱὸς τῷ Πατρὶ, δηλονότι καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τῷ Πατρὶ.” The English translation is taken from *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, c. 18, sect. 45: “δι’ ἐνὸς Υἱοῦ τῷ ἐνὶ Πατρὶ συναπτόμενον” (emphasis added).

According to Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395), Basil's younger brother, "the Holy Trinity fulfils every operation . . . so that there is one motion and disposition of the good will which is communicated from the Father *through the Son to the Spirit* [διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα]."²⁶ That is, "one [the Son] is directly from the first Cause, and another [the Spirit] through that which is directly from the first Cause [i.e., from the Son] . . . and . . . the interposition of the Son . . . does not shut out the Spirit from His relation by way of nature to the Father."²⁷ Furthermore, "as the Son is bound to the Father, and, while deriving existence from Him, is not after Him according to being, so again *the Holy Spirit is related to the Only-begotten, Who is understood as before the Spirit's hypostasis only by reason of being a cause* [κατὰ τὸν τῆς αἰτίας]."²⁸

Finally, the contemporary opponent of Nazianzen, the heretic Eunomius (d. 393), held that the Spirit "a third in nature and order, [was] created by order of the Father, *through the activity of the Son* [ἐνεργεία δὲ τοῦ υἱοῦ]."²⁹ This manifests the presence,

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium* (F. Mueller, ed., *Gregorii Nysseni opera* 3.1 [Leiden: Brill, 1958]), 48-49, ll. 20-24): "Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν . . . ἡ ἅγια τριάς . . . μία τις γίνεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος κινήσις τε καὶ διάδοσις, ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα διεξαγομένη" (emphasis added). English translation based on Gregory of Nyssa, *On "Not Three Gods,"* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. A. Wilson (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2905.htm> (accessed 8/16/22).

²⁷ *Ibid.* (Mueller, ed., 56, ll. 5-10): "τὸ μὲν γὰρ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου . . . καὶ . . . τῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ μεσιτείας . . . τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς φυσικῆς πρὸς τὸν πατέρα σχέσεως μὴ ἀπειργούσης."

²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* (W. Jaeger, *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vols. 1.1 & 2.2 [Leiden: Brill, 1960], bk. 1, c. 1, sect. 691, ll. 3-7 = PG 45:464B.12-464C.7): "ὡς γὰρ συνάπτεται τῷ πατρὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ εἶναι ἔχων οὐχ ὑπερῖζει κατὰ τὴν ὑπαρξιν, οὕτω πάλιν καὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦς ἔχεται τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἐπινοία μόνῃ κατὰ τὸν τῆς αἰτίας λόγον προθεωρουμένου τῆς τοῦ πνεύματος ὑποστάσεως" (emphasis added). English translation based on *NPNF* (second series) 5, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/290101.htm> (accessed 8/16/22).

²⁹ Eunomius of Cyzicus, *Apologia* 25 (B. Sesbotié, ed., *Basil de Césarée: Contre Eunome suivi de Eunome, Apologie, Sources chrétiennes* 305 [Paris: Cerf, 1983]), 286, ll. 28-29): "τρίτον καὶ φύσει καὶ τάξει, προστάγματι τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐνεργεία δὲ τοῦ υἱοῦ γενόμενον" (emphasis added).

if not dominance, of the idea that there is a relation of origin between the Son and the Holy Spirit, predating Nazianzen. Brian Daley notes two theological traditions, Latin and Greek, neither of which was “directly concerned with the question of just how the origin of the Holy Spirit within the mystery of God can best be conceived and expressed.”³⁰ While there is good reason to distinguish traditions of East and West, we could observe with José Grégoire that the Eastern Fathers were not united on the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit, and we could wonder whether it is safe to conclude that the Western Fathers were.³¹ Even so, we do have evidence of a widespread teaching that there is a relation of origin between the Son and the Holy Spirit.

III. NAZIANZEN ON THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This section comprises four parts. First, I will consider the implications of Nyssa’s and Eunomius’s accounts of the Holy Spirit’s procession, mentioned above, for Nazianzen’s understanding. Second, I will present four passages from Nazianzen where he speaks of the Spirit’s procession from the Father without any mention of the Son as a principle of the Spirit. Third, I will examine eight quotations from the Theologian that manifest, in varying degrees, the sense that the Spirit is in some way *from the Son*. Fourth, I will review a provocative analogy for the Trinity that Nazianzen adduces, which manifests his lack of interest in establishing the order between generation and procession. Taken together, these texts confirm that Nazianzen is quite at peace with the notion that the Spirit is from the Son, but that he has no intention of discussing the order between generation and procession.

³⁰ Daley, “Revisiting the ‘Filioque’,” 41.

³¹ José Grégoire, “La relation éternelle de l’esprit au fils d’après les écrits de Jean de Damas,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 64 (1969): 713-55, at 754 n. 1.

A) *The Implications of Nyssa's and Eunomius's Affirmations about the Spirit's Procession*

Nyssa's and Eunomius's unequivocal assertions of the Son's being a principle of the Spirit point to an argument from silence for Nazianzen's acceptance of the idea. That is, Nazianzen never corrects Eunomius's teaching that the Spirit is from the Father through the Son, while he blasts him repeatedly for denying the Spirit's full divinity.³² This would be a massive oversight if Nazianzen in fact did not believe that the Spirit could be said to be in some way from the Son. After all, if that were an error, its correction would be a critical first step to affirming the Holy Spirit's equality in divinity to the Son. Later opponents of the *Filioque*, such as Photius himself, would argue precisely that understanding the Spirit to be from the Son subordinates the Spirit to the Son.³³

Likewise, Nazianzen offers no comment on Nyssa's identification of the Son as a cause (αἰτία) of the Spirit—just as the Father is the cause of the Son.³⁴ The assertion is stunning, because only three hundred years later, Maximus would defend the *Western Fathers'* teaching of the *Filioque* by arguing that “that they themselves do not make the Son the cause [αἰτία] of the Spirit for they know that the Father is the one cause of the Son and the Spirit”;³⁵ and in 1995, the Vatican's own Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity declared that the Father

³² See n. 29 above.

³³ Photius, “Encyclical to the Eastern Patriarchs” (Epistle 2), in *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie R. Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 301 n. 11: “[If the Spirit proceeded from the Son] the Son would be closer to the Father's essence than the Spirit would be. And thus Macedonius's bold attack against the Spirit will emerge again.”

³⁴ See n. 28 above.

³⁵ Maximus, *Letter to Marinus* (*Opusculum* 10 [PG 91:136A, ll. 11-12]): “οὐκ αἰτία τὸν Υἱὸν ποιῶντας τοῦ Πνεύματος . . . μίαν γὰρ ἴσασιν Υἱοῦ καὶ Πνεύματος τὸν Πατέρα αἰτία.” English translation in A. Edward Siecinski, “The Authenticity of Maximus the Confessor's ‘Letter to Marinus’: The Argument from Theological Consistency,” *Vigilae Christianae* 61 (2007): 189-90 n. 1.

“is the sole origin [ἀρχή, αἰτία] of the ἐκπόρευσις of the Spirit.”³⁶ Nyssa composed *Against Eunomius* around 380, just at about the same time as Nazianzen was writing his theological orations, ten years before Nazianzen’s death. If Nazianzen had thought it an error, one would have expected a comment of some kind on the topic.³⁷ After all, when Nyssa merely taught pagan Greek literature, Nazianzen accused him of preferring the title “rhetor” to “Christian” and even suggested that Nyssa might be dead to him, like a friend turned enemy.³⁸

These selections from Eunomius and Gregory of Nyssa, as well as those of Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, and Basil, show that the context in which Nazianzen was working broadly presumed that the Holy Spirit is in some way *from the Son*. The circumstantial evidence of his silence in the face of his contemporaries’ patent affirmations of the same, are by no means a proof that Nazianzen would desire to embrace the notion. However, these indications may not simply be ignored because they challenge an overly tidy assessment of Nazianzen’s position.

B) Four Passages without Mention of the Son in Relation to the Spirit

Of these four passages which omit reference to the Spirit’s relation to the Son, the latter three expose a tension in Nazianzen’s formulation precisely on this point by suggesting that the Son and the Holy Spirit are ordered with respect to each

³⁶ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “Greek and Latin Traditions Regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit,” <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/greek-and-latin-traditions-regarding-the-procession-of-the-holy-spirit-2349> (accessed 5/2/22).

³⁷ The dating of Gregory of Nyssa’s letter to Ablabius is difficult; its composition might be placed anywhere from 375 to 390. See Giulio Maspero, *Trinity and Man: Gregory of Nyssa’s “Ad Ablabium”* (Boston: Brill, 2007), xix. Thus, it is possible that Nazianzen (d. 390) would not have had time to reply to this letter, but Nyssa’s *Against Eunomius* makes the strongest claims that the Son is a principle of the Spirit.

³⁸ Nazianzen, *Epistle* 11. See *Gregory of Nazianzus*, trans. Brian Daley (New York: Routledge, 2006), 174.

other in some way. And the last selection, a lengthier excerpt, includes Nazianzen's clearest articulation of the Spirit's distinction from the Father and the Son.

First, in a passage from *Oration 20* concerning God's unity, Nazianzen's formulation could be taken to suggest that the Spirit is related to the Father alone, since he places the Son and the Holy Spirit in simple parallel, speaking only of their proceeding and coming back to the Father as "one cause," without mentioning any relationship between the Son and the Spirit:

The one God, in my view, would be preserved if both Son and Spirit come back to one cause, neither being merged nor fused together, but according to one and the same divinity, if I may so phrase it, as well as movement and will and identity of being.³⁹

Thus, the Father is the principle of unity in the Trinity, and the Son and the Spirit "come back" to him somehow. If Nazianzen held that the Spirit proceeded also from the Son, we would expect him to explain how this relationship bears on the Son's and the Spirit's coming back to the Father. But he has no comment about this.

Second, in *Oration 32*, we again find reference solely to the Father as the principle of the Holy Spirit, but this assertion is followed by an intriguing mention of the Spirit's yielding (*παραχωρέω*) to the Father *and* to the Son:

We must recognize one God, the Father, without source and unbegotten, and one Son, begotten of the Father, and one Spirit who takes his existence from God and who, while yielding to the Father his unbegottenness *and to the Son*

³⁹ *Oration 20* (Justin Mossay, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 20-23, Sources chrétiennes* 270 [Paris: Cerf, 1980], sect. 7 = PG 35:1073, ll. 3-8): "Τηροῖτο δ' ἄν, ὡς ὁ ἐμὸς λόγος, εἷς μὲν Θεός, εἷς ἔν αἴτιον καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ Πνεύματος ἀναφερομένων, οὐ συντιθεμένων, οὐδὲ συναλειφομένων καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔν καὶ ταυτὸ τῆς θεότητος, ἵνα οὕτως ὀνομάσω, κίνημά τε καὶ βούλημα καὶ τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ταυτότητα."

My thanks to Fr. Andrew Hofer, O.P., for his assistance in translating this passage. Martha Vinson in fact renders "εἷς ἔν αἴτιον καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ Πνεύματος ἀναφερομένων" as "both Son and Spirit are causally related *to him alone*" (emphasis added), but this risks introducing a polemic that the text itself does not suggest.

his generation, is yet in all other respects their equal in nature, dignity, glory and honor.⁴⁰

So, the Spirit takes his existence from God, that is, from “one God, the Father.” There is no mention of the Spirit’s taking his existence from the Son. But the Spirit yields to the Father *and* to the Son, which suggests some kind of order between the Spirit and the Son. For even if Nazianzen is only saying that the Spirit does not have the properties of the Father and the Son (unbegottenness and generation), that indicates *some* kind of relation, since the three would otherwise be indistinguishable as one God, with one intellect and one will.

Third, in *Oration 34*, Nazianzen teaches that the Son does not have causality, which would make one suspect that he cannot be the principle of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Nazianzen follows up that remark with the suggestion of an order between the Son and the Spirit in words that would be foolishly confusing were the Spirit not *from the Son* in some way:

All that the Father has belongs likewise to the Son, except causality; and all that is the Son’s belongs also to the Spirit, except His Sonship, and whatsoever is spoken of Him as to Incarnation.⁴¹

Can the Son be the principle of the Holy Spirit if he does not have causality like the Father? That is the question that

⁴⁰ *Oration 32* (Claudio Moreschini, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 32-37, Sources chrétiennes* 318 [Paris: Cerf, 1985], sect. 5 = PG 36:180A, ll. 14-20): “δέον ἕνα θεόν Πατέρα γινώσκειν, ἄναρχον καὶ ἀγέννητον, καὶ Υἱὸν ἕνα γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ Πνεῦμα ἕν ἐκ Θεοῦ τὴν ὑπαρξιν ἔχον, παραχωροῦν Πατρὶ μὲν ἀγεννησίας, Υἱῷ δὲ γεννήσεως· τὰ δὲ ἄλλα συμφυεῖς καὶ σύνθρονον καὶ ὁμόδοξον καὶ ὁμότιμον” (emphasis added). The English translation is taken from *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations*, trans. Martha Vinson, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 107 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

⁴¹ *Oration 34* (Claudio Moreschini, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 32-37, Sources chrétiennes* 318 [Paris: Cerf, 1985], sect. 10 = PG 36:252A, ll. 1-4): “πάντα ὅσα ἔχει ὁ Πατήρ, τοῦ Υἱοῦ ἐστι, πλὴν τῆς ἀγεννησίας· πάντα δὲ ὅσα τοῦ Υἱοῦ, καὶ τοῦ Πνεύματος, πλὴν τῆς υἰότητος καὶ τῶν ὅσα σωματικῶς περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγεται.” The English translation is taken from *NPNF* (second series) 7.

Nazianzen does not answer. The Son does not have causality, *but* all that is the Son's belongs to the Spirit, just as all that the Father has belongs to the Son! This is strongly reminiscent of John 16:15: "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he [the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you," which would later become Aquinas's favorite Scripture passage to support the assertion that the Spirit proceeds from the Son. Possession of all that the other has implies that one has it all *from that other*. There is a rather strong tension here that Nazianzen does not resolve.

Fourth, in *Oration* 31, "On the Holy Spirit," Nazianzen, quoting the Gospel of John, again mentions the Spirit's procession from the Father without the Son's involvement, but he goes on to assert that the Spirit is God insofar as procession is a *mean between* (μέσον) innascibility and generation:

[John 15:26:] "The Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father." Inasmuch as he proceeds thence, he is not a creature; inasmuch as he is not begotten, he is not a Son; and inasmuch as he is the mean between unbegottenness and begottenness, he is God.⁴²

In this passage, Nazianzen is searching for a way to reply to the following argument, which comes from the Arians: the Spirit must either be unbegotten or begotten; but if the Spirit were unbegotten like the Father, there would be two unbegottens and that would mean that there are two who are unoriginate, which is impossible; therefore the Spirit must be begotten—either by the Father, yielding two Sons, or else by the Son, making the Spirit the Father's Grandson;⁴³ so if orthodox theologians will not convert to Arianism, then they must live with either a Father and two Sons or a Father, a Son, and a Grandson. In response, Nazianzen asserts that the Spirit's procession is a mean between

⁴² *Oration* 31 (J. Barbel, *Gregor von Nazianz: Die fünf theologischen Reden* [Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1963], sect. 8, ll. 9-11): "Τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται· ὃ καθ' ὅσον μὲν ἐκείθεν ἐκπορεύεται, οὐ κτίσμα· καθ' ὅσον δὲ οὐ γεννητόν, οὐχ υἱός· καθ' ὅσον δὲ ἀγεννήτου καὶ γεννητοῦ μέσον θεός." The English translation is taken from Frederick W. Norris, ed., *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, trans. Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991).

⁴³ *Oration* 31 (Barbel, ed., sect. 7, ll. 2-5).

unbegottenness and begottenness, which steers between the two horns of the Eunomian dilemma.

But how precisely is the Spirit's procession a mean between unbegottenness and begottenness? Nazianzen goes on in this letter to admit that while he knows that the Spirit is distinct from the Son according to his procession, he cannot specify how this procession is distinct; the mystery eludes us:

What, then, is "proceeding"? You explain the unbegottenness of the Father and I will give you a biological account of the Son's begetting and the Spirit's proceeding—and let us go mad the pair of us for prying into God's secrets. What competence have we here? We cannot understand what lies under our feet, cannot count the sand in the sea, "the drops of rain, or the days of this world" [Sir 1:2], much less enter into the "depths of God" [1 Cor 2:10] and render a verbal account of a nature so mysterious, so much beyond words.⁴⁴

It is beyond us to say what proceeding really is. Yet after this humble admission, Nazianzen proceeds to a brilliant account of personal distinction in the Trinity that Aquinas will make central to his own Trinitarian theology nine hundred years later. Nazianzen explains that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, being the same in nature, must be distinct by *mutual relations* (τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσεως):

It is their difference in, so to say, "manifestation" or mutual relationship, which has caused the difference in names. The Son does not fall short in some particular of being Father. Sonship is no defect, yet that does not mean he is Father. By the same token, the Father would fall short of being Son—the Father is not Son. No, the language here gives no grounds for any deficiency, for any subordination in essence. The very fact of not being begotten, of being begotten, and of proceeding, gives them whatever names are applied to them—Father,

⁴⁴ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 8, ll. 13-20): "τίς οὖν ἡ ἐκπόρευσις; εἰπέ σὺ τὴν ἀγεννησίαν τοῦ πατρὸς, κἀγὼ τὴν γέννησιν τοῦ υἱοῦ φυσιολογήσω, καὶ τὴν ἐκπόρευσιν τοῦ πνεύματος, καὶ παραπληκτίσομεν ἄμφω εἰς θεοῦ μυστήρια παρακύπτοντες· καὶ ταῦτα τίνες; οἱ μὴδὲ τὰ ἐν ποσὶν εἰδέναι δυνάμενοι, μὴδὲ ψάμμον θαλασσῶν, καὶ σταγόνας ὑετοῦ, καὶ ἡμέρας αἰῶνος ἐξαριθμῆσθαι, μὴ ὅτι γε θεοῦ βάθειον ἐμβατεύειν, καὶ λόγον ὑπέχειν τῆς οὕτως ἀρρήτου καὶ ὑπὲρ λόγον φύσεως."

Son, and Holy Spirit respectively. The aim is to safeguard the distinctness of the three persons within the single nature and quality of the Godhead.⁴⁵

The Holy Spirit is distinct in his procession—which is a mean between unbegottenness and begottenness in the sense that it is neither—on account of mutual relationship. While Nazianzen sees that the Spirit must be related to the Son, he is not willing to say explicitly that the Spirit proceeds *from the Son*; he declines to comment on the manner in which the Spirit is related to the Son.

C) Eight Passages Indicating That the Spirit Is in Some Way from the Son

Despite these four cases where Nazianzen affirms the Spirit’s procession from the Father, without mentioning the Son as a principle, his manner of speaking in at least eight other places could lead one to believe that he subscribes to the idea that the Spirit proceeds from the Son. For instance, earlier in *Oration 31*, Nazianzen indirectly suggests an order of existence between the Son and the Spirit in a counterfactual:

If ever there was a time when the Father was not, then there was a time when the Son was not. If ever there was a time when the Son was not, then there was a time when the Spirit was not. If the One was from the beginning, then the

⁴⁵ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 9, ll. 3-12): “τὸ δὲ τῆς ἐκφάνσεως, ἴν’ οὕτως εἶπω, ἢ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσεως διάφορον, διάφορον αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν κλήσιν πεποίηκεν. οὐδὲ γὰρ τῷ υἱῷ λείπει τι πρὸς τὸ εἶναι πατέρα, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔλλειψις ἢ υἰότης, ἀλλ’ οὐ παρὰ τοῦτο πατήρ. ἢ οὕτω γε καὶ τῷ πατρὶ λείπει τι πρὸς τὸ εἶναι υἱόν· οὐ γὰρ υἱὸς ὁ πατήρ. ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐλλείψεως ταῦτά ποθεν, οὐδὲ τῆς κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑφέσεως· αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ μὴ γεγενῆσθαι, καὶ τὸ γεγενῆσθαι, καὶ τὸ ἐκπορεύεσθαι, τὸν μὲν πατέρα, τὸν δὲ υἱόν, τὸ δὲ τοῦθ’ ὅπερ λέγεται πνεῦμα ἅγιον προσηγόρευσεν, ἵνα τὸ ἀσύγχυτον σώζηται τῶν τριῶν ὑποστάσεων ἐν τῇ μιᾷ φύσει τε καὶ ἁξίᾳ τῆς θεότητος.”

Basil of Caesarea was the first to deploy “relation” systematically. See Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 80.

Three were so too. If you throw down the One, I am bold to assert that you do not set up the other Two.⁴⁶

This hypothetical test formulated in the negative establishes the striking claim that the Spirit in some way takes his existence from the Son.

Second, in *Oration* 41, “On Pentecost,” Nazianzen repeats the language that he used in *Oration* 34 with Johannine overtones, noted above.⁴⁷ But here he does not speak of the Spirit’s coming forth from the Father while omitting mention of the Son. Instead he draws a necessary connection between the Father and the Son—who proceeds from the Father—and between the Son and the Holy Spirit; and then he expresses this connection in terms of equal possession of divinity:

For it was not ever fitting that either the Son should be wanting to the Father, or the Spirit to the Son. . . . All that the Father has the Son has also, except the being Unbegotten; and all that the Son has the Spirit has also, except the Generation.⁴⁸

This is a noteworthy assertion, given that the Son has all that the Father has because *he proceeds* from the Father. Again here, without daring to state that the Spirit “proceeds” from the Son, Nazianzen implies that the Son is implicated in the Spirit’s having everything; that is, there must be some order between them, where the Spirit is from the Son in some way. And this order of *being from* is placed in parallel with the Son’s having everything from the Father. Moreover, the Son must have the Spirit, as the

⁴⁶ *Oration* 31 (Barbel, ed., sect. 4, ll. 1-4): “Εἰ ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ πατήρ, ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ υἱός. εἰ ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ υἱός, ἦν ὅτε οὐδὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. εἰ τὸ ἐν ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, καὶ τὰ τρία. εἰ τὸ ἐν κάτω βάλλεις, τολμῶ, καὶ λέγω, μηδὲ τὰ δύο θῆς ἄνω.”

⁴⁷ See n. 41 above.

⁴⁸ *Oration* 41 (Moreschini, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38-41*, sect. 9, ll. 3-4 and 23-25 = PG 36:441B, ll. 16-17 and 38-40): “οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔπρεπεν ἐλλείπειν ποτὲ, ἢ Υἱὸν Πατρὶ, ἢ Πνεῦμα Υἱῶ. . . . Πάντα ὅσα ὁ Πατήρ τοῦ Υἱοῦ, πλὴν τῆς ἀγεννησίας. Πάντα ὅσα ὁ Υἱός, τοῦ Πνεύματος, πλὴν τῆς γεννήσεως.” The English translation is taken from *NPNF* (second series) 7.

Father must have the Son. If Nazianzen did not believe that there was an order of *being from* between the Son and the Holy Spirit, the expression he uses in this *Oration* would be dangerously confusing and irresponsible.

Third, in *Oration* 31, again we find Nazianzen hinting at this order of procession:

The Son is not Father; there is *one* Father. Yet he is whatever the Father is. The Spirit is not Son on account of being from God; there is only *one* Only-begotten. Yet whatever the Son is, he is.⁴⁹

These words repeat the idea that appears in the quotations above from *Orations* 34 and 41, but here with the sense of “to be” instead of “to have”—“whatever the Son [is, the Holy Spirit is]” versus “all that the Son has the Spirit has also” (or word for word, “all that the Son [has is] the Spirit’s”). Here again, it would be misleading if Nazianzen did not intend to point to an order between the Son and the Spirit. He could have said “whatever the Father is, the Spirit is.” But he does not.

A fourth case similarly indicates such an order between the Son and the Spirit, but this time with respect to the persons’ being known to us. In *Oration* 6, Nazianzen speaks of “knowing the Father in the Son, the Son in the Holy Spirit, in which names we have been baptized.”⁵⁰ This assertion is reminiscent of the theme strongly emphasized in the latter chapters of the Gospel of John according to which the person proceeding makes his principle known, such as when Jesus says to Philip: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?”

⁴⁹ *Oration* 31 (Barbel, ed., sect. 9, ll. 12-14): “οὔτε γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς πατὴρ, εἷς γὰρ πατήρ, ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ὁ πατήρ· οὔτε τὸ πνεῦμα υἱὸς ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἷς γὰρ ὁ μονογενής, ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ὁ υἱός.”

⁵⁰ *Oration* 6 (Justin Mossay, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 20-23, Sources chrétiennes* 270 [Paris: Cerf, 1980]), sect. 22 = PG 35:749, ll. 30-31: “ἐν Υἱῷ τὸν Πατέρα, ἐν Πνεύματι τὸν Υἱὸν γινώσκοντες, εἰς ἃ βεβαπτίσμεθα.” The English translation is from *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations*, trans. Martha Vinson, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 107 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

(John 14:9-10). Here Nazianzen asserts that as the Father is known in the Son, the Son is known in the Spirit.

Fifth, in his naming of the three divine persons in the *Carmina moralia* as Without-Source, Source, and Spirit, it seems unfitting that only the Son would be named from creatures. But if the Son is named Source not on account of creatures, of whom would he be the source, and therefore the principle, except the Holy Spirit? In the same poem, Nazianzen lists the three as Uncaused, Generated, and Spirated—all names having nothing necessarily to do with creatures.⁵¹ And *Oration* 23 similarly gives us the eternal names Without-Source, Generation, and Procession.⁵²

Sixth, naming the three persons in *Oration* 42, Nazianzen designates the Father and the Son with these same words Without-Source (ἀναρχος) and Source (ἀρχή), but he calls the Spirit *With-the-Source* (τὸ μετὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς).⁵³ Thus the Spirit can even be personally named with reference to the Son alone. Even if one insists that “source” here means source of creatures, it would still be significant that the Spirit is named as a distinct person by his relation to the Son. And given that the Father is named Without-Source here, “source” does not seem to refer to creatures.

Seventh, in *Orations* 34 and 38, Nazianzen recognizes an order of *action* between the Son and the Spirit in similar language, where he names the persons the Cause, the Creator, and the Perfecter⁵⁴ and states that creation “was a work fulfilled

⁵¹ *Carmina moralia* (PG 37:751, ll. 12-13: “Ἀναρχον, Ἀρχή, Πνεῦμα, Τριάς τιμία, Ἀναίτιον, γεννητὸν, ἐκπορεύσιμον.”

⁵² *Oration* 23 (Justin Mossay, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 20-23, Sources chrétiennes* 270 [Paris: Cerf, 1980], sect. 11 = PG 35:1161, l. 48): “ἀνάρχω, καὶ γεννήσει, καὶ προόδω.”

⁵³ *Oration* 42, sect. 15 (PG 36:476, ll. 19-21): “Ὄνομα δὲ τῷ μὲν ἀνάρχω, Πατὴρ, τῇ δὲ ἀρχῇ Υἱός, τῷ δὲ μετὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς Πνεῦμα ἅγιον.”

⁵⁴ *Oration* 34 (PG 36:249, l. 4): “The Former is called God, and subsists in Three Greatest, namely, *the Cause, the Creator, and the Perfecter* [αἰτίω, καὶ δημιουργῶ, καὶ τελειοποιῶ]; I mean the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who are neither so separated from one another as to be divided in nature, nor so contracted as to be

by His Word, and perfected by His Spirit.”⁵⁵ Effects reveal something of their causes, and actions manifest the agent in some way. Here we see that the Spirit’s action in the created order—his effect in the economy—is to perfect what the Son has created. This suggests an order between the Son and the Spirit: the Son creates, and the Holy Spirit perfects that creation.

Eighth, in *Oration* 31, Nazianzen struggles to find a reasonably adequate analogy for the Trinity but, finding none, falls back on two adduced by others that he finds dissatisfying—namely, (1) a source (ὄφθαλμός), a spring (πηγή), and a river (ποταμός)⁵⁶ and (2) the sun (ἥλιος), its ray (ἄκτινα), and its light (φῶς).⁵⁷ He recognizes the potential of each analogy but critiques their disheartening weaknesses. Regarding the first analogy, (a) there is no distinction in time (οὔτε χρόνον διέστηκεν) among the divine persons, but a source, a spring, and a river are incapable of standing still (στάσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν);⁵⁸ (b) there is real distinction among the three by three properties (πως τρισὶν ιδιότησι), but a source, a spring, and a river are numerically one (ἓν ἐστὶν ἀριθμῷ), though in different forms (διαφόρως

circumscribed by a single person” (emphasis added). Translation from *NPNF* (second series) 7.

⁵⁵ *Oration* 38 (Moreschini, ed., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38-41*, sect. 9 = PG 36:320C, ll. 1-6): “But since this movement of self-contemplation alone could not satisfy Goodness, but Good must be poured out and go forth beyond Itself to multiply the objects of its beneficence, for this was essential to the highest Goodness, he first conceived the heavenly and angelic powers. *And this conception was a work fulfilled by his Word, and perfected by his Spirit*” (Ἐπει δὲ οὐκ ἤρκει τῇ ἀγαθότητι τοῦτο, τὸ κινεῖσθαι μόνον τῇ ἑαυτῆς θεωρίᾳ, ἀλλ’ ἔδει χεθῆναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὀδεῦσαι, ὡς πλείονα εἶναι τὰ εὐεργετούμενα—τοῦτο γὰρ τῆς ἄκρας ἦν ἀγαθότητος—, πρῶτον μὲν ἐννοεῖ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς δυνάμεις καὶ οὐρανίους· καὶ τὸ ἐννόημα ἔργον ἦν, Λόγῳ συμπληρούμενον, καὶ Πνεύματι τελειούμενον) (emphasis added). English translation is taken from *NPNF* (second series) 7.

⁵⁶ *Oration* 31 (Barbel, ed., sect. 31, line 6). “Eye” (ὄφθαλμός) is an unusual choice, but it is clear that Nazianzen means to indicate the ultimate source here. Hurricanes have eyes at their center, but rivers are not commonly said to have eyes.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* (Barbel, ed., sect. 32, line 1).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (Barbel, ed., sect. 31, ll. 8, 10-11).

σχηματιζόμενα).⁵⁹ Concerning the second analogy, (a) the sun, its ray, and its light give the idea of composition (σύνθεσις), but God is utterly simple with an uncompounded nature (ἀσυνθέτου φύσεως);⁶⁰ (b) the Son and the Holy Spirit have personhood (ὑποστήσωμεν), and are not just powers of God (δυνάμεις θεοῦ), existing in him (ἐνυπαρχούσας), but the ray and the light are only emanations of the sun (ἡλιακαὶ τινες ἀπόρροιαί) and qualities of its essence (ποιότητες οὐσιώδεις);⁶¹ (c) if the radiance of the sun is flashing on account of being blocked intermittently, one could incorrectly think that there is being and nonbeing in God; (d) if the radiance of the sun is quivering, one will not be able to discern whether it is one or many; (e) in the analogy, motion (κινήσαν) is given, but there is nothing prior to God that could put him in motion;⁶² and (f) there is the suggestion of composition (συνθέσεως), diffusion (χύσεως), and an unsettled and unstable nature (ἀστάτου καὶ οὐ παγίας φύσεως), all of which must be denied of God.⁶³

Nazianzen concludes that these analogies will only be useful if we accept one point that they illustrate while rejecting a number of unintended implications. What we should notice here is that, despite his careful analysis, in no case does Nazianzen find fault with the implication that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son like a river from a spring and like light from a ray. If he doubted that there was an order of origin between the Son and the Spirit, would he not be guilty of negligence in critiquing these analogies without confronting this implication?

⁵⁹ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 31, ll. 9 and 12-13). Nazianzen could have argued conversely that while the three divine persons are numerically one essence, a source, a spring, and a river are divided into three different places.

⁶⁰ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 32, l. 2).

⁶¹ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 32, ll. 4-6).

⁶² Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 33, l. 2).

⁶³ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 33, l. 5).

D) One Passage Indicating That Nazianzen Does Not Consider How the Spirit Is Related to the Son

Taken together, the eight passages above could make us want to conclude—even if hesitantly—that Nazianzen recognizes that the Holy Spirit is in some way from the Son. However, *Oration 31* offers a key counterexample that would prevent us from drawing that conclusion too confidently. In *Oration 31*, Nazianzen propounds the analogy of Adam, Seth, and Eve for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:

What was Adam? Something molded by God. What was Eve? A portion of that molded creation. Seth? He was the offspring of the pair. Are they not, in your view, the same thing—the molded creation, the portion, and the offspring? Yes, of course they are. Were they of the same substance? Yes, of course they were. It is agreed, then, that things with a different individual being can be of the same substance. I say this without implying molding or division or anything bodily as regards the Godhead—no quibbler shall get a grip on me again here—but by way of contemplating spiritual realities, stages as it were, in these things. It is impossible, you see, to track down a spotless picture of the whole truth.

What does this amount to? people will say. *There cannot be two things, one an offspring and the other something else, coming from the single source.*

Why not? Were not Eve and Seth of the same Adam, who else? Were they both offspring? Certainly not. Why?—because one was a portion of Adam, the other an offspring. Yet they had a mutual identity—they were both human beings, nobody can gainsay that. You have grasped the possibility of our position by means of human illustrations, so will you stop fighting desperately against the Spirit for your view that he must either be an offspring or not consubstantial and not God? I think it would be as well for you if you did, unless you are extremely determined to argue and fight plain facts.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ibid. (Barbel, ed., sect. 11, ll. 1-17): “Ο Ἀδάμ τί ποτε ἦν; πλάσμα θεοῦ. τί δὲ ἡ Εὐά; τμήμα τοῦ πλάσματος. τί δὲ ὁ Σήθ; ἀμφοτέρων γέννημα. ἄρ’ οὖν ταῦτόν σοι φαίνεται πλάσμα, καὶ τμήμα, καὶ γέννημα; πῶς οὐ; ὁμοούσια δὲ ταῦτα, ἢ τί; πῶς δ’ οὐ; ὠμολόγηται οὖν καὶ τὰ διαφόρως ὑποστάντα τῆς αὐτῆς εἶναι οὐσίας ἐνδέχασθαι. λέγω δὲ ταῦτα, οὐκ ἐπὶ τὴν θεότητα φέρων τὴν πλάσιν, ἢ τὴν τομὴν, ἢ τι τῶν ὅσα σώματος, μὴ μοί τις ἐπιφρέσθω πάλιν τῶν λογομάχων, ἐπὶ δὲ τούτων θεωρῶν, ὡς ἐπὶ σκιῆς, τὰ νοούμενα. οὐδὲ γὰρ οἷόν τε τῶν εἰκαζομένων οὐδὲν πρὸς πᾶσαν ἐξικνεῖσθαι καθαρῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν. καὶ τί ταῦτά, φασιν; οὐ γὰρ τοῦ ἐνὸς τὸ μὲν γέννημα, τὸ δὲ ἄλλο τι. τί οὖν; ἢ Εὐά καὶ ὁ Σήθ, οὐχὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἀδάμ; τίνος γὰρ ἄλλου; ἢ καὶ ἀμφοτέροι γενηήματα; οὐδαμῶς. ἀλλὰ τί; τὸ μὲν τμήμα, τὸ δὲ γέννημα. καὶ μὴ ἀμφοτέροι ταῦτόν ἀλλήλοισι ἀνθρωποι γάρ· οὐδεὶς ἀντερεῖ. παύση οὖν ἀπομαχόμενος πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα, ὡς ἡ γέννημα

It is clear that Nazianzen is so focused on the distinction of processions, in order to establish the distinction of persons along with the persons' perfect equality in divinity, that he completely ignores the order *between* the two processions suggested by the analogy. The order between the two processions is so much out of consideration that Nazianzen is not reluctant to propose an analogy that could be taken to imply that the Son proceeds from the Holy Spirit—an error so odious that Aquinas would observe centuries later that not even any heretic had ever proposed such an absurdity.⁶⁵ This utter disregard for the order between the processions must be considered when reading Nazianzen's assertions that imply some order of procession between the Spirit and the Son.

IV. JOHN DAMASCENE ON THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this section, we will briefly examine Damascene's understanding of the Holy Spirit's procession, particularly his rejection of the idea that the Spirit is from the Son. As Grégoire affirms, Damascene is a figure of special significance, because he is the last Father to enjoy the common patrimony of the Church in the East and the West, so that his teaching is respected in both the East and the West.⁶⁶ This was certainly true for Aquinas, for whom Damascene was a significant theological source. In his *De fide orthodoxa*, as Vassa Kontouma reports, Damascene drew from numerous Fathers but most abundantly from "Gregory of Nazianzus (194 citations, 186 of which are exact), Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria (73 citations, 58 of which are exact), Basil of Caesarea (69 citations), Gregory of Nyssa (49 citations, of which 42 are exact) and ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite

πάντως, ἢ μὴ ὁμοούσιον, μηδὲ θεόν, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων τὸ δυνατὸν λαβὼν τῆς ἡμετέρας ὑπολήψεως; ἐγὼ μὲν οἶμαι σοὶ καλῶς ἔχειν, εἰ μὴ λίαν ἔγνωκας φιλονεικεῖν, καὶ πρὸς τὰ δήλα μάχεσθαι" (Vinson, trans., 284-85).

⁶⁵ *STh* I, q. 36, a. 2.

⁶⁶ Grégoire, "La relation," 714.

(41 citations).⁶⁷ Since our ultimate purpose is to compare Nazianzen and Aquinas, here we will take Damascene's assertion that the Spirit is not from the Son as an objection that will have to be shown not to have been derived from Nazianzen.

In the third objection of question 36, article 2 of the *Prima pars*, Aquinas accurately quotes the position that Damascene articulates in *De fide orthodoxa*:

We say that the Holy Spirit is from the Father, and we name him the Spirit of the Father; but we do not say that the Holy Spirit is from the Son, though we name him the Spirit of the Son.⁶⁸

In his reply to this objection, Aquinas observes that some maintain that Damascene does not intend to deny that the Spirit is from the Son; however, Aquinas takes Damascene at his word and asserts that his opinion cannot stand.⁶⁹ The Angelic Doctor clarifies that the Nestorians were the first to deny that the Spirit proceeds from the Son in one of their creeds that was condemned by the Council of Ephesus. He mentions Theodoret of Cyr, whom he classifies as a Nestorian, before noting that Damascene too succumbed to this error.⁷⁰

The editor of the critical edition of *De fide orthodoxa*, Bonifatius Kotter, identifies a reference in Nazianzen for ten passages in Damascene's text relevant to the procession of the

⁶⁷ Vassa Kontouma, *John of Damascus: New Studies on his Life and Works* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 7.

⁶⁸ John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, bk. 1, c. 8 (ed. B. Kotter, *Sources chrétiennes* 535 [Paris: Cerf, 2010], sect. 8, ll. 323-25): "Τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς λέγομεν καὶ πνεῦμα πατρὸς ὀνομάζομεν, ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα οὐ λέγομεν, πνεῦμα δὲ υἱοῦ ὀνομάζομεν." Translation mine.

⁶⁹ Grégoire, "La relation," 715, notes that Damascene is not reacting to the Western formulation of the Spirit's procession, as he was completely unaware of Augustine's theology.

⁷⁰ Concerning the debate between Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret, Sicienski (*Filioque*, 49), asserts that Cyril denied that the Spirit derives his personal existence from the Son when questioned about it by Theodoret, who considered such an affirmation blasphemous. In support of this claim, Sicienski cites André de Halleux, "Cyrille, Théodoret et le *Filioque*," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 74 (1979). However, de Halleux states (*ibid.*, 609) that there is no evidence that Cyril made any such retraction or concession to Theodoret in the face of his critique of the idea that the Spirit is from the Son.

Holy Spirit, as shown in the tables below.⁷¹ Six of these are uncontroversial statements about the Trinity—namely, that the Spirit is from the Father (8.39), that the Spirit comes forth not by generation but by procession (8.135-38,⁷² 8.156-58, 8.213-14, and 8.311-12), and that everything comes from the Father, where the three are distinct by unbegottenness, begottenness, and procession (8.218-24). Three other passages suggest some order between the Son and the Spirit—an order with which Aquinas would agree, namely, that the Spirit is united to the Father through the Son (13.86-88),⁷³ that the Spirit is the Son's companion and the revealer of the Son's energy (7.17-18), and that the Spirit rests in the Son (8.194-95). The last passage (8.323-32), includes the very passage to which Aquinas refers, where Damascene rules out the *Filioque*:

And we speak likewise of the Holy Spirit as from the Father, and call Him the Spirit of the Father. And we do not speak of the Spirit as from the Son: but yet we call Him the Spirit of the Son. For if any one has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Romans 8:9), says the divine apostle. And we confess that He is manifested and imparted to us through the Son. For He breathed upon His Disciples, says he, and said, Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:29). It is just the same as in the case of the sun from which come both the ray and the radiance (for the sun itself is the source of both the ray and the radiance), and it is through the ray that the radiance is imparted to us, and it is the radiance itself by which we are lightened and in which we participate.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The *Sources chrétiennes* series uses the Greek text of Kotter's critical edition of *De fide orthodoxa*, but with different line numbering than appears in his original edition, published thirty-seven years earlier in *Patristische Texte und Studien* (vol. 12 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973]). Since the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) follows the line-numbering scheme of the original edition, I provide those line numbers in parentheses.

⁷² The assertion that generation and procession are distinct is uncontroversial, but the analogy deployed here comparing the Son to Seth and the Spirit to Eve could be considered controversial—although I would call it simply maladroit or provocative.

⁷³ *De fide orthodoxa* 12b.62-63 asserts similarly that the Father produces the Spirit through the Son, but Kotter does not identify any connected reference in Nazianzen for this passage.

⁷⁴ For the Greek text, see the table below. *De fide orthodoxa* TLG 12b.79-83 similarly asserts that the Spirit proceeds not from but through the Son; however, Kotter does not identify any connected reference in Nazianzen for this passage.

As noted in the table below, Kotter refers this passage to Nazianzen's *Oration* 31, where Nazianzen proposes and then critiques the analogy of a source, a spring, and a river for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As we saw in our discussion of this passage above, although Nazianzen is critical of the analogy's shortcomings, he does not find fault with the implication that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son like a river from a spring. Thus, according to the only connection to Nazianzen that Kotter could establish for Damascene's text, Damascene's rejection of the *Filioque* does not come from Nazianzen.

Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 7.17-18 (TLG 7.14-15)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 41.11 (p. 338), but this only pertains to the Spirit empowering the disciples

When we have learned about the Spirit of God, we contemplate it as the companion of the Word and the revealer of His energy.	οὕτω καὶ πνεῦμα μεμαθηκότες θεοῦ τὸ συμπαρομαρτοῦν τῷ λόγῳ καὶ φανεροῦν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνέργειαν.	He wrought first in the heavenly and angelic powers, and such as are first after God and around God. For from no other source flows their perfection and their brightness, and the difficulty or impossibility of moving them to sin, but from the Holy Ghost. . . .	Τοῦτο ἐνήργει, πρότερον μὲν ἐν ταῖς ἀγγελικαῖς καὶ οὐρανίους δυνάμεσι, καὶ ὅσαι πρῶται μετὰ θεόν, καὶ περὶ θεόν. Οὐ γὰρ ἄλλοθεν αὐταῖς ἡ τελείωσις καὶ ἡ ἐλλαμψις, καὶ τὸ πρὸς κακίαν δυσκίνητον, ἢ ἀκίνητον, ἢ παρὰ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος. . . .
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 8.39 (TLG 8.33)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 23.7 (p. 294) and *Oration* 29.2 (p. 180)

[one Father . . .] Producer of the most Holy Spirit.	[ἓνα πατέρα . . .] καὶ προβολέα τοῦ παναγίου πνεύματος.	23: For if, while admitting the dignity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we implied that they are either without source or from a different source, we should in fact face the terrible risk of dishonoring	Εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐμέλλομεν, Υἱοῦ καὶ Πνεύματος τὴν ἄξιαν ὁμολογοῦντες, ἢ ἄναρχα ταῦτα εἰσάγειν, ἢ τὴν ἄξιαν ὁμολογοῦντες, ἢ ἄναρχα ταῦτα εἰσάγειν, ἢ εἰς ἐτέραν ἀρχὴν
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		<p>God or of setting up a rival deity. . . . Similarly, is there any greater cause for honor in God's case than being the Father of his Son? This adds to his glory not detracts from it, as does the fact that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from him.</p>	<p>ἀνάγειν, δέος ἂν ἦν ὄντως μὴ ἀτιμασθῆ Θεός, ἢ κινδυνεύσει παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ ἀντίθεον. . . . τῷ Θεῷ δὲ ἄλλο τι μείζον, ἢ Υἱοῦ τυγχάνειν Πατέρα, ὃ προσθήκη δόξης ἐστίν, οὐχ ὑφαίρεσις, ὡς δὲ καὶ προβολέα Πνεύματος.</p>
		<p>29: The Son is the Begotten, and the Holy Spirit the Emission. . . . Therefore let us confine ourselves within our limits, and speak of the Unbegotten and the Begotten and That which proceeds from the Father.</p>	<p>τῶν δέ, τὸ μὲν γέννημα, τὸ δὲ πρόβλημα διὰ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων ὄρων ἰστάμενοι τὸ ἀγέννητον εἰσάγομεν, καὶ τὸ γεννητόν, καὶ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον.</p>

Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*
8.135-38 (TLG 8.119-21)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.11 (144D1-45B5)

<p>We have an analogy in Adam, who was not begotten (for God Himself molded him), and Seth, who was begotten (for he is Adam's son), and Eve, who proceeded out of Adam's rib</p>	<p>ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ Ἀδάμ ἀγέννητος ὢν (πλάσμα γὰρ ἐστὶ θεοῦ) καὶ ὁ Σήθ γεννητός (υἱὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν τοῦ Ἀδάμ) καὶ ἡ Εὐὰ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Ἀδάμ πλευρᾶς ἐκπορευθεῖσα</p>	<p>Did not both Eve and Seth come from the one Adam? And were they both begotten by him? No; but the one was a fragment of him, and the other was begotten by him. And yet the two were one and the same thing; both were human</p>	<p>ἢ Εὐὰ καὶ ὁ Σήθ, οὐχὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἀδάμ; τίνας γὰρ ἄλλου; ἢ καὶ Εὐὰ καὶ ὁ Σήθ, οὐχὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἀδάμ; τίνας γὰρ ἄλλου; ἢ καὶ ἀμφότεροι γεννήματα; οὐδαμῶς. ἀλλὰ τί; τὸ μὲν τμήμα, τὸ δὲ γέννημα. καὶ μὴν ἀμφότεροι</p>
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(for she was not begotten).	(οὐ γὰρ ἐγεννήθη αὐτή)	beings; no one will deny that. Will you then give up your contention against the Spirit, that He must be either altogether begotten, or else cannot be consubstantial, or be God?	ταῦτὸν ἀλλήλοις· ἄνθρωποι γάρ· οὐδεὶς ἀντερεῖ. παύση οὖν ἀπομαχόμενος πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα, ὡς ἡ γέννημα πάντως, ἢ μὴ ὁμοούσιον, μηδὲ θεόν.
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*
8.156-58 (TLG 138-39)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 30.19 (128C5-7)

And only the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father's essence, not having been generated but simply proceeding.	καὶ μόνον τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐκπορευτὸν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς, οὐ γεννώμενον ἀλλ' ἐκπορευόμενον.	But the Proper Name of the Unoriginate is Father, and that of the unoriginately Begotten is Son, and that of the unbegottenly Proceeding or going forth is the Holy Ghost.	ἴδιον δὲ τοῦ μὲν ἀνάρχου, πατήρ· τοῦ δὲ ἀνάρχως γεννηθέντος, υἱός· τοῦ δὲ ἀγεννήτως προελθόντος, ἢ προϊόντος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον.
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*
8.194-95 (TLG 8.173)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.2 (133ff) and
Oration 41.9 (441BC)

Who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son.	τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον καὶ ἐν υἱῷ ἀναπαυόμενον.	133. Now the subject of the Holy Spirit presents a special difficulty, not only because . . . these men have become weary in their disputations concerning the Son . . . but further because we ourselves also, being worn out by the multitude of their questions, are in something of the same condition with men who have lost their appetite.	Ἔχει μὲν οὖν τι καὶ δυσχερὲς ὁ περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος λόγος, οὐ μόνον ὅτι . . . περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ λόγους ἀποκαμόντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι . . . ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ ἡμεῖς τῷ πλήθει τῶν ζητημάτων ἀποκναισθέντες ταῦτὸν πάσχομεν τοῖς κακοσίτοις.
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		<p>441. For it was not ever fitting that either the Son should be wanting to the Father, or the Spirit to the Son. . . . by Whom the Father is known and the Son is glorified; and by Whom alone He is known. . . . All that the Father has the Son has also, except the being Unbegotten; and all that the Son has the Spirit has also, except the Generation.</p>	<p>οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔπρεπεν ἐλλείπειν ποτὲ, ἢ Υἱὸν Πατρὶ, ἢ Πνεῦμα Υἱῶ. . . . δι’ οὗ Πατὴρ γινώσκεται, καὶ Υἱὸς δοξάζεται, καὶ παρ’ ὧν μόνων γινώσκεται. . . . Πάντα ὅσα ὁ Πατὴρ, τοῦ Υἱοῦ, πλὴν τῆς ἀγεννησίας. Πάντα ὅσα ὁ Υἱὸς, τοῦ Πνεύματος, πλὴν τῆς γεννήσεως.</p>
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 8.213-14 (TLG 8.190-91)

Oration 4 (128C)—however this passage seems irrelevant. There is no occurrence of “Holy Spirit” or “procession” in *Oration 4*.

<p>And the Holy Spirit likewise is derived from the Father, yet not after the manner of generation, but after that of procession.</p>	<p>τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καὶ αὐτὸ μὲν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἀλλ’ οὐ γεννητῶς ἀλλ’ ἐκπορευτῶς.</p>
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 8.218-24 (TLG 8.195-201)

Nazianzen, *Oration 25.16* (1221B13-15)

<p>All then that the Son and the Spirit</p>	<p>Πάντα οὖν, ὅσα ἔχει ὁ υἱός, καὶ</p>	<p>For what the Father and</p>	<p>Κοινὸν γὰρ Πατρὶ μὲν καὶ Υἱῶ καὶ ἀγίῳ</p>
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<p>have is from the Father, even their very being: and unless the Father is, neither the Son nor the Spirit is. And unless the Father possesses a certain attribute, neither the Son nor the Spirit possesses it: and through the Father, that is, because of the Father's existence, the Son and the Spirit exist, and through the Father, that is, because of the Father having the qualities, the Son and the Spirit have all their qualities, those of being unbegotten, and of birth and of procession being excepted.</p>	<p>τὸ πνεῦμα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχει καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι. Καὶ εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ ἐστιν, οὐδὲ ὁ υἱὸς ἐστιν οὐδὲ τὸ πνεῦμα. Καὶ εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ ἔχει τι, οὐδὲ ὁ υἱὸς ἔχει, οὐδὲ τὸ πνεῦμα. Καὶ διὰ τὸν πατέρα, τουτέστιν διὰ τὸ εἶναι τὸν πατέρα, ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα. Καὶ διὰ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα πάντα, ἃ ἔχει, τουτέστι διὰ τὸν πατέρα ἔχειν αὐτά, πλὴν τῆς ἀγεννησίας καὶ τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως.</p>	<p>Son and Holy Spirit have in common is their divinity and the fact that they were not created, while for the Son and the Holy Spirit it is the fact that they are from the Father. In turn, the special characteristic of the Father is his ingenerateness, of the Son his generation, and of the Holy Spirit its procession.</p>	<p>Πνεύματι, τὸ μὴ γεγονέναι, καὶ ἡ θεότης· Υἱῷ δὲ καὶ ἀγίῳ Πνεύματι, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς. Ἴδιον δὲ Πατρὸς μὲν, ἡ ἀγεννησία· Υἱοῦ δὲ, ἡ γέννησις· Πνεύματος δὲ, ἡ ἐκπεμψις.</p>
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*
8.311-12 (TLG 8.277-79)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 20.10 (1078B4-11)

<p>The Holy Spirit is one Spirit, going forth from the Father, not in the manner of Sonship but of procession.</p>	<p>Ἐν πνεῦμα ἅγιον τὸ πνεῦμα, προῖόν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς, οὐχ υἱκῶς δὲ ἀλλ' ἐκπορευτῶς.</p>	<p>Do not be too inquisitive about the procession of the Spirit, either. (I am satisfied with the declaration that he is Son and that he is from the Father, and that the one is Father and the other Son; and I refuse to engage in meaningless speculation beyond this point.)</p>	<p>μηδὲ τοῦ Πνεύματος περιεργάζου τὴν πρόσδον.</p>
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 8.323-32 (TLG 8.288-96)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.31 (169BC)

<p>And we speak likewise of the Holy Spirit as from the Father, and call Him the Spirit of the Father. And we do not speak of the Spirit as from the Son: but yet we call Him the Spirit of the Son. For if any one has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Romans 8:9), says the divine apostle. And we confess that He is manifested and imparted to us through the Son. For He breathed upon His Disciples, says he, and said, Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:29). It is just the same as in the case of the sun from which come both the ray and the radiance (for the sun itself is the source of both the ray and the radiance), and it is through the ray that the radiance is</p>	<p>Τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς λέγομεν καὶ πνεῦμα πατρὸς ὀνομάζομεν, ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα οὐ λέγομεν, πνεῦμα δὲ υἱοῦ ὀνομάζομεν («εἴ τις γὰρ πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει», φησὶν ὁ θεῖος ἀπόστολος) καὶ δι' υἱοῦ πεφανερῶσθαι καὶ μεταδεδοῦσθαι ἡμῖν ὁμολογοῦμεν («ἐνεφύσησε» γὰρ καὶ εἶπε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ· «Λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον»), ὥσπερ ἐκ τοῦ ἡλίου μὲν ἦ τε ἀκτίς καὶ ἡ ἔκλαμψις (αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ πηγὴ τῆς τε ἀκτίνος καὶ τῆς ἐκλάμψεως), διὰ δὲ τῆς ἀκτίνος ἡ ἔκλαμψις ἡμῖν μεταδίδεται καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ φωτίζουσα ἡμᾶς</p>	<p>I picture to myself a source, a spring, a river,⁷⁵ as others have done before, to see if the first might be analogous to the Father, the second to the Son, and the third to the Holy Ghost. For in these there is no distinction in time, nor are they torn away from their connection with each other, though they seem to be parted by three personalities. But I was afraid in the first place that I should present a flow in the Godhead, incapable of standing still; and secondly that by this figure a numerical unity would be</p>	<p>ὀφθαλμόν τινα, καὶ πηγὴν, καὶ ποταμόν ἐνενόησα, καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἄλλοι, μὴ τῷ μὲν ὁ πατήρ, τῇ δὲ ὁ υἱός, τῷ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἀναλόγως ἔχη. ταῦτα γὰρ οὔτε χρόνῳ διέστηκεν, οὔτε ἀλλήλων ἀπέρρηκται τῇ συνεχείᾳ· κἂν δοκεῖ πως τρισὶν ιδιότησι τέμνεσθαι. ἀλλ' ἔδρεια, πρῶτον μὲν ῥύσιν τινα θεότητος παραδέξασθαι στάσιν οὐκ ἔχουσαν· δεύτερον δὲ μὴ τὸ ἐν τῷ ἀριθμῷ διὰ τῆς εἰκασίας ταύτης εἰσάγηται. ὀφθαλμός γάρ, καὶ πηγὴ, καὶ ποταμός ἐν ἐστὶν ἀριθμῷ, διαφορῶς σχηματιζόμενα.</p>
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⁷⁵ I have changed “eye” to “source” and “fountain” to “spring.”

imparted to us, and it is the radiance itself by which we are lightened and in which we participate.	καὶ μετεχομένη ὑφ' ἡμῶν.	introduced. For the source ⁷⁶ and the spring and the river are numerically one, though in different forms.	
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Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 13.86-88 (TLG 13.77-79)

Nazianzen, *Oration* 31.8 (141B7ff) and *Oration* 31.29 (165B14-C5)

The Holy Spirit is God, being between the unbegotten and the begotten, and united to the Father through the Son. We speak of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord.	Θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, μέσον ἀγεννήτου καὶ γεννητοῦ καὶ δι' υἱοῦ τῷ πατρὶ συναπτόμενον· πνεῦμα θεοῦ λέγεται, πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ, νοῦς Χριστοῦ, πνεῦμα κυρίου.	141B: The Holy Ghost, which proceeds from the Father; Who, inasmuch as He proceeds from That Source, is no Creature; and inasmuch as He is not Begotten is no Son; and inasmuch as He is between the Unbegotten and the Begotten is God.	Τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὁ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται· ὁ καθ' ὅσον μὲν ἐκείθεν ἐκπορεύεται, οὐ κτίσμα· καθ' ὅσον δὲ οὐ γεννητόν, οὐχ υἱός· καθ' ὅσον δὲ ἀγεννήτου καὶ γεννητοῦ μέσον θεός.
		165B: He is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Mind of Christ, the Spirit of The Lord, and Himself The Lord, the Spirit of Adoption, of Truth, of Liberty; the Spirit of Wisdom, of Understanding, of Counsel, of Might, of Knowledge, of Godliness, of the Fear of God.	πνεῦμα θεοῦ λέγεται, πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ, νοῦς Χριστοῦ, πνεῦμα κυρίου, αὐτὸ κύριος· πνεῦμα υἰοθεσίας, ἀληθείας, ἐλευθερίας· πνεῦμα σοφίας, συνέσεως, βουλῆς, ἰσχύος, γνώσεως, εὐσεβείας, φοβοῦ θεοῦ·

⁷⁶ I have changed “eye” to “source.”

Kotter does not identify any reference in Nazianzen for these passages of *De fide orthodoxa*.

7.1 (TLG 7.1)	Moreover the Word must also possess Spirit.	Δεῖ δὲ τὸν λόγον καὶ πνεῦμα ἔχειν.
7.30-31 (TLG 7.26-27)	For never was the Father at any time lacking in the Word, nor the Word in the Spirit.	οὔτε γὰρ ἐνέλειψέ ποτε τῷ πατρὶ λόγος οὔτε τῷ λόγῳ πνεῦμα.
8.130-31 (TLG 8.114-15)	For though the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, yet this is not generative in character but processional.	εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἀλλ' οὐ γεννητῶς ἀλλ' ἐκπορευτῶς.
8.204 (TLG 8.182)	Proceeding from the Father and communicated through the Son.	ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον καὶ δι' υἱοῦ μεταδιδόμενον.
8.216-17 (TLG 8.193-94)	Further, the generation of the Son from the Father and the procession of the Holy Spirit are simultaneous.	Ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἡ υἱοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γέννησις, καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐκπόρευσις.
8.280-82 (TLG 8.250-52)	But only in the attributes of Fatherhood, Sonship, and Procession, both in respect of cause and effect and perfection of subsistence.	ἐν μόναϊς δὲ ταῖς ιδιότησι τῆς τε πατρότητος καὶ τῆς υἱότητος καὶ τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως κατὰ τε τὸ αἴτιον καὶ αἰτιατὸν καὶ τὸ τέλειον τῆς ὑποστάσεως.
12b.62-63 (TLG 12b.43-44)	[The Father is . . .] through the Word the Producer of the revealing Spirit.	[ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ . . .] καὶ διὰ λόγου προβολεὺς ἐκφαντορικοῦ πνεύματος.
12b.68-71 (TLG 12b.47-49)	And the Holy Spirit is the power of the Father revealing the hidden mysteries of His Divinity, proceeding from the Father through the Son in a manner known to Himself, but different from that of generation. Wherefore the Holy Spirit is the perfecter of the creation of the universe.	Τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐκφαντορική τοῦ κρυφίου τῆς θεότητος δύναμις τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐκ πατρὸς μὲν δι' υἱοῦ ἐκπορευομένη, ὡς οἶδεν, οὐ γεννητῶς· διὸ καὶ πνεῦμα ἅγιον τὸ τελεσιουργὸν τῆς τῶν ἀπάντων ποιήσεως.

12b.79-83 (<i>TLG</i> 12b.56-57)	For there is no impulse without Spirit. And we speak also of the Spirit of the Son, not as though proceeding from Him, but as proceeding through Him from the Father. For the Father alone is cause.	(οὐδεμία γὰρ ὁρμὴ ἄνευ πνεύματος) καὶ υἱοῦ δὲ πνεύμα οὐχ ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὡς δι' αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενος· μόνος γὰρ αἴτιος ὁ πατήρ.
13.84-85 (<i>TLG</i> 13.75-76)	The Son is the Father's image, and the Spirit the Son's, through which Christ dwelling in man makes him after his own image.	Εἰκὼν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱός, καὶ υἱὸς τὸ πνεῦμα, δι' οὗ Χριστὸς ἐνοικῶν ἀνθρώπῳ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα.

V. AQUINAS ON THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Aquinas would certainly agree with Nazianzen's assertion that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and his suggestion that there is some order between the Spirit and the Son. With the benefit of nine centuries of theological development intervening, however, he has much more to say than Nazianzen does. For Aquinas, "the Father can be known by common spiration insofar as he is the principle of the Holy Spirit by breathing forth Love."⁷⁷ The notion of common spiration "distinguishes the Father from the Holy Spirit but unites him to the Son,"⁷⁸ since the Father and the Son are together one single Spirator of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹

In this section, we will very briefly draw out Aquinas's exposition on five points, namely, that (1) spiration is common to the Father and the Son, (2) the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father as Love, (3) the Spirit is the mutual love of the Father and the Son, (4) the Holy Spirit proceeds principally from the Father, and (5) the Father and the Son are a single principle in spiration.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *I Sent.*, d. 28, q. 1, a. 1: "Unde Pater potest . . . innotescere . . . communi spiratione, inquantum est principium Spiritus sancti per spirationem amoris."

⁷⁸ *I Sent.*, d. 29, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2: "communis spiratio distinguit Patrem a Spiritu sancto, sed unit Filio."

⁷⁹ *STh* I, q. 36, a. 4, ad 7.

⁸⁰ For more on Aquinas's exposition, see Ku, *God the Father*, chap. 5. I offer an abridged version here.

Nazianzen's thought touches on the first of these points, and ever so faintly on the second.

Concerning the first point, Aquinas teaches that there is no "property by which the Father differs from the Holy Spirit alone" because that relation by which the Father is distinguished from the Holy Spirit is possessed in common with the Son.⁸¹ In Aquinas's doctrine of subsistent relations, this unified action of the Father and the Son is secured immediately, and the fact of the Holy Spirit's procession from the Son is a foregone conclusion. Considering the divine person as a subsistent relation, if the Son did not spirate the Holy Spirit, the Son "could in no way be personally distinct from him."⁸² The Son is the divine essence, and the Holy Spirit is the divine essence; the only way they can be distinct is if one proceeds from the other, giving rise to mutually opposed relations. So, either the Son proceeds from the Spirit, or else the Spirit proceeds from the Son. The former is against the faith.

We have noted Nazianzen's appeal to mutual relation in order to distinguish the divine persons; he writes, "it is their difference in . . . mutual relationship, which has caused the difference in names."⁸³ This necessity of mutual relations for personal distinction is precisely Aquinas's argument for the procession of the Spirit from the Son.⁸⁴ Were there no such procession, there would be no mutual relations between them, and thus they could

⁸¹ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 57: "Proprietatem autem qua Pater differat a solo Spiritu Sancto, non est assignare, eo quod Pater et Filius sunt unum principium Spiritus Sancti, ut ostensum est." In fact, the Father does differ from the Holy Spirit alone by spiration; that is, the notion of spiration does not distinguish the Father from any other person except the Holy Spirit. It would be more accurate to say that there is no notion by which the Father alone is distinguished from the Holy Spirit. For spiration distinguishes not only the Father but also the Son from the Holy Spirit.

⁸² *STh* I, q. 36, a. 2: "nullo modo posset ab eo personaliter distingui."

⁸³ See n. 45 above.

⁸⁴ See Ku, "Divine Innascibility," 57-85 for a brief discussion of mutual relation in Nazianzen and Aquinas.

not be distinct;⁸⁵ rather, the Trinity would be reduced to a Sabellian binity, where the second person would have two names.

Regarding the second point—the Spirit’s procession as Love—Aquinas understands the procession of the Holy Spirit according to the analogy of the word and love. That is, in knowing himself, the Father speaks the Word, the Son; and in loving themselves and each other, the Father and the Son breathe forth the Holy Spirit. Thus as the Father is the principle and object of the divine knowledge in the procession of the Word, so are the Father and the Son the principle and object of the divine love in the procession of the Holy Spirit:

Therefore, as we express the way whereby God is in God, as the known in the knower, when we say “Son,” who is the Word of God; so we express the way whereby God is in God, as the beloved in the lover, when we posit a “Spirit” here, who is the Love of God.⁸⁶

Hence in the analogy of the word and love, the Holy Spirit is viewed as God’s love for himself, proceeding in his will as an *impression breathed forth*—or, better, the Holy Spirit is viewed as the love of the Father and the Son for themselves and each other as the highest good, proceeding in the divine will as an *impression breathed forth*.⁸⁷ The Word is the fruit of the Father’s act of knowing himself, proceeding in the divine intellect as a likeness of what is known—namely, the Father, who is the divine essence. The Holy Spirit is the fruit of the Father’s and the Son’s act of loving themselves and each other, proceeding in the divine will not as a likeness of what is known but as an impression, an impulse, an affection, driving the lover toward the beloved—

⁸⁵ *STh* I, q. 36, a. 2.

⁸⁶ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 46: “Sicut igitur in diuinis modus ille quo Deus est in Deo ut intellectum in intelligente exprimitur per hoc quod dicimus Filium qui est verbum Dei, ita modum quo Deus est in Deo sicut amatum in amante exprimimus per hoc quod ponimus ibi Spiritum qui est amor Dei.”

⁸⁷ In addition to speaking of the Holy Spirit as “a certain impression” (*quaedam impressio*) of the beloved in the lover in *STh* I, q. 37, a. 1; and *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 2, ad 11; Aquinas also uses the term “a certain impulsion” (*impulsionem quandam*) in *STh* I, q. 36, a. 1. For more examples of similar terms, see Emery, *Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 229.

namely, the Father toward the Son, and the Son toward the Father—who are each the divine essence.

Nazianzen only hints at this association between the Spirit and love when he identifies the Spirit's role as one of perfecting. As noted above, Nazianzen names the three divine persons "the Cause, the Creator, and the Perfecter," and he states that creation "was a work fulfilled by His Word, and perfected by His Spirit."⁸⁸ Now, goodness is the same as being in the real order. It is being under the aspect of desirability: something is desirable insofar as it is perfect, and perfect insofar as it is actual.⁸⁹ So, love is connected to perfection, because we love what is perfect, namely, that which has goodness more completely. Thus there is a convergence, albeit faint, in the thought of these two Doctors of the Church on the personality of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas mines the analogy of the word and love to lay hold of the Holy Spirit's personality as the one who proceeds as Love in person, and Nazianzen points out the Spirit's character as the Perfecter in the created order. It is fitting that the one who proceeds on account of divine love of the divine goodness would be the one who perfects creatures in goodness. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Aquinas expresses the Spirit's role as Perfecter, in the appropriation of glorification to him, on account of goodness:

Three works are appropriated to the three persons: creation, as if first, to the Father, who is the principle not from a principle; glorification, which is the final end, to the Holy Spirit, by reason of goodness; and re-creation, which is in the middle, to the Son, who is the middle person in the Trinity.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ See n. 55 above.

⁸⁹ *STh* I, q. 5, a. 1.

⁹⁰ III *Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum, quod tria opera tribus personis appropriantur: creatio, quasi prima, patri, qui est principium non de principio: glorificatio, quae est ultimus finis, spiritui sancto, ratione bonitatis: recreatio, quae media est, filio, qui est media in Trinitate persona."

With respect to the third point, the Holy Spirit may be understood as the mutual love of the Father and the Son, an analogy that Aquinas develops as follows:

The Holy Spirit is said to be the bond of the Father and the Son insofar as he is Love because, since the Father loves himself and the Son with one single love, and conversely, the relationship [*habitude*] of the Father to the Son as the lover to the beloved, and conversely, is implied in the Holy Spirit, as he is Love. But from the fact that the Father and the Son love each other mutually, it is necessary that the mutual Love, who is the Holy Spirit, proceed from both. Therefore according to origin the Holy Spirit is not the middle but the third person in the Trinity. But according to the aforesaid relationship he is the middle bond of the two, proceeding from both.⁹¹

As we observed above, Nazianzen does speak of the Holy Spirit's procession as "the mean" (μέσον) between unbegottenness and begottenness.⁹² However, there he is simply looking for a way out of the Arian straightjacket that erroneously presumes that birth is the only way that one divine person may proceed from another. That is, "unbegotten" is taken to mean without origin, so if it is admitted that a divine person has an origin, then that person cannot be unbegotten but must be begotten and thus be a Son. But in fact, the Spirit has an origin but by way of procession, not begetting, and Nazianzen expresses this with the term "mean." Nevertheless, despite the convenient coincidence in language, the Theologian does not appear to be asserting any sense that the Spirit is a bond of mutual love between the Father and the Son.

Fourth, following Augustine, Aquinas states that the Holy Spirit is said to "proceed *principally* or properly from the Father"

⁹¹ *STh* I, q. 37, a. 1, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod Spiritus Sanctus dicitur esse nexus Patris et Filii, in quantum est amor, quia, cum Pater amet unica dilectione se et Filium, et e converso, importatur in Spiritu sancto, prout est amor, habitudo Patris ad Filium, et e converso, ut amantis ad amatum. Sed ex hoc ipso quod Pater et Filius se mutuo amant, oportet quod mutuus amor, qui est Spiritus Sanctus, ab utroque procedat. Secundum igitur originem, Spiritus Sanctus non est medius, sed tertia in Trinitate persona. Secundum vero praedictam habitudinem, est medius nexus duorum, ab utroque procedens." Also, *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 9, ad 20: "[Spiritus sanctus] procedit a duobus mutuo se amantibus."

⁹² See n. 42 above.

because the Son receives the power to spirate from the Father.⁹³ The Holy Spirit does not proceed first (*prius*), more fully (*plenius*), or simply more (*magis*) from the Father than from the Son.⁹⁴ The Holy Spirit proceeds properly from the Son as well as from the Father.⁹⁵ But since the Son receives the power to spirate the Spirit from the Father, the Spirit proceeds principally from the Father and not principally from the Son. Nazianzen has no such detail in his discussion of the Holy Spirit's procession.

Fifth, in common spiration, "the Father and the Son are *two spirating*, on account of the plurality of their suppositis, but not *two Spirators*, on account of their one spiration."⁹⁶ It must be affirmed that the two spirating remain distinct as persons but are one perfectly united principle. The Holy Spirit who is "one simple person" must have an uncomposed principle, if he himself is not to be a composite.⁹⁷ There is no such refined consideration of spiration in the thought of Nazianzen.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that there is a profound basic agreement in the thought of these two great theologians concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. Both authors understand that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and that the divine persons are understood to be distinct on account of mutually opposed

⁹³ *STh* I, q. 36, a. 3, ad 2: "dicatur principaliter vel proprie procedere de Patre" (emphasis added).

⁹⁴ *I Sent.*, d. 12, q. un., a. 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, ad 3.

⁹⁶ *STh* I, q. 36, a. 4, ad 7: "Pater et Filius sunt *duo spirantes*, propter pluralitatem suppositorum; non autem *duo spiratores*, propter unam spirationem."

⁹⁷ *I Sent.*, d. 11, q. un., a. 2: "una et simplex persona." See also *I Sent.*, d. 11, q. un., a. 1, ad 7: "What is simple cannot proceed from many things that are different in essence with different operations. But the Father and the Son, with the power of one nature, spirate the Holy Spirit by one single spiration. And therefore, he who is spirated is simple" ("simplex non potest procedere a pluribus quae sunt diversa per essentiam, quorum sunt diversae operationes. Sed Pater et Filius virtute unius naturae spirant Spiritum sanctum unica spiratione. Et ideo qui spiratur est simplex.")

relations. Furthermore, Nazianzen seems to recognize an order of origin between the Son and the Holy Spirit, but he has no name for it and has no intention of looking into the question. Aquinas names it “procession,” reusing the word that was applied to the Spirit’s coming forth from the Father—thus, affirming that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. Whereas Aquinas expounds in detail how the Spirit is from the Father and the Son as from a single principle, principally from the Father, proceeding as Love and as a bond between the Father and the Son, Nazianzen refrains from saying that the Holy Spirit *proceeds from* the Son. Aquinas too has a unique term for the Father as the unoriginate principle of the Holy Spirit, namely, *auctor*; this distinction has unfortunately not often been noted in recent Trinitarian theology.

If one presumes that Nazianzen could not hold that the Spirit is from the Son in some way, then the quotations above may seem shocking. However, if no such preconceived judgment is made, then one can see that they manifest a consistency in his thought, and a natural relevance to the discussion of the Spirit’s procession that we find in contemporary heretics and heroes of orthodoxy.

While we should not be attached to a naive harmony in the manner of a toddler clutching a teddy bear, neither should we overreact to potential oversimplification with an adolescent resentment whereby we would change wine into water under the influence of a sophomoric skepticism. A preconceived commitment to either extreme must be avoided. As tempting as it might be to push Nazianzen toward the Western Church’s later articulation of the *Filioque* and Aquinas’s decisive defense of it, we must flatly admit that he simply did not address that specific issue. Still it is neither more honest nor intelligent to read what he did in fact assert in utter isolation from more explicit affirmations that preceded him or were contemporary to him.

Why should we not just admit that we are comparing apples to oranges, that is, that Nazianzen and Aquinas are not involved in the same project at all, and that the unity of faith comprises such a diversity of theologies? If Jesus is who he says he is, and the Church he instituted has declared with his authority that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, then we can

gain insight into how the Church breathes with her two lungs⁹⁸ by finding—without imposing—a harmony of thought between the great Eastern and Western Doctors. If we were to give free reign to skepticism, we should ask whether any of the Fathers were engaging in the same project: Grégoire points out that the Greek Fathers themselves were not united on the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁹

Since words signify things, there can be a principle of unity in speech even among people living in very different times, as long as they are in contact with the same reality. In this case, we have Christians in contact with the same revelation. We are strengthened and gain insight when we see what is held and articulated in common, and what is said differently. Hailing from different epochs and cultures, naturally these two saints formulated their theology through different idioms. Yet they are unmistakably guided by the same Spirit of truth, who inspired the Scriptures and preserves the Church from error.

⁹⁸ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), n. 54: “The Church must breathe with her two lungs!” https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html (accessed 4/28/2022).

⁹⁹ Grégoire, “La relation,” 754 n. 1.

OBEDIENCE, CONSCIENCE, AND *PROPRIA VOLUNTAS* IN ST. THOMAS

AARON MADDEFORD

Richmond, Virginia

OBEDIENCE PLAYS an important role in human perfection, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, who says that it is, in a way, the greatest moral virtue. In an article on the obedience of Christ in St. Thomas, Michael Waldstein calls obedience “the often maligned virtue.”¹ It does seem that obedience in St. Thomas’s thought, if not actively maligned, has at least been given less attention than its status as one of the greatest moral virtues would warrant.² One possible reason for

¹ Michael Waldstein, “The Analogy of Mission and Obedience: A Central Point in the relation between *theologia* and *oikonomia* in St. Thomas Aquinas’s Commentary on John,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 112.

² A handful of articles treat of obedience in St. Thomas. Some concentrate on Christ’s obedience: Waldstein, “The Analogy of Mission and Obedience”; Mark Armitage, “Obedient unto Death, Even Death on a Cross: Christ’s Obedience in the Soteriology of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Nova et vetera* (English ed.) 8 (2010): 505-26. A few writers concentrate on obedience in the life of every Christian, as Benjamin J. Brown, “The Integration of Law and Virtue: Obedience in Aquinas’s Moral Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002): 333-51; and Rudi te Velde, “Obedience as a Religious Virtue: An Essay on the Binding of Isaac from the Perspective of Thomas Aquinas,” *Jaarboek Thomas Instituut te Utrecht* 36 (2017): 165-79. Te Velde, however, is uncomfortable with aspects of St. Thomas’s teaching on obedience to other humans (as opposed to God): “A certain paternalism is part and parcel of his view on the hierarchical ordering of human relationships. . . . This view is unmistakably shaped by the feudal-monarchist form of society of the Middle Ages” (ibid., 169). Viktória Hedvig Deák, in “*Consilia sapientis amici*”: *Saint Thomas Aquinas on the Foundation of the Evangelical Counsels in Theological Anthropology* (Rome: Editrice pontificia università gregoriana, 2014) is unapologetic about St. Thomas’s teaching, but only treats of

this is that obedience at times seems to conflict with other human goods, in particular the inviolability of our conscience and free will. For instance, Jean Porter, in an article on obedience in St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, focuses on the limitations of obedience that are, in her view, imposed by equality and by freedom.³ But there is a tension between the description of such a circumscribed and qualified obedience and that obedience which St. Thomas says is the most excellent moral virtue because it consists in the sacrifice of one's *propria voluntas*, "proper will," and whose paradigm is Christ, who was "obedient unto death, even death on a cross."⁴

In this article, I will look at the relationship between obedience and conscience and between obedience and free will. This will help not only to resolve their apparent tensions, but also better to understand the nature of obedience in St. Thomas's thought. In the first part, I will look at St. Thomas's study of obedience in his treatment of the virtues. Two questions arise.

obedience as a counsel. Finally, and most importantly, Hugues Bohineust has a detailed treatment of obedience in *Obéissance du Christ, obéissance du chrétien: Christologie et morale chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2017). His work is especially helpful in placing obedience within God's providential ordering of the universe and showing how it is ordered to the common good. Further, he argues that, for St. Thomas, true obedience is compatible with freedom, since he combines the instrumental servitude of Aristotle with the freedom of the human (ibid., 224ff.). I build on Bohineust's work, but differ from him in focusing on the apparent conflict between obedience as a sacrifice of one's proper will (*propria voluntas*) on the one hand, and the claims of conscience and free will on the other. The interpretation of *propria voluntas* is at the center of this article, while Bohineust treats of it only in passing (ibid., 502-4, 544), and does not, as I do, explain it in terms of man's *proprium bonum*.

³ Jean Porter, "Natural Equality: Freedom, Authority and Obedience in Two Medieval Thinkers," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 21 (2001): 276: "Both [Bonaventure and Aquinas] value the virtue of obedience highly, but at the same time, both also place clear limits on the obligation of obedience, limits which point beyond themselves (explicitly, in Aquinas' case, implicitly but clearly in Bonaventure's case) to a norm of natural equality which constrains the exercise of authority." See also ibid, 290: "Both Bonaventure and Aquinas presuppose the goodness of human freedom in their analysis of the scope and limits of a praiseworthy obedience. For both, there are occasions when a subordinate need not obey, or should not obey, and this presupposes that the subordinate continues to exercise judgment and choice in evaluating commands and deciding whether to carry them out."

⁴ Phil 2:8 (RSV).

First, St. Thomas argues that we must follow our conscience even against the order of our superior. How is this in accord with his teaching that obedience is the greatest moral virtue? Second, St. Thomas frequently uses St. Gregory's formulation, which describes obedience as the sacrifice of one's *propria voluntas*, one's "proper will." How is such a sacrifice possible, given that obedience, like every virtuous act, must be voluntary and so arise from our free will? In the second part, I will look at St. Thomas's teaching about obedience in his description of man's first sin and Christ's redemptive mission. In the third part, I will briefly review the use of the term *propria voluntas* in the Christian tradition and consider St. Thomas's way of appropriating this term. I will argue that the will immolated by obedience, referred to by St. Thomas as *propria voluntas*, is not the faculty of the will simply but the will insofar as it aims at some good that is opposed to a more common good. The immolation of *propria voluntas* through obedience does not restrict human freedom, but grants us the truest freedom, that of obtaining our *ultimus finis*. In the fourth part, I will argue that the injunction to follow our conscience over the commands of superiors does not lessen the importance of obedience, since to follow our conscience is an act of the virtue of obedience on St. Thomas's account. In the end, we will see that an examination of obedience in its relationship to conscience and free will, far from lowering its status, confirms the exalted place St. Thomas accords it among the moral virtues.

I. OBEDIENCE AND ITS LIMITS

A) *The Virtue and Counsel of Obedience*

Obedience is a moral virtue that is part of justice. Justice is the "habit according to which someone by a firm and continuous will renders to everyone his due."⁵ Justice is a cardinal

⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 2: "Iustitia est habitus secundum quem aliquis constanti et perpetua voluntate ius suum unicuique tribuit." All texts of St. Thomas are taken from

virtue, and like the other cardinal virtues has certain virtues joined to it, which in some way fall under the definition of justice but in another way do not. Among these virtues is *observantia*, which is the virtue by which “reverence and honor are shown to persons established in authority [*dignitate*].”⁶ Like justice, it is ordered to another person, but unlike justice, what is given is not equal to what is owed, since we cannot give to those who rule well the honor they deserve.⁷ *Observantia* is divided into two virtues: *dulia*, the virtue by which honor is paid to those established in authority; and obedience, the virtue by which we obey their commands. The formal object of obedience, then, is the command of a superior.

Saint Thomas argues that obedience is in a way the greatest of the moral virtues.⁸ The merit of virtuous acts comes from adhering to God and thinking little of created things.⁹ It is by the theological virtues that we adhere to God, while by the moral virtues we don’t overestimate the importance of created things so that we can adhere to God. It follows that the theological virtues are greater than the moral virtues. Among the moral virtues, their ranking is determined by the greatness of the goods from which they allow us to turn. Saint Thomas distinguishes three types of human goods: the lowest are exterior goods, followed by goods of the body, and the highest

the website Corpus Thomisticum, prepared by Enrique Alarcón. Translations of Latin throughout are mine.

⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 102, a. 1: “Sub pietate invenitur observantia, per quam cultus et honor exhibetur personis in dignitate constitutes.”

⁷ See *STh* II-II, q. 80, a. 1. See also q. 80, a. 1, ad 3: “Nam praecellentibus personis debetur et reverentia honoris et obedientia”; and q. 102, a. 1, ad 3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod ad iustitiam specialem proprie sumptam pertinent reddere aequale ei cui aliquid debetur. Quod quidem non potest fieri ad virtuosos, et ad eos qui bene statu dignitatis utuntur.” Note that the inequality of what is owed and what is given, which precludes *observantia* and similar virtues from perfectly fitting the definition of justice, does not denote a deficiency on the part of those virtues, but is rather a consequence of the inequalities between the members of the relationships involved.

⁸ The qualification “in a way” should be noted. Saint Thomas identifies several virtues as the greatest in some way, e.g., mercy (*STh* II-II, q. 30, a. 4), justice (*STh* I-II, q. 66, a. 4), and religion (*STh* II-II, q. 81, a. 6). See Bohineust, *Obéissance*, 133.

⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 3: “Meritum virtuosi actus consistit e contrario in hoc quod homo, contemptis bonis creatis, Deo inhaeret.”

are goods of the soul. Among the goods of the soul, “in a way the will is the chief one, inasmuch as man by his will uses all other goods.”¹⁰ Therefore “the virtue of obedience, which thinks little of one’s proper will [*propriam voluntatem*] because of God, is more praiseworthy than the other moral virtues, which think little of some other good because of God.”¹¹

In his treatment of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, St. Thomas always gives the pre-eminent place to obedience. He distinguishes the counsels from the precepts, in that the precepts command what is necessary to attain eternal happiness, whereas the counsels advise how better to attain this end.¹² The religious state consists in vows to live according to these counsels in a permanent way. Among these vows, St. Thomas says, the most important is that of obedience. By the vow of poverty external things are offered to God, by the vow of chastity we offer our own body, but through obedience we offer to God our proper will, which is the highest of the three goods.¹³

B) Limits on Obedience: Conscience and the Will

Conscience binds even over the commands of our legitimate superiors. In question 17, article 5 of the disputed questions *De*

¹⁰ Ibid.: “Sunt autem tria genera bonorum humanorum quae homo potest contemnere propter Deum: quorum infimum sunt exteriora bona; medium autem sunt bona corporis; supremum autem sunt bona animae, inter quae quodammodo praecipuum est voluntas, in quantum scilicet per voluntatem homo omnibus aliis bonis utitur.”

¹¹ Ibid.: “Laudabilior est obedientiae virtus, quae propter Deum contemnit propriam voluntatem, quam aliae virtutes morales, quae propter Deum aliqua alia bona contemnunt.”

¹² *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4. Deák argues that St. Thomas does not understand the counsels as the exclusive concern of the religious, but rather as an “integral part of the Gospel perfection” (*Foundation of the Evangelical Counsels*, 411). They “appear first and foremost as ways for greater freedom, which serve to realize the end of human life” (ibid., 412; cf. 196-201); they “help human nature to be fully realized” (ibid., 9). Nevertheless, they find their fullest expression in the religious state, with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

¹³ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 8.

veritate, St. Thomas asks whether an erroneous conscience binds in indifferent things more than the command of a superior. He argues that conscience binds, not only in indifferent matters, but in all matters, more than the command of a superior. The reason for this is that conscience binds “by the power of a divine precept, whether according to written law, or according to the law of implanted nature.”¹⁴ Hence to compare the command of conscience with that of a superior is to compare a divine command with a human command. Since a divine command obliges against the command of another superior, “the binding of conscience will be greater than the binding of the command of a superior, and conscience will bind, even if there is a command of a superior to the contrary.”¹⁵ Conscience is to be followed over the command of a superior.

In the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas does not specifically address the question of the claims of conscience versus obedience, but he does carefully lay out the scope of obedience (*STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 5). He asks whether subjects are bound to obey their superiors in all things. In answering this question, he draws on an analogy between human acts and natural powers. There are two reasons why a natural thing might not be moved by what normally moves it: first, it might be impeded by a stronger mover (as when wood is not burned if enough water impedes); second, the moved might be subject to the mover in some ways, but not in all ways. Similarly, there are two reasons why a subject is not bound to obey his superior in all things: first, a greater superior might order a contrary thing; second, the order of a superior may be disregarded when he commands something over which his authority does not extend. In support of this, St. Thomas quotes Seneca: “He errs who thinks slavery descends into the whole man. His better part is excepted. Bodies are subject and appointed to lords, but the mind follows

¹⁴ *De Verit.*, q. 17, a. 5. “Conscientia non ligat nisi in vi praecepti divini, vel secundum legem scriptam, vel secundum legem naturae inditi.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: “Unde, cum praeceptum divinum obliget contra praeceptum praelati, et magis obliget quam praeceptum praelati: etiam conscientiae ligamen erit maius quam ligamen praecepti praelati, et conscientia ligabit, etiam praecepto praelati in contrarium existente.”

its own law.”¹⁶ And therefore, St. Thomas says, “in those things which have to do with the interior motion of the will, man is not bound to obey man, but only God.”¹⁷

Over what things, then, does a superior’s authority extend? “In those things which have to do with the ordering of acts and human things, a subject is bound to obey his superior according to the ground [*rationem*] of superiority: as a soldier must obey the leader of an army in those things which pertain to war.”¹⁸ The claims of obedience are limited with respect to the type of command given and with respect to the type of authority of the one ordering. And even when the command falls within these limits, if it is countermanded by conscience, it should not be obeyed.

These restrictions on the claims of obedience, and especially the primacy of conscience over the commands of a superior, seem to be incompatible with the exalted rank that the virtue of obedience possesses according to St. Thomas. There seems to be ample justification to focus on the limitations and checks on obedience rather than its status as the highest moral virtue. If we only follow the commands of our superior when they do not contradict our own conscience—that is, our own judgment about what we should or should not do—of what value is obedience? Obedience is the virtue by which we obey the commands of our superiors, by which we subject our will to theirs. But in what sense is this a true subjection, if it only takes place when we ourselves determine that the course of action which our superiors command is, if not good, at least not intrinsically evil?

A distinct but related question arises about St. Thomas’s description of obedience as a sacrifice of our will. As quoted

¹⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 5: “Dicit enim Seneca, in III *de Benefic.*: Errat si quis existimat servitutum in totum hominem descendere. Pars eius melior excepta est. Corpora obnoxia sunt et adscripta dominis: mens quidem est sui iuris.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: “In his quae pertinent ad interiorem motum voluntatis, homo non tenetur homini obedire, sed solum Deo.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: “Sed in his quae pertinent ad dispositionem actuum et rerum humanarum, tenetur subditus suo superiori obedire secundum rationem superioritatis: sicut miles duci exercitus in his quae pertinent ad bellum.”

earlier, St. Thomas says that obedience is the greatest moral virtue because of this sacrifice. In the same article he quotes St. Gregory's description of obedience as an immolation of the will.¹⁹ In his description of the counsels in *Liber de perfectione spiritualis vitae* (1270), St. Thomas follows St. Gregory in describing obedience as renouncing or sacrificing our will.²⁰ As noted above, the value of this renunciation constitutes the worth of the counsel of obedience, the greatest of the three religious counsels.

But the will is part of human nature, so how can we relinquish it? Saint Thomas teaches that the will accompanies the intellect, "*voluntas enim intellectum consequitur.*" The will is proper to human beings. It is a power of the soul that flows necessarily from the rational faculty.²¹ Even setting aside the impossibility of completely getting rid of our will, why would that be good? The second part of the *Summa* is concerned with man inasmuch as he is made in the image of God, and therefore is "himself the principle of his actions, as having free will and power over his actions."²² Man is "*dominus sui actus,*" "lord of his own acts."²³ After describing the end of man, beatitude, for the first five questions of the *Prima secundae*, St. Thomas turns to the acts by which humans arrive at beatitude or are kept from it. But the chief characteristic of human acts is being voluntary: "Since acts are properly called human which are voluntary, because the will is the rational appetite, which is proper to man,

¹⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 3: "Unde Gregorius dicit, in ult. *Moral.*, quod *obedientia victimis iure praepositur: quia per victimas aliena caro, per obedientiam vero voluntas propria mactatur.*

²⁰ For instance: "obedientia in abrenuntiatione propriae voluntatis consistit" (*De Perf.*, c. 10); "per obedientiae votum homo Deo propriam voluntatem offert" (*ibid.*, c. 11); obedience is described as "deserens propriae voluntatis arbitrium" (*ibid.*, c. 10); and religious enter the highest way of perfection through obedience, "voluntatem propriam abnegando" (*ibid.*, c. 11).

²¹ *STh* I, q. 19, a. 1. See also *STh* I-II, q. 6, prol.

²² *STh* I-II, prol.: "Restat ut consideremus de eius imagine, idest de homine, secundum quod et ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem."

²³ *STh* I-II, q. 6, a. 2, ad 2. The phrase *dominus sui actus* or its equivalent, *dominus sui*, appears thirty-two times in Aquinas, according to the Index Thomisticus.

it is necessary to consider acts inasmuch as they are voluntary.”²⁴ Why would one wish to get rid of the voluntary nature of his acts? Further, acts done through obedience are voluntary, inasmuch as to obey is a choice we can make or not make. Thus St. Thomas says, “Obedience pertains to those things which we do voluntarily.”²⁵ It is difficult to say, then, in what sense obedience is an immolation of the will.

To answer these questions, I will consider St. Thomas’s teaching regarding, on the one hand, the angels’ fall and Adam’s disobedience, and on the other hand, Christ’s obedience.

II. A STORY OF DISOBEDIENCE AND OBEDIENCE

A) “*Bonum proprium*” and “*Ultimus finis*”

For angels, the possibility of sin only arises because they are ordered to an end above their nature.²⁶ Saint Thomas distinguishes between the *bonum proprium*, the good of one’s own nature, and the *ultimus finis*, which is God himself: “The ultimate end of all things made by God is the divine goodness.”²⁷ This is beyond the power of creatures to attain, since it is a goal beyond their nature. Hence they must be directed to it by a higher power:

But no will of any creature has rectitude in its act, except insofar as it is ruled by the divine will, to which the ultimate end pertains, just as each will of the

²⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 6, prol.: “Cum autem actus humani proprie dicantur qui sunt voluntarii, eo quod voluntas est rationalis appetitus, qui est proprius hominis; oportet considerare de actibus in quantum sunt voluntarii.”

²⁵ *In Rom.*, c. 1, lect. 14: “In his obedientia locum habet quae voluntarie facere possumus.”

²⁶ For the sin of the angels and its relation to the common good, see Charles DeKoninck, *The Primacy of the Common Good against the Personalists in The Writings of Charles DeKoninck*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerney (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

²⁷ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 101: “Necesse est igitur omnium rerum factarum a Deo ultimum finem divinam bonitatem esse.”

inferior ought to be ruled according to the will of the superior, as the will of the soldier is ruled according to the will of the general.²⁸

Sin arises by seeking the proper good of one's nature rather than being directed by God to one's ultimate end. Each thing wills its proper good of necessity: "Each will naturally wills that which is the proper good [*proprium bonum*] of the one willing, namely that it be complete [*perfectum*]." ²⁹ But because a creature does not have its proper good as an ultimate end, but the good of a superior being, it can choose to will the ultimate end or not: "It is left to his own will that he orders his proper perfection to a higher end."³⁰ Lucifer sinned in that "he did not order his proper good and perfection to the ultimate end, but adhered to his proper good as an end."³¹ He sought to make his will, rather than the divine will, the measure of himself and of others. It is in this sense, St. Thomas teaches, that the devil coveted a likeness to God. He did not aspire to an absolute equality with God, for he could never be deceived that this was possible. But he "arranged that other things be ruled by himself, in whom he had established the end, and that his will was not ruled by another higher being. But this is owed to God alone."³² His sin was that of pride, inasmuch as he wished "to rule others,

²⁸ *STh* I, q. 63, a. 1: "Omnis autem voluntas cuiuslibet creaturae rectitudinem in suo actu non habet, nisi secundum quod regulatur a voluntate divina, ad quam pertinet ultimus finis, sicut quaelibet voluntas inferioris debet regulari secundum voluntatem superioris, ut voluntas militis secundum voluntatem ducis exercitus."

²⁹ *ScG* III, c. 109: "Quaelibet autem voluntas naturaliter vult illud quod est proprium volentis bonum, scilicet ipsum esse perfectum." See also *Comp. Theol.* II, c. 9: "Proprium autem bonum uniuscuiusque rei est id quo res illa perficitur." Each thing necessarily desires its own perfection, which is that thing's proper good. For intellectual natures, i.e., God, angels, and men, St. Thomas says that their *proprium bonum* is *beatitudo* or *felicitas* (see, e.g., *STh* I-II, q. 2, a. 4; *ScG* I, c. 100).

³⁰ *ScG* III, c. 109: "Relinquitur igitur suo arbitrio quod propriam perfectionem in superiorem ordinet finem."

³¹ *Ibid.*: "Potuit igitur in voluntate substantiae separatae esse peccatum ex hoc quod proprium bonum et perfectionem in ultimum finem non ordinavit, sed inhaesit proprio bono ut fini." See also *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 113.

³² *ScG* III, c. 109: "Et quia ex fine necesse est quod regulae actionis sumantur, consequens est ut ex seipsa, in qua finem constituit, alia regulari disponderet, et ut eius voluntas ab alio superiori non regularetur. Hoc autem soli Deo debetur."

and that his own will not be ruled by a higher being.”³³ Every created thing only attains its ultimate end by subjecting its will to God. Lucifer rejected such a submission, instead treating his own proper good as if it were his ultimate end.

Saint Thomas does not explicitly call the angels’ sin disobedience, perhaps because in Scripture there is no mention of a specific command of God that was broken, as in Adam’s fall. In the *Summa theologiae* he states that the devil’s sin was primarily pride, inasmuch as he refused to be subject to a due superior. From this, the sin of envy followed, since he sorrowed over the good that humans attained. All the sins of the demons, says St. Thomas, are comprised under these two sins. In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, however, St. Thomas says the sin of Lucifer is one of injustice, “inasmuch as he did not subordinate himself to the order of a higher being, and so gave to himself more than he ought, and to God less than was owed to him.”³⁴ Saint Thomas’s description of the angels’ fall matches closely his description of obedience and disobedience.³⁵ In obedience we are ruled by another’s will, which directs us to a good. Through obedience man “*contemnit propriam voluntatem*,” “thinks little of his proper will,” and follows the will of his superior. The devil sinned in failing to subject his will to God and in seeking his ultimate end through his own power.

B) *Adam’s Disobedience*

Saint Thomas does identify Adam’s fall as a sin of disobedience. Like the angels, humans are called to a good beyond their nature. And like them, this ordering to something above their own nature opens up the possibility of sinning, when their

³³ Ibid.: “Velle autem alios regulare, et voluntatem suam a superiori non regulari.”

³⁴ Ibid.: “Patet etiam quod medium virtutis praetermisit, inquantum se superioris ordini non subdidit, et sic sibi plus dedit quam debuit, Deo autem minus quam ei deberetur.”

³⁵ According to Bohineust, the angels can have the moral virtues only in an analogical sense. Their sin was properly one of pride. He adds that in a general sense it falls under disobedience in that they refused to submit to God’s will (*Obéissance du Christ*, 269).

will “remains fixed on their proper good, by not tending beyond to the highest good which is the ultimate end.”³⁶ Men also can sin in a second way, when they follow their sensible passions against the rule of reason. Before the fall, in the garden of paradise, both orders were maintained—the subordination of man’s proper good to his ultimate end, and the subordination of his passions to his reason. The former is the cause of the latter.³⁷ And man in the garden was subordinating his proper good to God through obedience to him, as St. Thomas explains: “From the fact that the will of man was subject to God, man was referring all things to God as to his ultimate end; in this his innocence and justice consisted.”³⁸ It is in this light that St. Thomas interprets God’s command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God did not forbid the fruit because eating it would be evil in itself, “but that man, at least in some small thing, might observe it for the sole reason that it was a command from God.” The “eating was made evil, because prohibited.”³⁹

Man’s sin, like the devil’s, was primarily one of pride.⁴⁰ But St. Thomas frequently describes the Fall as a sin of disobedience. In his commentary on Romans he closely links the two in Adam’s sin:

It is said that “the beginning of pride makes man to depart from God,” because the first part of pride consists in the fact that man does not wish to be subjected to the divine precepts, which pertains to disobedience. Therefore, the first sin of man seems to have been disobedience, not according to the exterior act, but according to the interior motion of pride, by which he wished to go against the divine precept. Therefore God censured his disobedience in

³⁶ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 113: “Unde potest in eis defectus voluntariae actionis contingere per hoc quod voluntas remaneat fixa in proprio bono, non tendendo ulterius in summum bonum quod est ultimus finis.” See also *ScG* III, c. 109.

³⁷ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 186.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: “Ex hoc vero quod voluntas hominis erat Deo subiecta, homo referebat omnia in Deum sicut in ultimum finem, in quo eius iustitia et innocentia consistebat.”

³⁹ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 188: “Quidem ligni esus non ideo prohibitus est quia secundum se malus esset, sed ut homo saltem in hoc modico aliquid observaret ea sola ratione quia esset a Deo praeceptum: unde praedicti ligni esus factus est malus, quia prohibitus.”

⁴⁰ See, for instance, *II Sent.*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 1.

Genesis 3:17: “Because you listened to the voice of your wife, and ate from the tree which I had commanded you not to eat,” etc.⁴¹

Unlike with the fallen angels, the story of the first fall, as related by Scripture, has an explicit precept at the heart of it. Thus the virtue of obedience, whose formal object is the precept of a superior, occupies a central role in that story. Adam’s sin was one of pride inasmuch as he wished not to be subject to any other will and for his proper good to be his ultimate end; it was disobedience insofar as he acted against the precept of a superior. And when man refused to be subject to the divine order, he also broke the order of his passions’ subjection to his reason and his body’s subjection to his soul.⁴²

C) *Christ’s Obedience*

The disorder that Adam introduced into the relationships of man to God, of man’s body to his soul, and of the passions to reason was repaired by Christ, says St. Thomas.⁴³ Commentators have drawn attention to the central role of obedience in St. Thomas’s understanding of the Incarnation. Mark Armitage interprets St. Thomas’s teaching on the obedience of Christ as part of his “fulfillment of Torah and Temple.” He focuses on “Christ’s reversal of the sin of Adam through his meritorious, satisfactory, and sacrificial obedience.”⁴⁴ Drawing on the commentary on St. John’s Gospel, Michael Waldstein goes so far as to say that “St. Thomas takes all the key Johannine concepts and phrases that express the obedience of Jesus and interprets them as applicable to Jesus in

⁴¹ *In Rom.*, c. 5, lect. 5: “Sed dicendum est quod, sicut ibidem dicitur *initium superbiae facit homines apostatare a Deo*, quia scilicet prima pars superbiae consistit in hoc quod homo non vult subiici praeceptis divinis, quod ad inobedientiam pertinet. Unde primum hominis peccatum fuisse videtur inobedientia, non secundum actum exteriorem, sed secundum interiorem motum superbiae, quo voluit divino praecepto contraire. Unde eius inobedientiam dominus arguit Gen. III, 17: *quia audisti vocem uxoris tuae, et comedisti de ligno de quo praeceperam tibi ne comederes*, etc.”

⁴² *Comp. Theol.* I, cc. 192, 193.

⁴³ *Comp. Theol.* I, cc. 199, 200.

⁴⁴ Armitage, “Obedient unto Death,” 506.

his divinity.”⁴⁵ The obedience of Christ is central in the redemption of human nature ravaged by the disobedience of Adam.

In question 47, article 2 of the *Tertia pars*, St. Thomas asks whether Christ died from obedience. He answers in the affirmative, giving three reasons why this was “extremely fitting.” The first reason is its fittingness for human justification. Saint Thomas quotes Romans 5:10: It is fitting that, just as through one man’s disobedience many became sinners, so through one man’s obedience many became just. Second, it is fitting for the reconciliation of God and man. Christ’s death was a sacrifice; but since obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Kgs 15:22), it was fitting that Christ’s death proceeded out of obedience. Finally, it was fitting for Christ’s victory over the devil that he conquered him by obeying God, just as a soldier conquers through obeying his leader.

In discussing Christ’s obedience in his commentary on St. John, St. Thomas notes an important connection between *propria voluntas* and obedience. Adam sinned through disobedience, by preferring his *proprium bonum* to his *ultimus finis*, and so not following God’s will. All subsequent sin, as St. Thomas says, comes about either through following our *proprium bonum* rather than our *ultimus finis*, or through the revolt of our passions against our reason. This revolt was made possible because the original rectitude, procured by the submission of our will to God’s, was shattered. By contrast, Christ said, “I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). Saint Thomas paraphrases this as follows: “I do not seek to fulfill my proper will [*voluntatem propriam*], which, inasmuch as it is in itself, is inclined to its proper good [*bonum proprium*], but the will of him who sent me, the Father.”⁴⁶ Adam fulfilled his *voluntas propria*, thus disobeying God; Christ set aside his *voluntas propria*, thus obeying God.

⁴⁵ Waldstein, “The Analogy of Mission and Obedience,” 102. Cf. Bohineust, *Obéissance du Christ*, 317ff.

⁴⁶ *Super Ioan.*, c. 5, lect. 5: “Non quaero implere *voluntatem meam* propriam, quae, quantum in se est, inclinatur ad bonum proprium, sed *voluntatem eius qui misit me*, patris.”

III. *PROPRIA VOLUNTAS* AND OBEDIENCEA) “*Propria voluntas*” in the Christian Tradition

The expression *propria voluntas* is important in understanding St. Thomas’s teaching on obedience. *Proprius*, a common classical Latin word, means “one’s own,” but with a distinct meaning: it refers to “that which is exclusively one’s own, in opp. to *communis*, that which is common, like ἴδιος.”⁴⁷ “*Proprius*” is closely related to “*suus*”; they can both mean “one’s own.” In their most precise use, they differ insofar as “*proprius*” is opposed to “*communis*,” while “*suus*” is opposed to “*alienus*.” But in practice they are often interchangeable, especially in later Latin.⁴⁸ The classical sense, however, is present in the term “*proprium*” in Aristotelian logic, where it signifies an accident that is unique to a species; for instance, risibility is a *proprium* of man, since it belongs to man in such a way that it is not common to man and any other species.

“*Propria voluntas*” as a term of art has a rich tradition in Christian theology on which St. Thomas can draw, as it appears in St. Augustine, St. John Cassian, and St. Gregory the Great.⁴⁹ It occupies a prominent role in St. Benedict’s Rule, starting with the second sentence: “To you therefore my discourse is directed, whoever renounces his proper will [*propriis voluntatibus*] and takes up the most brave and shining weapons of obedience to fight for the Lord Christ the true king.”⁵⁰ In his list

⁴⁷ Doderlein’s *Handbook of Latin Synonymes*, trans. Rev. H. H. Arnold (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1882), s.v. “*privus; proprius; peculiaris*.” See also Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (1987), s.v. “*proprius*.”

⁴⁸ Harm Pinkster, *The Oxford Latin Syntax*, vol. 1, *The Simple Clause* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 980-81.

⁴⁹ For a description of the use of this term in the Benedictine tradition, see “A Will and Two Ways,” in Edith Scholl, *Words for the Journey: A Monastic Vocabulary* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2009), 1-15.

⁵⁰ *Benedicti Regula*, prol.: “Ad te ergo nunc mihi sermo dirigitur, quisquis abrenuntians propriis voluntatibus domino Christo vero regi militaturus oboedientiae fortissima atque praeclara arma sumis” (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, v. 75, ed. Rudolphus Hanslik [Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1960]). The plural is used one other time in the Rule, but typically the singular *propria voluntas* is used.

of the tools of good works, St. Benedict instructs his monks to hate their proper will. *Propria voluntas* is used in the Rule to describe self-will or a disordered will. But St. Benedict does not use it only in this negative sense. Michaela Puzicha argues that there are two different uses of the word in the Rule. In most cases *propria voluntas* is used “in the negative sense of ‘self-will.’”⁵¹ But it also appears once in the rule in a positive way, in the sense of “one’s own will”: Each monk is encouraged to “offer something to God by his own will [*propria voluntate*] with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”⁵²

Through the Rule, the idea of *propria voluntas* has had a profound influence on Benedictine and Cistercian theology. The use of *propria voluntas* as a term of art describing a disordered will is common in St. Anselm and in St. Bernard. For both, it takes on a wholly negative connotation, at least as regards men. Saint Anselm describes *propria voluntas* in men as willing that which is against God’s will. When man wills what God prohibits, he has “no author of his will, but himself,” and therefore it is *propria*. A *propria voluntas* is a will which “is subject to no other.”⁵³ But to be subject to no other belongs only to God. Therefore, St. Anselm says, to have a *propria voluntas* belongs to God alone; when men or angels have it, they are unjustly usurping God’s prerogative.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Michaela Puzicha, “*Propria voluntas*: Self-Will and One’s Own Will: Self-realization and Self-determination in the Rule of Benedict,” *American Benedictine Review* 60 (2009): 244. See also Terence G. Kardong, “Self-Will in Benedict’s Rule,” *Studia monastica* 42 (2000): 319-46. Kardong argues that “*propria voluntas*” in Benedict’s Rule is not identical with “*voluntas*,” and should be translated as “self-will” rather than as “will.”

⁵² Puzicha, “*Propria voluntas*,” 248. *Benedicti Regula*, c. 49: “Aliquid propria voluntate cum gaudio sancti spiritus offerat deo.”

⁵³ *Liber de fide Trinitatis et de incarnatione Verbi*, c. 5 (*Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, vol. 158, ed. J. P. Migne [Paris: Garnier frates editores, 1864], 277): “Cum enim vult aliquis quod Deus velle prohibet, nullum habet auctorem suae voluntatis, nisi seipsum: et ideo sua propria est. . . . Quapropter propria voluntas est, quae nulli alii est subdita.”

⁵⁴ According to Gregory Sadler, *propria voluntas* is “best (but inadequately) translated in English as ‘autonomous willing’” (“Anselmian Moral Theory and the Question of Grounding Morality in God,” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 5, no. 1 [2014]: 88).

In St. Bernard the use of *propria voluntas* to indicate a disordered will reaches, perhaps, its apotheosis. In his Paschal Sermons, he states: “What does God hate or punish besides proper will? Let proper will be still, and there will be no hell.”⁵⁵ Étienne Gilson sums up the use of *voluntas propria* in St. Bernard by contrasting it with *voluntas communis*:

Voluntas communis, the common will, is nothing else than charity. . . . The contrary of this *voluntas communis*, that is to say the *voluntas propria*, is therefore a refusal to have anything whatsoever in common with others, a decision to will nothing save for ourselves and for our own sake. . . . When a man’s heart is filled with this “proper will,” then, making shipwreck of charity, his will becomes alienated from God’s will, and by that very fact he shuts himself out from participation in the Divine life.⁵⁶

Propria voluntas refers in St. Bernard to a disordered use of the will, one by which men turn from God. It is against this background that St. Thomas uses the term.

B) “*Propria voluntas*” in St. Thomas

To what extent is St. Thomas following the tradition in his use of *voluntas propria*? Most translators, such as Laurence Shapcote, the translator of the most common English edition of the *Summa*, simply translate *propria voluntas* as “own will.” Such a translation, as opposed to “self-will” or “autonomous will,” might indicate that St. Thomas is breaking with the traditional use of the term, despite his frequent reference to St. Gregory, St. Benedict, and St. Bernard in his discussion of obedience.

Saint Thomas certainly does not employ the term exactly as St. Bernard or St. Anselm do, since it is not always negative

⁵⁵ *In tempore resurrectionis, ad abbates*, sermo 3 (*Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, vol. 183, ed. J. P. Migne [Paris: Garnier frates editores, 1854], 289-90): “Quid enim odit aut punit Deus praeter propriam voluntatem? Cesset voluntas propria, et infernus non erit.” This passage is referenced by St. Thomas twice: *De malo*, q. 5, a. 2; *Quodl.* II, q. 7, a. 1.

⁵⁶ Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2008), 55.

when applied to humans. He often uses it to indicate a *sine qua non* of a human action, namely, that it must be from oneself, that is, voluntary. In this sense it is indistinguishable from *suus* and is best translated by “one’s own will,” as is typical. For instance, in discussing the Holy Innocents, St. Thomas says, “It is better said that those murdered infants attained through the grace of God the glory of martyrdom, which in others their own will [*propria voluntas*] merits.”⁵⁷ Or, when he is speaking of one enjoying the beatific vision, he says the “blessed one is not able by his own will [*propria voluntate*] to leave beatitude.”⁵⁸ In these cases the distinction seems to be between one’s own and another’s, not between one’s own and what is common. *Suus* would work as well, and indeed would be the preferred classical choice. Other instances of this use of *propria voluntas* appear in St. Thomas.

Nevertheless, when St. Thomas defines *proprie* and *proprium* he refers to its classical sense as what belongs to one kind of thing only, as opposed to what is common to more than one kind of thing.⁵⁹ And he often uses the phrase *propria voluntas* in a way that indicates that he is preserving the classical understanding of *proprius* as opposed to *communis*. For instance, in his discussion of intemperance in the *Summa theologiae*, he compares one whose intemperance grows through acts of intemperance to a boy left to his own will: “A boy, if he is left to his own will [*suae voluntati*], grows in his proper will [*propria voluntate*].”⁶⁰ This sentence makes little sense if *sua voluntas* is not distinguished from *propria voluntas*, and the classical meaning seems to fit best: if a boy is left to his own will (instead of being guided by the will of another), his desire to follow his proper will (in opposition to what God wills, the common good) grows.

⁵⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 124, a. 1, ad 1: “Ideo melius dicendum est quod martyrii gloriam, quam in aliis propria voluntas meretur, illi parvuli occisi per Dei gratiam sunt assecuti.”

⁵⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 5, a. 4: “Sic ergo patet quod propria voluntate beatus non potest beatitudinem deserere.”

⁵⁹ I *Sent*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, obj. 1 and ad 1; *De Pot.*, q. 10, a. 4, ad 7.

⁶⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 142, a. 1: “Puer enim, si suae voluntati dimittatur, crescit in propria voluntate.”

In his formal discussion of God's will in both the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas never uses the expression *propria voluntas* when referring to God's will, but only *sua voluntas*. God's will is not opposed to anything more common; what he wills is the common good of all creation. I have found only two places in all of St. Thomas's writings where he uses the expression *propria voluntas* when speaking of God's will;⁶¹ the overwhelming majority of the time he uses *sua voluntas*. In contrast to St. Anselm, for whom *propria voluntas*—the "autonomous will"—belongs of right exclusively to God, St. Thomas seems to think that *sua voluntas*, rather than *propria voluntas*, more accurately describes the Will that is always ordered to the ultimate end, the common good of all creation.

When St. Thomas speaks of the human will, however, and especially when he is describing obedience as the denial or sacrifice of one's will, he typically uses *propria voluntas* rather than *sua voluntas*. For instance, in *Liber de perfectione spiritualis vitae*, St. Thomas frequently speaks of denying one's will. He uses the phrase *propria voluntas* coupled with verbs such as *abrenuntio* or *abnego* seven times, but *sua voluntas* with such verbs only once.⁶²

In his commentary on John, St. Thomas connects *propria voluntas* with *proprium bonum* in his discussion of Christ's wills.⁶³ Interpreting Christ's statement that he comes to do not his will but that of his Father, St. Thomas says:

For in the Lord Jesus Christ there are two wills. One divine which he has the same with the Father; the other human, which is proper to himself, as it is proper to him to be man. The human will is carried to its proper good [*bonum*

⁶¹ *STh* III, q. 46, a. 3, obj. 1; *Quodl.* IV, q. 3, a. 1.

⁶² The Index Thomisticus shows the phrase *propria voluntas* appearing ten times in *De perfectione*, *sua voluntas* 3 times. When St. Thomas is speaking about denying one's will, he uses *propria voluntas* with the sole exception of when he speaks of Christ denying his human will (*De Perf.*, c. 10).

⁶³ Bohineust states that *propria voluntas* refers to a "personal and disordered will." Clearly Christ had no proper will in this sense, yet he renounced his proper will inasmuch as he renounced "the desires of his will as nature [*ut natura*] and of his sensible will [*voluntas sensibilitatis*]" (*Obéissance du Christ*, 502, 504).

proprium]; but in Christ through the rectitude of reason it is ruled and regulated, so that always it is conformed in all things to the divine will; and therefore he says: I do not seek to fulfill my proper will [*voluntatem propriam*], which, inasmuch as it is in itself, is inclined to its proper good [*bonum proprium*], but the will of him who sent me, the Father.⁶⁴

Propria voluntas here cannot mean Christ's human will simply, since then his seeking to fulfill the will of his Father would not be voluntary. But it means, as St. Thomas says, his human will insofar as it is ordered to the proper good of human nature. Human nature naturally desires, for instance, life. And to follow this proper good is good, provided it does not conflict with the will of God, who directed humans to an end beyond human nature. It is in sacrificing his *propria voluntas* to the will of God that Christ's perfect obedience consisted: "This obedience consists in the renunciation of his proper will [*propriae voluntatis*]."⁶⁵ This is in contrast to the fallen angels and Adam, who sought their proper good rather than the ultimate end to which they were called. Rather than submitting to God's will, "the rule and law of the created will,"⁶⁶ and thereby attaining beatitude, they pursued their own proper good, "not tending beyond to the highest good which is the ultimate end."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Super Ioan.*, c. 5, lect. 5: "In Domino enim Iesu Christo sunt duae voluntates. Una divina quam habet eandem cum Patre; alia humana, quae est sibi propria, sicut est proprium eius esse hominem. Voluntas humana fertur in bonum proprium; sed in Christo per rectitudinem rationis regebatur et regulabatur, ut semper in omnibus voluntati divinae conformaretur; et ideo dicit: non quaero implere *voluntatem meam propriam*, quae, quantum in se est, inclinatur ad bonum proprium, sed *voluntatem eius qui misit me*, patris." Saint Thomas follows St. John Chrysostom here. See *Super Ioan.*, c. 6, lect. 4; cf. *Catena aurea S. Ioan.*, c. 6, lect. 6. Bohineust understands Chrysostom as teaching that Christ had no proper good but only the common good of all (*Obéissance du Christ*, 504). This seems to overstate Chrysostom's position.

⁶⁵ *De Perf.*, c. 11: "Haec autem obedientia in abrenuntiatione propriae voluntatis consistit." The expression is similar to that in the beginning St. Benedict's Rule, "abrenuntians proprias voluntatibus." According to Terrence G. Kardong, "Renounce (abrenuntians) is a baptismal idea occurring in the formula 'Do you renounce Satan?' It was used long before Benedict's time (e.g., Ambrose, *Incar.* 1, 2, 5.)" (*Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996], 8).

⁶⁶ *De Perf.*, c. 11: "Voluntas autem divina regula est, et lex voluntatis creatae."

⁶⁷ *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 113: "Voluntas remaneat fixa in proprio bono, non tendendo ulterius in summum bonum quod est ultimus finis." See also *ScG* III, c. 109.

In one sense, then, *propria voluntas* refers to the will insofar as it seeks the proper good of one's nature in opposition to one's *ultimus finis*. Thus Lucifer and Adam followed their *propria voluntas*, while Christ renounced his. Saint Thomas uses *propria voluntas* in this sense in the tenth chapter of *De perfectione*, titled "*De tertia perfectionis via quae est per abrenuntiationem propriae voluntatis.*" There he states that it is not enough to relinquish exterior things for the sake of God, but perfection demands that "in some sense one relinquish one's very self." By doing this, one can adhere more perfectly to Christ. The martyrs are an example of this, who reject what is clearly their *proprium bonum*, their life, for the sake of God.⁶⁸

Not all are called to be martyrs, but through the counsel of obedience men can give up one of their most proper goods, their free choice of will. As mentioned earlier, St. Thomas says that a property of humans is that they have free will. The phrase "*dominus sui*" or "*dominus sui actus*" is frequently used by St. Thomas to denote that characteristic of humans to choose, flowing from reason. This is what religious give up through the vow of obedience: "By deserting the choice of his proper will, through which he is lord of himself [*dominus sui*], he denies his very self."⁶⁹ Saint Thomas quotes the passage from St. John, already quoted above, when Christ says that he seeks the will of his Father and not his own. We follow Christ by subordinating our will to God and to men put over us.⁷⁰ We cannot give up the will simply, as that flows from our rational nature and cannot be dispensed with; further, it is by the will that we both make and adhere to the vow of obedience. But we give up our *propria voluntas*, our will insofar as it aims at the proper good of our nature rather than our ultimate end. We sacrifice our will, not by following the will of just any other person, but

⁶⁸ *De Perf.*, c. 10: "Martyres illud propter Deum contemnunt, scilicet propriam vitam, propter quam omnia temporalia quaeruntur."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: "Deserens propriae voluntatis arbitrium, per quod ipse sui dominus est, se ipsum abnegare invenitur."

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: "In quo nobis dedit exemplum, ut sicut ipse suam voluntatem humanam abnegabat supponendo eam divinae, ita et nos nostram voluntatem Deo totaliter supponamus, et hominibus qui nobis praeponuntur tanquam Dei ministri."

through subordinating it to the will of God, whose will is the *ultimus finis* of the universe, and to legitimate superiors placed by God over us, whose office is to pursue a common good.⁷¹

The virtue of obedience, however, does not always directly pertain to turning from one's proper good to the ultimate end, since often our superiors are not directly concerned with the ultimate end of humans. For instance, St. Thomas says we are bound to obey civil superiors. They are pursuing an end proper to our nature, the common goods of peace and virtue within a political order, not our ultimate end. Nevertheless St. Thomas is clear that this falls under the virtue of obedience,⁷² which is an immolation of our *propria voluntas*. At times, then, *propria voluntas* refers to the will insofar as it is ordered to a less common good as opposed to a more common good, but not necessarily to the proper good of our nature rather than to our ultimate end.

IV. CONSCIENCE AND OBEDIENCE

In introducing the virtue of obedience, St. Thomas compares human things to natural things: just as in the natural order the higher power moves the lower, so in human affairs the "superior moves the inferior through his will, by the strength of divinely ordained authority."⁷³ Human superiors can err, however, and when their orders conflict with our conscience we are bound to follow our conscience. When one disobeys a superior because the command given is against one's conscience, this is not a departure from the virtue of obedience, but an act falling under it, according to St. Thomas's understanding of both conscience and obedience.

⁷¹ According to Bohineust, the common good always determines and limits obedience (*Obéissance du Christ*, 99; see also 83ff., 105).

⁷² *STh* I-II, q. 104, a. 6.

⁷³ *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 1: "Oportuit autem in rebus naturalibus ut superiora moverent inferiora ad suas actiones, per excellentiam naturalis virtutis collatae divinitus. Unde etiam oportet in rebus humanis quod superiores moveant inferiores per suam voluntatem, ex vi auctoritatis divinitus ordinatae."

In question 17, article 3 of *De veritate*, St. Thomas asks how conscience binds. He first explains that “binding” (*ligatio*) is said of spiritual things by metaphor with material things. When something is bound it stays of necessity in one place, and power of going elsewhere is taken from it. This necessity can be absolute in corporeal things, when something cannot but act as its mover determines. But such an absolute necessity, which St. Thomas calls the necessity of force, does not apply to the will, which is naturally free. On the will, however, a conditional necessity can be imposed. Something is conditionally necessary when it is necessary for the sake of some end, for example attaining a reward. Just as necessity is imposed on material things by some action, so conditional necessity is imposed on the will by some action. This action is “a command of the one ruling and governing.” And just as action only works on material things through contact, so a command can’t bind anyone unless it makes some contact with them. It does this through knowledge⁷⁴—if we do not know the command of our superior, we are not bound by it. And so, St. Thomas says,

it is the same power by which a precept binds and by which knowledge binds: since knowledge does not bind except through the power of the precept, nor does the precept unless through knowledge. Whence, since conscience is nothing other than the application of knowledge [*notitiae*] to an act, conscience is said to bind by the strength of a divine precept.⁷⁵

And a precept is the formal object of the virtue of obedience.

It is important to note the difference between St. Thomas’s notion of conscience and the typical modern understanding of

⁷⁴ *De Verit.*, q. 17, a. 3: “Actio autem corporalis agentis numquam inducit necessitatem in rem aliam nisi per contactum ipsius actionis ad rem in quam agitur; unde nec ex imperio alicuius regis vel domini ligatur aliquis, nisi imperium attingat ipsum cui imperator; attingit autem eum per scientiam.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: “Ita etiam eadem vis est qua praeceptum ligat et qua scientia ligat: cum scientia non liget nisi per virtutem praecepti, nec praeceptum nisi per scientiam. Unde, cum conscientia nihil aliud sit quam applicatio notitiae ad actum, constat quod conscientia ligare dicitur in vi praecepti divini.”

it.⁷⁶ Conscience is often spoken of as an interior voice guiding decisions—a value-proclaiming voice that admits of no appeal or correction. A typical instance of this may be found in the description of freedom of conscience on the United Nations human rights website:

There are no admissible limitations to this freedom, as long as personal convictions are not imposed on others or harm them. While it may seem evident, respect for freedom of conscience is hard to attain. People tend to judge convictions of others. Furthermore, it is very common that those who hold a conviction defend it. What is less common but more needed is that we all stand up to defend everyone's right to their own convictions.⁷⁷

In this typical view, conscience is an expression of convictions that are absolute and untouchable, such that to question them is a violation.

In Catholic thought as well, the modern understanding of conscience differs from that of St. Thomas. Matthew Levering has traced in detail the role of conscience in twentieth-century Catholic moral theology.⁷⁸ Conscience has occupied a central, and inordinate, role in moral theology since at least the sixteenth century. This development is marked by several features, among which are the following: the overshadowing and even replacement of prudence as the chief of the moral virtues;⁷⁹ an emphasis on law rather than virtues;⁸⁰ and the

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the differences between Aquinas's understanding of conscience and modern understandings, see Prudence Allen, "Where Is Our Conscience? Aquinas and Modern and Contemporary Philosophers," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 335-72. Allen argues that a great source of these differences is where the conscience is located. For Aquinas, it is in the practical intellect, whereas other philosophers locate it variously in the theoretical intellect, imagination, emotions, or elsewhere.

⁷⁷ "Module 1: Freedom of Conscience," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, accessed January 19, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/faith4rights-toolkit/Pages/Module1.aspx>.

⁷⁸ Matthew Levering, *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2021).

⁷⁹ See Levering's discussion of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange's critique of moral manuals (*ibid.*, 50-51), as well as Levering's summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the moral manuals (*ibid.*, 194-95).

⁸⁰ See especially Levering's discussion of Servais Pinckaers (*ibid.*, 114-21).

treatment of conscience as an infallible guide and itself the ground of obligation, rather than a means by which we know obligations that are not themselves reducible to conscience.⁸¹

For St. Thomas, conscience is an act applying knowledge to a particular case. This knowledge, in part, can be acquired; we can help others acquire it. Through learning and experience, correction and discussion, our conscience can be altered. It is precisely because conscience is an application of knowledge that it binds, in St. Thomas's words, "by the strength of a divine precept." As St. Thomas says, "the fact that the human reason is the rule of human will, from which its goodness is measured, it has from the eternal law, which is the divine reason."⁸² All knowledge, he says, is a "certain irradiation and participation in the eternal law, which is unchangeable truth."⁸³ To obey our conscience is to act according to the eternal law, insofar as we are able to understand it.⁸⁴ To follow one's conscience, then, is an act of obedience: it is obeying a command, it is the subjection of our will to a precept. It is still the sacrifice of our *propria voluntas*.

Does it follow that any acts done according to conscience are acts of obedience to God, and therefore are acts of the virtue of obedience? This would seem to reduce all virtuous acts to obedience. Saint Thomas touches on this question when he asks, in question 104, article 2 of the *Secunda secundae*, whether obedience is a special or general virtue. He argues that it is a special virtue because it has a special object, namely, "the tacit or expressed command." The first objection and his response are of particular interest here. The first objection argues that "disobedience is a general sin: for Ambrose says that sin is disobedience to the divine law. Therefore obedience is not a special virtue, but a general one." In his reply St. Thomas says

⁸¹ See Levering's discussion of Michel Labourdette (*ibid.*, 94-95).

⁸² *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 4.

⁸³ *STh* I-II, q. 93, a. 2.

⁸⁴ See Levering, *Abuse of Conscience*, 95: "The obligations to which conscience awakens us do not derive from conscience. They derive instead from God's eternal law." And in the following paragraph: "Labourdette comments that conscience is not another Sinai; it is not an immediate revelation of God's commandments."

that acts can viewed under different specific aspects. For instance, a soldier defending the camp of a king performs an act of fortitude inasmuch as he does not flee death, and an act of justice inasmuch as he gives what he owes to his king. “So therefore the aspect of precept, which obedience attends to, happens with the acts of all the virtues.”⁸⁵ The acts of all the virtues, inasmuch as they are prescribed by natural law, can fall under the virtue of obedience, provided the one doing them is intentionally doing them in order to fulfill a precept.⁸⁶

Saint Thomas goes on to say that the aspect of precept, though it occurs with the acts of all the virtues, does not nevertheless occur “with all the acts of the virtues, because not all the acts of the virtues are commanded, as was said above.” The reference is to question 100, article 2 of the *Prima secundae*, where he asks “whether the precepts of the moral law are about all the acts of virtues.” He argues that the divine law gives precepts around everything “through which the reason of man is well ordered.” But this happens through the acts of all the virtues (*per actus omnium virtutum*—the same expression that occurs in *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 2). The intellectual virtues order reason itself, while the moral virtues order the internal passions and external operations. Therefore, says St. Thomas, “it is manifest that the divine law fittingly proposes precepts concerning the acts of all the virtues.” Nevertheless, he adds, while some of the acts of the virtues fall under precepts, others fall under counsels. Precepts are about those things which are necessary for men to obtain their end, while counsels are not necessary, but help men obtain their end more perfectly.⁸⁷

To summarize, all the virtues have at least some acts that are commanded, and these acts can fall under the virtue of obedience, provided they are done intentionally to fulfill a precept. But it is not the case that all the acts of a virtue are commanded—some are “of counsel,” better to do but not

⁸⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 2, ad 1: “Sic igitur ratio praecepti, quam attendit obedientia, concurrat cum actibus omnium virtutum.”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4.

necessary for salvation and so not commanded. These acts fall under the counsels rather than the precepts.

Following one's conscience, as said above, is obeying God. And God is to be obeyed in all things, as St. Thomas argues (*STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 4), even if it means disobeying our superiors. But it is important to note that for St. Thomas, disobeying our human superiors in order to obey God is the exception, not the rule. In his treatments of obedience in the *Summa theologiae* and the *Commentary on the Sentences*, he refers first to human obedience. The argument he gives for the necessity of obedience in the first question in his treatise on obedience in the *Summa* rests on a comparison with natural things: just as in natural things the higher moves the lower, so in human things God has ordained that superiors move subordinates through precepts.⁸⁸ While the divine rule is the *prima regula*, human beings can approach more or less closely to the divine will. Those closer to it are like a second rule, a *secunda regula* to other men.⁸⁹ We know God's will, typically, through mediation by a human will. This is shown in a striking manner by the greatest of the evangelical counsels, obedience. The one who takes the vow of obedience, St. Thomas says, achieves the greatest sacrifice of his *propria voluntas*. Through this vow he adheres most closely to his *ultimus finis*.⁹⁰ He does this by binding himself to obey his human superior.

⁸⁸ According to Bohineust, this stems from man's ordination to the common good (*Obéissance du Christ*, 61; see also 62-63).

⁸⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 104, a. 1, ad 2.

⁹⁰ Deák emphasizes that for St. Thomas the counsels can only be understood in the context of charity; they are ordered to our final union with God. See, e.g., *Foundation of the Evangelical Counsels*, 269: "According to the mind of the Angelic Doctor, life according to the evangelical counsels receives its full meaning only in view of the supernatural end of human life, that is, of eternal beatitude and the beatific vision, seeing the counsels as a means of invitation to strive for that union with God, which is realized already in Christ and which has been started in us by grace and will be completed in eternity."

CONCLUSION

Obedience is, in a way, the highest moral virtue because it is a sacrifice of our *propria voluntas*, which is in a way our highest good, since by it we use all our other goods. Such a sacrifice is not only good, but necessary for humans, since we are called to an ultimate good which is beyond the proper good of our nature. We only attain this ultimate good by following the will of God rather than being guided by our own *propria voluntas*. The will of another as expressed in a command is precisely the good to which obedience looks.

Attempts to limit the importance of obedience by appealing to conscience or freedom do not do justice to St. Thomas's thought. It is true that our ultimate obedience is owed to God, and we follow our conscience against the command of our human superior when they conflict. But that itself is an act of obedience, inasmuch as the good it seeks is the command of God. Further, in the normal order of things God's will—in both the civil and religious spheres—is made known to us by humans, and our obedience to him is mediated by obedience to human wills. In obedience the voluntary and free nature of human act is preserved, inasmuch as the will being sacrificed is not our faculty of free will, but rather our *propria voluntas*—our will insofar as it is ordered to our own proper good, either our sensible good or the proper good of our nature, as opposed to a more common good, whether that good is a natural one or our ultimate end.⁹¹

⁹¹ My thanks to Fr. Thomas Hufford, Daniel Shields, and Erik Bootsma for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

DIVINE CONTEMPLATION
AS “INCHOATE BEATITUDE” IN AQUINAS

GERALD P. BOERSMA

*Ave Maria University
Ave Maria, Florida*

*Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,
mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,
e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa.*

*Thus all my mind, absorbed,
was gazing, fixed, unmoving and intent,
becoming more enraptured in its gazing.
(Dante, *Paradiso* XXIII 97-99, trans. Hollander)*

AT THE OUTSET of his theological career, in the very first lines of his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, St. Thomas Aquinas maintains categorically, “All who think rightly perceive that the end of human life is the contemplation of God.”¹ Likewise, near the close of the *Secunda secundae* of his great *Summa theologiae*—which also marks the last chapters of his life—Aquinas insists that the contemplation of divine truth “is the end of the whole human life [*contemplatio est finis totius humanae vitae*].”² No one (to my knowledge)

¹ *I Sent.*, q. 1, a. 1: “Omnes qui recte senserunt, posuerunt finem humanae vitae, Dei contemplationem.” The Latin texts of Aquinas used in this article are taken from the Aquinas Institute, available online (<https://aquinas.cc>), except where otherwise noted. Most of the commentary on the *Sentences* is not yet translated, and so most of the translations of that text are my own. I have consulted the translation on the Aquinas Institute site where available, and have so noted.

² *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4. The Latin text of the *Summa* is from *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia: Iussu impensaue, Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Rome: Ex typographia polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882); the translation is that of the Fathers of the English

disagrees that, for Aquinas, the contemplation of God is the paramount and unifying aspiration of human existence.³ He is quite explicit about this. And yet, surprisingly, the topic of contemplation in his thought has received only modest scholarly attention.⁴

Aquinas attributes a surprising degree of finality to the contemplation of God *in via* inasmuch as such contemplation participates, already in this life, in man's final end. His treatment of contemplation advances—almost to the point of paradox—the

Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947). All other texts from Aquinas are drawn from the *Opera omnia* published by the Aquinas Institute unless otherwise noted.

³ Cf. ScG II, c. 83; ScG III, c. 37; see also I *Sent.*, prol., and aa. 1 and 3; *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1.

⁴ Thomas Hibbs notes, "Given Thomas's emphasis upon the crucial role of contemplation in the good life, it is surprising how little attention has been devoted to the topic or to the role of intellectual virtues. I might list the topic of contemplation and intellectual virtue among those features of Aquinas's moral thought that remain neglected in the literature" ("Interpretation of Aquinas's Ethics since Vatican II," in Stephen Pope, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas* [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002], 412). The following literature is most pertinent to the topic of contemplation in Aquinas: Joseph Maréchal, *Le sommet de la contemplation d'après Saint Thomas*, in *Études sur la psychologie des mystiques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1924-37), 2:193-234; Dermott O'Keefe, *Theology and Contemplation according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Officium libri catholici, 1952); Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1998); Jean Leclercq, "La vie contemplative dans s. Thomas et dans la tradition," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 28 (1961): 251-68; Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Aquinas and His Role in Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2002); Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2005), 27-38; Inos Biffi, *Teologia, storia e contemplazione in Tommaso d'Aquino* (Milan: Jaca Books, 2009), 53-137; Adriano Oliva, "La contemplation des philosophes selon Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 96 (2012): 585-662; Imai Edyta, *Thomas Aquinas on Contemplation and the Human Animal* (Saarbrücken: Scholars' Press, 2013); Mary Catherine Sommers, "Contemplation and Action in Aristotle and Aquinas," in Gilles Emery and Mathew Levering, eds., *Aristotle in Aquinas's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 167-85. Most recently, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); cf. his earlier recent articles on Aquinas's theology of contemplation: "Recipientes per contemplationem, tradentes per actionem": The Relation between the Active and Contemplative Lives according to Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 81 (2017): 1-30; "Contemplation, *intellectus*, and *simplex intuitus* in Aquinas: Recovering a Neoplatonic Theme," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (2017): 199-225; "Aquinas on Contemplation: A Neglected Topic," *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 35 (2016): 9-33.

notion of a “penultimate finality.” He offers the analogy of sight, which is pleasurable in itself, but also because one sees the person one loves, to illustrate both the subjective and the objective delight of contemplation.⁵ The saint’s contemplation of divine truth is an “inchoate beatitude” and thus has the character of a satisfying *delectatio* and “ultimate and perfect happiness” (inasmuch as that is possible for the wayfarer) both because of the subject contemplating and because of the divine object contemplated.⁶

Aquinas’s treatment of contemplation stresses a fundamental continuity between the contemplation of divine truth that the saint already now enjoys *in via* and the eschatological, “face to face,” contemplation that belongs to the saint in eternity. They are related as the imperfect (*imperfecta*) to the perfect (*perfecta*).⁷ Indeed, the contemplation of divine truth, maintains Aquinas, “bestows on us a certain inchoate beatitude [*quaedam inchoatio beatitudinis*], which begins now and will be continued in the life to come.”⁸ In the *Summa contra gentiles* he writes, “In this life there is nothing so like this ultimate and perfect happiness

⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7. The distinction between the subjective and objective happiness of contemplation outlined in this passage corresponds to the reasons advanced for the claim that ultimate human happiness consists in the vision of the divine essence (*STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 8): “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed. First, that man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek; secondly, that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object.”

⁶ Precisely because creaturely happiness is subject to mutation, the “ultimate and perfect happiness” of the contemplative life (*ScG* III, c. 63) is said *secundum quid*; human beings are happy not absolutely but *as men*. Cf. *ScG* III, c. 48.

⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 3.

⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4. Apart from this instance in the article on contemplation, the phrase *inchoatio beatitudinis* is also found in *STh* I-II, q. 69, a. 2. Here Aquinas addresses the question whether the rewards that belong to the beatitudes obtain only in the next life or also in this life. He affirms that even in this life holy men experience a “kind of imperfect inchoation of future happiness [*quandam inchoationem imperfectam futurae beatitudinis*].” Similarly, in his commentary on Galatians, he remarks that while the fruits of the Spirit are perfected in glory, sometimes such fruit is already manifest in this life. This might be referred to as a “flower,” because it signifies future fruit: “And as in the flower there is a beginning of the fruit, so in the works of the virtues is a beginning of happiness [*inchoatio beatitudinis*], which will exist when knowledge and charity are made perfect” (*In Gal.*, c. 5, lect. 6).

[*ultima et perfecta felicitates*] as the life of those who contemplate the truth, as far as possible here below. . . . For contemplation of truth begins [*incipit*] in this life, but will be consummated [*consummator*] in the life to come.”⁹ For this reason, in the question on contemplation, Aquinas devotes an article to the claim that the *delectatio* belonging to contemplation has no equal (*STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7).

Rik Van Nieuwenhove has recently published the important *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, the final chapter of which (before the conclusion) considers “Happiness and the Vision of God.” Van Nieuwenhove concludes:

The *intuitus simplex* that is the climax of our intellectual contemplation on earth resembles, and points towards, the intuitive, non-discursive beatific vision of God. This means that the acme of our mode of knowing on earth, i.e. the moment of intellective insight, has an eschatological dimension. It is one more instance of grace perfecting nature. Of course, the moment of speculative insight is the result of a discursive process that ultimately relies on phantasms, and it is merely fleeting, whereas the beatific vision is purely intellective and lasting. Still, it is sufficiently similar to be called an *inchoatio beatitudinis*, an incipient participation in eternal bliss.¹⁰

Given Van Nieuwenhove’s insightful work on a topic that invites further consideration, I will argue that what Aquinas terms “divine contemplation”—the contemplation of divine truth—is a participation in beatific knowing. Already in this life, divine contemplation achieves something of the simple, direct, intellectual vision of the divine essence. In short, contemplation is a proleptic experience of final beatitude. I will argue that for Aquinas this is the case when we consider the nature of divine contemplation from two perspectives: the subjective (human) experience of contemplation and the objective (divine) reality contemplated.¹¹

⁹ *ScG* III, c. 63.

¹⁰ Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation*, 195.

¹¹ To engage the Thomistic corpus without differentiating the periods in Aquinas’s life from which various texts come to us can be perilous. On a number of critical topics his thought undergoes development (some significant, some less so). In this essay I draw from the breadth of his corpus as a systematic whole. While I am alert to the danger this poses,

To demonstrate how, for Aquinas, the *subjective* (human) experience of contemplation anticipates the beatific vision we will proceed in four steps. First, we will define more precisely what he means by “divine contemplation,” particularly in contrast to the “natural contemplation” identified by Aristotle as the highest good. Second, since divine contemplation is the unique prerogative of creatures endowed with the *imago dei*, an analysis of how Aquinas understands the distinct modality according to which the human person realizes the *imago dei* is essential to his theology of divine contemplation. Third, divine contemplation is said not of our rational nature in general, but specifically of *intellectus*, our contemplative faculty. Therefore, Aquinas’s distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* as well as their circular nature underwrites his doctrine of divine contemplation. *Intellectus* at once completes human ratiocinative knowing and transcends human knowing inasmuch as it participates in the simplicity and immediacy of angelic knowing. (Here I draw heavily on the great insight of Van Nieuwenhove’s study.) This leads to the final step of this section: How does divine contemplation remain a human activity when it expresses the mode of knowing proper to separate substances? Here Aquinas’s doctrine of obediencial potency is a critical (if underappreciated) feature of his account of divine contemplation. The contemplation of God both *in via* and *in patria* is predicated on this capacity *to be* elevated that belongs exclusively to *intellectus*. Indeed, *intellectus*—that which is most proper to the *imago dei*—suggests an obediencial potency for divine contemplation. This is a capacity—the actuation of which is wholly dependent on divine initiative—for the supernatural elevation of *intellectus* beyond what is strictly human. Thus, the subjective (human) experience of divine contemplation is, for Aquinas, an “inchoate beatitude” at once fulfilling and transcending what is highest in the human person.

From the perspective of the *divine object*, contemplation is a vision of God himself, enjoyed both below by the wayfarer and

I am confident that I have not inadvertently glossed over a major shift in his thinking on contemplation.

above by the blessed (albeit according to differing modes). I will argue that three features of Aquinas's treatment of divine contemplation underwrite this fundamental continuity. First, Aquinas distinguishes natural and theological contemplation from divine contemplation. Only the latter enjoys an immediacy and direct experience of God himself on account of its participation in God's own love. Aquinas describes divine contemplation as a *delectatio* because the wayfarer already possesses and enjoys the first fruits of that which he loves. This reading of Aquinas draws on an important strain of the commentatorial tradition, associated with John of St. Thomas, Ambroise Gardeil, and Jacques Maritain. Second, the supernatural gift of wisdom is the source for the immediacy of divine contemplation. The infused gift of wisdom generates the affective knowledge that belongs to divine contemplation. Third, I will argue that, for Aquinas, the vision of the holy angels and the contemplation of God enjoyed by Adam in a state of innocence serve as a proximate analogue for understanding the nature of divine contemplation here below. In sum, divine contemplation is, for Aquinas, an "inchoate beatitude" because its divine object is affectively known by the gift of wisdom in an intimate and experiential manner that is analogous to humanity's pre-fallen knowledge of God or the knowledge of God enjoyed by the holy angels.

My argument that, for Aquinas, divine contemplation *in via* already participates in the vision of God *in patria* relies in important ways on the central claim Van Nieuwenhove advances in his recent monograph (as quoted above). While I share with him the conclusion that, for Aquinas, divine contemplation constitutes an inchoate beatitude, each of the two parts of my analysis in this essay—the subjective (human) experience of contemplation and the objective (divine) reality contemplated—advance a significant new contribution to our shared conclusion. My construal of the nature-grace discussion in the first part—particularly the obediencial potency for divine contemplation proper to *imago dei*—contributes an important addition to understanding why, for Aquinas, divine contemplation both fulfills and transcends that which is highest in the human person. In the second part I argue that underwriting the continuity of

divine contemplation in this life and in glory is its affective and sapiential character. This is not a pronounced feature in Van Nieuwenhove’s treatment. In sum, the twofold analysis of my essay—the subjective/objective character of divine contemplation—serves to contribute in significant ways to the conclusion I share with Van Nieuwenhove regarding the nature of divine contemplation as an *inchoatio beatitudinis*.

I. THE SUBJECTIVE BEATITUDE OF CONTEMPLATION

Aquinas considers the “contemplative life” in a number of places, but his most developed and mature exposition is in questions 179 to 182 of the *Secunda secundae*, where he distinguishes the active from the contemplative life in general. In question 180, he offers his *ex professo* treatment of the “contemplative life” in particular. He articulates the subjective delight proper to contemplation:

Each individual delights in the operation which befits him according to his own nature or habit. Now contemplation of the truth befits a man according to his nature as a rational animal: the result being that *all men naturally desire to know*, so that consequently they delight in the knowledge of the truth [*in cognitione veritatis delectantur*].¹²

Here, Aquinas defines contemplation as *intuitus simplex*, that is, the “simple act of gazing on the truth.”¹³ This definition holds contemplation to be an intellectual act that is immediate, simple, and nondiscursive.¹⁴ Further, Aquinas establishes that the fulfilment of the human person is dependent on this unique intellectual activity.

¹² *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7.

¹³ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad 1: “contemplatio pertinet ad ipsum simplicem intuitum veritatis.”

¹⁴ Van Nieuwenhove (“Contemplation, *intellectus*, and *simplex intuitus*”) explores the implications of this definition for Aquinas’s account of contemplation.

A) *Natural and Divine Contemplation*

It is important to distinguish at the outset natural contemplation—the object of which is truth in general—from the contemplation which Aquinas holds to be a divinizing (an “inchoate beatitude”) or “divine contemplation.” He notes succinctly,

But there is an act of virtue which when it is complete is essentially happiness, namely, the act of reason or intellect [*rationis vel intellectus*]. For contemplative happiness is nothing else than the perfect contemplation of the highest truth [*perfecta contemplatio summae veritatis*]. . . . However, if we are speaking of celestial happiness which is promised to the saints, the will is ordered to it by charity [*caritas*], but if we are speaking of contemplative happiness of which is treated by philosophy, the will is ordered to it by a natural desire [*naturali desiderio ordinatur*].¹⁵

Aquinas here distinguishes between the contemplative happiness of the saints—the source of which is divine charity—and the happiness of the philosopher, the source of which is natural desire. He gives a more developed account of the same distinction in the discussion of contemplation in the commentary on the *Sentences*. In the prologue of that work, the young Aquinas also notes that the contemplation of God is twofold. The first is the philosopher’s “imperfect” contemplation of God, and its happiness is reserved to this life. The second is the “perfect” contemplation of the saints, which consists in the immediate vision of the divine essence. Further, distinct directional vectors underlie this division. The contemplation of the philosopher proceeds “up” from creatures to a knowledge of God (*ex rationibus creaturarum procedit*). By contrast, the contemplation

¹⁵ *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 8 (trans. Ralph McInerney, *Disputed Questions on Virtue* [South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009]). Likewise, in II *Sent.*, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1 Aquinas asserts that the most perfect operation of *intellectus* is the contemplation of the highest intelligible (*altissimi intelligibilis*), which is God. For this reason, man’s ultimate happiness consists in the contemplation of God. However, this is said not only of the saint, but of the philosopher [*non solum secundum sanctos, sed etiam secundum philosophos*].”

of the saint proceeds “down” by way of God’s own self-disclosure.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the contemplation of the saints which is perfected in glory is already experienced here below in the seed of faith (*secundum fidei suppositionem*). Aquinas explains:

Hence it is necessary that those things that are directed to the end are proportioned to that end, insofar as man is led by the hand [*manuducatur*] to that contemplation while still in *statu viae* [the earthly life of the wayfarer] by a knowledge not derived from creatures but inspired directly by the divine light [*immediate ex divino lumine inspiratam*]. This is the doctrine of theology [*doctrina theologiae*].¹⁷

In this passage Aquinas makes clear that the divine light of faith shares in the limitations of natural contemplation; it is “imperfect” inasmuch as it is limited to life here below and will pass away. However, it also shares already in the “perfect” contemplation of the saints inasmuch as it is “proportioned” to that end. The revealed truth possessed in faith leads believers “by the hand” to divine contemplation. A fundamental continuity obtains between the divine light possessed by the believer who in faith clings to *doctrina theologiae* and the divine light enjoyed by saints in contemplation.¹⁸ This is the central claim of this essay which we explore in more detail below.

Although contemplation is an intellectual act, affectivity constitutes an integral part of its definition. However, the affect can be directed in two ways. Here a further distinction between

¹⁶ Torrell comments on this distinction: “They represent two intellectual ways in opposite directions. The first starts from creatures to culminate in God at the end of an inductive inquiry. The second, conversely, begins with God and . . . remains under the influence of this divine origin that gives meaning and consistency to all its search” (Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic,” in *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 9.

¹⁷ *I Sent.*, q. 1, a. 1.

¹⁸ An interesting comparison is found in Albert the Great, whose discussion of faith tends to emphasize less its “imperfect” character and more the fact that faith truly unites the believer with divine realities. For Albert, the light of faith is akin to mystical light. See Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 157-65.

natural and divine contemplation obtains. In the first case, affect is directed towards the perfection of the knower, in which case contemplation proceeds from love of self (*amore sui*): “This is how the affection was in the contemplative life of the philosophers [*in vita contemplativa philosophorum*].” Second, the affection of contemplation can terminate in the object, such that the object incites the desire for contemplation: “For where the love is, there the eye is, and *where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matthew 6:21). And this is how the contemplative life of the saints [*vita contemplativa sanctorum*] has its desire.”¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell remarks that despite the “apparent serenity” of this passage, it is “decidedly combative.” Aquinas is, in fact, contending against the claim that human felicity can be had by natural contemplation—a position identified with Aristotle and held by many in the faculty of arts at the University of Paris during Aquinas’s residency there:

For Aristotle, the happiness of the philosopher consists in contemplation, not by virtue of the object contemplated, but rather because contemplation is the highest activity of the human being, who finds his perfection therein. This strictly intellectual activity achieves its perfection in immanence, not in a transcendent object. Aquinas could only disdain this enclosure of self in pure humanism, and it is this that he rejects under the name of contemplation of the philosophers.²⁰

For Aquinas, the paradigmatic example of (and source for) natural contemplation is Aristotle. In the well-known question on happiness as man’s last end (*STh* I-II, q. 3) Aristotle serves as his main interlocutor. Here Aquinas gives three reasons why contemplation is most delightful from the perspective of the subject contemplating. First, contemplation constitutes man’s chief happiness because it engages his “highest power in respect of its highest object.”²¹ In contemplation, our intellect (*intellectus*) has the divine good as its principal object. Contemplation of divine things is, therefore, “most proper” (*maxime propria*) to man and, consequently, “most delightful” (*maxime delectabilis*)

¹⁹ III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 1.

²⁰ Torrell, “Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic,” 11.

²¹ *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 5.

to him.²² Second, in no other action apart from contemplation does the end inhere in the act in such a perfect manner: "contemplation is sought principally for its own sake [*maxime quaeritur propter seipsam*]."²³ Finally, in the experience of contemplation, human beings share in the happiness of God and the angels. Admittedly, the more exalted nature of pure intellects entails a more perfect mode of contemplation and, therefore, a more perfect happiness in the contemplation of God.²⁴ Nevertheless, the contemplation of embodied creatures shares in a limited way in the happiness that is proper to separate substances (i.e., angels without bodies). Aquinas concludes this question by once again contrasting perfect and imperfect contemplation: "Therefore the last and perfect happiness, which we await in the life to come, consists entirely in contemplation. But such imperfect happiness, such as can be had here, consists first and principally in contemplation."²⁵ Both in this life and the in the life to come, our natural desire for happiness finds its consummation in the contemplation of God. For Aquinas, this fact is predicated on our intellectual nature, which is intrinsically ordered to seek divine truth itself. Moreover, this desire cannot rest in simply knowing *that* God exists (*an est*), but seeks to contemplate the divine essence itself (*quid est*).²⁶

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. In *ScG* III, c. 25 Aquinas compares contemplation to play inasmuch as both are lovable in themselves rather than directed to some extrinsic end. See also *I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 5; *Exp. De Hebd.*, pro.

²⁴ Pierre Rousselot beautifully expresses how the intellectual character of contemplation engenders a singular happiness: "The speculative idea always gladdens us by itself: always pure, it is always loved, and in this, too, it resembles the ultimate end. Thomas explains this generally by saying that it 'has no contrary.' The idea is spirit's perfection. . . . It is of another order. Whatever becomes substantially and successively *other* (matter), can be transformed, but these changes do not affect spirit's object, essential truth, and they could no more take a bite out of spirit than a dog baying at the moon could chew up moonbeams" (Pierre Rousselot, *Intelligence: Sense of Being, Faculty of God*, trans. Andrew Tallon [Madison, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1998]; translation of *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas* [Paris, 1908; 2nd ed. 1921], 144-45).

²⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 5.

²⁶ Cf. *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 8. Cf. *Comp. Theol.* 104. The entire argument, as Rousselot points out, rests on an analysis of human knowing. There is no reference to revelation or

How does Aquinas speak of divine contemplation? Forms of the term “divine contemplation” (*divina contemplatio*) appear approximately twenty-two times in his corpus.²⁷ These break down into two main categories. The first describes divine contemplation as a heavenly reality. The angels of the supreme hierarchy are “established in the hiddenness of most high divine contemplation [*in abscondito altissimae divinae contemplationis constituti*].”²⁸ Divine contemplation marks the life of the blessed—the saints and angels—who refer all other contemplation to God as its singular object.²⁹ Divine contemplation is the eternal sabbath rest experienced by intellectual creatures *in patriam*, which is signified by the seventh day of the creation narrative: “But the course of the six days is attributed to the action by which God produced things, while the seventh is attributed to the rest of divine contemplation [*divinae contemplationis*], by which God enjoys himself. Therefore sanctification and blessing are especially due to the seventh day.”³⁰ Commenting on Hebrews 12:22, “you are come to Mount Zion,” Aquinas writes that Zion signifies “the loftiness of divine contemplation [*altitudinem divinae contemplationis*] . . . the intellectual vision of beatitude.”³¹ However, the heavenly reality of divine contemplation is also experienced here below by the pilgrim. Aquinas refers to an uplifted spiritual state, one withdrawn from distractions, errors, phantasms, and spiritual forms.³² This state is achieved through certain contemplative activity—twice Aquinas quotes Richard of St. Victor who speaks approvingly of those who persevere in divine contemplation by reading daily from sacred Scripture and transcribing its clear insights of truth into their hearts³³—and by those committed to a

grace, but to “concrete human nature”: “intelligence as such is the root of the demand for its compliment” (Rousselot, *Intelligence*, 148).

²⁷ Aquinas also refers to “deifying contemplation” (III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 1, resp. qcla. 1, ad 1).

²⁸ *De div. nom.*, c. 5, lect. 2.

²⁹ IV *Sent.*, d. 44, q. 2, a. 1, qcla. 3, ad 4.

³⁰ II *Sent.*, d. 15, q. 3, a. 3.

³¹ *De Hebd.*, c. 12, lect. 4.

³² III *Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 4.

³³ IV *Sent.*, d. 47, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 4.

certain state of life: “Now holy virginity refrains from all venereal pleasure in order more freely to have leisure for divine contemplation [*divinae contemplationi*].”³⁴ Admittedly, here below divine contemplation is experienced only episodically.³⁵

The second matrix within which the term “divine contemplation” occurs is in comparing and contrasting the active and contemplative life. Divine contemplation renders religious life a higher form of life *simpliciter*.³⁶ Indeed, the active life is often a hindrance to divine contemplation.³⁷ This can be the case even in religious life when those entrusted to care for the community’s common possessions find their responsibilities “an obstacle to some higher act of charity, such as divine contemplation [*contemplationis divinae*].”³⁸ Nevertheless, the demands of charity require persevering in either the active life (as is the case of a bishop who should not abandon those entrusted to his spiritual welfare even “for the sake of the quiet of divine contemplation [*divinae contemplationis quietem*]”³⁹) or in certain charitable activities (as is the case for those religious who are made busy by their responsibilities). In fact, such activity can be more meritorious than contemplating divine truth because “a man may now and then suffer separation from the sweetness of divine contemplation [*dulcedine divinae contemplationis*] for the time being, that God’s will may be done and for His glory’s sake.”⁴⁰

Despite the continuity between natural and divine contemplation, Aquinas insists on a number of critical distinctions. First, the two forms of contemplation stem from distinct sources—natural desire and divine charity respectively. Second, the happiness of the first is reserved to this life, whereas the happiness of the second is fully realized only in glory. Third, the knowledge of God had by natural contemplation proceeds “up” from a knowledge of creatures, whereas divine contemplation

³⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 152, a. 2.

³⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 8, ad 2.

³⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 182, a. 2, ad 1; *Contra Impugn.*, p. 1, c. 6, 3.14; p. 1, c. 7, 6.5.

³⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 182, a. 3, ad 2.

³⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 188, a. 7.

³⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 185, a. 4.

⁴⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 182, a. 2.

proceeds “down” by way of divine revelation. Finally, natural contemplation seeks the perfection of the knower and is, therefore, animated by self-love. Divine contemplation, by contrast, seeks to know God and is animated by love of him. Most fundamentally, then, Aquinas considers divine contemplation to be a heavenly reality—an activity belonging to the angels and saints—that obtains occasionally here below by participation.

B) The “*imago dei*”

Aquinas’s contention that contemplation is perfective of human nature needs to be situated within his anthropology of the *imago dei*.⁴¹ Near the outset of his treatment of the *imago* in the *Summa*, Aquinas explains that all creatures participate in God by sharing in his likeness according to three ways: because they exist, because they live, and because they know or understand.⁴² To participate in God according to the exalted mode of the *imago dei* belongs exclusively to the last—to creatures possessed of *mens* or *intellectus* and thereby capable of *knowing* God.⁴³ But to possess this capacity is not yet to realize the exalted character of beatifying contemplation.

⁴¹ On Aquinas’s doctrine of the *imago dei* see Marie-Joseph Serge de Laugier de Beaucrueuil, “L’homme image de Dieu selon saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Etudes et recherches* 8 (1952): 45-82; and 9 (1955): 37-97; F. J. A. de Grijns, *Godelijk mensontwerp, Een thematische studie over het beeld Gods in de mens volgens het Scriptum van Thomas van Aquino* (Hilversum and Antwerp: Paul Brand, 1967); Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study in the Development of Aquinas’ Teaching* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990); Michael Dauphinais, “Loving the Lord Your God: The *imago dei* in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 241-67; Klaus Krämer, *Imago Trinitatis: Die Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen in der Theologie des Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000); Henk J. M. Schoot, “Thomas Aquinas on human beings as image of God,” *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 38 (2020): 33-46.

⁴² *STh* I, q. 93, a. 2.

⁴³ Dauphinais points out how in Aquinas’s mature treatment of the *imago dei* (*STh* I, q. 93) he uses the terms *mens* and *intellectus* synonymously. Earlier, in *De Verit.*, q. 10, a. 1, ad 5 Aquinas follows Augustine in distinguishing mind from its memory, understanding and will. See Dauphinais, “*Imago Dei* in Aquinas,” 254-55.

For Aquinas, the *imago* is defined less by a fixed nature than by an activity, namely divine contemplation, which can begin in this life and awaits its perfection in glory. Aquinas writes, “We refer the Divine image in man to the word born of the knowledge of God, and to the love derived therefrom. Thus the image of God is found in the soul according as the soul turns to God, or possesses a nature that enables it to turn to God.”⁴⁴ In distinguishing here between the soul turned to God and the capacity for such orientation, Aquinas subtly evokes his earlier distinction of the three ways human persons can be said to possess the image of God. First, by dint of being human, man possesses a “natural aptitude” on account of *mens* to know and love God. This is to possess the image in potency (*imago naturalis*). Here we enter the terrain of natural contemplation. By virtue of possessing an *intellectual* nature, man is ordered to the contemplation of truth. Second, by grace man actually or habitually knows and loves God. This is to possess the image imperfectly (*imago gratiae*). Third, man can fully or actually possess the image in glory inasmuch as he knows and loves God perfectly (*imago gloriae*).⁴⁵ Act gives definition to potency and so the fullness of the image in glory renders intelligible the potency or capacity that is the image of God found in human nature.

It has been frequently pointed out that Aquinas (drawing on Augustine) has a dynamic account of the *imago*—that is to say, the image of God is not a static datum of nature but manifests a *motio* or potency tending towards union with God by way of knowledge and love.⁴⁶ For Aquinas, this dynamism expresses

⁴⁴ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 8 (translation slightly emended).

⁴⁵ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 4. These three Latin terms—*imago naturalis*, *imago gratiae*, and *imago gloriae* are not found verbatim in the text, but this threefold distinction (nature, grace, and glory) frames Aquinas’s description of the ways in which the human person can possess the image of God. He concludes the body of the article stating, “The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed.”

⁴⁶ Dauphinais articulates this well: “Situated within the *Summa*, Aquinas’s teaching on the image of God in humans must not be viewed as a static or abstract anthropological datum; rather, it manifests the dynamic character of the relation of the human creature to God, for the image is moving through various levels of potency and act, on the one hand, and obscurity and beauty, on the other” (“*Imago Dei* in Aquinas,” 242). Blankenhorn traces the development of Aquinas’s theology of the *imago dei*. In his early

itself most fully in the beatifying contemplation of God. The knowledge and love that constitute the mind (or intellect) does not sufficiently account for its nature as *imago*. Even the reflective and reflexive character of the mind that knows and loves itself fails adequately to disclose the full nature of the *imago*. Only when mind or intellect is turned to its creator—contemplating him by knowledge and love—can we speak precisely of the image of God in man. The soul “must be engaged in at least the beginning of contemplation of God for it to be the image of the divine Trinity.”⁴⁷ This is because the full realization of the image—the *imago gloriae*—belongs to the blessed whose delight consists solely in the contemplation of God, an activity that for the just has its beginning already in this life according to the *imago gratiae*.

Two features that are critical to this account of the *imago dei* serve to hinge Aquinas’s theology of contemplation. First, the *imago dei* does not properly speaking refer to man’s rational faculty or knowing capacity in general, but of what is highest in man, namely, *intellectus* or *mens* by which he can participate in God. We will explore this distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* further. Second, not each and every act of *intellectus* is beatifying. Rather, the possession of *intellectus* bestows a capacity (proper to the *imago naturalis*) for the natural contemplation of truth in general. Only when this potency is actualized—living the *imago gratiae* in the contemplation of God—does the soul begin truly to live out its nature as image of God and proleptically to participate in the eternal contemplation that will belong to the *imago gloriae*.

Sentences commentary, Aquinas tracked closely to Albert the Great and the received Scholastic account of the *imago* as a fixed nature. In Aquinas’s early treatment, the account of human knowing and loving presented in books 9 and 10 of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* stands as the source for his theology of the *imago*. With *De veritate*, Aquinas begins to emphasize the *active* character of human remembering, knowing, and loving whereby the image of God is conformed to its archetype. This theology culminates in the *Summa contra gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae* where books 14 and 15 of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* serve as the primary point of engagement. See Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union with God*, 239-47.

⁴⁷ Dauphinais, “*Imago Dei* in Aquinas,” 257.

C) “*Ratio*” and “*intellectus*”

It is fruitful to consider in some detail Aquinas’s frequently invoked epistemological distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* to clarify how contemplation, for Aquinas, both fulfills and transcends human nature.⁴⁸ *Ratio* refers to a distinctly human mode of knowing in which a body of knowledge is accumulated over time and through the senses.⁴⁹ It refers especially to the discursive character of human knowing.⁵⁰ By contrast, *intellectus* refers to the manner in which separate intelligences (such as angels) know—immediately, directly, and intuitively.⁵¹ It is *intellectus* that is the proper domain of contemplation. After quoting Bernard that “contemplation is the mind’s true and certain gaze [*verus certusque animi intuitus*],” Aquinas explains, “To gaze belongs to intellect [*intueri est intellectus*], whereas to make inquiry belongs to reason [*rationis*]. Therefore the

⁴⁸ *STh* I, q. 59, a. 1, ad 1: “But intellect and reason differ as to their manner of knowing; because the intellect knows by simple intuition, while reason knows by a process of discursion from one thing to another.” The distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* occurs frequently in Aquinas: I *Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, ad 4; II *Sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 8, ad 1; *De Verit.*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 5; q. 8, a. 15; q. 15, a. 1; q. 24, a. 3; *Expos. De Trin.* q. 2, a. 2; q. 6, a. 1; *STh* I, q. 58, aa. 3 and 4; q. 59, a. 1, ad 1; q. 79, a. 8, ad 2; q. 83, a. 4; *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1, obj. 2; q. 9, a. 1, ad 1; and q. 180, a. 3. Rik Van Nieuwenhove has noted the primacy of the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* in Aquinas’s account of contemplation and that in nearly every instance Aquinas appeals to either Pseudo-Dionysius or Boethius to support this distinction (“Contemplation, *intellectus*, and *simplex intuitus*,” 202 n. 13).

⁴⁹ John Henry Newman vividly describes the discursive, sense-based process of *ratio*: “We know, not by a direct and simple vision, not at a glance, but, as it were, by piecemeal and accumulation, by a mental process, by going round an object, by the comparison, the combination, the mutual correction, the continual adaptation, of many partial notions, by the employment, concentration, and joint action of many faculties and exercises of mind” (*The Idea of a University* [London: Longmans, 1907], 151).

⁵⁰ Cf. *STh* II-II, q. 49, a. 5, ad 3.

⁵¹ Joseph Pieper summarizes the distinction succinctly: “*Ratio* is the power of discursive, logical thought, of searching and of examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions. *Intellectus*, on the other hand, is the name for the understanding in so far as it is the capacity of *simplex intuitus*, of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye” (*Leisure as the Basis of Culture* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009], 28).

contemplative life consists in the act not of reason, but of intellect.”⁵²

Two properties define *intellectus*. First, *intellectus* penetrates to the essence of what it apprehends. It does not know its object at a remove, by holding it up to the light and examining it from various angles, nor does it compile knowledge through taste, touch, smell and hearing. Rather, *intellectus* enters into its object, penetrating its substantial nature and knowing it simultaneously and completely from within. *Intellegere* comes from “*intus legere*” (“to read inwardly”), explains Aquinas, and as such it “penetrates into the very essence of a thing.”⁵³ The “intimate penetration of the truth”⁵⁴ proper to *intellectus* takes diverse forms depending on what reality is known:

Now there are many kinds of things that are hidden within [*interius latent*], to find which human knowledge has to penetrate within so to speak [*quasi intrinsecus penetrare*]. Thus, under the accidents lies hidden the nature of the substantial reality, under words lies hidden their meaning; under likenesses and figures the truth they denote lies hidden (because the intelligible world is enclosed within as compared with the sensible world, which is perceived externally), and effects lie hidden in their causes, and vice versa. Hence we may speak of understanding [*intellectus*] with regard to all these things.⁵⁵

Intellectus grasps the essence of the reality known from within or “underneath” (so to speak) its accidental manifestation.

The second defining property of *intellectus* is its apprehension of reality as one or simple. *Intellectus* is uniquely calibrated to apprehend the unity and simplicity of divine truth. The method of reason (*modus rationis*) is discursive and accumulating; it is well suited to apprehend the diverse and multitudinous character of the natural order. By contrast, the divine science “adheres most closely to the method of intellect [*modus intellectus*].”⁵⁶ This is because the divine science is one and simple:

⁵² III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 2 (trans. Aquinas Institute).

⁵³ *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1.

⁵⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 49, a. 5, ad 3.

⁵⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1.

⁵⁶ *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3.

Now reason differs from intellect as multitude does from unity. Thus Boethius says that reasoning is related to understanding [*ratio ad intelligentiam*] as time to eternity and as a circle to its center. For it is distinctive of reason to disperse itself in the consideration of many things, and then to gather one simple truth from them. Thus Dionysius says, "Souls have the power of reasoning in that they approach the truth of things from various angles, and in this respect they are inferior to the angels; but inasmuch as they gather a multiplicity into unity they are in a way equal to the angels." Conversely, intellect first contemplates a truth one and undivided and in that truth comprehends a whole multitude, as God, by knowing his essence, knows all things. Thus Dionysius says: "Angelic minds have the power of intellect in that they understand divine truths in a unified way."⁵⁷

In accumulating a body of knowledge we proceed discursively, in *modus rationis*; this is a distinctly human mode of proceeding. However, once such knowledge is actually possessed, it is possessed as a whole: indivisible, simple, and one. In this case, we participate in what is properly an angelic mode of knowing. Indeed, to know a multiplicity as one is to approximate the manner in which God knows contingent being, that is, in his own simple unity. As such, Aquinas compares the indivisible, simple, and unified apprehension of being proper to *intellectus* to the indivisible unity and simplicity of eternity or to the point of a circle.

It is here that we begin to touch on contemplation. While *intellectus* is proper to the knowing of separate substances (i.e., angels), it can also speak to some aspects of the human experience of knowing. In this respect, *intellectus* characterizes both the beginning and the end of our knowing process.⁵⁸ At the outset of the knowing process, *intellectus* offers an immediate apprehension of first principles (such as the principle of non-contradiction). Likewise, the conclusion of the knowing process terminates in a flash of insight or *intellectus*. In short, *intellectus* entails that human knowing shares something with angelic knowing. However, separate intelligences know reality exclusively by adverting to intelligible, infused species, whereas, for us, *intellectus* operates in concert with *ratio* as the foundation

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See Van Nieuwenhove's discussion from which this analysis draws: "Contemplation, *intellectus*, and *simplex intuitus*," 204-11.

and consummation of the knowing experience. Consider the following passage, devoted to the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*:

Reason and intellect in man cannot be distinct powers. We shall understand this clearly if we consider their respective actions. For to understand is simply to apprehend intelligible truth [*intelligere enim est simpliciter veritatem intelligibilem apprehendere*]: and to reason [*ratiocinari*] is to advance from one thing understood to another, so as to know an intelligible truth. And therefore angels, who according to their nature, possess perfect knowledge of intelligible truth, have no need to advance from one thing to another; but they apprehend the truth simply and without mental discursion, as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* VII). But man arrives at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore he is called rational. Reasoning [*ratiocinari*] therefore, is compared to understanding [*intelligere*], as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession; of which one belongs to the perfect, the other to the imperfect.⁵⁹

Intellectus and *ratio* are diverse operations of one human knowing power. Further, the analogy of movement to rest suggests that *ratio* is ordered towards *intellectus*, which draws *ratio* to its completion.⁶⁰ Human beings share with separate intelligences a simple apprehension of truth, but only as the consummation of a ratiocinative process.⁶¹

Following his Neoplatonic sources, especially Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas situates human knowing hierarchically. Beasts live exclusively according to sense perception. By contrast, human beings are called “rational animals” because of the process by which we come to know—the process of inquiry or the movement of reason. Rationality is not an attribute that belongs to either God or the angels; it is proper (and exclusive)

⁵⁹ *STh* I, q. 79, a. 8.

⁶⁰ Van Nieuwenhove writes, “In our case [*intellectus*] refers to the moment of insightful understanding, which remains distinct from, but grounds and fulfils, the ratiocinative process; and it is in this crowning act that contemplation comes to fruition” (“Contemplation, *intellectus*, and *simplex intuitus*,” 202).

⁶¹ Cf. *De Verit.*, q. 16, a. 1: “Human nature, insofar as it comes in contact with the angelic nature, must both in speculative and practical matters know truth without investigation.” All translations from *De veritate* come from James McGlynn, trans., *De veritate* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), unless otherwise noted.

to the genus of animal (*rationale est differentia animalis*).⁶² We apprehend the quiddity of things by adverting from sense data to the sensible species in an act of abstraction. Finally, angels know by advertence to the infused species with which they were created. Human knowing shares something with angelic knowing in the immediacy of this advertence:

The human soul, according to what is highest in it, attains to [*atingit*] that which is proper to angelic nature, so that it knows some things at once and without investigation [*subito et sine inquisitione*] although it is lower than angels in this, that it can know the truth in these things only by receiving something from sense.⁶³

Situated midway up the hierarchy of being, we have something in common with both beasts and angels. We rely on sense data in the ratiocinative process of coming to know, but the moment of insight—once something *is known*—abstracts from sense data, so that what is known is known according to its immaterial and eternal species. In that moment of insight or recognition, which consummates the knowing process, human knowing “attains to” angelic knowing⁶⁴ (in an admittedly different mode, since angels

⁶² Cf. I *Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 4. To the extent that our thinking approximates the simplicity of *intellectus* (as opposed to *ratio*), this is not an inherent quality but “participates to some extent in that simple knowledge which exists in higher substances” (*De Verit.*, q. 15, a. 1). Likewise, in his commentary on the *Ethics*, Aquinas writes, “Aristotle considered the intellect a part of the soul, and in this view, the intellect is not something divine by itself [*simpliciter*], but the most divine of all the things in us. This is so because of its greater agreement with the separated substances, inasmuch as its activity exists without a bodily organ” (X *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 10). And further on, “[Contemplation] is not on the human level, but above man [*non est secundum hominem, sed supra hominem*]. Indeed, it is not on the human level considering man’s composite nature, but it is most properly human [*propriissime secundum hominem*] considering what is principal in man [*principalissimum in homine*]—a thing found most perfectly in superior substances but imperfectly and by participation [*imperfecte et quasi participative*], as it were, in man” (X *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 11)

⁶³ *De Verit.*, q. 16, a. 1. I am relying on Van Nieuwenhove’s exegesis of this text (“Aquinas on Contemplation,” 13-14).

⁶⁴ *De Verit.*, q. 15, a. 1: “Although the knowledge proper to the human soul takes place through the process of reasoning [*per viam rationis*], nevertheless, it participates to some extent in that simple knowledge [*simplicis cognitionis*] which exists in higher

do not abstract in a rational process, but know truth intuitively and immediately, outside of temporal succession, by adverting to the eternal forms). The manner in which our physical senses instantaneously and completely apprehend their proper matter (light for the eyes or sound for the ears) is a fruitful analogy for the human power of *intellectus*, the moment of insight that breaks beyond the ratiocinative limits of the human to share in the direct intuitive gaze of truth proper to separate substances.⁶⁵ At the acme of the knowing process, we share with angels a nondiscursive, immediate, simple apprehension of truth, and it is to this experience of *intellectus* that contemplation corresponds.

Aquinas insists that contemplation belongs exclusively to the crowning act of *intellectus*. At first glance it might seem that many “spiritual” activities enter into the contemplative life—meditation, spiritual reading, and prayer.⁶⁶ For Aquinas, however, such activities might lead to contemplation or result from it, but they are not properly designated “contemplation” because such an aggregate of spiritual activities would vitiate the unity of the one contemplative act understood as *intuitus simplex*—the “simple act of gazing on the truth.” He writes,

Accordingly, then, the contemplative life has one act wherein it is finally completed [*finaliter perficitur*], namely the contemplation of truth, and from this act it derives its unity. Yet it has many acts whereby it arrives at this final act. Some of these pertain to the reception of principles [*acceptatio principiorum*], from which it proceeds to the contemplation of truth; others are concerned with deducing from the principles [*deductio principiorum*], the truth, the knowledge of which is sought; and the last and crowning act [*ultimus autem completivus actus*] is the contemplation of the truth.⁶⁷

Aquinas here distinguishes three intellectual movements relevant to contemplation. There are distinct ratiocinative steps on the way “up” to the moment of contemplative insight, which build

substances, and because of which they are said to have intellective power [*intellectivam vim*].”

⁶⁵ Cf. Pieper, *Leisure*, 29.

⁶⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 3, obj. 4. See the discussion on the “spiritual” activities relevant to contemplation in Biffi, *Teologia, storia e contemplazione*, 94-96

⁶⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 3.

on what he refers to as the “reception of principles” (*acceptionem principiorum*). There are also ratiocinative steps on the way “down” from the contemplative act—“deduction from principles” (*deductionem principiorum*). But only the crowning act of the simple gaze on truth itself is properly termed contemplation. These three intellectual movements relevant to contemplation are “circular.” Aquinas explains, “The circularity is observed in this, that reason reaches conclusions from principles by way of discovery [*viam inveniendi*], and by way of judgement [*viam iudicandi*] examines the conclusions which have been found, analyzing them back to the principles.”⁶⁸ Van Nieuwenhove’s study of contemplation in Aquinas highlights the “circular” character of his presentation, illustrating how “discovery” and “judgment” are the two movements “up to” and “down from” the moment of contemplative insight.⁶⁹

It is fruitful to turn again to the question devoted to the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* (*STh* I, q. 79, a. 8). After considering the relation between *ratio* and *intellectus* according to the analogy of movement and rest, Aquinas continues,

Movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest; hence it is that human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery [*secundum viam inquisitionis vel inventionis*], advances from certain things simply understood—namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment [*in via iudicii*] returns by analysis [*resolvendo*] to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found. Now it is clear that rest and movement are not to be referred to different powers, but to one and the same, even in natural things: since by the same nature a thing is moved towards a certain place.

Note that in all three texts just cited the knowing process is described as circular: it begins with *intellectus*—the immediate recognition of first principles—and by such *acceptionem principiorum* proceeds “up” in a reasoning process of “inquiry and discovery” until it arrives at a new insight, a fresh moment of *intellectus*. This new insight (*intuitus simplex*) is the base from

⁶⁸ *De Verit.*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 10.

⁶⁹ Aquinas’s circular account of contemplation predicated on the *viam inveniendi* and the *viam iudicandi* is discussed at length in Van Nieuwenhove, “Contemplation, *intellectus*, and *simplex intuitus*,” 204-11.

which the reasoning process also descends by way of judgment (*deductionem principiorum*) to arrive, once again, at an experience of *intellectus*. In contemporary epistemic parlance we would call the *viam inveniendi*, which depends on the reception of principles, “inductive reasoning” and the *viam iudicandi*, which proceeds by deduction from principles, “deductive reasoning.”

The contemplative experience, thus, at once *crowns* what it means to be human and *transcends* what it means to be human, inasmuch as the operation of *intellectus* entails a participation in the knowing that properly belongs to separate substances. Aquinas writes, “Insofar as he is contemplative, a man is in a way above man [*supra hominem*], for in the simple vision of the intellect [*intellectus simplici visione*] a man is united with the higher substances, which are called ‘intelligences’ or ‘angels.’”⁷⁰ Thomas Hibbs remarks that, for Aquinas, “the contemplative life cannot be fully achieved by the embodied intellect; yet, to the extent that it is available to us, contemplation most fully actualizes our humanity, or at least what is highest in it.”⁷¹ In the very last sentence of the article on contemplation, Aquinas writes, “The Philosopher declares the contemplative life to be above man [*supra hominem*], because it befits us ‘so far as there is in us something divine’ (*Ethic.* x, 7), namely the intellect [*intellectus*] which is incorruptible and impassible in itself.”⁷² Josef Pieper comments on this paradoxical feature of Aquinas’s account of *intellectus*, which is “already beyond the sphere allotted to man. And yet it belonged to man, though in one sense ‘superhuman’; the ‘purely human’ by itself could not satiate man’s powers of comprehension, for man, of his very nature, reaches out beyond the sphere of the ‘human’, touching on the order of pure spirits.”⁷³ Contemplation reaches out beyond the merely human knowing proper to our ratiocinative nature (it is *supra hominem*); but, at

⁷⁰ III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 2, ad 1 (trans. Aquinas Institute).

⁷¹ Thomas Hibbs, “Transcending Humanity in Aquinas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 66 (1992): 195.

⁷² *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 8, ad 3. Elsewhere, Aquinas describes the *vita contemplativa* as “*non proprie humana, sed superhumanum*” (*De Virtut.*, q. 5, a. 1).

⁷³ Pieper, *Leisure*, 28-29.

the same time, our natural desire to know truth in general manifests an obediential potency ordered to fulfillment in such contemplation.⁷⁴ This capacity or disposition to be raised is the defining character of *intellectus*.

D) Obediential Potency

Both in this life and in the life to come, the natural desire to contemplate the divine essence exceeds our nature.⁷⁵ The

⁷⁴ Cf. *STh* I, q. 62, a. 1.

⁷⁵ Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* (1946) sparked the major conflagration of twentieth-century theology, namely, a debate over how to render the nature-grace relationship, and, more particularly, over the question whether man has a natural desire for the vision of God. De Lubac forcefully rejected the Scholastic thesis of “pure nature,” that is, the contention that God could have created human beings apart from grace, thereby rendering human nature intelligible according to a purely natural end. De Lubac summarizes his position as such: “This desire [for God] is not some ‘accident’ in me. . . . For God’s call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And by God’s will, I now 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’” (*The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed and John Pepino [New York: Crossroad, 1998], 70). By insisting that man only has one end, the graced end of the beatific vision, De Lubac claimed to be retrieving the authentic teaching of St. Thomas. In the words of Christopher Cullen, “through his history-making thesis, de Lubac believed himself to have, in one stroke, saved Aquinas from the neo-Scholastics and vindicated Augustine’s great insight that ‘our heart is restless until it rests in you’” (Christopher Cullen, “The Natural Desire for God and Pure Nature: A Debate Renewed,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86 (2012): 706). This complex debate is inextricably tied up with the claim of the first half of this essay, namely, the subjective beatitude of contemplation. For my purposes, however, it need not be resolved here. Central literature on the topic includes Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946); idem, *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (Paris: Aubier, 1965); John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2005); *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., trans. Robert Williams (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2009); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle théologie and Sacramental Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 86-98; Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, Fla.: Sapientia Press, 2010). For an overview of this debate, see Cullen, “Natural Desire for God.”

unsurpassable gulf between the finite and the infinite entails an incommensurability between the subject (the human *intellectus*) and the divine object. Is our natural desire for happiness, then, rendered void (*inane*)? Are we created to achieve an end that is unachievable? No, nature cannot be in vain, writes Aquinas when treating of the vision of God. The beatific vision is the final cause of the rational animal: “If the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, the natural desire would remain void [*inane desiderium naturae*].”⁷⁶ The metaphysical structures of Aquinas’s anthropology help to resolve this logical impasse of a creature attaining a natural desire that exceeds its nature. Aquinas admits that there is a deeply rooted “capacity” or “disposition” on the part of the human intellect *to be* elevated to contemplate God, the realization of which is wholly dependent on divine initiative. As Aquinas puts it, “Rational creatures surpass every other kind of creature in being capable of the highest good in beholding and enjoying God, although the sources from their own nature do not suffice to attain it, and they need the help of God’s grace to attain it.”⁷⁷ The orismology of “obediential potency” has not been applied in discussions of Aquinas’s theology of contemplation, yet the concept underlies his account of the capacity and aptness of the intellectual creature *to be raised* to the vision of God.⁷⁸

The obediential potency *to be raised* to a simple, direct vision (*intuitus simplex*) of the divine essence is exclusive to *intellectus*; such a disposition or capacity does not obtain for rocks or goats, or even ratiocinative knowing. Rousselot expresses well this aptness which is unique to *intellectus*:

The “obedience of potency” of intellectual natures, according to Aquinas, is not something independent from their natural potency; it is that very nature. So we can recognize, at least *post factum*, the traces of this capacity in the consciousness that being has of itself in certain muted summons [*appels sourds*]

⁷⁶ *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1. Cf. *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 8.

⁷⁷ Cf. *De Malo*, q. 5, a. 1 (trans. Richard Regan [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003]).

⁷⁸ The best entry into the topic of “obediential potency” is Steven A. Long, “Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1997): 45-63.

of its nature. And what in the absence of the divine offer could only be translated into the undecipherable darkness of affective longing [*appétitif*] might with the light of faith be formulated in a series of clear syllogisms. In that way we construct a probable system to link reason and revelation, taking as middle terms the insufficiency of human speculations and our desire to embrace the first intelligible. Aquinas believed that as a matter of fact we have been offered this increase in its very highest form, the promise of intuitive vision. If we take the whole human dynamism thus transformed, it is clear that this gracious gift from heaven crowns his conception of intellectualism in the most triumphant way.⁷⁹

The supernatural finality of *intellectus*—that natural contemplation finds its fulfillment in divine contemplation—is manifest only in the light of revelation and the gift of faith.

The profound paradox entailed in the contemplation of divine truth—that human nature is fulfilled by an experience that transcends human nature—is, in fact, the outworking of Aquinas’s doctrine of the *imago dei*. The image of God is not a simple datum of human nature; it transcends human nature *per se* (it is *supra hominem*). Aquinas does not predicate the *imago dei* in man according to *ratio*, but according to *intellectus*, whereby we are capable of being elevated to contemplate God. Aquinas writes,

As Dionysius says (see *De Div. Nom.* VII), an inferior nature reaches its peak at the lowest point of a superior nature [*secundum supremum sui attingit infimum naturae superioris*], and thus, at its peak, it participates somehow in intellectuality [*intellectualitatem*]. And because the image is designated according to what is highest in the soul, it is better designated according to intellect than according to reason, for reason is nothing other than an obscured intellectual nature [*natura intellectualis obumbrate*]. This is why reason knows through inquiring and under the aspect of temporal succession what intellect conveys immediately and in full light [*statim et plena luce*].⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Rousselot, *Intelligence*, 151-52.

⁸⁰ *I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, a.1, ad 4. Rousselot explains what Aquinas means when he states that rational creatures are said to “attain” participation in natures that are purely intellectual: “According to the Neoplatonic laws of continuity lower beings participate by their highest operation in the simpler and nobler nature of the higher beings, so human intelligence functions as *intellect* in certain acts, but its specific mark is *discursive reason* which shatters the intelligible perfection” (*Intelligence*, 52).

Because the *imago dei* is most precisely predicated of *intellectus*, which exceeds the proper definition of “rational animal,” Aquinas maintains (perhaps surprisingly) that “the image of God is more perfect in the angels than in man, because their intellectual nature is more perfect.”⁸¹

The *imago dei* in man is predicated of *intellectus* whereby it has an obediencial potency for divine contemplation; this is a capacity and orientation not fitted to the human person’s ratiocinative nature. The natural desire for divine contemplation demands supernatural elevation beyond (but not opposed) to our human nature. The immediacy and simplicity (*intuitus simplex*) of apprehension proper to *intellectus* belonging to the *imago naturalis* suggests a capacity or fittingness (obediencial potency) to be raised to divine contemplation and, hence, the possibility of attaining the natural desire for the vision of the divine essence.⁸² From the perspective of the human subject, the contemplation of God is singularly beatifying and delightful—an “inchoate beatitude”—because it both fulfills and transcends that which is highest in the human person.

II. THE OBJECTIVE BEATITUDE OF CONTEMPLATION

The second reason contemplation in this life participates already in the contemplation of God that belongs to eternity is “on the part of its object, in so far as one contemplates that which one loves.”⁸³ The *object* of divine contemplation—God in himself—likewise renders the contemplation of divine truth an “inchoate beatitude.” In an article devoted to the delight of contemplation, Aquinas writes, “Since, then, the contemplative

⁸¹ *STh* I, q. 93, a. 3.

⁸² Of course, Aquinas is categorical throughout his corpus that a created intellect can in no way see the divine essence by its own natural powers (“It is impossible for any created intellect to see the essence of God by its own natural power” [*STh* I, q. 12, a. 4]). Cf. *De Verit.*, q. 8, a. 3: “Nature does not transcend its limits. Now, the divine essence surpasses any created nature. Consequently, the divine essence cannot be seen by any natural cognition.” In this life, Aquinas reminds us, we are united to God “as to one unknown” (*STh* I, q. 12, a. 13, ad 1).

⁸³ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7.

life consists chiefly in the contemplation of God, of which charity is the motive . . . it follows that there is delight in the contemplative life, not only by reason of the contemplation itself, but also by reason of the Divine love.”⁸⁴ The reason contemplation *in via* is an “inchoate beatitude” is that contemplation here below and *in patria* is animated by the same motive cause, namely, the divine love. Aquinas writes,

The contemplation of God in this life is imperfect in comparison with the contemplation in heaven; and in like manner the delight of the wayfarer’s contemplation is imperfect as compared with the delight of contemplation in heaven, of which it is written (Psalm 35:9): “Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.” Yet, though the contemplation of divine things which is to be had by wayfarers is imperfect, it is more delightful than all other contemplation however perfect, on account of the excellence of that which is contemplated.⁸⁵

A fundamental continuity obtains between contemplation *in via* and *in patria* because the saint drinks the same water of life in a rivulet below that he experiences as a torrent above. This section will treat of the fundamental continuity (but distinct mode of apprehension) that obtains with respect to the contemplation of the wayfarer and that of the blessed.

A) *Natural, Theological, and Divine Contemplation*

Aquinas distinguishes between three types of knowledge of God: natural knowledge, graced speculative knowledge, and graced affective knowledge.⁸⁶ An important strain in the

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., ad 3.

⁸⁶ *STh* I, q. 64, a. 1. The context for this division is fascinating. Aquinas presents his argument about the knowledge of demons, maintaining that they are not deprived of all knowledge of the truth. Knowledge of truth comes from both nature and grace. Further, the knowledge had by grace is also twofold: “speculative” knowledge, by which one knows divine secrets, and “affective” knowledge, which produces a love for God. Aquinas identifies the latter with the gift of wisdom. The *natural knowledge* of God that belongs to demons is not compromised by their unhappy state; yet their *speculative knowledge* is less than that of those angels who are established in grace, and they have no *affective knowledge* of God.

commentatorial tradition holds that this division corresponds to three types of contemplation—natural, theological, and divine—of which only the last is an “inchoate beatitude” inasmuch as it has divinity itself as its object.⁸⁷ The three dominant figures associated with this interpretation of Aquinas are John of St. Thomas (1589-1644), Ambroise Gardeil (1859-1931), and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973).⁸⁸

The first, *natural contemplation*, is a knowledge of God by way of causality. This is the domain of metaphysics. The metaphysician knows God as a necessary first principle, who is one, simple, and distinct from his creatures.⁸⁹ For Aquinas, Aristotle is, once again, the paradigmatic example of natural contemplation.⁹⁰ Metaphysical knowledge of God operates on

⁸⁷ For discussion of Aquinas’s three-fold division of wisdom see Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 263-70; Charles Journet, *Introduction a la théologie* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945), 9; Lawrence Boadt, “Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Biblical Wisdom Tradition,” *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 595-96; Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 28-34. Some recent commentators resist this division inasmuch as it seems to threaten Aquinas’s insistence on the unity of the contemplative act. See Van Nieuwenhove, “Aquinas on Contemplation,” 22-27; Rudi te Velde, “Understanding the *scientia* of Faith,” in Fergus Kerr, ed., *Contemplating Aquinas* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 55-74; Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Aquinas, Contemplation, and Theology,” *New Blackfriars* 102 (2021): 160-73.

⁸⁸ John of St. Thomas, *Curs. Theol.*, I, q. 8, disp. 8, a. 6; I, q. 43, disp. 17, a. 3; I-II, q. 110, disp. 22, a. 1; I-II, q. 72, disp. 17, a. 3. Ambroise Gardeil, *La structure de l’âme et l’expérience mystique*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1927); idem, “L’expérience mystique pure dans le cadre des ‘missions divines,’” *Vie spirituelle, supplément* 32 (1932): 138-42; Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*. Cf. H. F. Dondaine, *Somme théologique* (Paris: Desclée, 1950), 449-53, who follows Gardeil’s interpretation.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ScG* III, cc. 25, 37.

⁹⁰ In book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that contemplation is the highest form of human happiness. In his commentary, Aquinas considers the five reasons Aristotle enumerates for this claim. First, contemplation is the most noble of human activities considered both on the part of the *subject* contemplating (i.e. the intellect) and on the part of the *objects* of contemplation (realities that are “supra-sensible—especially divine”). Second, because contemplation is free from bodily labor it can be more “continuous and lasting” than other human activity. Third, Aristotle describes contemplation as “the most delightful [*delectabilissima*] of all activities” offering “pleasures marvelous both in purity and permanence.” Aquinas explains that the “purity” of contemplation lies in the fact that it deals with immaterial realities while the immutable

the plane of analogy. As such, it never attains to the knowledge of the divine essence; and yet, in the words of Jacques Maritain,

It truly knows God in the divided mirror of the transcendental perfections analogically common to the uncreated and to the created. In this mirror it grasps in the imperfect mode proper to finite things, realities which, brought to their pure state and overflowing all of our concepts, pre-exist in the incomprehensible simplicity of the infinite.⁹¹

Perfections (such as goodness and life) refer properly and principally to God (*perfectiones ipsas significatas*), but their manner of signifying (*modum significandi*) is through creatures and are therefore imperfect.⁹² To take an example, if I seek to explain the notion “wise” to my child, that reality is more readily intelligible to him (*modum significandi*) when I point to his grandfather while the notion *itself* is most properly predicated (*significatas*) of God. In sum, natural contemplation involves a knowledge of God from his effects using the discourse of analogy.

The second, *theological contemplation*, corresponds to graced speculative knowledge of God. Here we enter a realm wholly distinct from natural contemplation. This is because the object of theology is distinct from metaphysics. It does not know God analogically, through his creation, but as he reveals *himself*.⁹³ Again, Maritain is trenchant: “[Theological contemplation] does not have as its object God as expressed by His creatures, nor God as the first cause or author of the natural order, but, rather, God in the guise of mystery, as inaccessible to reason alone, in His own essence and inner life.”⁹⁴ Unlike natural contemplation, the study of *sacra doctrina* presupposes revelation and requires that

objects of contemplation account for its “permanence.” Fourth, contemplation is particularly self-sufficient. While other virtues such as justice require another person on whom to exercise virtue, the “contemplation of the truth is an entirely internal activity not proceeding externally.” Finally, contemplation is desirable in itself (*per se*): “it is never sought for the sake of anything else” (*Nic. Ethic.* 10.10.2087-97 [trans C. I. Litzinger (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964)]. See also *Metaphys.* 12.8.2538-43).

⁹¹ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 264-65.

⁹² *STh* I, q. 13, a. 3.

⁹³ Although it is distinct from creation, Aquinas does consider the revelation proper to *sacra doctrina* as a divine “effect.” Cf. *STh* I, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1.

⁹⁴ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 265.

the light of faith illumine reason to inform the contemplation of divine truth.⁹⁵ It must be stressed, however, that Aquinas never abandons the foundational premise that *all* knowledge of God—even that of revelation—rests on a causal knowledge of God that apprehends divinity through his effects.

Finally, *divine contemplation* corresponds to graced affective knowledge of God. It is to this highest form of contemplation that Aquinas refers when he describes contemplation as an “inchoate beatitude.” The gifts of the Holy Spirit—particularly the gift of wisdom—allow for an immediate, intuitive, and connatural knowledge of God. Here the object of contemplation is God *in himself*. Whereas theological contemplation operates according to a mode of knowing strictly proportionate to our rational nature (even as its object is supernatural), divine contemplation knows its supernatural object in a *mode* that is also supernatural, namely, by an infused gift of wisdom.

The emphasis in this account, which stems from John of St. Thomas, falls on the immediacy of divine contemplation. The affective experience of love given in the presence of God is direct; indeed, it is exclusive of any intermediary. Further, such immediate perception of divinity is “supraintentional” because it is possessed without concepts. This strain of commentary is attentive to Aquinas’s frequent use of the language of sensation, (particularly, the language of tasting, savoring, and relishing) to articulate the connatural or experiential knowledge of God given to the saint in divine contemplation. The immediacy of taste is a fitting metaphor for the direct experience of God that belongs to this highest form of contemplation.⁹⁶ Divine contemplation is an

⁹⁵ As Torrell points out, the principles of theological wisdom are found in revelation, but “its manner of judging derives from science in a human way; one is more or less wise to the degree that one is more or less learned about divine things” (Torrell, “Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic,” 15).

⁹⁶ “For the knowing that comes from union with God, ‘tasting’ is the metaphor used to capture its immediacy and persuasiveness. It is a savoring of a divine reality attained in faith’s penumbra and fully realized in the face-to-face radiance of the blessed” (Thomas Ryan, “Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 66 [2005]: 67).

immediate participation in God's own love and, therefore, "supraconceptual." Maritain writes,

This love grows into to an *objective means* of knowing, *transit in conditionem objecti*, and replaces the concept as intentional instrument obscurely uniting the intellect with the thing known, in such a way that man not only experiences his love, but, through his love, that precisely which is still hidden in faith, the *still more* to be loved, and to be tasted in love, which is the hidden substance of faith.⁹⁷

The striking assertion advanced by this reading of Aquinas is that divine contemplation transcends the ratiocinative limits of finite knowing, and mystically and proleptically already partakes (in some manner) in beatific knowing.

However, this account of divine contemplation has been criticized for seeming to abscond from Aquinas's bedrock principle that *in via* there is no immediate knowledge of God: any and all knowledge of God possessed by the wayfarer necessarily derives from the divine *effects*.⁹⁸ On this score, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877-1964) breaks with his mentor, Gardeil.⁹⁹ The only knowledge of God that is immediate, maintains Garrigou-Lagrange, is reserved to beatitude. The experiential knowledge of God proper to divine contemplation is therefore an effect of God, namely, the filial love that he produces in the just soul. It is by this divine effect that God is

⁹⁷ Jacques Maritain, "On Knowledge through Connaturality," *The Review of Metaphysics* 4 (1951): 475-76.

⁹⁸ Here one might point to *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 12, ad 11 (McInerney, trans.): "The wisdom whereby we contemplate God now does not look immediately to God [*non immediate respicit ipsum Deum*], but to His effects which are the present means of contemplating him." Only the beatific vision constitutes an immediate knowledge of God—all other knowledge of God is necessarily from his effects. As such, the vision of beatitude is qualitatively distinct from divine contemplation. Nevertheless, as we will outline below, the knowledge of God proper to divine contemplation is an "effect" that is internal, infused, and experiential.

⁹⁹ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "L'habitation de la sainte Trinité et l'expérience mystique," *Revue thomiste* 33 (1928): 449-74; idem, *L'amour de Dieu et la croix de Jésus* (Paris: Cerf, 1953), vol. 1, chap. 3. Francis Cunningham follows Garrigou-Lagrange; see, Francis Cunningham, *The Indwelling of the Trinity* (Dubuque, Iowa: Priory Press, 1955), 196-211.

known. While such knowledge is not immediate, it is also not discursive, nor does it derive from a reasoning process. Rather, divine contemplation is an experience of divine love that generates “supradiscursive” knowledge. Garrigou-Lagrange writes, “Mother and child have no need of reasoning to reveal their hearts to each other, but know each other deeply through their mutual love. The same is true of God and those who are born of God.”¹⁰⁰

It is important to take this concern seriously, for Aquinas does hold that all knowledge of God in this life necessarily derives from God’s effects. *Prima facie*, there is a challenge here to the emphasis on the direct and immediate experience of God proper to the account of divine contemplation advanced by John of St. Thomas, Gardeil, and Maritain. How does the latter position sufficiently preserve the qualitatively distinct experience of beatitude, which alone is direct and immediate? We will consider this question in the final section. Here I will only remark that the distinctive feature of Aquinas’s account of divine contemplation is that it knows God as *present*. It seems that Aquinas intends more than simply a supradiscursive awareness of the divine effects of our filiation (à la Garrigou-Lagrange) or a discursive conjecture of what *might be* divine effects, namely, love and moral virtue (à la Galtier). Divine contemplation is predicated on a genuine experience of the presence of the divine persons themselves in the soul. Such contemplation is engendered by union—it is a connatural, “loving knowledge.” Further, Aquinas

¹⁰⁰ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus* (St. Louis: Herder, 1947), 156. Paul Galtier maintains in turn that Garrigou is not consistent. It is not coherent, maintains Galtier, to claim that knowledge of God proper to divine contemplation is “supradiscursive.” If such knowledge is an effect, claims Galtier, we know it only discursively. He insists that divine contemplation remain human, not angelic; it is the experience of a *rational* animal. See Paul Galtier, *L’habitation en nous des trois personnes* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1949). Thomas Fitzgerald follows Galtier; see Thomas Fitzgerald, *De inhabitatione Spiritus sancti doctrina s. Thomae Aquinatis* (Chicago: Mundelein, 1949), 65-72. The division of Aquinas’s commentators on this question into three distinct camps (the schools of Gardeil, Garrigou-Lagrange, and Galtier) follows the classification laid out by John Dedek, “*Quasi experimentalis cognitio: A Historical Approach to the Meaning of St. Thomas*,” *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 357-90.

is clear that this contemplation obtains both *in via* and *in patria*. Commenting on Christ’s response to the disciples’ question as to where he dwells—“come and see” (John 1:39)—Aquinas comments,

In the mystical sense, he says, *come and see*, because the dwelling of God, whether it is of glory, or grace, cannot be known except by experience: for it cannot be explained in words. . . . And so he says, *come and see*. *Come*, by believing and working; *and see*, by experiencing and understanding. It should be noted that we can attain to this knowledge in four ways: first, by doing good works . . . second by the rest or stillness of the mind . . . third, by tasting the divine sweetness . . . fourth, by acts of devotion.¹⁰¹

He will frequently appeal to Dionysius in his treatment of divine contemplation because the Areopagite speaks not of *learning* divine things, but *suffering* divine things. In his commentary *On the Divine Names*, Aquinas writes,

There is another most perfect knowledge of God [*perfectissima Dei cognitio*], namely by remotion [*remotionem*], by which we know God through ignorance, through a kind of union with divinity above the mind’s nature [*supra naturam mentis*], inasmuch as our mind . . . is united to the supra-resplendent rays of divinity.¹⁰²

The knowledge of God obtained in union with him, continues Aquinas, is possessed by way of gift, inasmuch as the mind is “illuminated from the inscrutable depths of divine wisdom itself.”¹⁰³

The experience of divine contemplation proper to the gift of wisdom entails that charity (which is the Holy Spirit’s “own likeness”)¹⁰⁴ becomes both the means of knowledge and the

¹⁰¹ *In Ioan.*, c. 1, lect. 15.

¹⁰² *In De Divin. Nom.*, c. 7, lect. 4 (ed. C. Pera [Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1950], no. 732).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Bernard McGinn explains, “The *donum sapientiae* does not give us new conceptual information about God and divine mysteries, but provides us a new way of knowing them, a knowing by an *intuitus* that is *connaturalis*, *experimentalis*, and *affectivus*” (Bernard McGinn, “Contemplatio sapientialis: Thomas Aquinas’s Contribution to Mystical Theology,” *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 95 (2019): 328.

¹⁰⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 70, a. 3.

object of knowledge. For this reason, maintains Aquinas, contemplation is characterized by *delectatio*: “everyone delights when he obtains what he loves.”¹⁰⁵ Here we see again the almost paradoxical character of a “penultimate finality” that marks Aquinas’s account of contemplation. The indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the soul of the saint and the concomitant gift of wisdom entail the striking conclusion that the saint, while *in via*, already possesses a type of beatitude. In the *Scriptum* Aquinas terms this a “foretaste”: “For the contemplative life is not ordered to something else within the one who has it, since eternal life is nothing except a consummation of the contemplative life available in the present [life] in a certain way as a foretaste [*praelibatur*] through the contemplative life.”¹⁰⁶ Unlike theological contemplation possessed in faith, “divine contemplation” already achieves, in an inchoate mode, the delight that belongs to the “loving knowledge” of beatific vision.

In the final analysis, one must admit that the clear delineation between natural, theological, and divine contemplation—as well as the emphasis on the immediate and experiential character of the last—is a development of Aquinas’s teaching by one significant line of commentators. Although one readily finds resources in the texts of Aquinas to advance this reading, one also finds texts that are difficult to square with this interpretation and that seem, rather, forcefully to eschew the possibility of a direct experience of God in this life.

B) Contemplation and the Gift of Wisdom

The gift of wisdom is, for Aquinas, the source of divine contemplation. Such wisdom generates an affective knowledge of God derived from a loving union with him. In the *Scriptum*, Aquinas elaborates on the distinction between theological contemplation, which proceeds by the light of faith and which knows divine truth in a human mode (mediated in concepts and divinely given analogies), and divine contemplation, which in

¹⁰⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *III Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 4, qcla. 1.

love experiences divinity itself. He writes, "The gift of wisdom proceeds to a type of godlike contemplation [*ad quamdam deiformem contemplationem*] and a certain unfolding of the articles of belief that faith holds in a somewhat enfolded manner according to a human manner of knowing."¹⁰⁷ The distinction between theological contemplation and divine contemplation hinges on how Aquinas differentiates the virtues from the gifts.¹⁰⁸

Both the virtues and the gifts are infused by the Holy Spirit and both are habits perfective of human nature, but they have distinct modes of operation. The virtues order human action naturally, under the guidance of reason, whereas the gifts order human action supernaturally, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁹ The theological virtues logically precede the gifts as their necessary condition, while the gifts supervene as perfective of the virtues. And, while the virtues express human loving and knowing, it is more accurate to say the gifts are a divine expression of loving and knowing.¹¹⁰ The virtues proceed from natural reason (aided by grace) such that it is appropriate to describe virtuous action as "my action." The gifts, by contrast, proceed directly from the Holy Spirit; they are wholly

¹⁰⁷ III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 1, qcla. 1, ad 1.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Jordan Aumann, "Mystical Experience, the Infused Virtues and the Gifts," *Angelicum* 58 (1981): 33-54; Andrew Pinsent, "The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit," in Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 475-88.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *STh* I-II, q. 68, a. 1: "Now it is manifest that human virtues perfect man according as it is natural for him to be moved by his reason in his interior and exterior actions. Consequently man needs yet higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God. These perfections are called gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed to become amenable to the Divine inspiration." See also *STh* I-II, q. 68, a. 4; *STh* II-II, q. 52, aa. 1 and 3.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *STh* III, q. 7, a. 5. In *STh* II-II, q. 52, a. 2, ad 1, Aquinas writes, "In the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the position of the human mind is of one moved rather than of a mover." In the *Scriptum* he explains, "The mode of an action is taken from what is the measure and rule of action. Since the gifts are for a superhuman mode of action, the activity of the gifts must be measured by another standard than that which regulates human virtue. This standard is divinity itself, in which man participates according to his own mode, no longer in the manner of men, but as one who has become God by participation" (III *Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 3).

gratuitous.¹¹¹ It is more appropriate to describe the activity of the gifts as “God’s action” (with which I cooperate). Ultimately, the distinction between the virtues and the gifts is the distinction between a human and a divine act. In the first case, the soul is active in virtue and in the latter the soul is passive to the motion of the Holy Spirit.¹¹²

The highest of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the *donum sapientiae*, allows the saint to know God according to a divine mode that is divine contemplation. Such contemplation is a wholly gratuitous gift of God (*sapientia infusa*) that obtains by the indwelling of love (appropriated principally to the Holy Spirit). Aquinas writes, “Uncreated Wisdom . . . unites itself to us by the gift of charity, and consequently reveals to us the mysteries the knowledge of which is infused wisdom. Hence, the infused wisdom [*sapientia infusa*] which is a gift, is not the cause but the effect of charity.”¹¹³ By contrast, theological contemplation proper to *sacra doctrina* proceeds to divine truth in a human mode. Here the virtue of faith illumines what reason discovers

¹¹¹ Cf. Bernhard Blankenhorn, “Aquinas on the Spirit’s Gift of Understanding and Dionysius Mystical Theology,” *Nova et vetera* (English ed.) 14 (2016): 1118.

¹¹² For a more detailed analysis, see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrangé, “Le mode suprahumain des dons du Saint-Esprit dans la *Somme Théologique* de S. Thomas,” Supplement, *La Vie Spirituelle* 7 (1923): 126-31; and Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 80-97. More recent scholarship has challenged the notion that for Aquinas the operation of the gifts entails the passivity of the soul to the primary movement of Holy Spirit. Rather, because the gifts operate as a *habitus*, they do not exclude the exercise of human faculties cooperating with God. Instead the gifts allow human beings to respond to God with new alacrity and docility. Cf. Cruz Gonzalez-Ayesta, *El don de sabiduría según santo Tomás* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1998), 43-52; Servais Pinckaers, “Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit: Aquinas’s Doctrine of ‘Instinctus,’” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 388-89; Ulrich Horst, *Die Gaben des Heiligen Geistes nach Thomas von Aquin* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 57, 71-79. Bernhard Blankenhorn summarizes this recent emphasis of human agency in Aquinas’s theology of the gifts: “God’s impulse does not bypass but rather elevates the act of deliberation. . . . The Spirit perfects rather than replaces the acts of the theological virtues. . . . The gifts as *habitus* grant deeper receptivity, enabling higher subsequent, active spontaneity. Aquinas does not speak of being passive before the Spirit but of ‘being movable (*mobilis*)” (Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union*, 275-76).

¹¹³ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 6, ad 2.

through theological investigation and study (*sapientia acquisita*).¹¹⁴ An overarching principle in Aquinas’s treatment of the virtues and the gifts is that the gifts are dependent on and perfective of the virtues. Likewise, divine contemplation is dependent on and perfective of theological contemplation; Aquinas describes it as an experiential “unfolding of the articles of belief that faith holds in a somewhat enfolded manner according to a human manner of knowing.”¹¹⁵

Although divine contemplation is an act of the intellect (*essentialiter consistat in intellectu*), it has its origins (*principium*) in the affect, since the love of God (as both a subjective and an objective genitive) propels the soul to contemplate (*ex caritate ad Dei contemplationem incitatur*).¹¹⁶ The animating fire of divine love is not only the efficient cause of contemplation, but informs this unique intellectual act, such that its formal character is a “loving knowledge”:

Since the end corresponds to the beginning, it follows that the term [*terminus*] also and the end [*finis*] of the contemplative life has its being in the affect, since one delights in seeing the object loved, and the very delight in the object seen arouses a yet greater love. Wherefore Gregory says (*Hom. xiv in Ezech.*) that “when we see one whom we love, we are so aflame as to love him more.” And this is the ultimate perfection of the contemplative life [*ultima perfectio contemplativae vitae*], namely that the Divine truth be not only seen but also loved.¹¹⁷

Here we touch on a rather thorny question: does divine contemplation belong more properly to the intellect or to the will? In the question on wisdom (*STh* II-II, q. 45), Aquinas gives a succinct answer: “The wisdom that is a gift has a cause in the will, viz., charity, but it has its essence in the intellect.”¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁴ Aquinas does not use the term *sapientia acquisita*. However, it expresses well the contrast between divine wisdom that is a gift (*sapientia infusa*) and theological wisdom obtained through study. Here I follow McGinn, “Contemplatio sapientialis,” 325.

¹¹⁵ III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 1, qcla. 1, ad 1.

¹¹⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 1. Cf. Biffi, *Teologia, storia e contemplazione*, 75-82.

¹¹⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 1 (translation slightly emended).

¹¹⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2. In the *Scriptum* Aquinas explains that divine contemplation does not consist solely in cognition because the contemplative life is fixed on the love of God and so is animated by the affect. He continues, “To taste pertains to one’s affect, just

distinct contemplative knowledge of God generated by the gift of wisdom certainly is a type of *knowledge*, but a knowledge of divine love and *by means* of divine love.¹¹⁹ It is true that only the intellect illumines, but the will draws the intellect to the object of its affection, focusing its attention on the object of its delight.¹²⁰ Or, as Aquinas puts it in the *Scriptum*: “The contemplative life consists in the act of the cognitive power that has been directed by the affect [*praeacceptatae per affectivam*].”¹²¹

C) *Contemplative Vision and Beatific Vision*

If the saint already experiences an “inchoate beatitude” inasmuch as by the indwelling of the Holy Trinity and the concomitant gift of wisdom he experiences divinity itself as his object of contemplation, how does Aquinas preserve the unique character of the eschatological vision of God? The claim that the contemplation of divine truth already participates in the beatific knowledge of God raises a question about the distinction between divine contemplation and beatific vision. Surely, it is not the case that divine contemplation is simply a transient or occluded experience of beatific vision.

In question 18 of the disputed questions *De Veritate*, Aquinas considers three distinct states according to which the human person can see God: innocence, corruption, and glory. What distinguishes the experience of the vision of God in these three states is the mode in which sight operates. Here we need briefly

as to see pertains to one’s intellect. But Gregory says that the contemplative life, by its intimate flavor [*saporem intimo*], tastes already the rest that is to come. Therefore the contemplative life does not consist only in cognition” (III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qcla. 1).

¹¹⁹ Rousselot’s articulation of a “loving knowledge” (“la connaissance amoureuse”) expresses well Aquinas’s account of the distinct quality of divine contemplation that involves both the will and the intellect (Rousselot, *Intelligence*, 13-49).

¹²⁰ This is only a cursory response. See Christopher J. Malloy, *Aquinas on Beatific Charity and the Problem of Love* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2019); Guy Mansini, “*Duplex amor* and the Structure of Love in Aquinas,” in *Thomistica*, ed. E. Manning (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 127-96; Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and by Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

¹²¹ III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 1, resp. qcla. 1.

to consider Aquinas’s account of vision, which operates according to a threefold medium, namely, the medium *under which* something is seen (*medium sub quo*), the medium *by which* something is seen (*medium quo*), and the medium *from which* knowledge is obtained of that which is seen (*medium a quo*). Thus, to see a yellow rutabaga requires light as the medium *under which* the rutabaga is seen, rendering the rutabaga to be “actually visible.” Second, the sensible species of the rutabaga existing in the eye is the medium *by which* the yellow rutabaga is seen. Aquinas calls the sensible species the “principle of the activity of sight.” Finally, the medium *from which* knowledge of the yellow rutabaga is obtained is the likeness of the rutabaga mirrored in the eye. Thus, it is not the physical rutabaga that enters into the eye, but its likeness from which I come to know the rutabaga.¹²² Such a threefold medium of sight also obtains with respect to our intellectual vision. The light of the agent intellect corresponds to physical light: it is the medium *under which* our understanding sees. Corresponding to the sensible species in physical sight is the intelligible species, the medium *by which* we understand. Finally, the effects that allow us to know the cause serve as the medium *from which* we know a thing. Aquinas maintains, “Consequently, this type of knowledge is called ‘mirrored’ knowledge because of the likeness which it has to sight which takes place through a mirror.”¹²³

This last medium—the medium *from which*—is required in our current state of corruption to see God. Ever since the Fall, our knowledge of God derives from his effects; we are led to know the cause as if through a mirror. However, in the state of innocence this medium *from which* was not necessary; rather, all that was needed to know God was something like the medium *by which*, namely, the intelligible species. Adam did not enjoy the direct vision of the divine essence, but “saw God through a spiritual light which was given to the human mind by God and

¹²² *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 1.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

which was a kind of expressed likeness of the uncreated light.”¹²⁴ Aquinas explains further:

In the state of innocence, man, by reason of the perfection of grace, received a knowledge of God by means of an internal inspiration due to the irradiation of divine wisdom [*inspirationem internam ex irradiatione divinae sapientiae*]. In this way he did not know God from visible creation but from a spiritual likeness imprinted on his mind.¹²⁵

The light of divine wisdom whereby Adam in a state of innocence possessed an infused and internal knowledge of God is, for Aquinas, a helpful analogue for understanding the *intuitus simplex* of divine contemplation, whereby the saint knows God in an infused and internal manner by the gift of wisdom.¹²⁶

However, this elevated way of knowing God—not from his visible effects, but from an internal experience of divine wisdom—is *not* equivalent to the vision of the blessed in glory. Some contend that in the state of innocence Adam enjoyed a “midway vision” (*mediam visionem*) of the divine essence, in a manner less perfect than that of the blessed, but still superior to that of fallen man apart from the healing of grace.¹²⁷ Aquinas excludes this possibility. The vision of the divine essence is not communicated in degrees (say, more transient and occluded). In short, either one sees or one does not: “The sight of the blessed is not distinguished from the sight of those in this life because the former see more perfectly and the latter less perfectly, but because the former see and the latter do not see.”¹²⁸ To see the divine essence is the end of man—an end that is either attained or not. In the state of innocence, Adam was a wayfarer, that is to

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 2.

¹²⁶ Commenting on the text from the Gospel of John, “No one has ever seen God,” Aquinas notes that there are different ways of “seeing” God. The highest degree according to which God is seen in this life is when “God is seen through a certain spiritual light infused by God into spiritual minds during contemplation [*infusum spiritualibus mentibus in contemplatione*]; and this is the way Jacob saw God face to face (Gen 32:30). According to Gregory, this vision came about through his lofty contemplation” (*In Ioan.*, c. 1, lect. 11).

¹²⁷ *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

say, one not yet having attained his end: “Every rational creature finds its beatitude in this, that it sees the essence of God, and not in this, that it sees it with such a degree of clarity, or more or less.”¹²⁹ Given the intransigent exclusivity of beatific vision for Aquinas, how does he maintain that the vision enjoyed by the wayfarer—both Adam in a state of innocence and those who taste of divine contemplation—is an “inchoate beatitude”?

The answer lies again in the distinct medium *under which* God can be seen. Divine, angelic, and human vision of God are distinguished according to the medium required to see God. God’s own vision of himself entails no medium at all; it is an immediate vision of the divine essence. Such a vision is not natural to any creature, but belongs to God alone.¹³⁰ For the creature to be elevated to such a divine vision of God requires the gift of illumination by a divine light. In beatitude, the light of glory will take the place of the medium *under which*, maintains Aquinas, appealing to Psalm 35:10: “In thy light we shall see light.” The second mode of seeing God is proper to angels, who do not see God from his created effects (medium *from which*), but require only an intelligible species to see God. This “intentional likeness” is the medium *by which* God is seen. To see God in this manner is proper only to separate substances—angels without bodies.¹³¹ For embodied rational animals to see God in this angelic manner requires the light of grace to serve as the medium *by which*. Finally, the vision of God proper to postlapsarian human nature is one of “mirrored knowledge”; a knowledge of God by likeness that discerns the cause from the effects (medium *from which*).¹³²

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ This is a foundational premise for Aquinas. One quotation will suffice: “It is impossible for the soul of man in this life to see the essence of God” (*STh* I, q. 12, a. 11).

¹³¹ In referring to the mode of vision proper to the angels, Aquinas is not referring to the knowledge that belongs to the confirmed angels, that is to say, the knowledge of the beatific vision.

¹³² *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 1. Elsewhere, when discussing “mirrored knowledge,” Aquinas uses the phrase “*in quo*” rather than “*a quo*.” Cf. *IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1, ad 15; *STh* I, q. 12, a. 5, ad 2.

The vision of God proper to God, angel, and man corresponds to the three states in which the human person can possess the vision of God: glory, innocence, and corruption. Aquinas writes,

Accordingly, it is clear that after the fall man needs a triple medium to see God: creatures themselves, from which he rises to knowledge of God; a likeness of God, which he gets from creatures; and a light from which he receives the perfection of being directed toward God. This light may be the light of nature, such as the light of the agent intellect or the light of grace, such as that of faith and wisdom. In the state before the fall, however, he needed a double medium: one which is a likeness of God, and one which is a light elevating and directing his mind. The blessed, however, need only one medium, the light of glory which elevates the mind. And God sees Himself without any medium, for He Himself is the light by which He sees Himself.¹³³

In a state of innocence, Adam did not see God from his created effects (medium *from which*) but from “an internal inspiration due to the irradiation of divine wisdom.” In this respect, the vision of God enjoyed by Adam before the Fall is proximate to that of the angels who see God by the medium *by which* of the intelligible species. While neither the holy angels nor man in the state of innocence enjoys the unmediated vision of God, Aquinas describes such vision as “midway between the sight which we now have and the sight of the blessed.”¹³⁴ Angels and prefallen Adam enjoy a knowledge of God imprinted directly on the mind. Prior to the Fall, Adam did not need to rise to a knowledge of God through the likeness mirrored in his effects (medium *from which*), but “had through grace the kind of sight which the angels had naturally.”¹³⁵ The medium *by which* Adam saw God in a state of innocence “is somewhat like the species of the thing seen, because he saw God, through a spiritual light which was given to the human mind by God.”¹³⁶ Unlike the knowledge of God proper to our current state—in a mirror, through an intermediary or a likeness—knowledge of God in a state of innocence is like

¹³³ *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 1.

¹³⁴ *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, ad 12.

¹³⁶ *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 1.

that belonging to the holy angels: experiential, interior, and given by a divine light.

It is precisely this internal, elevated, and luminous “angelic knowledge” enjoyed in the state of innocence by the “irradiation of divine wisdom” that Aquinas maintains is proximate to divine contemplation had by the “light of grace,” given in “faith and wisdom.” We have seen how human *intellectus*, for Aquinas, is characterized by an obediential potency to know God in a way proper to angelic knowing inasmuch as contemplation entails an “a simple act of gazing on the truth” (*intuitus simplex*).¹³⁷ The elevating “spiritual light” by which Adam before the Fall attained to a type of angelic knowledge of God is proximate to the manner in which infused divine contemplation allows the saint to behold God:

In contemplation, God is seen through a medium [*per medium*] which is the light of wisdom [*lumen sapientiae*]. This elevates the mind to the sight of things divine, not, however, to immediate vision of the divine essence itself. And it is in this way that God is seen through grace by the contemplatives after the fall, although He is seen more perfectly in the state of innocence.¹³⁸

While Aquinas preserves the exclusive character of the beatific vision proper to the saints in glory, he holds that in divine contemplation the gift of wisdom becomes the medium *by which*, such that the object of contemplation is divinity itself apart from any medium *from which*. As such, the saint *in via* enjoys an “inchoate beatitude,” sharing something of prelapsarian “angelic knowing.”

CONCLUSION

Aquinas’s treatment of contemplation stresses a fundamental continuity between the contemplation of divine truth that the saint already now enjoys *in via* and the eschatological, “face-to-face” contemplation that belongs to the saint in eternity. They

¹³⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad 1: “contemplatio pertinet ad ipsum simplicem intuitum veritatis.”

¹³⁸ *De Verit.*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 4.

are related as the imperfect (*imperfecta*) to the perfect (*perfecta*).¹³⁹ Indeed, the contemplation of divine truth, maintains Aquinas, “bestows on us a certain inchoate beatitude [*quaedam inchoatio beatitudinis*], which begins now and will be continued in the life to come.”¹⁴⁰ In the *Summa contra gentiles* he writes, “In this life there is nothing so like this ultimate and perfect happiness [*ultimae et perfectae felicitates*] as the life of those who contemplate the truth, as far as possible here below. . . . For contemplation of truth begins [*incipit*] in this life, but will be consummated [*consummator*] in the life to come.”¹⁴¹ For this reason, in the question on contemplation, Aquinas devotes an article to the claim that the *delectatio* belonging to contemplation has no equal (*STh* II-II, q. 180, a 7).

Divine contemplation, according to Aquinas, is an “inchoate beatitude,” participating, already in this life, in the eschatological contemplation of God enjoyed by the blessed in heaven. Aquinas’s claim for the fundamental continuity between the contemplation of the wayfarer and that of the blessed rests on two overarching arguments. First, when considered in relation to the human subject, the contemplation of God fulfills our natural desire for happiness. Aquinas’s theological anthropology is defined by the paradoxical truth that human nature is fulfilled by that which exceeds its rational nature, namely, the contemplation of divine truth. In this respect, Aquinas contrasts two modes by which intellectual creatures apprehend: *ratio* and *intellectus*. *Ratio* is a discursive and sense-based knowing process that belongs to animals in time and space, who accumulate a body of knowledge through sensible and accidental phenomena. Human beings are on this account defined as “rational animals.” *Intellectus*, by contrast, apprehends truth by penetrating to the hidden essence of a reality in a nondiscursive, immediate, and simple mode. *Intellectus* belongs to separate substances that know reality whole and simple, “at a glance” as it were. And, although *intellectus* transcends what is strictly human and

¹³⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 7, ad 3.

¹⁴⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4.

¹⁴¹ *ScG* III, c. 63.

functions only as an aspect of what for us is a process, its place in our knowing suggests a capacity in human nature for contemplation. Aquinas defines contemplation as *intuitus simplex*, the “simple act of gazing on the truth” that belongs to *intellectus*. Indeed, it is this capacity for contemplation proper to *intellectus* that gives definition to the *imago dei*. The natural desire of man for happiness in the contemplation of truth is not a vague wish, the attainment of which is bereft of any real possibility. Rather, *intellectus* manifests in the human person an obediential potency—an intrinsic ordering, disposition, or capacity, the realization of which wholly depends on divine initiative—for the contemplation of God. The wayfarer’s contemplation of God is, thus, an “inchoate beatitude” because it fulfills and transcends what is noblest in the human person.

The second reason for Aquinas’s contention that contemplation is an “inchoate beatitude” is that it apprehends divinity itself. Unlike natural contemplation of metaphysics or theological contemplation of *sacra doctrina*, divine contemplation apprehends a divine object in a mode that is also divine, namely, by the infused gift of wisdom. This interior and connatural manner of apprehension proper to the gift of wisdom unfolds divine mysteries that faith holds in an enfolded manner. Aquinas articulates the saint’s “loving knowledge” (or taste) of divine realities with a surprising degree of finality: in divine contemplation the wayfarer “obtains what he loves,” enjoying a supreme *delectatio*. Admittedly, the contemplation of the wayfarer is not the beatific vision; however, like Adam in a state of innocence, the saint sees divine realities not through the medium *from which* of God’s created effects, but by the medium of an infused gift of wisdom that elevates the mind to apprehend divinity itself. Divine contemplation is an “inchoate beatitude” in that by the gift of the *lumen sapientiae* it attains to an interior and direct knowledge of God proximate to that of prelapsarian man and the holy angels.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas. Edited by MATTHEW LEVERING and MARCUS PLESTED. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xxii + 730. \$165.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-19-879802-6.

Reading a text is a timely act, and the editors justify this compendious review of the reception of Aquinas by observing, courtesy of H. Gadamer and A. MacIntyre, that “one cannot properly read texts abstracted from their prior reception” (xv). Reading inserts the reader willy-nilly into a tradition, but it does this intelligently and with propriety only if we are conscious of the tradition. Just so, the volume begins with an essay by Jean-Pierre Torrell on the timeliness of Aquinas’s *own* reading: what did he read, and how did he handle his authorities—scriptural, patristic, and philosophical? For Aquinas, all words are from the Word and Spirit, and all theological words are from Christ. Still, he recognizes that as human words they really are timely words, and Torrell discerns on Aquinas’s part a practical recognition of the historicity of thought. This introductory chapter complements Torrell’s previous essay, “St. Thomas et l’histoire” (*Revue thomiste* 105 [2005]). Together, these essays assure the reader that the chapters in the *Handbook* before us are reading Aquinas with Aquinas, in harmony with his own hermeneutical practices, and not against him.

The scope of the *Handbook* is catholic, and includes Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant receptions of Aquinas. It is divided into eight sections that treat of receptions “Medieval,” “Reformation and Counter-Reformation,” “Baroque,” “Modern,” “Early Twentieth Century,” “Late Twentieth Century,” “Contemporary Philosophical,” and “Contemporary Theological.” The last four, from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, account for almost one-half of the *Handbook*, which will likely match reader expectations and desires. However, I think it will be a very rare person indeed who, reading the book from stem to stern, will not discover new and sometimes wonderful things in the first half, as well as meeting many old friends and comfortable enemies in the second.

In the first four sections, each chapter addresses the reception of Aquinas as a whole, but of course constrained by what the receivers of the period in question actually made of him—which was sometimes not very much. Medieval receptions, Eastern and Western, reported by Corey Barnes, Ioannis Polemis, Richard Cross, Isabel Iribarren, Pantelis Golutis, and Efre Jindráček, are sometimes rather refusals to receive, as with Scotus and William of Ockham

(Cross). The complicated relation of Orthodox theologians to Aquinas, from enthusiastic welcome to determined rejection (and betimes surreptitious use), is reported by Polemis and Golitsis and, to be sure, with reference to the Palamite controversy. In this regard, the *Handbook* easily lends itself to very focused interests. One can read of Orthodox and Russian receptions from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries, of Lutheran and Calvinist relations to Aquinas from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, and of Anglican notice of Aquinas from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

One should note a change in the status of Aquinas, from that of being simply one more interlocutor among many to that of a perceived authority: first in the Dominicans (Iribarren), reasserted in the fifteenth century (by Capreolus, Torquemada, and Cajetan [Jindráček]), and finally becoming more general in the sixteenth century. Benchmarks for this shift are reported in the second section by David Luy (Dominicans in controversy with Lutherans) and Romanus Cessario (Trent). This section on Reform and Counter-Reform also treats of Calvinist and Eastern receptions by David Sytsma and Klaus-Peter Todt, respectively, and gives us a chapter on Cardinal Cajetan by Cajetan Cuddy. Very rewarding in this section is the wonderful contribution by David Lantigua on the emergence of a more fulsome moral theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He gives us a necessarily short but still sweeping and inspiring account of the great synthetic view of moral theology constructed at Salamanca (F. Vitoria, M. Cano, D. Soto, B. Medina), whose basis is man made in the image of God, necessarily related in justice to other persons, making satisfaction for injustice as sealed by the sacrament of penance and powered by the satisfaction of Christ. Spanish discussion extends to the moral norms governing a modern economy beholden to furthering the common good, to money and to the limitation by the common human dominion over created goods on private property and by the rights of the poor, to the rights also of indigenous unbelievers, and finally to the *ius gentium*. The essay is a reminder of how much the modern world—and not just the theological world—owes to the Spanish Thomist renaissance.

Baroque receptions treat seventeenth-century Reformed and Anglican theology (Carl Trueman), Lutheranism (Benjamin Mayes), and Catholic receptions within and apart from the *De auxiliis* controversy. Matthew Gaetano speaks to the first, and Charles Robertson to the second, where we find important introductions to probabilism, John of St. Thomas on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the growing importance of the assertion of a natural desire to see God. Modern receptions include Greek and Russian (Vasa Kontouma and Kirill Karpov), Protestant (Steven Duby), and Catholic. Reginald Lynch's discussion of the relation of Catholic Thomism to rationalism and Thomas Marschler's account of Thomism before and after *Aeterni Patris* are important introductions to the origins of the drama of Catholic theology in the twentieth century. On Lynch's showing, resistance to the rationalism of the eighteenth century was already well underway long before the First Vatican Council in

such figures as Charles Billuart. But, alas, there came the damage of the French Revolution and its aftermath to Catholic institutions, including the Dominicans!

Twentieth-century receptions of Aquinas are more finely differentiated in the *Handbook* than the previous distribution of them into Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern spheres. Neoscholastic reception of Aquinas is both philosophic (Bernard Schumacher) and theological (Roger Nutt). These chapters will be full of good memories for readers of a certain age. Especially moving is Schumacher's account of J. Maritain's conversion: the nature of revelation entails epistemological realism and the abandonment of H. Bergson's seductive intuition of a nonconceptually known reality. Schumacher gives special attention to E. Gilson and J. Pieper in addition to Maritain. Nutt reminds us of the crucial engagement of Thomists with the fundamental theological issues raised by Modernism (E. Hugon, A. Gardeil, and F. Marín-Sola), but does not neglect the important contributions of Gardeil, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, and J. Arintero to ascetical mystical theology, which bore some fruit at the Second Vatican Council. Separate chapters in this section are devoted to the reception of the transcendent Thomists (Stephen Fields), of the neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper (James Eglinton), and of the Orthodox (Marcus Plested). Karl Barth and the *nouvelle théologie* each get special treatment (Adam Cooper and Kenneth Oakes). Cooper puts his finger on the key issue of the reception of Aquinas in the mid-twentieth century: is *sacra doctrina* in its Thomist scientific form a permanent theological standard, or an historical artifact no longer suited to contemporary needs? Later receptions of Aquinas in the twentieth century include the grammatical and postliberal reception, discussed by Anna Bonta Morland, and analytic philosophical reception, treated by John Haldane. As to moral philosophy, Christopher Kaczor handles the nonreception of Richard McCormick and the real and fruitful receptions of John Finnis and Alasdair MacIntyre. We might in this section have had an essay on the reception of Aquinas at the Second Vatican Council, or both Vatican Councils, matching Romanus Cessario's essay on Aquinas at Trent, and perhaps an essay touching on John Paul II. Maybe these are overly ambitious desires for the *Handbook*, which, after all, should remain a handbook. But I also miss a treatment of the reception of Aquinas by twentieth-century French theological phenomenologists, although Bernhard Blankenhorn comes within range of them in his chapter in the last section.

The organization of the volume is modified once again in the last two sections on contemporary receptions, philosophical and theological. Here, the authors are no longer constrained by how Aquinas has been read in the past, but give themselves over to how Aquinas *should* be received now, after a century and a half of Thomist *ressourcement* and the various experiments—transcendental, analytic, and otherwise—of the twentieth century. They devote themselves more expressly to the directive of Levering and Plested that the authors “should highlight elements that should be present in *any* reception of Aquinas” (xix). In this light, the last 175 pages of the *Handbook* constitute a sort of contemporary introduction to Aquinas, divided according to standard

philosophical and theological topics. So, for the philosophy of nature we have Michael Dodds, for ethics Angela Knobel, for metaphysics Gyula Klima, for philosophical anthropology Therese Scarpelli Cory, for natural theology David VanDrunen, and for law and politics Michael Pakaluk. These essays are mostly but not always accompanied by valuable bibliographies. Dodds helpfully sorts out the very different ways leading Thomists (Maritain, B. Ashley, C. De Konnack) think of the relation of the philosophy of nature to metaphysics. Cory's essay on man as the horizon between the spiritual and corporeal worlds and on the uniformity of the human being is quite brilliant and could well serve as a point of departure and point of arrival for a detailed treatment of Aquinas's philosophical anthropology. Klima's essay on the relation of Aquinas to G. Frege and the contemporary metaphysical world is itself a small, historically informed and systematically argued and organized, metaphysical essay. For his part, Michael Pakaluk gives us an equally systematically argued and splendid essay on law and politics that measures Aquinas against John Rawls—or John Rawls against Aquinas.

Turning to theology, we have six essays: Gilles Emery on the Trinity; Rudi te Velde on creation and the Fall; Daria Spezzano on nature, grace, and the moral life; Simon Francis Gaine on Christology; Bernhard Blankenhorn on sacramental theology; and Paul O'Callaghan on eschatology. What must be received in receiving Aquinas's Trinitarian theology? Emery notes the following: its centrality for and omnipresence throughout his whole theology; the fact that the divine missions *include* the processions of the persons; the persons as subsisting relations; the "psychological" analogy. Te Velde takes up the problem first formulated in the twentieth century by Marie-Dominique Chenu as to how the historically contingent events of the history of human and divine freedom are to be encompassed within what Aquinas conceives as a science, the science of theology. His essay recapitulates some of his own recent analysis of the structure of the *Summa*, and itself receives the thought of Aquinas in a new and thought-provoking way that includes a statement of the theological meaning of creation in time. Spezzano provides a fine outline encompassing the great breadth of the theological topics of which any treatment of Aquinas's moral theology must be aware and reminds us of its essential metaphysical underpinnings. Gaine proposes an important challenge for the reception of Aquinas's Christology today. It must, he thinks, seriously engage contemporary historical-critical studies of Scripture and the Fathers before its systematic and metaphysical exposition of the constitution of Christ, and subsequently return to Scripture with this systematic understanding, even as Aquinas did in his commentary on John. Gaine is saying, I think, that Thomist Christology must master that integration of a nonpositivist philosophy and dogmatic theology into modern exegetical practice that J. Ratzinger called for in 1988. He thinks, as well, that a serious listening to Aquinas on Christ will take account of precisely how the man Christ differs from us even at the same time as he is the model of our perfected humanity. Blankenhorn offers us a very sober account of the hurdles Aquinas's sacramental theology must overcome

today in a field given over seemingly exclusively to liturgical studies. And yet, these hurdles must be successfully jumped, else the final link of Aquinas's understanding of how the rational creature returns to God in Christ through the Spirit cannot be forged. Finally, O'Callaghan delivers a list of Aquinas's eschatologically important discussions, reminds us of the pervasiveness of the last things throughout his thought, and alerts us to the very considerable bibliography touching the issues surrounding final punishments and final glories in Aquinas. Taken together, all the studies in this last section indicate that there is no reception of Aquinas's theology without a reception of his metaphysics.

The *Handbook* relies on much scholarly work that its authors can only refer to but is in itself in its many parts a prodigious gathering of the fruit of enormous scholarly experience, dedication, and judgment. It is furthermore a thoughtful feat of scholarly and historical organization on the part of its editors. What, overall, does it mean? There is a theoretical and a practical lesson to be drawn.

When Cardinal Newman adverted to the fact of the development of dogma, he spoke of the Christian "idea" and its history as a sort of public thing. An observer could in principle determine what contemporary and developed form of the idea is its authentic version. This Newman located in the Catholic Church, a form of the Christian idea that is not only historically but, he maintained, logically continuous with the Gospel. Just because the idea was introduced into so many minds in so many historical circumstances and over so many centuries, however, the question would be a real question. The idea of Christianity itself—revelation—is embraced only by faith, and yet it is set free among the contingencies of history, cultures, and civilizations. In the end, therefore, the judgment would not be purely a determination of reason, a pure exercise of historical reasoning. It would be a judgment of history and of theology informed by faith; there would, in other words, be a sort of circumincession of faith, theology, and history in coming to a reasonable judgment as to what is to be identified as the true Church. But this very way of framing things all depends on the supposition that the Christian idea, if it really be God's revelation, will maintain itself in history, and even that the conflicting interpretations and realizations of it all bear witness to the fact that God's word really was so introduced into the world.

Something similar is true with regard to what the various receptions of Aquinas since the thirteenth century tell us of his own achievement. Well, *mutatis mutandis*. But this much at least is safe to say: like the judgment we make with regard to the true form of Christianity, the judgments we make about the various receptions of Aquinas will have us call similarly and comprehensively on whatever resources of philosophy, history, faith, and the theology faith produces we have. And there is implied a similar presupposition. For many—many Catholics, but by no means only Catholics—will think the following proposition true: the positive reception in one form or another of Aquinas by so many Christians of so various creedal commitments, though certainly not universal, itself is evidence of the authenticity of Aquinas's *own* reception of the Gospel, of Scripture, and of the Fathers. In this light, *The*

Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas can just in itself be taken to speak a theological word.

The practical lesson of the *Handbook* is easier to state. Depending on one's intellectual commitments, it can serve as an occasion for an examination of conscience.

GUY MANSINI, O.S.B.

Ave Maria University
Ave Maria, Florida

Cajetan on Sacred Doctrine. By Hieromonk GREGORY HRYNKIW. Foreword by ANDREW HOFER, O.P. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020. Pp. xxii + 330. \$75.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-8132-3347-5.

In this book, Gregory Hrynkiv provides a thorough account of the theology of Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534) and its relationship to faith. Hrynkiv pays special attention to Cajetan's understanding of the subject of theology, theological method, and biblical exegesis. The topic itself is difficult, and it seems to me that its difficulty is increased by three extrinsic factors. First, for much of the twentieth century many scholars largely dismissed Cajetan both as a thinker and as an expositor of St. Thomas Aquinas. Although more recent scholars such as Joshua Hochschild, Lawrence Feingold, and Steven Long have shown that such scholars frequently misunderstood Cajetan and the issues that he addressed, Cajetan's work is largely unknown. Second, Cajetan's readers need to be familiar with late medieval and Renaissance Scholasticism. Frequently Cajetan is not expounding Thomas's texts in their context but rather defending Thomas in light of difficulties raised by such figures as John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265/6-1308), Durandus of St.-Pourçain (ca. 1275-ca. 1332/34), and Petrus Aureol (ca. 1280-1322). Third, Cajetan is only one figure in a long Thomistic tradition. He often relies on the writings of earlier Thomists such as John Capreolus (ca. 1380-1444), and many of his own teachings were rejected or modified by later Thomists of equal or perhaps even greater stature, such as Domingo Bañez (1528-1604) and John of St. Thomas (1589-1644). Hrynkiv deftly guides the reader through these difficulties. He shows how Cajetan's account of sacred doctrine differs from that attributed to him by many twentieth-century scholars and provides an alternative account to that of theologians such as Scotus. Moreover, he shows how Cajetan responds to and builds on theologians such as Hervaeus Natalis (ca. 1260-1323) and Capreolus, and comes into conflict with some of his Thomistic contemporaries and immediate successors, such as Sylvester Mazzolini Prierias (ca. 1456/7-1527).

The book has two parts. The first is entitled “Sacred Doctrine Is the Framework.” This part consists of three chapters about what sacred doctrine is in relation to faith, the Church, and the Apostles’ Creed. The second part is entitled “Sacred Doctrine as the Habit of Theology.” It consists of three chapters that in some way correspond to the various articles of question 1 of the *Summa theologiae*, which is on sacred doctrine. A conclusion indicates Cajetan’s importance in the history of theology and as a resource for contemporary theology. Hrynkiw draws not only on Cajetan’s famous commentary on the *Summa theologiae*, but also on many of Cajetan’s theological *opuscula* and his later works on biblical exegesis.

One historical controversy has been over the very meaning of “Sacred Doctrine” and its relationship to theology. For instance, article 1 of the *Prima pars*’s question on sacred doctrine considers the necessity of revelation, which seems to be about faith, whereas the remaining articles are on sacred doctrine as a science, which is how Thomistic theologians understood theology. The argumentative nature of theology is discussed only in article 8. In chapter 1, Hrynkiw shows that some early Thomists, such as Capreolus and Natalis, held that the principles of faith are the principles of the science of theology, which draws conclusions from them. On this view, faith and theology would be distinct. In contrast to this earlier interpretation, a prominent contemporary Thomist, Sylvester Prierias, argued that faith and theology were both the same habit. Cajetan developed and defended the earlier position in his description of theology as a scientific habit that is distinct from the habit of faith even though it depends on it. Hrynkiw shows that the same issues were debated during the Thomistic revival of the twentieth century. He indicates how Marie-Dominique Chenu, who changed his mind over precisely this issue, would have benefited from a more careful reading of Cajetan. In Appendix 2, Hrynkiw provides the text of Cajetan’s commentary on the first three articles of question 1, which allows the reader to compare the book’s argument with Cajetan’s own texts.

Chapter 2 concerns the role of the Church in sacred doctrine. Hrynkiw shows how Cajetan was a staunch supporter of papal authority, but it is difficult to find from his notes where Cajetan states the position attributed to him that he “defines papal infallibility as a prophetic judgment or charism” that involves “suffering a state of rapture” (61). Chapter 3 argues that according to Cajetan the Apostles’ Creed provides the principles for theology and structures the *Summa theologiae*. On this reading, the articles of the Apostles’ Creed, since they are the principles of faith, are consequently the principles of sacred doctrine. The order of these articles in the Apostles’ Creed explains the structure of the *Summa theologiae*. In Appendix 3, Hrynkiw provides a lengthy table that supports this ordering. He mentions that Bañez was influenced by Cajetan (75). Bañez does understand the structure of the *Summa theologiae* in the way described, but it is difficult to find in the notes where Cajetan himself interprets the structure in this way. In general, chapters 2 and 3 seems less well grounded in Cajetan’s texts than the other chapters are.

It seems to me that part 2, which contains chapters 4 through 6, is the heart of the work, as it provides a thorough account of Cajetan's understanding of theology as a scientific habit. Chapter 6 discusses Cajetan's reading of the first syllogism in the *Summa theologiae*, which argues for the necessity of revelation without making the claim, later made by Scotus, that human nature on its own, without elevating grace, is ordered to a supernatural end. Although twentieth-century scholars heaped abuse on Cajetan's account of the supernatural, many recent scholars are more sympathetic, and Lawrence Feingold has shown, at the least, that the issues are more complex than once had been thought. In order to provide historical context for Cajetan's own approach, it might have been helpful if Hrynkiw had shown how some of Cajetan's claims about natural desire were modified or even rejected by later Thomists, such as Bañez and John of St. Thomas.

Chapter 5 is perhaps the most important because it indicates the precise way in which Cajetan shows that theology is a science, in contrast to Scotists who denied its scientific character, and some Thomists, such as John of St. Thomas, who perhaps misunderstood how it is subalternated to the higher knowledge of God and the blessed. Cajetan shows against Scotus and even some Thomists that theology is one scientific habit that has God as its object and subject, but a way of knowing God that is deficient, since its principles are borrowed from the higher science of God. This deficiency results from the way that faith is obscure. Cajetan shows how Scotus diminishes the way in which faith both provides the science of theology with certain principles and provides the light by which conclusions can be reached from these principles. Hrynkiw makes the perhaps not entirely convincing claim that Scotus's neglect of the light of faith led to later rationalism and fideism. Scotus's view that theology *in se* has God as the infinite God as its subject caused Cajetan to develop the Thomistic claim that theology has as its subject God as the deity, which virtually contains in itself all theological conclusions.

Cajetan also shows that the division of theology into practical, speculative, and affective parts reflects a misunderstanding of how our imperfect theological habit takes its principles from God's own knowledge, which cannot be divided in this way. Hrynkiw shows that Cajetan's account of the unity of theology was in part obscured by inadequate twentieth-century discussions over Thomas's understanding of the *revelabilia*, or what can be revealed, and Gilson's false attribution to Cajetan of the position that truths that can be demonstrated by reason (*demonstabilia*) cannot be revealed. Cajetan holds that revelation includes both truths that can be known only through revelation and some truths that can be demonstrated by reason.

Chapter 6 is largely on Cajetan's theological method. Hrynkiw discusses Cajetan's commentary on the last few articles of question 1, but focuses more on his biblical exegesis, which occupied his later years. Hrynkiw shows how Cajetan adopted the humanistic emphasis on biblical languages. Moreover, he makes a surprising but initially plausible case that Cajetan's exegesis is ecumenical. Even though Cajetan himself did not learn Hebrew or become

proficient in Greek, he engaged the services of those who did. Hrynkiw succeeds in showing how Cajetan's theology, like that of Thomas, is rooted in the Bible, and in particular in the literal meaning of the texts. He also indicates the difficulty in understanding what Cajetan means by the "literal sense." He does not address how Cajetan's biblical interpretation differs from that of Thomas in the former's engagement with the original languages and, with the exception of Jerome's work, in its neglect of patristic interpretations. These two features, along with Cajetan's criticisms of the Vulgate text, made Cajetan's commentaries suspect to later Catholics and particularly Thomists. It would be interesting to see if Cajetan's rather unusual, later biblical commentaries in some way indicate a departure from Thomas's theological method or even from Cajetan's own earlier practice of Thomistic theology.

The conclusion contains wide-ranging claims about the decline of theology since Thomas and Cajetan's importance for ecumenical theology. Hrynkiw thinks that the decadent Scholasticism that Cajetan opposed led to the Protestant Reformation. Moreover, he argues that Cajetan's theology particularly resembles that of St. Gregory of Nazianzus. It seems to me that we can recognize Cajetan's importance as a major figure in the history of Thomism and consequently theology without having to make such strong claims. Yet Hrynkiw's book happily corrects the once-standard view that Cajetan is a failed expositor of Thomas and the once-standard approach of reading Cajetan as if he were concerned with merely historical exegesis. If Thomas and Cajetan are correct that theology is a science, and theology like other sciences often improves over time, we should be eager to study a variety of late medieval and early modern theologians. This book provides an engaging overview of Cajetan's account of theology, and, consequently, of the way in which theology was understood by one of the most prominent figures in Thomistic theology.

THOMAS M. OSBORNE, JR.

University of St. Thomas
Houston, Texas

Before "Amoris Laetitia": The Sources of the Controversy. By JAROSŁAW KUPCZAK. Translated by GRZEGORZ IGNATIK. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021. Pp. xviii + 234. \$75.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-8132-3400-7.

This is an extraordinarily useful book for anyone attempting to understand the state of the Church today. For although it limits itself to the early years of the pontificate of Pope Francis and to discussions both within and with reference to two assemblies of the Synod of Bishops, it lays bare in a very precise

and well-documented manner the philosophical and theological ideas that lie beneath the surface of that pontificate as it continues. The book is divided into four chapters; “Chapter 5,” entitled “Awaiting the Postsynodal Exhortation,” is really just a summary of the previous four chapters.

Chapter 1 is largely devoted to an address delivered by Cardinal Kasper in February 2014 at the papal consistory called in order to prepare for the two upcoming synodal assemblies on the family; it was published that same year as a book, *The Gospel of the Family*, and had considerable influence on both assemblies. Kupczak considers Kasper’s book under two subheadings: “The Invalidity of a Contracted Marriage” and “Offering Communion to Divorced Persons Who Live in Second Unions”—the latter of which in certain circumstances Kasper clearly favors.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Kupczak’s analysis is his indication of the fact that many of the things that Kasper says correspond closely to things said in 1972 by then-professor of theology Joseph Ratzinger in an article cited by Kasper and entitled “Zur Frage nach der Unauflöslichkeit der Ehe: Bemerkungen zum dogmengeschichtlichen Befund und zu seiner gegenwärtigen Bedeutung” (“On the Question Regarding the Indissolubility of Marriage: Remarks on Its Dogmatic History and Present-Day Meaning”). Professor Ratzinger maintains there two theses: first, that the Fathers of the Church are “in agreement as to the complete impossibility of separating the Christian marriage that could lead to contracting a second marital union during the life of the spouse” and, second, that “residing, so to speak, below or within the highest determined model of the Church, a more flexible practice undoubtedly existed in pastoral ministry, a practice that indeed was seen as not fully in conformity with the actual faith of the Church, though one that was not absolutely excluded.” Ratzinger reports that Origen articulated the second thesis and argued that, although it ran contrary to what is said in Sacred Scripture, it was “not altogether without reason” and might be permitted in order to “avoid worse things.” According to both Ratzinger and Kasper, one finds a similar attitude in Basil of Caesarea and other authoritative sources (29-31). Given this “dogmatic history,” Ratzinger in the 1972 article speaks in favor, in certain circumstances, of granting to Catholics who are divorced and remarried permission to receive communion (35).

Kupczak points out, however, that in the same year that Kasper delivered his address, Ratzinger—by then pope emeritus—was preparing for inclusion in his collected writings the same article, but with a revised conclusion in which he speaks in favor of the divorced and remarried becoming more active in the Church but also comes out against granting permission to receive communion (45-46). This revised conclusion is consistent with a number of documents with which Cardinal Ratzinger was intimately involved, including a letter published in 1994 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that criticized a letter published by Kasper and two other bishops that spoke in favor of communion for the divorced and remarried. Kupczak writes, “we can safely say that in this 1994 letter, the prefect of the Congregation criticizes his own views laid out

twenty-two years earlier” (41). Kupczak also notes that in 2014, when in the text of his address to the papal consistory he cites the 1972 article, Kasper was well aware of the evolution of Ratzinger’s views. “Cardinal Kasper’s lack of engagement with his critics is a recurring charge against him” (47).

In chapter 2, on the October 2014 assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Kupczak, invoking the trope “the Rhine flows into the Tiber,” speaks of Cardinal Kasper’s influence on the proceedings. Particular attention is paid to the *Relatio post disceptationem* (the published report on the earlier discussions in the assembly), the second part of which, says Kupczak, “made clear to the audience in the synod hall that regardless of what they may have thought, the main topics of the synod’s discussion were to be the themes proposed by Walter Kasper” (75-76). This *Relatio* was at the time roundly criticized. Cardinal George Pell, then prefect of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy, spoke of it as “tendentious, skewed; it didn’t represent accurately the feelings of the synod fathers. . . . A major absence was a treatment of the Church tradition.” Cardinal Raymond Burke said of the document that it “propagates doctrinal error and a false pastoral approach.” Cardinal Wilfrid Napier of South Africa told reporters: “Just like you, I was surprised that it was published. . . . You people got the document before we got it, so we couldn’t have possibly agreed on it” (76-78).

Kupczak also discusses the final document of the synod, called the *Relatio synodi*, and in particular three “articles”—§52, §53, and §55—that failed to receive positive votes from two-thirds of the participants as required by the *Ordo synodi episcoporum*. The first of these articles states that “access to the sacraments might take place if preceded by a penitential practice, determined by the diocesan bishop,” although it also states that “the subject needs to be thoroughly examined.” The second states that “some synod fathers maintained that divorced and remarried persons or those living together can have fruitful recourse to a spiritual communion; others raised the question as to why, then, they cannot have access to sacramental communion” (87-88). The third (§55) has to do with homosexuality. It was criticized by, for example, Cardinal Vincent Nichols: “I didn’t think it went far enough, there were three key words as far as I was concerned . . . ‘respect,’ ‘welcome’ and ‘value.’ I was looking for those words and they weren’t there and so I didn’t think that was a good paragraph” (89). Kupczak reports, “Pope Francis decided that the published *Relatio synodi* would contain the totality of the text that synod fathers voted on, including the three articles that did not receive the required two-thirds of votes” (ibid.).

Kupczak concludes the chapter with summaries of reactions to the assembly, including a book published in 2015 by eleven cardinals, archbishops, and bishops from Africa: *Christ’s New Homeland—Africa*. In the book, Cardinal Robert Sarah, who was a participant in the assembly, describes §27 of the *Relatio synodi*, which speaks ambiguously of the morality of nonmarital cohabitation, as “unacceptable and scandalous.” Cardinal Sarah also criticizes the document’s disregard for John Paul II’s teaching not only on marriage and

the family but also on mercy (95). Cardinal Timothy Dolan is quoted as saying of the speeches by the African bishops during the assembly: “when [they] speak, though, you can see Irenaeus, you can hear Polycarp, you can hear Ignatius of Antioch” (96).

Kupczak originally thought of entitling chapter 3 “The Scandal in the Gregorianum,” for it treats of a closed conference, organized by the presidents of the episcopates of France, Germany, and Switzerland, that took place in May 2015 at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He decided against that title since, as he says, “the Jesuit university had no impact on the content of the conference and merely rented the venue to its organizers” (142). His low regard for the conference is reflected in the scare quotes and the question mark in the title he ultimately adopted: “A New ‘Theology’ of Marriage?”

The conference consisted of six addresses, for each of which Kupczak offers a summary and critique. Among these six is one by the German biblical scholar Thomas Söding, who is keen on what Kupczak refers to as “interpretation-hermeneutics.” “In all questions of ethics,” maintains Söding, “the historical reference of biblical texts is essential and precarious. . . . If ethics remains in principle, it *eo ipso* relies on actualizing concretizations; if it is concrete, it must be identified in its historical contingency and, proceeding from the Gospel itself, be open to answering today’s questions” (108). Another address was by the German Eberhard Schockenhoff, who argues that, “if two people make an irrevocable decision for a shared life project, in which they bind to each other forever, that does not mean that they can never revise their decision. Every life decision has not only a pre-history, which serves one’s self-examination and the clarification of one’s longings and expectations, but also a post-history, on which ultimately depends the success of the decision” (117). Kupczak describes this remark as “shocking.” Also addressing the conference was the French Jesuit Alain Thomasset. Kupczak writes, “From the very beginning, Thomasset ‘shows his cards’ by stating that the teaching on intrinsically evil acts is one of the main reasons the Church cannot accompany families in their growing-up to faith; as a rule, contraception, extramarital sexual intercourse, and sexual acts of homosexual persons are too quickly assessed as sinful” (125).

Chapter 4 is devoted to the “ordinary” assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, for which the “extraordinary” assembly of October 2014 was a preparation. Kupczak mentions a couple of times the Hungarian Cardinal Péter Erdö, who was appointed by Pope Francis relator general of the 2014 extraordinary assembly, a position he continued to fill in the 2015 assembly. During the earlier assembly, according to Kupczak, the cardinal gave the impression of siding with those who favored Kasper’s approach to the matters discussed. But in a presentation he gave in May 2015, Erdö, in the words of Kupczak, “opposed the tendency to make the Church like the world. . . . This statement was a signal that since the conclusion of the last synod, the views of the Primate of Hungary had undergone a considerable evolution” (106). Kupczak also mentions that, during the debate within the assembly itself, Erdö spoke favorably of John Paul II’s *Familiaris consortio* and proposed a way of

dealing pastorally with the divorced and remarried consistent with that document (176).

Kupczak says that entering into the debate during the assembly was a letter signed by thirteen cardinals who were participants, including Cardinal Pell, who brought the letter to Pope Francis, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Cardinal Dolan, Cardinal Gerhard Müller (then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith), Cardinal Napier, and Cardinal Sarah. Some of this letter had to do with procedure, such as the manner of voting on the assembly's final document. "The signatories of the letter also noted critically," says Kupczak, "that in contradiction to other synods, the members of the synodal editorial committee, on whom the content of [the] final document of the synod depended, were nominated and not elected by the assembly, which caused concern among many synod participants" (179). Pope Francis responded to the letter the next morning. Kupczak quotes Italian journalist Sandro Magister's summary of Pope Francis's response: "Francis has rejected the requests of the letter *en bloc*, apart from the marginal recommendation not to reduce the discussion only to 'Communion for the divorced'" (180).

Ultimately, the final document, the *Relatio finalis*, put together by "the ten-person commission, established before the synod by Pope Francis" (193), was approved by the required two-thirds majority. The three articles in the *Relatio finalis* receiving the most negative votes were §§84-86, having to do with "discernment and integration." Kupczak suggests that these were approved only because the commission formulated "a certain elusion, aimed at preserving what these articles meant while smoothing over their content so that they could be easier accepted by synod fathers" (199).

KEVIN L. FLANNERY, S.J.

Pontifical Gregorian University
Rome, Italy

The Structures of Virtue and Vice. By DANIEL J. DALY. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2021. Pp. 258. \$134.95 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-6471-2038-2.

Daniel Daly aims to make a significant contribution to Catholic theological ethics by teaching his readers to recognize and deal with structures of virtue and vice. He hopes to reach his fellow theologians, Church authorities, and as many Catholic lay people as possible.

In the introduction to his book, Daly says that he had one ultimate, and two proximate, goals in writing. The proximate goals are achieving "an understanding of the relation of social structure and moral agency and an

updated Catholic virtue theory” (3). Both of these proximate goals serve Daly’s ultimate goal, which is to develop “concepts capable of ethically categorizing and scrutinizing social structures” (ibid.). Moral agency refers to the role played by the free choices of individuals in setting up structures, especially those that do harm. For example, the U.S. Constitution initially protected the institution of chattel slavery in the southern states. Both the law and the culture justified the existence of slavery as a positive good for the slave and slave owners. The practice of slavery defended by the law and public opinion set up an opinion-forming structure that was hard for Southerners to resist.

Daly aims to teach his readers to recognize and deal with structures of virtue and vice, which come into existence both by the free choices of individuals over time and by causes of an “impersonal” nature (12). Societal structures sometimes take on a life “independent of human agency,” he emphasizes. “Structures” is the term used to identify various aspects of the political and economic order, institutions, organizations, and practices that incline people to live well or badly. Daly puts a lot of emphasis on the structure created by the manufacturing of clothing in the so-called sweatshops in the Third World that employ poorly paid workers. On April 24, 2013, a building owned by Sohel Rana, located in the vicinity of Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed, killing 127 people. Although engineers had told Rana that the building was unsafe, he nonetheless ordered workers to take their places. Daly asks who is responsible for the deaths of the workers—the owner, Sohel Rana; the manufacturer, the Children’s Place; the retail clothing company; or consumers seeking a bargain (12-13). It is unclear from Daly’s treatment whether he considers the last group as an example of “impersonal forces.” What is clear is that Catholic ethicists need to forge an instrument capable of structural ethical analysis. This kind of instrument will enable Catholics to put ethics into practice in every aspect of their lives. This is another way that Daly defines the book’s ultimate purpose—developing concepts by which to categorize and scrutinize social structures.

“In turning to the social sciences, Catholic ethicists may come to more fully understand how to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this new age” (30). They have to explain, for example, how individuals may protect themselves from neglecting their duties toward the exploited of the world. Daly believes that the study of the social sciences is indispensable for grasping the nature of reality, especially the nature of good and bad social structures, including their good and bad effects on “the moral character of the person” (35). As an example, he notes that Pope John Paul II’s “account of structural sin remained substantially . . . underdeveloped from a sociological point of view; the pope lacked an incisive account of what a structure is, how it shaped action and outcomes” (41). Daly has more regard for Pope Benedict because he says “the Church’s wisdom has always pointed to the presence of original sin in social conditions and the structure of society” (43). Daly, however, is unhappy that Benedict was mostly silent on unjust structures, focusing instead on vicious persons, whose individual actions alone generate structures of vice. While the studies of sociology and

psychology are helpful to Catholic ethicists, I would add that familiarity with political philosophy is indispensable to the student of Catholic social teaching.

With the advent of Pope Francis, Daly obtains what he wants from the Magisterium: the confession of belief in the existence of unjust and evil structures that are not the result of sinful actions by individuals. Daly recognizes that Pope Francis follows John Paul “in arguing that when society is organized in a particular manner, it can hinder the acquisition of the virtues” (45).

At this point, we know enough to ask whether or not Daly has made the case that structures of virtue and vice are brought into existence, not only by human agency, but also by unspecified “impersonal” causes (12). In another context, Daly says, “structures are not reducible to the accumulated actions of individual agents” (45). Instead, structures come into existence in ways other than the free choice of individual persons. Daly’s way of looking at things is more likely to allow some real perpetrators of injustice to escape detection. In my judgment, Daly has not made the case for the actual existence of these impersonal causes. He criticizes the Catholic Church for having failed to deliver an adequate ethical education between the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century and Vatican Council II in the twentieth century, during which time the focus was on “the avoidance of sin.” Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* corrects this inadequate emphasis by directing the attention of all Catholics to “human dignity, love, the common good, social justice and solidarity with the poor.” These are “the central . . . virtues of Catholic life” (34). The second major contribution of the pastoral constitution, argues Daly, has been to call for an examination of the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. Daly expects this focus to reveal the structures of evil. So, *Gaudium et Spes* shows how moral acts perfect the character of individuals and “also shows an awareness that political and economic structures have the ability to thwart a person’s goodwill and to direct her to act in ways that undermine human dignity and the common good” (ibid.). These are examples of the structures of evil that can do so much harm to individuals who are not educated to recognize their presence.

Daly believes that Catholic ethics, in order to deal with evil structures in the world, has to become more theological by embracing theocentrism, personalism, and an ethic of virtue. Here is where the difficulties begin. Invoking the judgment of Charles Curran, Daly maintains that John Paul II’s social teaching “privileged philosophical over theological argumentation” (99). To begin an evaluation of this judgment, let us take note of John Paul II’s basic message delivered to the Latin American bishops in January 1979, the first year of his papacy: “We cry out once more. Respect human beings! They are made in the image of God. Evangelize so that this may become a reality, so that the Lord may transform hearts and humanize the political and economic systems with man’s responsible commitment as a starting point.” The Church seeks justice and love through evangelization. This was the crux of John Paul II’s theologically grounded message to the bishops and to all the faithful. Of course, he makes use of philosophic reason whenever possible to explain the meaning of Catholic social teaching, which is ultimately based on revelation.

In his 1999 book, *The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II*, Avery Dulles writes, “He holds that the primary element in missionary activity is evangelization, the proclamation of the truth about Christ, which is proximately aimed at personal conversion” (57). To those puzzled by such an orientation in Catholic “social” teaching, Dulles briefly explains: “But such evangelization indirectly contributes to political and economic development or liberation, because those who have sincerely embraced the gospel are more generous, loving, and considerate of the needs of the poor and oppressed” (ibid.).

The second way to make ethics more theological, according to Daly, is to adopt personalism. This approach focuses on “the person in relation,” not on “discussions of human nature or other abstractions” (103). In paragraph 12 of *Gaudium et Spes*, the council Fathers “connect personhood to human dignity and interpersonal relationality” (102). Daly quotes John Paul II as saying that “the guiding principle ‘of all of the Church’s social doctrine is a correct view of the human person’” (ibid.). Daly rightly points to the different ways dignity is understood in Catholic circles. He mentions inherent dignity, consequent dignity, normative dignity, and emblematic dignity. Unfortunately, Daly only gives his readers one sentence on consequent dignity, but it is a good one: “Consequent dignity pertains to how a person has lived; here, a person ‘attains’ dignity through the virtuous life” (106). This is to understand dignity as an arduous achievement. Dulles further clarifies what John Paul II means by looking at dignity as a goal: “The dignity of the human person consists above all in being called to communion with God through Jesus Christ, the universal Redeemer” (Dulles, *Splendor of Faith*, 44).

A third postconciliar turn that makes Catholic ethics more theological is the recovery of virtue. Daly believes that Catholic moral theologians have done a better job than official Church teaching in showing how the practice of virtue perfects the character and improves the relations of individuals with their fellow human beings and with God. Daly again singles out John Paul II for criticism, this time for not drawing enough from the Catholic virtue tradition. For example, Daly says that in *Veritatis Splendor*, his encyclical on moral theology, the pope “focuses more on natural law, norms, and obedience than on virtue” (107). In fact, while John Paul does mention the natural law more than a few times for various reasons, his highest goal in *Veritatis Splendor* is to help people attain “salvation through faith in Jesus Christ” (VS 1). They “are made holy through ‘obedience to the truth’” (ibid.). All are called to love God with their whole heart and soul and their neighbors as themselves. This kind of life requires the practice of the cardinal and theological virtues. Sometimes individuals are invited to accept martyrdom rather than commit a mortal sin. It is the virtue of charity that would enable believers to embrace the supreme witness of martyrdom (VS 89).

Still, why does the pope not focus on the development of the virtues or virtue theory in his moral-theology encyclical? The simple answer is that not a few Catholic moral theologians have made fundamental errors in the development

of their theology and are not reliable guides for the lay faithful. Preserving the Catholic understanding of virtue requires engaging these errors. For example, “One must therefore reject the thesis, characteristic of teleological and proportionalist theories, which holds that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species—its ‘object’—the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behavior or specific acts, apart from a consideration of the intention for which the choice is made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act for all persons concerned” (VS 79). If acts are intrinsically evil by reason of their objects—for example, helping a sick parent to commit suicide or a pregnant woman to procure an abortion—they may never be done, even for a good reason. Otherwise stated, the human will cannot change the nature of reality by choice.

Besides examining the moral act, John Paul II probes influential contemporary thought on the relation of freedom to truth, conscience as an oracle and conscience as a herald, fundamental choice and specific kinds of behavior. The question Daly needs to ask is how contemporary virtue theory could shed more light on these four major topics discussed in chapter 2 of *Veritatis splendor*. As things stand now, Daly owes his readers a more comprehensive engagement with the moral theology of John Paul II.

J. BRIAN BENESTAD

Assumption University
Worcester, Massachusetts

Understanding the Religious Priesthood: History, Controversy, Theology. By CHRISTIAN RAAB, O.S.B. Foreword by BRIAN E. DALEY, S.J. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021. Pp. xviii + 340. \$34.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-0-8132-3323-9.

When Norbert of Xanten, Dominic de Guzman, and Ignatius of Loyola sought ecclesiastical approval for their new orders, their intention was to be at the service of the universal Church. They did not question the validity of combining ordination to the priesthood with the religious life. The communities of other founders such as Benedict of Nursia or Francis of Assisi were composed of the nonordained, although they accepted men already ordained to the priesthood and had some of their members ordained to serve the sacramental needs of the community. In the case of the “Poverello” of Assisi, it took only half a century for his order of nonordained friars to become a clerical institute. The combination of the ordained and the nonordained in a religious community gave rise to tensions and theological issues that have resurfaced throughout history: for example, what is the relationship between the religious priest and

the local bishop? how does a community of religious priests relate to the Holy See? what is the precise nature of the vocation in which a consecrated man is ordained to the priesthood?

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, these issues were given new impetus and have continued to engage scholars and commentators. The decision of the council Fathers to treat of the religious life (*Perfectae Caritatis*) and the priesthood (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) separately, without any consideration of the possible combination of the two vocations, has given greater incentive to explore the hesitations around this vocation well into the twenty-first century.

Christian Raab's response to these issues is the subject of his 2021 book, *Understanding the Religious Priesthood: History, Controversy, Theology*. The title indicates the enormity of the project, and Raab skillfully sets forth his argument for the validity of the vocation of the religious priest, employing a wide range of historical and theological sources in a convincing presentation of the pros and cons regarding the religious priesthood. Raab readily admits that "the religious priest must sometimes navigate between the ideal of radical discipleship and official ministry" (305). Nonetheless, his promise to focus on two fundamental questions provides a basis for the clarity of his thought throughout the text: first, what is the ecclesiastical identity and mission of the religious priest? and, second, does this joining of these two distinct vocations compromise or weaken one or the other of these vocations? (13). He is true to his promise from start to finish.

For Raab there is no unbridgeable gulf between the vocation to the religious life and the vocation to the priesthood. Reflection on his two fundamental questions yields his ultimate conclusion of four "marks" of the religious priesthood; these confirm and validate the long-standing tradition of ordaining professed religious or accepting the already ordained into community membership. Given the scope of his project, the author has wisely divided his text into four parts: historical perspectives, religious priesthood in and after Vatican II, the theology of vocations of Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the marks of religious priesthood. In each part several well-developed chapters deal with the topic in detail.

Part 4, the most original and creative section of the book, is, in many ways, the most successful. "Signification" heads the list of marks of the religious priesthood. Borrowing Balthasar's terminology, Raab sees the religious priest as signifying both radical subjective discipleship and apostolic ministry, as well as the unity of the two. His acknowledged dependence on the Swiss theologian is clear: "It would be difficult to overstate the importance of signification to contemporary theology and magisterial teaching" (223). For Raab, this is the central and strongest theological argument for the religious priesthood. While he admits that the religious priest often faces the tensions that flow from the two vocational poles of radical subjective discipleship and the commitment to apostolic ministry, he argues that history as well as theology support the validity of this "hybrid" vocation. In living out the evangelical counsels, the religious priest becomes a sign of what "life in Christ" means and makes possible a certain

spiritual intensity in his ministerial involvement. The very fact of the continued existence, even flourishing, of the religious priesthood over many centuries provides a strong validation for Raab's placement of signification as the first and foremost mark of the religious priesthood.

Raab's second mark, that the religious priesthood facilitates a "mediation" between charism and institution in the Church, follows logically from the notion of signification. Taking up the conciliar distinction between the "prophetic-charismatic" elements in the Church and her "hierarchical-ministerial-sacramental-authoritative" elements, Raab posits the ability of the religious priesthood to serve as a bridge between these two poles of ecclesial life, poles sometimes in tension when the prophetic role of the religious institute comes into conflict with the institutional governance of the Church in the hands of the diocesan bishop and his priests. Raab explores various opinions and, tracing out Balthasar's thought, concludes that the religious priest is well positioned to bring together elements that appear to be in opposition but can in fact be brought together, mediated, for the ultimate good of the Church.

The "extraparochial" and "transdiocesan" mission constitutes the third mark of the religious priesthood. The terminology may be cumbersome, as Raab again takes up the thought of Balthasar to sketch out an ecclesiological vision not limited to that found in the theology and praxis of Vatican II but which calls for an expanded appropriation of history and several theological themes found in earlier magisterial teaching. The theological consequences flowing from Balthasar's theology, as set out in the previous section, become apparent here.

In his final mark Raab addresses the "ministerial identity" of the religious priesthood. He argues that distinguishing the priestly functions (*munera*) into preaching and teaching (*munus docendi*), sanctifying (*munus sanctificandi*), and ruling and pastoring (*munus regendi*) facilitates identifying the religious priesthood with the *munus docendi* and the *munus sanctificandi*. In spite of Vatican II's insistence on the necessity of unifying these functions, Raab argues that it is still possible and reasonable primarily to identify the religious priest with the teaching and sanctifying functions of the priesthood. Granting that all priests must, in some way, serve as pastors of souls and thereby participate in the *munus regendi*, religious priests can be called upon to serve primarily as preachers and teachers as a consequence of their consecration and way of life.

Underpinning the conclusions of part 4 is the third part, on Balthasar's theology of vocations. The choice of Balthasar is somewhat puzzling given the uniqueness and subtlety of his theological vision, which some readers may find too difficult or at least not easily understood. "Balthasar's language is nuanced, and his scheme is complex," Raab tells us, and as a consequence he provides a sort of mini-tutorial in Balthasarian thought. The concepts of "mission, constellation and state" form the basis for a more developed theology of vocations. For Balthasar, all Christians share in the one mission of Christ, namely, to bring his presence and message to the world. There is as well, however, a personal, particular mission or charism proper to the individual Christian person, which lies at the core of one's personal identity. Thus, we all

share in the universal mission of Christ and his Church, just as we are all given a personal mission. This is foundational to Balthasar's theology of vocations. The term "constellation" refers to the biblical figures who surround Christ in the New Testament. Being conscious of these persons, Balthasar argues, suggests the way in which the individual relates to Christ himself as "other," and points to the call to live with others in a life of generous service rather than living for oneself alone. His use of the term "state" to indicate the traditional categories of "states of life" is not always clear and consistent. Raab exonerates him for this lack of clarity, claiming that it "is made up for by the advantage of honoring . . . the complexity of ecclesial vocational categories and their inter-relationships" (158). Raab devotes more than sixty pages to the exposition of Balthasar's "ana-logic of vocations." Balthasar himself admits that any discussion of various ecclesial vocations and their relationship to one another will always be imprecise. For Raab, it is the density of Balthasar's key concepts that explains this imprecision. The risk is that the uninitiated will tend to skip through this section of the book, thereby missing the full impact of part 4. The insistent use of Balthasar suggests the academic genesis of the book and tends to suggest a discontinuity with the early theological tradition that Raab presents in the first two sections of the book.

Parts 1 and 2 of Raab's text make for fascinating reading. Most readers will likely find part 2, on the religious priesthood at and after Vatican II, most engaging. Here again, as in part 4, Raab's original thought and reflection are evident. He provides an important service in the account of the treatment of the priesthood and religious life at Vatican II and beyond, for he brings together historical data, theological reflection, and commentary from disparate authors and sources.

Raab describes the ecclesiology of Vatican II as moving "from pyramid to communion," and he sees this as the context for his consideration of the contemporary issues concerning the religious priesthood. This is a Church more "theocentric, organic and interpersonal," defined by what Ratzinger calls a "eucharistic ecclesiology," an expression that Raab makes his own in this section of the text. The consequent emphasis on the local Church and the priest as subordinate to the order of bishops, in particular the diocesan ordinary, changed the way in which members of the religious priesthood, often enjoying the privilege of exemption, operated in the late twentieth century, either as individuals or as a community living within a diocese.

Part 4 shows Raab at his most original and creative, but the few earlier pages in which he addresses the conciliar teaching on religious life and the challenge this presents to the religious priesthood are at the heart of his theme and argument. Much of the exploration of the meaning of the postconciliar religious priesthood is found in literature proper to individual religious institutes. Acknowledging this, Raab turns to Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., and John O'Malley, S.J., as representatives of the more public debate on the topic—Schneiders being negative and O'Malley positive in their respective considerations of the religious priesthood. Happily, Raab's presentation of their

arguments includes references to a remarkable range of other authors and documents. Bringing together a comprehensive overview of so much material concerning the religious life and the religious priesthood into an orderly exposition merits high praise for Raab and shows the positive contribution of his work.

Taken as a whole, Raab's book provides a solid platform on which any future discussion about the religious priesthood could stand. As with any text, there are weaknesses. The choice of Balthasar's theology of vocations as the theological context may limit the appeal and accessibility of the work. One immediate consequence of this choice is the inadequate treatment of the patristic and medieval theological developments regarding the religious life and the priesthood that became the foundation for later magisterial teaching, particularly that of the Council of Trent and its pervasive influence in the centuries that followed. In part 1, on the history of the religious priesthood, Raab frequently depends on secondary and tertiary sources, rendering that portion of the text uneven in its presentation and in some of its conclusions. For example, in chapter 2, on the priesthood and the mendicants, the portrayal of the renewal of "the apostolic life" is inadequate, given the historical consequences that it set in motion in the growth and expansion of the mendicant orders. Given the breadth of the material, both historical and theological, that Raab has managed to research and present, and the fact that he has done so in a clear, logical, and convincing fashion, the limits become less important. This text will stand for a long time as a benchmark in the study and understanding of the religious priesthood.

GABRIEL B. O'DONNELL, O.P.

Dominican House of Studies
Washington, D.C.