

## ABSTRACT

Thomas Aquinas on Hebrews: The Excellence of Christ

Dana T. Benesh, Ph.D.

Mentor: Daniel H. Williams, Ph.D.

“There is none among the gods like unto Thee, O Lord: and there is none according to Thy works.” Ps. 85:8 (Vulgate). Thomas Aquinas uses this statement to open the prologue to his commentary on the letter to the Hebrews—a letter written by Paul, according to Thomas, and in which is revealed the grace of Christ as the head of the Church. In the body of the prologue, Thomas sets forth the theme of Hebrews, which is the excellence of Christ. He addresses both the excellence of Christ’s person, comparing him to angels, prophets, and priests, and the excellence of Christ’s works, in regard to creation, illumination, and justification.

This work contends that Thomas Aquinas merits attention not only as a theologian and philosopher, but also as an exegete. It examines how Thomas reads Hebrews by first considering his academic background, which is significant given that his Hebrews commentary originated as classroom lectures. It then moves to Thomas’ exegetical heritage, with particular interest in biblical exegesis as practiced by the Victorines. After discussing medieval prologues, Thomas’ commentary prologues and specifically his prologue to the commentary on Hebrews are considered. The prologue opens with the

*accessus* verse cited above, and takes shape as a combination of the sermonic and Aristotelian prologue forms; all of those elements are examined in detail. The concerns articulated in the prologue shape the next section of this dissertation, in regard to the excellence of Christ's person in and of himself; the comparative excellence of Christ in relation to angels, Moses, and priests; and the excellence of Christ's threefold work of creation, illumination, and justification. The final chapter reviews what can be seen of Thomas both as a teacher and an exegete through the preceding analysis of his exegesis of Hebrews. Attention is paid to his organizational strategies, dialectical approach, and hortatory comments, as well as his handling of the senses of Scripture and of the comparative argument that drives both Hebrews and his commentary. This work's aim is to understand and appreciate Thomas' exposition of Hebrews and to place him in regard to medieval exegesis.

Thomas Aquinas on Hebrews: The Excellence of Christ

by

Dana T. Benesh, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

---

W. H. Bellinger, Jr., Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

---

Daniel H. Williams, Ph.D., Chairperson

---

Mikeal C. Parsons, Ph.D.

---

David Lyle Jeffrey, Ph.D.

---

Thomas S. Hibbs, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School  
August 2014

---

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2014 by Dana T. Benesh

All rights reserved

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
CHAPTER 1. STUDYING THOMAS AQUINAS AS AN EXEGETE	1
The Value of Studying Thomas the Exegete	
An Approach to Studying Thomas' Exegesis of Hebrews	
A Plan for Studying Thomas' Exegesis of Hebrews	
Outline of the Dissertation	
CHAPTER 2. THOMAS AQUINAS AS TEACHER AND EXEGETE	15
Thomas Aquinas and His Teaching Context	
Thomas Aquinas and His Commentaries	
Thomas Aquinas and the Commentary on Hebrews	
Thomas Aquinas' Approach to Scripture	
CHAPTER 3. THOMAS AQUINAS AS HIS EXEGETICAL CONTEXT	43
Exegetical Influences: Augustine	
Exegetical Influences: The Victorines	
Exegetical Influences: Albert the Great	
Exegetical Influences: Bonaventure	
Exegetical Authorities and Exegetical Tools	
CHAPTER 4. THOMAS AQUINAS' APPROACH TO HEBREWS: THE PROLOGUE	98
Prologues to Medieval Commentaries	
Thomas Aquinas' Commentary Prologues	
Thomas Aquinas' Prologue to Hebrews	
CHAPTER 5. THOMAS AQUINAS' READING OF HEBREWS: THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S PERSON	147
Countering Errors Regarding Christ	
Presenting the Excellence of Christ	
CHAPTER 6. THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S PERSON: COMPARING CHRIST TO ANGELS, PROPHETS, AND PRIESTS	189
Comparing Christ to the Angels	
Comparing Christ to Moses	
Comparing Christ to the Old Testament Priesthood	
CHAPTER 7. THOMAS AQUINAS' READING OF HEBREWS: THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S WORK	252

Christ's Works in the Prologue	
Christ's Works in the Commentary	
CHAPTER 8. THOMAS AQUINAS AS TEACHER AND EXEGETE OF HEBREWS	289
Thomas Aquinas as Teacher of Hebrews	
Thomas Aquinas as Exegete of Hebrews	
APPENDIX	334
BIBLIOGRAPHY	345

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my mentor, Dr. Daniel H. Williams, for overseeing this dissertation, as well as my committee members: Dr. Mikeal C. Parsons; Dr. David Lyle Jeffrey, in whose medieval exegesis seminar I first encountered Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews, and whose kind suggestion led me to expand a seminar paper into this work; and Dr. Thomas S. Hibbs. Thanks are also due to my other dissertation readers, Dr. Ralph Wood and Dr. Paul Martens, as well as to Dr. Peter Candler, who assisted me in developing the prospectus for this dissertation.

I would also like to thank Dr. Peter Williams, Simon Sykes, and the fellow researchers at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, for access to materials, use of a desk, and scholarly and spiritual encouragement. This work was also greatly aided by the ability to read at the Cambridge University Library, for which I am most grateful. I must also acknowledge Dr. William H. Bellinger, the chair of Baylor's Department of Religion, who, having mentored my master's thesis, encouraged me to apply to the Ph.D. program.

And a final word of thanks is due to my husband, Dr. Greg A. Benesh, for all of his support and encouragement during the writing of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Studying Thomas Aquinas as an Exegete

Given the influence and readership of his two great *Summae*, Thomas Aquinas' reputation as a "systematic" theologian far surpasses his reputation as a biblical exegete. Even so, his commentaries merit attention due to Thomas' ability to explicate Scripture and due to his contributions to the development of exegesis. The commentaries of Thomas Aquinas, when compared to his better-known theological works, reveal the same spiritual and doctrinal concerns, and therefore deserve careful study; additionally, they comprise a significant portion of his scholarly output.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Aquinas the exegete has not received the same degree of attention as Aquinas the theologian or Aquinas the philosopher. Very few of the more than twenty biblical commentaries Aquinas wrote have received thorough study; book-length studies have been done on the commentaries on the Psalms<sup>2</sup> and on Ephesians,<sup>3</sup> in addition to an extensive study of the priesthood of Christ in Thomas' Hebrews commentary.<sup>4</sup> More of Thomas' commentaries

---

<sup>1</sup> By consulting the word counts of Aquinas' works as presented in Roberto Busa's *Index thomisticus*, Thomas Ryan has determined that "Thomas's explicitly scriptural works, including his continuous gloss on the Gospels commonly known as the *Catena aurea*, make up over 30 percent of his written output." Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 153. See also Roberto Busa, *Index thomisticus* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Ryan, *op.cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Christopher T. Baglow, "*Modus et Forma*": *A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios*. *Analecta Biblica Investigationes Scientifcae in Res Biblicas* 149. Editrice Pontificio Institute Biblico—Roma 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Antoine Guggenheim, *Jésus-Christ, Grand Prêtre de l'Ancienne et de la Nouvelle Alliance: Étude du commentaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin sur l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Langres: Parole et Silence, 2004). Guggenheim's work is organized according to Christ's priesthood—his qualifications for it, the



on Aristotle have been translated into English than have his biblical commentaries<sup>5</sup>; and his commentaries on Scripture look to be “among the last works to be published as part of the definitive Leonine edition”<sup>6</sup> of the works of Thomas Aquinas.

This neglect of Thomas Aquinas as an exegete is regrettable both on historical and theological grounds. During his seventeen years of active teaching at Naples, Orvieto, Rome, and the University of Paris,<sup>7</sup> the writing of commentaries on Scripture comprised a sizeable and consistent part of his literary output.<sup>8</sup> As a *magister in sacra pagina* at the University of Paris, Thomas’ assignment was three-fold: to lecture, dispute, and preach on the text of Scripture,<sup>9</sup> according to the job description provided by Peter the Chanter in the previous century:

The exercise of Sacred Scripture consists therefore in three things: the lecture, the disputation, and the sermon. The lecture is, as it were, the foundation and underpinning of the rest . . . The disputation is like walls for the building, because nothing is fully understood and faithfully preached unless it is first chewed by the

---

consummation of it, and the perfection of it; and his approach is quite different from mine: “Le thème du sacerdoce n’est donc pas le centre théologique de l’Épître aux Hébreux pour saint Thomas, même s’il est son centre littéraire. Le centre théologique de l’Épître se situe plutôt dans l’articulation christologique de l’ancienne et de la nouvelle Alliance.” Guggenheim, *Jésus-Christ, Grand Prêtre de l’Ancienne et de la Nouvelle Alliance*, 159.

<sup>5</sup> This disparity has been partially redressed by the 2012 publication of Thomas’ commentaries on the fourteen Pauline epistles by The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine in Lander, WY. The commentaries appear in a five-volume set and provide both the Latin text, based on the 1953 Marietti edition, and a fresh English translation. They will be cited throughout this dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, “Introduction,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Healy, “Introduction,” *Aquinas on Scripture*, 5, 8.

<sup>8</sup> For a chronology of Thomas’ commentaries, see James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 118. Thomas’ *Catena aurea*, a running commentary or gloss on the four gospels, was the result of a papal commission and was most likely written from 1262/3 to 1267. See Weisheipl, 171-3; and Eleonore Stump, “Biblical Commentary and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, eds. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252.

<sup>9</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’Aquino*, 116.

teeth of disputing. But preaching, which is served by the other functions, is, as it were, the roof and covering for the faithful from the heat and unrest of vices.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the teaching of Scripture was of prime concern for Thomas Aquinas, both as a Dominican and as a professional teacher. Therefore, on historical grounds, his commentaries on Scripture merit careful consideration.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Value of Studying Thomas the Exegete*

One cannot divorce Thomas' theology from his reading of Scripture—and on theological grounds, Thomas' commentaries do merit study. For scholars of Thomas' period, exegesis and theology were “two sides of the same activity,” and “without Scripture they would have been unable to do theology.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, while Thomas' *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae* may continue to enjoy pride of place, we must recognize the foundational theological and historical significance of Thomas' continual immersion in, and teaching of, Holy Scripture.

To date, relatively little attention has been given to Thomas' Scriptural commentaries. In addition to the aforementioned studies of Thomas' commentaries on Psalms, Ephesians, and Hebrews, a collection of introductory essays on each of Thomas' commentaries has appeared in the last decade.<sup>13</sup> Regarding the topic of Thomas' approach to Scripture, there is a work on the place and function of Scripture in Thomas'

---

<sup>10</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Verbum abbreviatum* 1, *Patrologia Latina* 205:25.

<sup>11</sup> Situating Thomas Aquinas in his exegetical context will comprise part of the next chapter of the dissertation, briefly addressing his predecessors, the Victorines; his teacher, Albert the Great; and his Franciscan contemporary, Bonaventure.

<sup>12</sup> A. Paretsky, “The Influence of Thomas the Exegete on Thomas the Theologian: The Tract on Law (Ia-IIae, qq. 98-108) as a Test Case,” *Angelicum* 71 (1994): 574.

<sup>13</sup> *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, eds. (London: T & T Clark International, 2005).

theology,<sup>14</sup> while a dissertation on Aquinas and the literal sense remains unpublished.<sup>15</sup> A consultation of bibliographies of Thomistic works<sup>16</sup> has failed to reveal anything more than one German monograph on Thomas' commentary on Romans<sup>17</sup> and numerous journal articles devoted to topical treatments of Thomas' commentaries.<sup>18</sup> Additional searches have yielded only a few topical works that use the commentaries, in addition to an essay on his Hebrews commentary and the translation of the commentary into English.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelmus G.B.M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht New Series, 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Robert G. Kennedy, "Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Sacred Scripture" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Vernon J. Bourke, *Thomistic Bibliography, 1920-1940* (St. Louis, MO: The Modern Schoolman, 1981); Terry L. Miethe and Vernon J. Bourke, *Thomistic Bibliography, 1940-1978* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1980); Richard Ingardia, *Thomas Aquinas: International Bibliography, 1977-1990* (Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University, 1993). Thomistic works in English, French, German, and Italian were surveyed. This work was done at the Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, England, in July of 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Domanyi, *Der Romerbriefkommentar Des Thomas von Aquin: Ein Beiträge zur Untersuchung Seiner Auslegungsmethoden*, Basler und Berner Studien Zur Historischen und Systematischen Theologie 39 (Bern: P. Lang, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Topics of periodical articles include determining the chronology of the commentaries; addressing how Aquinas views faith and worship in his commentaries on the Pauline letters; considering Thomas' reading of Jesus as the bread of life in his commentary on the sixth chapter of the gospel of John.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen C. Boguslawski, "Aquinas' Commentary on Romans 9-11" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1999); *idem.*, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews: Insights into His Commentary on Romans 9-11* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008). M. C. Daley, "The Notion of Justification in the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Epistle to the Romans," (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1971). Thomas G. Weinandy, "The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas' Commentary on Hebrews," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, eds. (London: T & T Clark International, 2005). Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. and ed. by Chrysostom Baer (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2006). Kevin Frederick Vaughan, "St. Thomas Aquinas' Mystical Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the 'Lectura Super Ioannem,'" (PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College, Canada, 2009).

Fortunately, perusal of recent journal articles discloses a growing interest in pre-modern exegesis.<sup>20</sup> A 2012 issue of *Modern Theology*, for example, is devoted to the significance of spiritual interpretation and “earlier modes of exegesis,” as the lead article indicates:

The current scholarly trend of increased attention to spiritual or theological interpretation of Scripture shows few signs of abating. Both by way of underlying hermeneutical reflection and in terms of biblical commentary, historical-critical interpretation appears to be on the wane as the dominant mode of biblical scholarship...[T]his renewed attention to spiritual interpretation not only represents a positive re-appropriation of earlier modes of exegesis but also offers renewed opportunity for ecumenical dialogue, in particular between Catholics and evangelicals.<sup>21</sup>

Another scholar notes the contributions made by Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas to hermeneutics, and calls for a return to a figural reading of Scripture that will allow faith to govern our reading of history, the world, and the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

### *An Approach to Studying Thomas' Exegesis of Hebrews*

Given the relative lack of attention paid to Thomas' commentaries, and the growing interest in pre-modern exegesis, an examination of Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews should prove to be both valuable and timely. Hebrews is especially deserving of study, given the priority that Thomas himself assigned to it. He had developed an outline of the entire corpus of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, which allowed him to order the books of the Bible according to the purposes

---

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, March 2010 and March 2011; *Nova et Vetera*, January 2011; and *Modern Theology*, April 2012 and October 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, “Spiritual Interpretation and Realigned Temporality,” *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 587.

<sup>22</sup> Brian E. Daley, “‘In Many and Various Ways’: Towards a Theology of Theological Exegesis,” *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 597-615.

of God.<sup>23</sup> The Old Testament outline orders its books in regard to God as king or as father; the New Testament outline orders its books in regard to Christ and the Church. In Thomas' scheme, Hebrews comes after the four gospels; and among all the epistles, Hebrews is preeminent because it reveals the power of the grace of Christ as head of the mystical body.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in Thomas' outline, Hebrews fittingly becomes a bridge between the gospels relating the life of Christ, and the letters fostering the life of the body of Christ, the church.

According to Thomas, this same sort of bridge relationship between Christ and the church may be discerned within the epistle to the Hebrews itself. Thomas opens Lecture One on Hebrews 1 by noting that the epistle was written to combat the errors of Jewish converts to Christianity who felt it necessary to keep the Law of Moses as well as believe the gospel of Christ. Then Thomas gives his view of the Apostle's<sup>25</sup> organization of Hebrews: "Hence the epistle is divided into two parts. First, he commends the excellence of Christ in many ways, so that in this way to prefer the New Testament to the Old. Second, he treats those things through which the members are joined to their Head,

---

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture," in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. Ralph McInerney (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 7-8, 11-12.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue [11], 4. The number in brackets refers to the Marietti paragraphing system and will be used throughout this work. "Est enim haec doctrina tota de gratia Christi, quae quidem potest tripliciter considerari. Uno modo secundum quod est in ipso Capite, scilicet Christo, et sic commendatur in epistola ad Hebraeos."

Thomas provides his outline of the books of the Bible in his inaugural sermon, "Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture." The outline covering the Pauline epistles is missing from the sermon text, but the prologue to Thomas' Romans commentary replicates it, and the prologue to the Hebrews commentary alludes to it. Baer combines the outline from the sermon and the outline from the Romans prologue to produce a composite. See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Chrysostom Baer, 1-3.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas assumes Pauline authorship of Hebrews. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue [5], 2-3.

namely, faith, and this part begins where he says in 11:1, ‘Now faith is the substance...’<sup>26</sup> In Thomas’ view, Hebrews 1-10 concerns the excellence and headship of Christ, and Hebrews 11-13 concerns the relationship that the body of Christ enjoys with its head through faith. The Apostle uses this organizational scheme to persuade the Jewish Christians of his day not to turn back but to continue moving forward in faith in Christ, and Thomas likewise has this goal for his students.

There are three aspects to the excellence of Christ that Thomas will seek to elucidate in his commentary on Hebrews: 1) Christ as the culmination of God’s revelation to his people; 2) Christ as the Lord and heir of creation; and 3) Christ as the justifier and head of his people, following the order in which those topics are developed in the epistle to the Hebrews. Thomas sets forth the tripartite excellence of Christ in his *prooemium*, observing that

the excellent work of Christ is three-fold. First, it extends itself to every creature, namely the work of creation . . . . Second, it reaches only to rational creatures, who are illumined by Christ, and this is the work of illumination . . . . Third is the work of justification, which pertains only to the saints, who through Him and through His life-giving grace are vivified and justified.<sup>27</sup>

The order in the *prooemium* is slightly different—creation, then illumination or revelation, and then Christ’s relationship to his saints, perhaps following a salvation-historical sequence; but the thoughts are the same. Thomas’ work on Christ in the third

---

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Baer, 1.1 [6], 8. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Baer. “Unde et dividitur in duas partes. Primo enim multipliciter commendat excellentiam Christi, ut per hoc praeferat Novum Testamentum Veteri; secundo agit de his per quae membra iunguntur capiti, scilicet de fide infra, XI cap., ibi *est autem fides*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher. I prefer Baer’s English translation to Larcher’s.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, Prologue [3], 6. “. . . triplex est opus excellens Christi. Unum quod se extendit ad totam creaturam, scilicet opus creationis. . . . Aliud quidem tantum ad creaturam rationalem, quae per Christum illuminatur, quod est illuminationis. . . . Tertium est iustificationis, quod pertinet tantum ad sanctos, qui per ipsum per gratiam vivificantem vivificantur et iustificantur.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2.

part of the *Summa Theologiae* will be an important resource in considering further the grace of Christ as the head of the church, the priesthood of Christ, and Christ's role as mediator,<sup>28</sup> as well as Christ's relationship to creation, justification, and illumination.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout his Hebrews commentary, Thomas is careful to show that the excellence of Christ qualifies him to be the head of his people, since he is the agent of our creation, our source of illumination, and our sympathetic, eternal, and effective high priest who is also the ideal sacrifice for sin. Acknowledging Christ's excellence and headship should move his people to hold on to their faith in him and continue on their spiritual pilgrimage, with Christ as their leader and exemplar. According to Thomas, faith in the Christ whose excellence has been demonstrated in Hebrews 1-10 is the thrust of Hebrews 11:1, wherein the Apostle admonishes the faithful thus to be joined to Christ. Thomas says that the act of faith is to believe, and, quoting Augustine, to know something with assent<sup>30</sup>; and he says that the object and end of faith is God, whom we do not yet possess. Therefore, a life of faith must be a life of progress toward God.<sup>31</sup>

Having sounded the great thematic notes of Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews, what of the commentary itself, and Aquinas' approach to the interpretation of Scripture? First, Thomas' commentary on Hebrews is a series of *lectura* on the text—lecture transcripts made by Thomas' secretary, Reginald of Piperno.<sup>32</sup> The didactic setting of the

---

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3.8.1-6; 3.22.1-6; 3.26, 1-2 (New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1964-1973). Henceforward, *ST*.

<sup>29</sup> *ST* 3.3.8; 3.7.8.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 12.1 [553], 227.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 12.1 [556-557], 229-230.

<sup>32</sup> Such a live report, called a *reportatio*, of a classroom lecture would not have been edited or corrected by Thomas himself. See Weisheipl, 117. Weisheipl, Mandonnet and Chenu cite these Latin

lectures shapes their discourse, as each major section of a lecture begins in one of two ways: 1) with a statement, which Thomas then elaborates, often with multiple points; or 2) with a question, which Thomas then answers. Second, Thomas' interpretation of the Scriptural text is governed by his understanding of the text's literal meaning—but his is not a bare literal sense. Rather, for Thomas, “the literal sense is that which the author intended; but the author of sacred Scripture is God, who comprehends in his *intellectus* all things at once. Therefore it is not unfitting...if even according to the literal sense there are several meanings in one letter of Scripture.”<sup>33</sup> Hence it is clear that Thomas is concerned to discover “the sacred writer's full original meaning,” which will include anything of import for an audience that is limited neither by location nor time<sup>34</sup>—an approach to interpreting Scripture that will benefit a pilgrim church attempting to understand its relationship to its head.

Thomas' commentary on Hebrews provides evidence of his understanding of the senses of Scripture, allowing us to appreciate his place in the history of exegesis. And the Hebrews work also provides attestation for how he understands the relationship of the Old and New Testaments. Does Thomas see the relationship between the two testaments as historical or essential? This question runs throughout the commentary.

---

editions and English translations of Thomas' *Expositio et lectura in S. Pauli Apostoli epistolas*: Parma, volume 13; Vivés, volumes 20 and 21; 8<sup>th</sup> Marietti edition, revised, two volumes, 1953; to which may be added Baer's 2006 translation. See Weisheipl, 373; Pierre Mandonnet, “La Chronologie des écrits scripturaires de St. Thomas d'Aquin,” *Revue Thomiste*, N.S. xi (1928): 42-50; and Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965), 245.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.1.10.

<sup>34</sup> Beryl Smalley, “The Bible in the Medieval Schools,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 215-216.



### *A Plan for Studying Thomas' Exegesis of Hebrews*

My method will necessarily be thematic, as demonstrated above. It will also be comparative, as I address what Thomas drew from key sources, such as the *Glossa ordinaria* and the works of Augustine and John Chrysostom. And it will be theological, as I frame the theology of Thomas' commentary on Hebrews within the larger context of the *Summa Theologiae*, particularly the Tertia Pars.

My first goal in studying Thomas' commentary on Hebrews is to be a faithful reader of the commentary itself. For the most part, Thomas' exegetical works have been used by scholars to buttress points developed more fully in his philosophical and theological works. His commentaries have simply been a means to an end, and I do not want to take that approach. Rather, I want the commentary itself to set the parameters of my investigation. For example, why did Thomas choose the *accessus* (an opening verse, from anywhere in Scripture, set at the beginning of a prologue) to the Hebrews commentary that he did (Ps. 85:8)? How does this verse convey the major themes of his commentary? Given Thomas' view of the literal sense, are there valuable examples of his particular brand of exegesis in this commentary? What examples are there of spiritual interpretations, or attention to word use or word play?

My second goal is to address Thomas' key themes as set forth in the prologue to his commentary. The excellence of Christ's person, his excellence in comparison to angels, Moses, and Priests, and the excellence of Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification are set forth in the prologue as the lens, so to speak, with which Thomas will read this epistle; therefore it will be worthwhile to follow the development of these

themes throughout the commentary. Other issues bear consideration, such as Thomas' use of the text of Hebrews to present his Trinitarian theology and his Christology.

My third goal is to address what Thomas' commentary can tell us about how Thomas reads Scripture, and what the goal of reading this unique book should be. Thomas was the inheritor of a long exegetical heritage, beginning with Augustine and running through the School of St. Victor, which held that reading could be transformative. After all, Augustine said that the goal of preaching should be to teach, delight, and move one's hearers.<sup>35</sup> And there are moments in the Hebrews commentary when Thomas the exegete becomes Thomas the classroom teacher, and perhaps Thomas the priest—times when he addresses his students as to what they need to *do*, not merely what they need to know. A consideration of those moments will enrich our understanding of this commentary and of Thomas' approach to exegesis.

The book of Hebrews is long and complex, as is Thomas Aquinas' commentary. As of yet, this commentary is a fallow field. I make no claim to be able to harvest all of its potential fruit. My hope is only to plow a few furrows, and to make future harvests by others a little easier to come by.

### *Outline of the Dissertation*

Chapters two and three of this dissertation establish Thomas' teaching context and his exegetical context. Thomas' own education and his approach to the teaching of Scripture receive attention in Chapter Two. Chapter Three addresses Thomas' exegetical heritage, beginning with Augustine, treating the Victorines, and concluding with Thomas' teacher, Albert the Great, and his Franciscan contemporary, Bonaventure. This

---

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* IV.12, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 117.

chapter also looks at Thomas' immediate exegetical situation in terms of the authorities and tools that a *magister in sacra pagina* had available. The Middle Ages had a particular regard for authority, as evidenced in the citations of Scripture, Church Fathers, philosophers and heretics alike one finds in Bible commentaries of the day; and the use of aids to exegesis such as the *Glossa ordinaria* and recently-compiled concordances also shaped medieval exegesis.

While the content of these two chapters is of a somewhat introductory nature, it does provide a contextual depth against which to read Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews. The provision of such a context has not been attempted in many years in an in-depth fashion, and for that reason has merit. Chenu's magisterial work on Thomas, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*,<sup>36</sup> is the fullest effort in print. Chenu does discuss Thomas' immediate theological context, the spiritual reawakening that characterized this period, and Thomas' exegetical method. However, he does not study Thomas' exegetical heritage in detail--and Chenu's book is nearly fifty years old. Weisheipl's study of Aquinas, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*,<sup>37</sup> does a superb job of placing Thomas' writings against a biographical and historical backdrop; but it does not consider exegetical issues and is nearly forty years old. Finally, Torrell's 1996 *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, investigates Thomas and his writings from his days as a student to his canonization, and is presented as a modification

---

<sup>36</sup> M.-D. Chenu, O.P., *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964).

<sup>37</sup> James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1974).

and expansion of Weisheipl's work<sup>38</sup>; but Torrell's concerns are primarily biographical and historical. While he does place Thomas' commentaries on Scripture in their historical context, he has little to say about exegetical issues—and indeed, seems to give greater consideration to summarizing the content of Thomas' theological and philosophical works than he does with Thomas' commentaries. Thus, an updated survey of the teaching and exegetical context of Thomas Aquinas will be both appropriate and helpful.

Chapter Four is a study of the prologue or *prooemium* to Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews. In the Middle Ages, a prologue was an integral part of a literary work, and provided a valuable framework within which to place the work and know how best to read it. Thomas also customarily attached an *accessus* verse to the beginnings of his commentary prologues—a verse from another book of the Bible that provided a lens through which to see more clearly the concerns of the book under consideration. This chapter will analyze both the *accessus* and the prologue.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven concern the excellence of Christ—the major emphasis for this commentary on Hebrews as set forth in Thomas' *accessus* verse and prologue. Chapter Five is a study of the excellence of Christ in himself, using categories designated by Thomas. Chapter Six follows with an extended comparison of Christ to angels, Moses, and priests, using those same categories. Chapter Seven then moves to a study of the excellence of Christ's work as identified by Thomas in the prologue. Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification—as traced in the Hebrews commentary and in the *Summa Theologiae*—will be addressed.

---

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume I: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

Chapter Eight provides a concluding consideration of Thomas Aquinas' reading of the book of Hebrews. The focus will be on what this Hebrews commentary reveals to us regarding Thomas the teacher and Thomas the exegete; the two roles necessarily overlap, but an analysis of each of them will be helpful. This chapter summarizes what Thomas' commentary reveals of his organizational strategies and dialectical approach in teaching Hebrews, as well as his practice of occasionally making direct hortatory comments to his students. The chapter closes with an examination of Thomas' exegesis of Hebrews in regard to his handling of the senses of Scripture and the role played by the commentary's prologue. For those of us who share his love of God, love of Scripture, and love of teaching, Thomas Aquinas' approach to his commentary on Hebrews should prove instructive.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Thomas Aquinas as Teacher and Exegete

In order to appreciate Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the book of Hebrews, it will be helpful to lay a foundation by first considering his teaching context; second, by surveying his commentaries, with particular attention paid to his commentary on Hebrews; and third, by addressing Thomas' general approach to Scripture. The following chapter will place Thomas Aquinas in his exegetical context.

#### *Thomas Aquinas and His Teaching Context*

As a member of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), Thomas Aquinas exemplified the order's commitment to study, teaching, and preaching. He also articulated that commitment in a discussion of the relative merits of an active order as opposed to a contemplative order. Thomas, in his *Summa Theologiae*, observes that, whereas the work of the contemplative life is, simply, to contemplate, the twofold work of the active life may involve either teaching and preaching, or acts of practical service, such as alms-giving and hospitality. That the active life of teaching and preaching subsumes and transcends a life of contemplation is clear, according to Thomas:

. . . the work of the active life is twofold. One proceeds from the fullness of contemplation, such as teaching and preaching. . . . And this work [of teaching and preaching] is more excellent than simple contemplation. For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate. . . . Accordingly the highest place in religious orders is held by those which are directed to teaching and preaching . . . .<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2.188.6. After granting the highest place to religious orders that focus on teaching and preaching, Thomas continues the discussion by giving the second place to

Therefore, a life spent in study, teaching, and preaching was for Thomas Aquinas a life directed toward the highest end.

The half-century before the birth of Thomas Aquinas was a time of a renewed interest in the gospel, in the life of Christ, and in Scripture. This period saw the rise of Peter Waldo and his followers, with their emphasis on apostolic poverty and the preaching of the gospel—a cause taken up and greatly strengthened by the founding of the Franciscan and Dominican orders in the earlier part of the thirteenth century. Thus, before Thomas Aquinas began his education in Paris and Cologne, there was a renewal of theology taking place, that

. . . centered within a tension that was spiritual and pedagogical all at once. The tension was between, on the one hand, that return to Scripture with its inborn and untransferable value, its stirring power within faith, its appetite for things religious, and on the other hand, that speculative elaborating which was to find in the discovery of Greek philosophy not only instrumentation of an admirable kind but a conception of nature, man, and reason.<sup>2</sup>

As Chenu drily puts it, spiritual awakenings at universities inevitably find expression “in regulation and pedagogical methods,” and in the sphere of university education, the friars set in motion a partial withdrawal from speculative theology in favor of a return to the

---

orders that concentrate on contemplation, and third place to orders who emphasize external actions and practical service. *The Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 681-682. Henceforward, *ST*, followed by the part, question, and article.

<sup>2</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry, O.P. and D. Hughes, O.P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 241-242.

exposition of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas was a beneficiary of this renewed emphasis on teaching of Scripture that prevailed in Paris and that affected other universities.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas' studies as a Dominican commenced under the supervision of Albert the Great, at the convent of St. Jacques in Paris from 1245 to 1248. St. Jacques was a Dominican *studium generale*, founded in 1229.<sup>5</sup> The mendicant orders had adopted the strategy of placing convents in university cities and then equipping those convents with schools of theology. They also embarked upon the creation of 'general study centers' in the major university cities, for the purpose of training the most able of their theologians.<sup>6</sup> Following a course of study much like that in theology faculties at universities,<sup>7</sup> such study centers would not only educate young friars for ministry in the order, but would prepare them to serve as lectors who would then educate other friars. The Dominicans sought to combine the current practice of *lectio divina* with scholarship, disputation, and preaching; as Smalley notes, given the purpose of the Dominican order, "an order of preachers was necessarily an order of doctors."<sup>8</sup>

Thomas also owed the beginning of his teaching career to Albert, as the two of them were sent to Cologne to found a Dominican *studium generale*. This assignment

---

<sup>3</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 268-269.

<sup>4</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 242.

<sup>5</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 265.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Verger, "L'exégèse de l'université," *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. P. Riché and G. Lobrichon, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 200.

<sup>7</sup> Dominic V. Monti, "Introduction," Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* (Saint Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005), xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 268.



lasted until 1252, and Thomas spent those years as both Albert's student and assistant. Here Thomas Aquinas delivered his first lectures, on Isaiah and Jeremiah,<sup>9</sup> when, as Albert's assistant, he fulfilled the function of a *cursor biblicus* or *baccalarius biblicus*. In this position, his responsibility was to read the text of Scripture "cursorily," paraphrasing obscure passages and providing the obvious glosses on the text.<sup>10</sup> Focusing on a sequential explanation of the literal meaning of words and phrases made possible the resolution of "obscurities or difficulties of vocabulary," so that "the sense was brought out."<sup>11</sup> The goal of such a lecture was simply to "run" through the text and familiarize students with the content of Scripture.

Returning to Paris in 1252, Thomas Aquinas began work at the University of Paris as a bachelor of the sentences, lecturing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. In 1256, he finished his commentary on the *Sentences*, the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*. This accomplishment earned for Thomas a master in theology, a position in the University of Paris faculty of theology, and the title of *magister in sacra pagina*. As a master of the sacred page, Thomas' assignment was three-fold: to lecture, dispute, and preach on the

---

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, "Life and Works," *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16. Weisheipl supports the plausibility of Thomas beginning his teaching career at Cologne, whereas Chenu maintains that he first taught during his subsequent assignment to the University of Paris, when he had achieved the status of *magister in sacra pagina*. This uncertain chronology regarding Thomas Aquinas' teaching career reflects the uncertain chronology of some of his commentaries. See James A. Weisheipl, James, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1974), 45; and Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 242.

<sup>10</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 45.

<sup>11</sup> "Explication littérale d'abord, des mots et des phrases, suivant leur enchaînement immédiat, dans la construction de la phrase. Les obscurités ou difficultés de vocabulaire ainsi résolues, le 'sensus' se dégage..." Palemon Glorieux, "L'Enseignement au Moyen Âge: Techniques et Méthodes en usage à la Faculté de Théologie de Paris, au XIII siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 43, (1968): 108.

text of Scripture,<sup>12</sup> according to the job description provided by Peter the Chanter in the previous century:

The exercise of Sacred Scripture consists therefore in three things: the lecture, the disputation, and the sermon. The lecture is, as it were, the foundation and underpinning of the rest. . . . The disputation is like walls for the building, because nothing is fully understood and faithfully preached unless it is first chewed by the teeth of disputing. But preaching, which is served by the other functions, is, as it were, the roof and covering for the faithful from the heat and unrest of vices.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas himself alludes to this three-fold teaching obligation: “Concerning these three offices, namely preaching, lecturing and disputing, it is said in Titus 1:9 ‘so that he may be powerful to encourage,’ as in preaching, ‘in sound doctrine,’ as in lecturing, ‘and refuting those who speak against,’ as in disputing.”<sup>14</sup> Here we have, as Smalley puts it, “the three academic functions: lecture, disputation, university sermon”<sup>15</sup>—the first two of which have a direct relationship to the exegetical works of Thomas Aquinas.

The textbook at a university school of theology was Scripture, the *sacra pagina*.<sup>16</sup> The lecture by a university master went beyond the cursory reading and brief clarification of the text provided by a *baccalarius biblicus*; the master’s lecture included the spiritual meanings to which the literal sense might point, as well as a consideration of the history of the text’s interpretation, and the text’s relationship to other parts of Scripture and to

---

<sup>12</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 116.

<sup>13</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Verbum abbreviatum*, c. 1, *Patrologia Latina* 205, 25.

<sup>14</sup> “Et saint Thomas en soulignera heureusement l’exacte portée: ‘de his tribus officiis, scilicet praedicandi, legendi et disputandi, dicitur Tit. I, 9 ‘ut sit potens exhortari’ quantum ad praedicationem, ‘in doctrina sana’ quantum ad lectionem, ‘et contradicentes revincere’ quantum ad disputationem.” From Thomas Aquinas’ 1256 inaugural lecture as a master of theology, “*Rigans montes*” (ed. Mandonnet, IV. 494), used by Glorieux, “L’Enseignement au Moyen Âge,” 106. See also discussion by Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 208.

<sup>16</sup> Glorieux, “L’Enseignement au Moyen Âge”: 110.

Church teaching and practice.<sup>17</sup> Such lectures could be recorded by students or assistants, corrected by the teacher or supplemented by his own notes, and published as a commentary. Peter of Andria transcribed Thomas' lecture notes during his first period in Paris (1256 to 1259), and Reginald of Piperno assumed that responsibility in 1259, serving in this capacity until Thomas' death.<sup>18</sup> Smalley notes that the text of Aquinas' own notes was notoriously illegible, making the use of skilled transcribers essential. In fact, "some of his secretaries made a special study of transcribing it legibly, and there was a chain system for taking down his dictation. The Dominicans were so proud of him and so convinced of the value of his work as to give him every possible facility."<sup>19</sup>

The second of the university master's three-fold responsibilities, the disputation, had a variety of forms and procedures. It could be held in public or in the classroom. It could be a debate over a set question that had arisen from a lecture or a controversy<sup>20</sup>; or it could be a quodlibet, typically held at Advent or Lent, as a public discussion of any question or topic proposed by students or other members of the audience.<sup>21</sup> That the

---

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, "Introduction," *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 10.

<sup>18</sup> J. Van der Ploeg, "The Place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St Thomas," *The Thomist* 10, (1947): 401.

<sup>19</sup> Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 2: "The West from the Fathers to the Reformation," ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 202.

<sup>20</sup> Torrell describes an arrangement of morning lessons followed by an afternoon disputation on a theme, lasting up to three hours. See Torrell, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 126-127; Glorieux, "L'Enseignement au Moyen Âge": 123. There are manuscripts of Thomas Aquinas' *Quaestiones de quodlibet I-XII*, from his two Paris regencies. See Wiesheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 367.

disputation developed from the questions that arose in the giving of a lecture seems clear; but at what point the disputation was formalized as an encounter between questioner and respondent is less clear.<sup>22</sup> What is evident is that just as the *lectio* gave rise to the *disputatio*, the *disputatio* in turn influenced the *lectio*, with the disputation form finding its way into print, in the shape of the questions, objections, replies, and conclusions that give shape to the works of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>23</sup>

And that the disputation even exists reflects the level of engagement between teacher and students, and the master's concern to prepare students spiritually as well as intellectually.<sup>24</sup> For while, as Glorieux explains, the master was completely free to choose which books of Scripture on which to comment,<sup>25</sup> the master also had to consider how best to answer students' questions and prepare them for their future responsibilities. This preparation involved more than answers to complex questions regarding interpretation; it involved instructing students regarding their duties and conduct, so that they would be ready to preach sermons of their own, lead the Church, and advise secular rulers.<sup>26</sup> Thus, an element of spiritual formation ran along side intellectual preparation in medieval schools of theology.

---

<sup>22</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 209-210.

<sup>23</sup> Torrell, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 17-18.

<sup>24</sup> Chenu says that the university teacher has replaced the abbot and that a professor's role included pastoral concern and pastoral teaching. See Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 237.

<sup>25</sup> Glorieux, "L'Enseignement au Moyen Âge": 110.

<sup>26</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 212.

After becoming a master of the sacred page, the rest of Thomas' life, falling into four distinct phases, was devoted to education.<sup>27</sup> Those four periods include Thomas teaching at the University of Paris from 1256 to 1259; an Italian period that saw him serving as a convent lector in Orvieto and then establishing a Dominican *studium generale* near Rome (1259-1268); a second stint teaching in Paris, from late 1268 or early 1269 until 1272; and a final period that found Aquinas organizing yet another *studium generale* for the Dominicans in Naples, where he maintained an intense schedule of study, teaching, and preaching<sup>28</sup> until a few months before his death at the age of forty-nine. Hence it may be seen that, as a Dominican and as a sometime university faculty member, Thomas Aquinas devoted his life to fulfilling his obligation to teach Scripture, regardless of his location or assignment. Even when producing philosophical or doctrinal writings, the teaching of Scripture was an enduring part of his daily schedule.<sup>29</sup>

### *Thomas Aquinas and His Commentaries*

As one who lectured on Scripture on a regular basis, whether at the University of Paris or at a Dominican *studium generale*, the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas were the natural outflow of his teaching responsibilities. His personal regard for teaching Scripture is evident in one of his first sermons as a new *magister in sacra pagina*.<sup>30</sup> Having begun

---

<sup>27</sup> Palemon Glorieux, *Répertoire des Maîtres en Théologie de Paris au XIII siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1933), 85.

<sup>28</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 320-321.

<sup>29</sup> Torrell, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 17; Healy, *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Mandonnet considered this sermon to be Thomas' *principium* or inaugural sermon, but both Torrell and Weisheipl view the sermon *Rigans montes* as Thomas' inaugural sermon; this sermon would have been Thomas' second sermon, the *resumptio*, extending and completing the inaugural sermon and delivered the day after Thomas' inception as a master of the sacred page. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1. The Person and His Work*, trans. by Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic

the sermon by alluding to Augustine's statement in *De Doctrina Christiana* that a speaker "should speak as to teach, to delight and to change," Thomas proceeds to describe how "the speech of Sacred Scripture does these three things in the fullest manner," as "it firmly teaches with its eternal truth," sweetly delights with its pleasantness," and "efficaciously changes with its authority."<sup>31</sup> And that all of Scripture performs this three-fold office in order to lead us to eternal life is the theme of this sermon.<sup>32</sup> The scriptural foundation of his best-known works, the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, is evident,<sup>33</sup> as is the ancillary value of studying Thomas' commentaries; for if we are to know Thomas better and develop a more comprehensive view of his work and method, "it is imperative to read and use in a much deeper fashion these biblical commentaries in parallel with the great systematic works."<sup>34</sup>

Each chapter of a commentary by Thomas Aquinas is a series of lectures, and the text of the commentary has as its basis notes taken as Thomas taught. While alluding to the chapter divisions developed by Stephen Langton,<sup>35</sup> these commentaries base their organization instead on the classroom lectures, with the running discussion of the text and

---

University of America Press, 1996), 53; and Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 104.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), IV.12, 117. Thomas Aquinas, "Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture," in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerney (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture," 7.

<sup>33</sup> Torrell alludes to the fact that there are 25,000 citations of Scripture in the *Summa Theologiae*. See Torrell, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol I. The Person and His Work*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 223-224. Smalley holds that Langton's system of chapter divisions was known in France by 1203.

the insertion of disputed questions.<sup>36</sup> The use of students' lecture notes or *reportationes* to provide the basis of a book by the master was a common practice. Sets of notes from multiple students could be used, or one person, such as Thomas' *socius* or associate Reginald of Piperno, could bear the responsibility for transcribing and preserving Thomas' teaching. Some sets of notes were published as commentaries as they stood; others Thomas Aquinas revised to some extent. The Latin title *Lectura* indicates that the commentary derives from lecture notes or *reportationes*; the title *Expositio* indicates that Aquinas either dictated or wrote the work himself.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of their origin, in each commentary the didactic setting of the lectures shapes their discourse, as each major section of a lecture begins in one of two ways: with a statement, which Thomas then elaborates, often with multiple points; or with a question, which Thomas then answers.

The masters at the schools of theology generally alternated teaching the Old and New Testaments, favoring in the Old Testament the book of Genesis, the prophetic books, Psalms, Canticles or Song of Songs, and Job; and preferring in the New Testament the gospels, especially Matthew and John, the epistles, and Revelation.<sup>38</sup> With the exception of Revelation, Thomas Aquinas produced commentaries on all of the aforementioned books or categories of books. Thomas' commentaries on Isaiah and Jeremiah

---

<sup>36</sup> Glorieux, "L'Enseignement au Moyen Âge": 110.

<sup>37</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 117; Healy, *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 244; Glorieux, "L'Enseignement au Moyen Âge": 110.

represent the prophets, and in addition to the commentaries on Matthew and John, he also wrote a *Catena aurea* from 1262 to 1267 that explicated the four gospels.<sup>39</sup>

Thomas, as a master of the sacred page, lectured on Scripture consistently throughout his academic career, but determining the chronology of his teaching of Scripture is a difficult task.<sup>40</sup> Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that university professors at this time had complete freedom when it came to choosing course material, setting lecture times, and organizing disputations.<sup>41</sup> Their freedom has led to historical uncertainty, and as a result, much academic discussion regarding the chronology of Thomas' lectures on Scripture and the resulting commentaries has ensued.<sup>42</sup>

### *Thomas Aquinas and the Commentary on Hebrews*

When Thomas Aquinas delivered his inaugural sermon as a *magister in sacra pagina*, he categorized the books of the Old Testament in regard to God as king or as

---

<sup>39</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 368-374. Glorieux, *Répertoire des Maîtres en Théologie de Paris au XIII siècle*, 90-92. While the catalogues of Thomas' writings list the commentary on Canticles, no manuscripts exist. See Weisheipl, 326-327.

<sup>40</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 243.

<sup>41</sup> In contrast, those preaching sermons would have their subject matter largely determined by the church calendar and the liturgy of the day, which would take into account various feast days; the medieval sermon typically began "with a scriptural text from the Gospel or Epistle of the day," which then set the theme of the sermon. J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, trans. J. de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964), 137. See also L.-J. Bataillon, "Early Scholastic and Mendicant Preaching as Exegesis of Scripture," in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 137.

<sup>42</sup> Glorieux and Mandonnet have different chronologies of the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas, and Glorieux has criticized Mandonnet's methods, which rely on Mandonnet's theory regarding Thomas' teaching schedule, a strict habit of alternating between the Old and New Testaments, and the resulting effect on his commentary output. Weisheipl cites Mandonnet's chronology, but with a caveat. The more recent research by Weisheipl and Torrell represents the best and most current thinking on this subject, and I will use their data. See Pierre Mandonnet, "La Chronologie des écrits scripturaires de St. Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Thomiste*, N.S. xi (1928), especially 34-36, 40, and 45; Glorieux, Palemon, "Essai sur les commentaires scripturaires de saint Thomas et leur chronologie," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 17, (1950), especially 263 and 265-266. The discussions and chronologies by Weisheipl and Torrell may be found in Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 118-119 and 368-374; and Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1. The Person and His Work*, 337-341.



father.<sup>43</sup> He categorized the books of the New Testament in regard to Christ and the Church, and further related the parts of the New Testament in this fashion:

The New Testament, which is ordered to eternal life not only through precepts but also through the gifts of grace, is divided into three parts. In the first the origin of grace is treated, in the Gospels. In the second, the power of grace, and this in the epistles of Paul, hence he begins in the power of the Gospel, in Romans 1:16 saying, ‘For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.’ In the third, the execution of the aforesaid virtues is treated, and this in the rest of the books of the New Testament.<sup>44</sup>

While the further division of the letters of Paul is missing from the text of this sermon, Thomas Aquinas addresses the Pauline corpus in the prologue to his commentary on Romans. Here he reiterates that the subject of Paul’s fourteen letters to the church is the grace of Christ. This subject can be approached in three ways, with the first way relating to the church’s “Head, namely Christ, and in this regard it is explained in the letter to the Hebrews.”<sup>45</sup> The other Pauline letters concern the grace of Christ as found either in the chief members of the Church or in the Church itself; but it is Hebrews that occupies the chief place, due to its depiction of the power of the grace of Christ as head of the mystical body. Thus, in Thomas’ scheme, Hebrews fittingly serves as a bridge between the gospels and the rest of the New Testament: the gospels relate the origin of grace and the letters explain the grace which the Church enjoys through its Head, Christ himself, as explained

---

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture,” 7.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture,” 11-12.

<sup>45</sup> “Est enim haec doctrina tota de gratia Christi, quae quidem potest tripliciter considerari. Uno modo secundum quod est in ipso Capite, scilicet Christo, et sic commendatur in epistola ad Hebraeos.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón Biblical Commentaries 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 4. Henceforward, *Romans*, Larcher.

in Hebrews; the gospels depict the life of Christ and the letters foster the life of the Church, Christ's body—a life made possible by that body's Head.

That Thomas Aquinas considered the letter to the Hebrews to be the work of Paul is evident in his prologues to the commentaries on both Romans and Hebrews. In the Romans prologue, Hebrews is the first of Paul's letters to be considered in Thomas' "division and order of all the epistles."<sup>46</sup> In the Hebrews prologue, Thomas concludes with a robust discussion of the topic of Paul's authorship of Hebrews,<sup>47</sup> using this opportunity to dispute and instruct, and to cite authorities and opinions both for and against Pauline authorship, before decisively declaring "the Apostle" to be the writer of this epistle.<sup>48</sup> For Thomas, it is vital to read Hebrews in the context of the formal unity of the Pauline corpus, as well as in the context of the New Testament.

Thomas Aquinas' commentaries on Paul's writings are of singular importance, according to Chenu: first, because this text accounts for a third of all of Thomas' exegetical writings; and second, because "it deals with the book of Scripture that, by its subject matter, is the most propitious to theological exegesis."<sup>49</sup> Thomas' commentaries on the Pauline corpus have come down to us in two ways: as a complete work based on

---

<sup>46</sup> "Scripsit enim quatuordecim epistolas quarum novem instruunt ecclesiam gentium; quatuor praelatos et principes Ecclesiae, id est reges; una populum Israel, scilicet quae est ad Hebraeos. . . . Et sic patet ratio distinctionis et ordinis omnium epistolarum." Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4-5. In citations of Thomas Aquinas' commentaries, numbers in brackets refer to the paragraph numbers assigned in the Marietti edition. References to the body of each commentary will list the epistle chapter and the lecture number, the Marietti paragraph number in brackets, and the page number(s).

<sup>47</sup> "Sed antequam accedamus ad divisionem, sciendum est quod ante synodum Nicaenam, quidam dubitaverunt an ista epistola esset Pauli." Thomas Aquinas, "*Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura*," *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, vol. 1, ed. Raphael Cai (Turin: Marietti, 1952), *Prologus* [5], 336.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. and ed. by Chrysostom Baer (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2006), Prologue [5], 6-7. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Baer.

<sup>49</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 248.

the *reportationes* of Reginald of Piperno; and as a partial manuscript edited by Thomas, an *expositio*, that covers only Romans and I Corinthians 1-10. There are thirty extant complete manuscripts of the Pauline commentary corpus, and seven manuscripts of the commentary on Hebrews standing by itself.<sup>50</sup> Dating the Pauline corpus is fraught with difficulty and disagreement. Both Glorieux and Mandonnet maintain that Thomas' *lectura* on Paul's letters originated during his first stay in Italy, which Glorieux dates from 1259 to 1265, and Mandonnet dates from 1259 to 1268.<sup>51</sup> Chenu offers no opinion, Torrell places the *lectura* in Rome from 1265 to 1268,<sup>52</sup> and Weisheipl argues for placing Thomas' work on Paul in his second Paris regency, between 1269 and 1272.<sup>53</sup>

There are two versions of the first seven chapters of the Hebrews lectures. One version appears to be the *reportatio* of Reginald of Piperno. The other version was brought to light by Remigius of Florence and first appeared in a 1562 Venice edition; it is included in the critical Marietti edition.<sup>54</sup> Both Larcher and Baer use the Marietti text for

---

<sup>50</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 372. A list of these manuscripts appears in Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, vol. 1, ed. Raphael Cai, xvii-xix. Critical editions include Parma, vol. 13; Vivés, vol. 20, 381-742, and vol. 21; Marietti, 2 vols., ed. Raphael Cai, 1953. A newer Leonine edition of Thomas' commentaries on Paul's letters is under way, but only the commentary on Romans is at an advanced stage of work. See *Romans*, Larcher, iii.

<sup>51</sup> Glorieux, "Essai sur les commentaires scripturaires de saint Thomas et leur chronologie": 254-258; Mandonnet, "La Chronologie des écrits scripturaires de St. Thomas d'Aquin": 34.

<sup>52</sup> Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1. The Person and His Work*, 340. This issue is a troubling one, relying as it does on finding correspondences between Thomas' thought in the *lectura* and his thought in the *Summa Theologiae*. Prügl is uncomfortable with the idea of Thomas in Rome writing the *Summa*, lecturing on Pseudo-Dionysius, and commenting on Paul simultaneously, and so prefers to situate the commentary on Paul's letters as being written during Thomas' first Paris teaching assignment. See Thomas Prügl, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture," *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 390-391.

<sup>53</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 373.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, xiv.

their translations of the Hebrews commentary.<sup>55</sup> Baer notes that the version found by Remigius tends to repeat statements found in other passages, and also to be more philosophical in nature. His opinion is that this material represents either “an interpolation of another student’s class notes,” or an effort by Thomas to answer a student’s questions. That what we have in the Hebrews commentary is authentic, however, neither Baer nor Torrell doubt.<sup>56</sup>

### *Thomas Aquinas’ Approach to Scripture*

In order to place Thomas Aquinas in the history of interpreting the Bible, examining two broad aspects of his exegesis will be helpful: how Thomas viewed the senses of Scripture, and how he handled the words and text of Scripture.

#### *The Senses of Scripture*

Two valuable texts for considering Thomas’ approach to the senses of Scripture are the prologue to his commentary on Job and his *Summa*. Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologiae* I, q.1, a.10, poses this exegetical challenge: “It seems that in Holy Writ a word cannot have several senses, historical or literal, allegorical, tropological or moral, and anagogical.”<sup>57</sup> He cites various objections to there being multiple senses to Scripture: the confusion produced by multiple senses, and the resultant inability to

---

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), iii (henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher); Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, xiv.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, xiv. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1. The Person and His Work*, 255. In my research on Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews, I have encountered no criticism of sections of the work for being inauthentic.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

construe a clear argument, in addition to the inconsistent lists of senses that previous interpreters have applied. Thomas, in citing those objections, is not simply theorizing; he is describing the state of the teaching of Scripture in the schools. The masters taught from glosses in which unlabeled senses were attached to a verse, forcing the master to decide which sense he was explicating; terminology regarding the senses was not consistent; and there was still a tendency to view the spiritual sense as nobler and higher than the literal sense, in spite of the work of the Victorines.<sup>58</sup> Stephen Langton had also tried to sort out the literal glosses from the spiritual, but “no satisfactory theory was developed before Thomas.”<sup>59</sup>

Thomas’ reply to the opening challenge of the problem of the multiple senses of Scripture, and the resultant confusion and inconsistency, runs as follows:

I answer that, The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning not by words only (as man can also do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property that the things signified by the words have themselves also a meaning. Therefore that first meaning whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That meaning whereby things signified by words have themselves also a meaning is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it.<sup>60</sup>

After discussing the threefold division of the spiritual sense, Thomas continues: “Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have

---

<sup>58</sup> See Smalley, “The Bible in the Medieval Schools,” 213-215.

<sup>59</sup> A. Paretsky, “The Influence of Thomas the Exegete on Thomas the Theologian: The Tract on Law (Ia-IIae, qq. 98-108) as a Test Case,” *Angelicum*, no. 71 (1994): 560.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10. Thomas’ reliance on Augustine and *On Christian Teaching* is discussed in Chapter 3.

several senses.”<sup>61</sup> Here Thomas has chosen to follow the exegetical teachings laid down by Hugh of St. Victor, who holds that polysemeity is inherent in the way that God speaks through things. According to Hugh, the “meaning of things is much more manifold (*multiplex*) than the meaning of words. Few words have more than two or three meanings, but a thing can mean as many other things as it has visible or invisible properties in common with other things.”<sup>62</sup>

Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of the literal sense of Scripture is one that allows for a multiplicity of senses, yet without equivocation. Such an enriched literal sense is due to Thomas’ understanding of the nature and provenance of Scripture. God is the author of Scripture, and He speaks through words and things. Words signify things; this is the literal historical sense. Words signify things that in turn are further significations of other things; this is the spiritual or figurative sense. God is the primary cause of the text of Scripture; its human authors are the instrumental causes. Human language uses words to signify things; God speaks using people, events, and institutions. The book of Job is a case in point, moving the reader to understand that “God not only orders the life of just men to their own good,” but also has their lives represented, through the medium of the text of Scripture, for others to see.<sup>63</sup> Thus, as Thomas reads it in his commentary, the life

---

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

<sup>62</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* [14], in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 225. See also Zinn’s discussion: Grover A. Zinn, Jr., “Hugh of St. Victor’s “*De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* as an “Accessus” Treatise for the Study of the Bible,” *Traditio*, no. 52 (1997): 131.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, trans. Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 1:12, 81. Henceforward, *Job*. Citations give the chapter and verse of Job, followed by the page number.

of Job points to the account of the life of Job, which in turn points to the account of God's providential dealings in human lives.<sup>64</sup>

Thomas Aquinas goes on in his *Summa* to explain that God speaks in a variety of ways in Scripture by means of the literal sense, speaking poetically, suitably, and directly. God's poetic speaking relates to Scripture's reliance on figures of speech, which are grounded in the literal sense. As Thomas contends, it is most proper for Scripture to use metaphors, putting forward "divine and spiritual truths under the likenesses of material things." Truths conveyed through the veil of sensible imagery do not allow "the minds of those to whom the revelation has been made to rest in the likenesses"; rather, truths so conveyed raise human minds "to the knowledge of intelligible things."<sup>65</sup>

And Thomas states that Scripture's pervasive use of symbol and allegory pertains to the literal sense. As he says in the prologue to his commentary on Job, "the truths intended about spiritual things through sensible figures belong not to the mystical but to the literal sense, because the literal sense is that which is primarily intended by the words, whether they are used properly or figuratively."<sup>66</sup> Or, as Smalley puts it, "if the 'letter' is defined as the whole intention of the inspired writer, it makes no difference whether he expresses himself in plain language or symbolically or metaphorically."<sup>67</sup> Ocker observes that Thomas in his commentaries "calls some things 'parabolic' that earlier would have

---

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job*, Prologue, 68. Here in the prologue, Thomas states that the intention of the book of Job is to show "through plausible arguments that human affairs are ruled by divine providence," and that in discussing this theme, the subject will be "the many grave afflictions of a certain man, perfect in every virtue, named Job."

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.9.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job* 1:6, 76.

<sup>67</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 300.

been called mystical . . . thus leaving symbolic meaning firmly in the context of the letter.”<sup>68</sup>

In addition to speaking poetically, God also speaks in ways suited for our understanding. For example, God addresses things done out of time as if they happened in time. Such is the case with the six days of creation, when, in fact, God speaks an eternal word of creation. Regarding the “time” of creation, Thomas describes the language of Scripture in this way: “things are said to be created in the beginning of time not as if the beginning of time were a measure of creation, but because together with time heaven and earth were created.”<sup>69</sup> In his commentary on Job, Thomas further explains that, “in the beginning of Genesis, God is said to have said some things on the first or on the second day, even though His speaking is eternal, because the things which are said by Him happened in time.”<sup>70</sup>

And in addition to speaking poetically and suitably, God speaks directly. He speaks most fully through His Son; He speaks to and through individuals, such as the prophets; He speaks to Satan in his heavenly court, as the book of Job indicates; and God speaks at events, such as Christ’s baptism and transfiguration. God also speaks through people’s lives, again as Thomas Aquinas indicates in his commentary on Job. As words represent things, so the book of Job represents the life of Job; and the life of Job provides the representation—for our benefit—both of what a righteous life looks like and of how

---

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.46.3.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job* 1:6, 77. Thomas further applies this argument to Job 1:6, which alludes to the angels and Satan appearing before God “on a certain day.” He says that a measure of time is used here to show that this deed occurred at a specific time in history, even though the angels never cease standing in God’s presence.



divine providence works. And yet, as Thomas asserts in the prologue, such a mimetic purpose does not reduce the life of Job to a parable.<sup>71</sup> Such a reading would not accord well with the truth or with the authority of Scripture, says Thomas. It is Job as history that will provide evidence of God's dealings in human affairs—and so we return to the literal and historical sense of Scripture, in which its examples and teachings are grounded.

Thomas' method is to begin with the actual text and discuss textual and lexical issues before moving on to doctrine or theology. This approach is evident in his commentary on Job. In the prologue to this commentary, Thomas expresses his desire to allow Gregory's excellent spiritual commentary on Job to stand,<sup>72</sup> while he focuses on the literal level alone, which, after all, is the foundation for the spiritual sense. Such an approach is a valuable one for Thomas, since it is the literal sense which will allow him to do theology; as Thomas states, "all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn."<sup>73</sup> Thus it is the literal sense and his understanding of it that can be debated and challenged. Just as Job and his friends debate the ways of God and the situation of Job in a medieval *disputatio*, so by adhering to the literal sense is Thomas inviting conversation and challenge, in order that through the communal process of discussion and debate all may come to a better understanding of the text and its applications. Thus the literal sense is sufficient for progress toward the truth, since "nothing necessary to the faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not

---

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job*, Prologue, 68-69.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job*, Prologue, 69.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense.”<sup>74</sup> In his commentaries on Job and Paul’s letters, it is clear that Thomas’ careful attention to the literal sense allows him to consider theological questions of great import,<sup>75</sup> as he uses grammatical and logical analysis of the text to consider “the religious and intellectual purposes of biblical narrative,” and then distill from that narrative various doctrinal statements.<sup>76</sup>

Many instructive examples of Thomas’ handling of the literal sense can be found in his commentaries on Job and on Hebrews. In regard to Job 1:1, which says that Job was without guile and upright, and had turned away from evil, Thomas uses the text first as evidence that Job was without sin, and then as an opportunity to discuss the ways in which we do sin—against our neighbor, against God, and against ourselves.<sup>77</sup> In Hebrews 11:13, with its reference to the Old Testament saints who were pilgrims and strangers on this earth, Thomas discusses three biblical personages who called themselves a pilgrim or a stranger—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and what it means to be a pilgrim or a stranger, with allusions to Isaiah 23 and Psalm 38.<sup>78</sup> And in Hebrews 12:1, in which the saints referred to as a cloud of witness, Thomas reflects on three concerns: what it means to witness; why the saints are likened to clouds; and how the saints serve as our exemplars.<sup>79</sup> Thus it may be seen how surprisingly deep, in Thomas’ hands, can a commentary on the literal sense be. In the process of commenting on just a few words,

---

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

<sup>75</sup> Verger, “L’*ex*ègese de l’université,” 204.

<sup>76</sup> Ocker, *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation*, 41.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job* 1:1, 71-72.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 11.4 [596], 245.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 12.1 [657-658], 269.

Thomas can bring in a multiplicity of Scripture texts, doctrines, and theological applications, so that what would at first glance seem to be a dry and linear approach is instead rich and multifoliate.

### *The Words of Scripture*

In his first lecture on the book of Hebrews, Thomas makes the observation that “it is extraordinary in this epistle that every single word has its own purpose and keeps its own order.”<sup>80</sup> The fact that each word, and the placement of each word, matters to Thomas indicates that he will closely examine and reflect on the meaning of the words and phrases of every verse—which is indeed his procedure throughout the commentary, and which is essential to the thorough understanding of the literal sense that must take place before spiritual senses may be considered. While such an approach may sound, and sometimes be, rather pedantic, there are occasions when Thomas’ reflections on the meaning of a word or phrase are both illuminating and delightful. For example, the Douay-Rheims<sup>81</sup> version of Hebrews 2:12 reads, “I will declare Thy name to My brethren; in the midst of the church will I praise Thee.” Thomas here reads “middle” rather than “midst”; and the notion of Christ being “in the middle” leads to a catena of interpretive comments:

And he says *in the middle*, since, just as a pillar in the middle supports the house itself, and a lamp in the middle of a house illumines, and the heart in the middle vivifies the body, so is Christ in the middle of the Church. Likewise, He is *in the middle*, since He was not sent to one people only, as Moses was—Ps. 75:1: *In Judea God is known*—but He was sent for the salvation of the whole world. Ps.

---

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.1 [7], 9.

<sup>81</sup> In his translation of Thomas’ Hebrews commentary, Baer has chosen to use the Douay-Rheims version of the Bible because it is the closest of the modern translations to the Latin version Thomas would have had. Occasionally, Thomas’ version differs slightly, as in this case. See Baer, “Translator’s Introduction,” *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, xiv.

73:12: *He hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth*; and therefore it is said in Lk. 24:36: *Jesus stood in the middle of them [the disciples]*.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, while the writer of Hebrews here has Christ speaking the words of Psalm 22:22 in order to sing God's praises in the midst of the congregation, Thomas Aquinas asks the question, "Why is Christ in the middle of the church?" He takes the time to reflect on the significance of the speaker's position relative to His hearers, and why it matters that Christ is not only in our midst, but "in the middle," since it is in this all-important position that Christ supports the Church, and illumines us and gives us life. And Thomas' consideration of this rather pedestrian phrase allows him to anticipate the contrast between Moses the servant and Christ the Son that the writer of Hebrews will discuss in the next chapter; for while Moses made God known only to Judea, Christ came to proffer salvation to the entire world. Because of Thomas' conviction that every word of the epistle to the Hebrews has its place and purpose, no detail is overlooked, and even a lowly prepositional phrase may render remarkable service to a careful reader.

The influence of *lectio divina* is evident as well, a practice that cultivated the daily reading of Scripture as the basis of the contemplative life.<sup>83</sup> To read Scripture in this way "was a religious experience, involving such careful meditation on the words of the text that they became permanently imprinted on the mind and spirit."<sup>84</sup> Scripture commentaries of the thirteenth century were first and foremost theological works, as determined by *lectio divina*; and the theologian's contemplative role involved meditating on and praying the Word of God so that he could then interpret it according to its

---

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 2.3 [132], 65.

<sup>83</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 27.

<sup>84</sup> Robert E. McNally, S.J., *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 9.

senses.<sup>85</sup> Years of *lectio divina* would produce not only a deep knowledge of the words and ideas of Scripture, but also the ability to see the interconnections of those words and ideas across the books of Scripture. And in the case of Thomas Aquinas and other exegetes of his day, the appearance of one word in a particular text of Scripture would induce citations of one or many other verses where that same word or thought appears in the Bible. Thomas' canonical understanding of Scripture and his awareness of its myriad interconnections are apparent in every lecture.

It must be admitted that in his work on Scripture, Thomas Aquinas faced serious philological limitations. He did not know Greek or Hebrew, and his understanding of Jewish customs was limited.<sup>86</sup> He used the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, which, after Alcuin's recension, had fewer errors; but the Vulgate existed in multiple versions, and Thomas occasionally selected alternative readings if they better suited his exegetical purposes.<sup>87</sup> But even with those limitations, Thomas Aquinas "possessed a keen sense for linguistic peculiarities in the Bible,"<sup>88</sup> in addition to being sensitive to genres; he remarks, for example, that in the third chapter of Job, hexameter verses appear, so that "it

---

<sup>85</sup> "Sans se désintéresser pour autant des questions exégétiques, les commentaires de l'Écriture sont au XIII siècle avant tout des ouvrages théologiques, lesquels sont toujours ordonnés à la *lectio divina*. La fonction éminemment contemplative du théologien consistait à méditer et à prier la parole de Dieu pour ensuite l'interpréter et tâcher d'en faire saisir tous ses sens." Jean-Éric Stroobant de Saint-Éloy, "Introduction," in Thomas d'Aquin, *Commentaire sur les Psaumes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 13.

<sup>86</sup> Edward Synan, "The Four 'Senses' and Four Exegetes," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 227, 229.

<sup>87</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 255, 266.

<sup>88</sup> Prügl, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture," 398.

is clear from this point on that the book is written in the manner of a poem,” and that “the author uses the figures and styles which poets customarily use.”<sup>89</sup> Thomas and the other exegetes of his day were confident of finding logic and a conceptual wholeness in every book of Scripture, given that, as he stated in his *Summa Theologiae*, “the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect.”<sup>90</sup>

All lectures on Scripture opened in the same way, with the reading of the text of the sacred page. Such a beginning was necessary since not all students possessed a copy of the Bible, nor were their memories to be relied upon for such an important enterprise.<sup>91</sup>

And then, after reading the text, the master would begin to divide it,

according to the internal order governing the development of the text and the arrangement of its parts. As a result, the text from the beginning of it to the end is divided and subdivided, first into broad portions, and then pericope after pericope, sentence after sentence. Whereas traditional glossing latched upon one or another difficult word as one drifted through the text, it is now a matter of seeking to grasp textual wholes, to determine trains of thought by means of a logical analysis pushed to the point of minuteness. . . .<sup>92</sup>

This approach had medieval interpreters of Scripture dividing the text first in order to analyze the resulting parts; then seeking to understand the parts in terms of how they related to each other; and then re-unifying the text. As a result, medieval commentaries typically focus on a theme, and feature large blocks of Scripture that always include units at the level of phrases, verses, and sometimes words.<sup>93</sup> While unlike the modern approach

---

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Job* 3:4, 102.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

<sup>91</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 116.

<sup>92</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 250.

<sup>93</sup> John F. Boyle, “The Theological Character of the Scholastic “Division of the Text” with Particular Reference to the Commentaries of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *With Reverence for the Word*:

of focusing on one verse or pericope, the medieval method is fruitful in its own way; the key is to remember to read and view these commentaries in their entirety, for “the division of the text not only presumes a conceptual unity, but produces a commentary that itself must be understood as a whole.”<sup>94</sup>

This method of *divisio textus*, treating the text as a unity while discussing its divided and subdivided elements, had been instituted by Hugh of St. Cher and reinforced by Guerric of St. Quentin.<sup>95</sup> Hugh of St. Cher was the first to teach in the Dominican chair of theology at the school of St. Jacques in Paris, Guerric of St. Quentin was the second, and Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas’ teacher, was the third<sup>96</sup>; and it was at the school of St. Jacques that Thomas spent his first three years in Paris. Thus Thomas was the inheritor of a pure stream of a scholarly enterprise that relied on addressing parts in order to see the whole.

Having first divided the text,<sup>97</sup> the master next would address the letter or meaning of each small unit of the text, bearing in mind the sequence proposed by Hugh of St. Victor of considering the letter, the sense, and then the *sententia* or deeper meaning. Defining and classifying words and concepts is the master’s third task. Thomas fulfills this particular responsibility in regard to the statement in Hebrews 3:6 that we the faithful are Christ’s house, as he considers the four elements that are characteristic of

---

*Medieval Christian Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 276.

<sup>94</sup> Boyle, “The Theological Character of the Scholastic “Division of the Text,” 278.

<sup>95</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 296-297.

<sup>96</sup> Weisheipl, “Thomas d’Aquino and Albert His Teacher,” 3.

<sup>97</sup> In discussing these five steps of the exposition of a text, I am reliant on Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 250-253.

houses but are not found in “tents or other temporal dwellings.” Such houses are certain and permanent; they have a disposition rightly ordered to God’s glory; they persevere; and they stand firm, being unmoved by adversity.<sup>98</sup> Philosophical categories, such as the four Aristotelian causes, could also play a part at this level of the exposition of a text,<sup>99</sup> as when Thomas, in discussing God’s creation of the world through Christ in Hebrews 1:2, expounds on how the preposition “through” denotes the cause of the Father’s creative action, and whether in this case the cause is final, formal, or efficient.<sup>100</sup>

The fourth task undertaken by the master involves the search for reasons—“the reasons for things, for events, for words, for steps taken. Always it is supposed that the evangelist or the prophet had reasons in mind.”<sup>101</sup> When considering Hebrews 11:1, regarding faith as the substance of things hoped for, Thomas says that the word “substance” may be explained both causally and essentially, which he proceeds to do. And when the text or the teaching of the text produces further questions, the fifth and final task of the master now begins, as he “passes spontaneously from the *expositio* to the *quaestio*.”<sup>102</sup> Thomas does this numerous times in his Hebrews commentary, as seen, for example, in his consideration of Hebrews 12:15 and the man who is wanting or lacking in the grace of God. Here Thomas moves from a simple explanation of the text to the form of an article from his *Summa*, as he must clarify the nature of grace and deal with questions arising from erroneous views (Does grace depends on our good works? On our

---

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 3.1 [169], 81.

<sup>99</sup> William M. Wright, *Rhetoric and Theology: Figural Reading of John 9* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 131.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.1 [22], 15-16.

<sup>101</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 252.

<sup>102</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 253.



free will?) in a discussion entailing a *sed contra* and a *respondeo*.<sup>103</sup> As Chenu describes, in such a discussion, “exegesis often develops along the lines of doctrinal research, argumentation, arguing from suitabilities, and lengthily at times, refuting errors,” so that, step by step, “the passage is accomplished from exegesis to theology and to its *modus ratiocinativus*.”<sup>104</sup>

These five steps of the explication of a passage of Scripture are to be found in Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews. This process was the teaching method of the day, and the commentary is, after all, a compilation of notes taken from Thomas’ lectures. And given his confidence that every word of the letter to the Hebrews has its purpose and keeps its own order, Thomas Aquinas would deem it fitting and right that the orderly nature of this epistle be mirrored by his orderly presentation of it.

---

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 12.3 [689], 280-281. “Sed contra. Quia si gratia non datur ex operibus sed tantum ex hoc quod aliquis non point obstaculum, ergo habere gratiam dependet ex solo libero arbitrio, et non ex electione Dei, quod est error Pelagii. Respondeo. Dicendum est quod hoc ipsum, quod aliquis non point obstaculum, ex gratia procedit.” *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura*, ed. Cai, 12.3 [689], 488.

<sup>104</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 253.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Thomas Aquinas and His Exegetical Context

As an interpreter of Scripture, Thomas Aquinas was the beneficiary of a rich exegetical and intellectual heritage. His exegetical heritage was shaped by other students of Scripture, both in what they wrote regarding exegesis and in how they themselves interpreted the Bible. His intellectual heritage is evinced in his references to academic and religious authorities, with whom he at times dialogues in his commentaries.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Thomas Aquinas lived during a period of intellectual expansion, when, due to the value placed on the study of Scripture and the rapid growth of knowledge in multiple disciplines, a growing array of tools was available to those who sought to understand and teach the Bible.

Thus, in order to appreciate Thomas Aquinas' exegetical context, it will be helpful first to consider those individuals in the history of exegesis who influenced him. Predecessors of note include Augustine in the patristic period; and the Victorines—in particular, Hugh, Richard, and Andrew of the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris—who preceded Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period. Two of Thomas' contemporaries merit attention as well: Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas' teacher, and Bonaventure, Thomas' Franciscan peer. After addressing those who influenced Thomas' exegesis, an examination of the authorities cited in medieval exegesis and the tools available to aid exegesis will shed further light on the exegetical context of Thomas Aquinas.

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Thomas disagrees with Jerome, who holds that Heb 2:13 refers to Is 8:17; while Thomas quotes Jerome, he notes that Is 12:2 is a much clearer reference to the phrase being considered. See *Hebrews*, Baer, II.3 [133], 65.

### *Exegetical Influences: Augustine*

In the field of exegesis, Augustine was a dominant force during the scholastic period.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the veneration due this Father of the Church, the works of Augustine in their original forms were being more widely and carefully read during the thirteenth century. The spiritual renewal that had led to the founding of the Dominican and Franciscan orders had also prompted a resurgent appreciation for the thought of Augustine.<sup>3</sup> And the work done by Robert Kilwardby between 1256 and 1261 provided medieval students with access to the best of ancient Christian thought, as he prepared both summaries and alphabetized indexes of the works of Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and others.<sup>4</sup> As Chenu explains, this enterprise enabled Kilwardby to “put into circulation the texts of Augustine that would otherwise have been quite unmanageable due to their massiveness.”<sup>5</sup>

That Thomas Aquinas owes a considerable hermeneutical debt to Augustine is patent, given how often Thomas’ statements on interpreting Scripture echo Augustine’s seminal work, *On Christian Teaching*—a work that summarizes Augustine’s philosophy of Bible study and exegesis.<sup>6</sup> Wawrykow notes that “many of Augustine’s insights in the *DDC* about God’s revelation in Scripture and about the appropriate means for the

---

<sup>2</sup> Jean Leclercq, “The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture: From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 195.

<sup>3</sup> M.-D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 53.

<sup>4</sup> M. Michèle Mulchahey, “*First the Bow is Bent in Study....*”: *Dominican Education before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 524-525; Chenu, 47, 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 47-48.

<sup>6</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 22-23.

reception of this revelation have found their way, implicitly and explicitly, into thirteenth-century accounts of the discipline of theology” written by Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, among others.<sup>7</sup> How language functions; the value of figuration in Scripture; multiple meanings encoded in the words of Scripture—on these vital topics, Augustine and Aquinas are of the same mind, and in the last two articles of the first question of his *Summa*, Thomas’ debt to Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching* is especially clear.<sup>8</sup>

In Books I and II of *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine describes the structure of language. He states that words are signs—“those things which are employed to signify something.”<sup>9</sup> Things also may be signs, and in turn signify other things. Signs may be literal or metaphorical, and they may be clear or ambiguous.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Aquinas reveals a similar understanding of how Scripture functions and signifies, observing in one of his quodlibetal disputations that

Sacred Scripture manifests the truth which it teaches in two ways: by words and by the figures of things. The manifestation by words produces the historical or literal sense; so everything that can be rightly acquired from the very signification of the words has to do with the literal sense. The spiritual sense, on the other hand, . . . consists in the expressions of certain things by the figures of other things. . . .<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Wawrykow, “Reflections on the Place of the *De doctrina christiana* in High Scholastic Discussions of Theology,” in *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 100.

<sup>8</sup> Wawrykow, “Reflections on the Place of the *De doctrina christiana* in High Scholastic Discussions of Theology,” 102. See *ST* I.1.9 and 10.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* I.2, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* II.10, 37.

<sup>11</sup> “Sicut enim dictum est, sacra Scriptura veritatem quam tradit, dupliciter manifestat: per verba, et per rerum figuras. Manifestatio autem quae est per verba, facit sensum historicum sive litteralem; unde totum id ad sensum litteralem pertinet quod ex ipsa verborum significatione recte accipitur. Sed sensus spiritualis, ut dictum est, accipitur vel consistit in hoc quod quaedam res per figuram aliarum rerum

Likewise, in the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas states that Scripture's author is God, "in whose power it is to signify His meaning not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property that the things signified by the words have themselves also a meaning."<sup>12</sup> Clearly, Thomas is well acquainted with Augustine's theory of both words and things (people, objects, events) functioning as signs.

The use of one thing to signify another gives rise to a consideration of the purpose of figures or metaphors in Scripture, and here again Augustine and Thomas view the matter alike. They find that figuration in Scripture has both an aesthetic and heuristic value, in addition to a protective function; and that what the use of figures may obscure in one passage, another passage of Scripture will clarify. Hence, Augustine observes that

. . . no one disputes that it is much more pleasant to learn lessons presented through imagery, and much more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty. Those who fail to discover what they are looking for suffer from hunger, whereas those who do not look, because they have it in front of them, often die of boredom. . . . It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones. Virtually nothing is unearthed from these obscurities which cannot be found quite plainly expressed somewhere else.<sup>13</sup>

And Thomas in turn declares in the *Summa* that it is fitting for spiritual truths to be presented through material things for three reasons: first, "because all our knowledge originates from sense"; second, because even the simple who cannot grasp intellectual truths may understand such truths if they are "expounded by means of likenesses taken

---

exprimuntur. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* VII.6.15, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi, O.P. (Rome: Marietti, 1949), 147. Translation quoted by Eleonore Stump, "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 257.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* II.6, 33.

from corporeal things”; and third, because such representations are pleasing, as in poetry’s use of metaphors.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the use of metaphors and corporeal likenesses in Scripture is necessary, useful, and pleasing. And such a practice—using inferior entities to represent higher truths—neither diminishes nor obscures those higher truths. Thomas observes that

the ray of divine revelation is not extinguished by the sensible imagery in which it is veiled . . . . Hence those things that are taught metaphorically in one part of Scripture, in other parts are taught more openly. The very hiding of truth in figures is useful for the exercise of thoughtful minds, and as a defense against the ridicule of the impious,” since “divine truths are better hidden from the unworthy.”<sup>15</sup>

So it is that for both Augustine and Aquinas, figural representations in Scripture hinder the unbelieving and undeserving, motivate the earnest, and speak sufficiently clearly even to the simple.

In Book III of *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine discusses the fact that two or more meanings may be found in one passage of Scripture. Augustine commends attention to context and to parallel passages that are clearer for determining meaning, and advises the diligent pursuit of “the intention of the writer through whom the Holy Spirit produced that part of Scripture.”<sup>16</sup> The thrust of Augustine’s discussion of Scripture’s diversity of meanings is that Scripture is polysemous, possessing an abundance of meaning. The relationship of text and meaning is never a mere one to one correspondence, and Augustine contends that the Holy Spirit planned this—that the incorporation of layers of meaning into a text was intentional on the part of the Holy Spirit, who worked through

---

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.9.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.9.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* III.27, 87.

the author of the text for sake of the reader of the text. Augustine asks, “Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages?”<sup>17</sup>

Thomas’ rejoinder—with a reference to Augustine’s *Confessions*—is much more succinct: given that “the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Write should have several senses.”<sup>18</sup> Multiple meanings in one passage of Scripture testify to the power of Scripture’s primary author; for “God alone not only can make words point to *res* but also have this literal *res* point to other, “deeper” *res* as well, in the latter demonstrating God’s providential control over history.”<sup>19</sup> And Thomas further states that such a state of affairs neither arises from, nor leads to, interpretive uncertainty; for “in Holy Writ no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one—the literal—from which alone can any argument be drawn.”<sup>20</sup>

In his commentaries, Aquinas will at times present two literal meanings for the same text, discuss each meaning and its value, and pass on to the next topic without preferring one meaning over the other. As Healy has noted,

---

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* III.27, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.1.10. Augustine cites the example of the writings of Moses in his *Confessions*, stating that through Moses, “the one God has tempered the sacred books to the interpretations of many, who could come to see a diversity of truths.” See Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.42, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 271.

<sup>19</sup> Wawrykow, “Reflections on the Place of the *De doctrina christiana* in High Scholastic Discussions of Theology,” 107.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.1.10.

one of the more significant differences between contemporary exegesis and his is that Thomas does not seem to think that the exegete's task is to determine 'the' meaning of Scripture. . . . Scripture is the focus of theological argument, but the goal of such argument is not, or not primarily, to achieve consensus upon a single meaning. Instead, it is to enrich our understanding of what Scripture is saying to us . . . to hear what its divine author is saying to us here and now by its means.<sup>21</sup>

Thus Aquinas applies in his exegesis the endorsement given by Augustine to multiple meanings in Scripture. But it must be pointed out that Augustine does qualify that approach by enjoining the interpreter of Scripture to keep in mind the context of the Scripture passage and any relevant bounds set by the rule of faith.<sup>22</sup> Such doctrinal concerns are fully supported by Thomas in his Hebrews commentary, given the frequent discussions of the two natures of Christ and the errors of various heretics, for example. Context and the rule of faith, in addition to a consideration of the author's intention; the testimony of other Scripture passages; and the understanding of figural expressions—all are exegetical practices that Thomas Aquinas seems to have inherited from Augustine, and taught and applied in his works.

### *Exegetical Influences: The Victorines*

Established in 1113 near Paris, the Abbey and School of Saint Victor served as a center of learning and piety. The abbey's founding was one consequence of a movement to reform cathedral clergy, and indeed, its founder, William of Champeaux, had been archdeacon of Notre Dame in Paris until his decision to leave the cathedral and the

---

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, Introduction," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, III.1, 68.



schools.<sup>23</sup> Those resident at the Abbey “were unique at Paris in being both *scholars* and *claustrales*,<sup>24</sup> and Saint Victor was one of many establishments seeking renewal through cloistered religious life lived under the Rule of St. Augustine.<sup>25</sup> Notable among its members for their contributions to the exposition of Scripture were the Augustinian canons Hugh of Saint Victor (1056-1141); Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173); and Andrew of Saint Victor, a student under Hugh (1110-1175).

The Victorines represent an important school of thought in the history of exegesis, due to their ability “to bring into being an original blending of the new methods [of intellectual research and theological instruction] with the spiritual outlook of the monastic past. Hugh of Saint Victor initiated this, and his disciples continued his work”<sup>26</sup>—this work being the promotion of the study of the arts in order to serve the divine wisdom and deepen the knowledge of the faith.<sup>27</sup> To Hugh of Saint Victor is ascribed the shaping of the Victorine tradition, with its study of both Scripture and theology, and its devotion to contemplation, in a liturgical and communal setting.<sup>28</sup> Clark cites “its famous philosophers, scholars, and writers, and its impact on the intellectual life

---

<sup>23</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, trans E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 275.

<sup>24</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Grover A. Zinn, “Introduction,” *Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of The Trinity*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Smalley, “The Bible in the Medieval Schools,” 190.

<sup>27</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 270-271.

<sup>28</sup> Zinn, “Introduction,” *Richard of St. Victor*, 3.

of Paris.”<sup>29</sup> And Smalley further credits the Abbey of Saint Victor with moving scholasticism toward the practice of teaching the entire Bible, and with having a powerful influence outside of its ranks, for example on secular masters such as Peter Comestor, Peter the Chanter, and Stephen Langton.<sup>30</sup>

### *Exegetical Influences: Hugh of Saint Victor*

Hugh entered the abbey of Saint Victor about 1118. Completing his studies under the abbey’s founder, William of Champeaux, he stayed on to teach Scripture and the liberal arts.<sup>31</sup> Hugh dealt with the reading and exposition of Scripture in two significant works. One is the *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*,<sup>32</sup> a re-appropriation of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* for his own era.<sup>33</sup> The other is *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors*,<sup>34</sup> a work intended to introduce readers both to the text of Scripture and to its interpretation.

---

<sup>29</sup> William W. Clark, “The Twelfth-Century Church of St. Victor in Paris: A New Proposal,” in *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 68.

<sup>30</sup> Smalley, “The Bible in the Medieval Schools,” 206.

<sup>31</sup> A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary-Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 65.

<sup>32</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). Henceforward, *Didasc.*, Taylor.

<sup>33</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 86. Gibson alludes to Augustine’s influence on the Victorines, stating that “the positions that Augustine develops in the *De doctrina christiana* . . . are the basis for Hugh’s curriculum, Richard’s contemplative writings, and Andrew’s exegesis.” See Margaret T. Gibson, “The *De doctrina christiana* in the School of St. Victor,” in *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors*, trans. Frans van Liere, in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, Victorine Texts in Translation, vol. 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012).

Written later than the *Didascalicon*,<sup>35</sup> and more succinctly, *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* seems intended as an introduction to Scripture as a whole—or, as Zinn contends, an “*accessus*” treatise for studying the Bible.<sup>36</sup> Zinn makes a valid case for deeming *On Sacred Scripture* an example of a twelfth-century *accessus ad auctores*,<sup>37</sup> due to its consideration of Scripture’s literary characteristics: the distinctiveness of Scripture; the order, number, authority of the books of Scripture; and the authors and subject matter of Scripture. But Hugh considers not only how to categorize Scripture in this work but also how to read it. His comments on Scripture’s threefold interpretative scheme of history, allegory, and tropology are remarkable for the emphasis he gives to “the fundamental role of the literal/historical interpretation for all exegesis.”<sup>38</sup> Hugh explains that the historical sense “considers the first meaning of words, when they refer to things,” and that these things then signify truths of the Christian faith, at the allegorical level.<sup>39</sup> Hugh reinforces the fundamental importance of the historical sense in his statement that “to ignore the letter is to ignore what the letter signifies and what is signified by it.”<sup>40</sup>

This concern for the proper relationship between the historical and allegorical senses is also evident in Hugh’s earlier work, the *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*.

---

<sup>35</sup> Frans van Liere, “Introduction to Hugh of St Victor’s *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* and *The Diligent Examiner*,” *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory*, 208.

<sup>36</sup> Grover A. Zinn, Jr., “Hugh of St. Victor’s “*De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* as an “Accessus” Treatise for the Study of the Bible,” *Traditio*, no. 52 (1997): 112.

<sup>37</sup> Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 12-15.

<sup>38</sup> Zinn, “Hugh of St. Victor’s “*De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* as an “Accessus” Treatise for the Study of the Bible”: 126.

<sup>39</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* [3], 214, 215.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* [5], 217.

So greatly appreciated was Hugh's *Didascalicon* that it was "recommended reading for all Dominican novices as they prepared themselves for a lifetime of disciplined study."<sup>41</sup> In it, Hugh instructs both the student of the arts and the student of Scripture, and seeks to apply the principles of interpreting Scripture gleaned from Augustine to his philosophy of education.<sup>42</sup> As Taylor expresses it, Hugh's goal is to define and integrate the principal areas of knowledge, to demonstrate how they are integrated, and to prove that "in their integrity they are necessary to man for the attainment of his human perfection and his divine destiny."<sup>43</sup>

Reading in the liberal arts is the topic of books I through III; the reading and understanding of Scripture is the subject of books IV through VI. And reading for Hugh is no mere intellectual exercise; rather, reading in the arts, and especially in Scripture, has as its goal "the restoration within us of the divine likeness, which is our form and God's very nature."<sup>44</sup> Herein lies a clue to Hugh's emphasis on the historical sense: for him, history is to be comprehended "both as the narrative of saving deeds done throughout time that is recorded in scripture and as the primary or literal meaning of this narrative."<sup>45</sup> The right reading of God's saving deeds at the historical level will then lead to

---

<sup>41</sup> Mulchahey, "*First the Bow is Bent in Study . . .*", 92.

<sup>42</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey, *Houses of the Interpreter: Reading Scripture, Reading Culture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, "Introduction," Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, II.1, 96, trans. Franklin T. Harkins, in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, Victorine Texts in Translation, vol. 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012). Henceforward, *Didasc.*, Harkins.

<sup>45</sup> Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, "General Introduction," in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, Victorine Texts in Translation, vol. 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 36.

understanding them at the allegorical level, followed by transformative application of that understanding at the tropological level—so that fallen human creatures have the divine image progressively restored.

After describing the futility of seeking the knowledge of Scripture for the sake of human achievement or empty curiosity, Hugh addresses those who want to know Scripture in order to defend the faith, preach the truth, and understand and love the hidden things of God more deeply.<sup>46</sup> How to mine the treasures of Egypt and press the new learning into the service of the faith was the challenge facing Hugh, and his students. And to that end, he gives them the order in which their studies should proceed—along the lines of history, allegory, and tropology.<sup>47</sup>

History and the literal sense must come first. Studying historical books such as Genesis and the gospels in terms of the events that occur, when and where they occur, and by whom the events are done, will produce knowledge of history and of the literal historical sense.<sup>48</sup> “History” can refer not only to the narrative of events but also to “the first meaning of any narrative which uses words according to their proper nature”<sup>49</sup>—that is, the literal sense of a text. And in treating the literal sense, Hugh reminds his readers that God in Scripture speaks not only through words but also through things, noting that “the significance of things is far more excellent than that of words,” and that “the latter is

---

<sup>46</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, V.10, 134.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.2, 135.

<sup>48</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.3, 136-137. In the category of history, Hugh lists Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Kings, Chronicles, the gospels, and Acts.

<sup>49</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.3, 137.

the voice of men, the former the voice of God speaking to men.”<sup>50</sup> Hugh adjures his students to keep to the order of study in which history is addressed first, and to remember that, in history, we have “the means through which to admire God’s deeds, in allegory the means through which to believe his mysteries, in morality the means through which to imitate his perfection.”<sup>51</sup>

Hugh then goes on to address allegory and its mysteries. He cautions his students to use sound judgment and moderation as they seek to augment their understanding of the sacred page’s mysteries, always bearing in mind that history must anchor allegory. Using his building metaphor, Hugh says that the superstructure of allegory, laid on the foundation of history, has eight courses; it includes doctrinal and theological topics such as the Trinity, free will, grace, sin, the incarnation of the Lord, and our resurrection.<sup>52</sup> Because the New Testament makes explicit in theological matters what the Old Testament only foreshadowed, Hugh recommends reading doctrinally rich New Testament books first—such as the Pauline epistles—before attempting Old Testament books such as Isaiah and the Psalms.<sup>53</sup> Hugh stresses the inter-dependence of the historical and allegorical senses of Scripture as they instruct us, respectively, in what happened and in what we are to believe. And he warns against an overly individualistic interpretation of Scripture, reminding his students to keep in mind both the intention of the author and the teaching of the Church:

---

<sup>50</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, V.2, 121.

<sup>51</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.3, 138.

<sup>52</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.4, 144.

<sup>53</sup> For edification in the study of allegory, Hugh recommends the Genesis creation account, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, the Psalms, Matthew, John, and the epistles, especially those of Paul. See Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.4, 144.

But I do not say these things in order to offer anyone the chance to interpret the Scriptures according to his own will, but in order to show the man who follows the letter alone that he cannot long continue without error. For this reason it is necessary both that we follow the letter in such a way as not to prefer our own sense to the divine authors, and that we do not follow it in such a way as to deny that the entire pronouncement of truth is rendered in it. . . . In order, therefore, that you may be able to interpret the letter safely, it is necessary that you not presume upon your own opinion, but that first you be educated and informed, and that you lay, so to speak, a certain foundation of unshaken truth upon which the entire superstructure may rest. . . .<sup>54</sup>

Tropology receives only the briefest treatment in the *Didascalicon*, as Hugh states that it deals more with the meaning of things than the meaning of words. For it is from the meaning of things that we derive justice, from which arises morality—both of which should dictate our behavior. Hugh then explains that it is “by contemplating what God has done” that “we realize what we ourselves ought to do.”<sup>55</sup> Hugh’s summary handling of tropology in the *Didascalicon* is a reflection of the fact that tropology, after all, is not a *disciplina legendi*; it is a *diciplina vivendi*, “a method of moral training that is to be lived out.”<sup>56</sup>

Having instructed students in how to read Scripture in order to produce a changed life, Hugh’s final topic in this important book of the *Disdascalicon* is the exposition of Scripture. Exposition has three components. First is the letter, which is found in any kind of discourse, and which often needs no further explication.<sup>57</sup> Second is the sense, which may be either fitting or unfitting, as there will be times when, although the meaning of

---

<sup>54</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.4, 143-144.

<sup>55</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Harkins, VI.5, 172.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin T. Harkins, “*Lectio exhortatio debet esse*: Reading as a Way of Life at the Twelfth-Century Abbey of St. Victor,” in *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 111.

<sup>57</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.8-9, 147-148.

the words themselves is clear, the import of the statement is not. Regarding the meaning, the third component of the exposition of Scripture, Hugh states that this “divine deeper meaning can never be absurd, never false,” never contradictory. He here invokes the rule of faith, cautioning that if “the circumstances of the writing cannot be explored and examined, let us at least prefer only what sound faith prescribes. For it is one thing not to see what the writer himself thought, another to stray from the rule of piety.”<sup>58</sup>

Hugh’s penultimate chapter consists of a mere three sentences, but in this chapter he well describes the scholastic approach to the exposition of Scripture:

The method of expounding a text consists of analysis. Analysis takes place through separating into parts or through examination. We analyze through separation into parts when we distinguish from one another things which are mingled together. We analyze by examination when we open up things which are hidden.<sup>59</sup>

Investigating a text through separation into parts, through applying a discerning eye, through careful examination that reveals hidden truths—such a description applies to the exegetical approach of Thomas Aquinas as well as that of Hugh of St. Victor.

A remarkable feature of the *Didascalicon*’s approach to reading and teaching Scripture is the way in which, after centuries of the spiritual sense being privileged,<sup>60</sup> Hugh consistently returns to the letter and to history, as he establishes “the primacy of the

---

<sup>58</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.11, 150. De Lubac offers the suggestion that Hugh here had in mind Peter Abelard; the dating of the *Didascalicon* can be related to Abelard’s checkered career. See de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 219-222.

<sup>59</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.12, 150.

<sup>60</sup> Gregory the Great’s *Moralia on Job* may represent the apex of reading Scripture according to the spiritual sense, and this work’s influence surely perpetuated the spiritual exposition of Scripture. So influential was the *Moralia* that when Thomas Aquinas wrote his own commentary on Job, he declared his intention to avoid competing with Gregory’s subtle and clear disclosure of Job’s mysteries in favor of a literal treatment that would facilitate a discussion of divine providence. See Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, trans. Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), Preface, 69. See also Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, ed. Marci Adriaen (Turnholt: Brepols, 1979).



literal meaning among the multiformed constructions of biblical exegesis.”<sup>61</sup> As Smalley points out, Hugh’s explication of the three senses of Scripture gave a greatly increased weight to the literal historical sense, for rather than “contrasting the lowly foundation of the ‘letter’ with the higher spiritual senses, he groups together the letter and allegory, which pertain to knowledge”; he then contrasts those two senses with tropology, which pertains to action.<sup>62</sup>

Here Smalley in her enthusiasm comes close to crediting Hugh with a novel approach to exegesis. De Lubac, with Chenu, views Hugh not as an innovator but as a restorer: a superior scholar who is seeking to return the reading of Scripture to its traditional mode, by redirecting the methodology of this discipline away from immature and uncontrolled allegory and back toward careful study and an appreciation for the letter.<sup>63</sup> Both his *Didascalicon* and *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* articulate this approach to Scripture. Hugh’s complaint is not against the spiritual sense, but against bad scholarship that produces bad readings of Scripture:

Since the mystical understanding cannot be gleaned except from those things that the letter of the text proposes in the first place, I wonder how certain people dare to present themselves as teachers of allegory when they do not even know the first meaning of the letter. They say: “We read Scripture, but we do not read the letter. We do not care about the letter, for we teach allegory.” How can you read Scripture and not read the letter? If we take away the letter, what is Scripture?<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 238.

<sup>62</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 89.

<sup>63</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 212. To give Smalley credit, in the preface to the third edition of *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, she acknowledges that, in the light of later scholarship, “the Victorines seem less original as pioneers that I thought.” Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, xii.

<sup>64</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Harkins, [5], 216.

What Hugh seeks is not the privileging of the literal sense over the spiritual sense, but a revival of the traditional method and the balance it provided—a balance Hugh consistently depicts in the *Didascalicon* through the metaphor of a building, with its foundation in the earth supporting a “spiritual structure which is raised on high, built, as it were, with as many courses of stones as it contains mysteries.”<sup>65</sup> Smalley’s summary of Hugh’s contribution to exegesis rings true: “Living over a century before St. Thomas, Hugh seems to have grasped the Thomist principle that the clue to prophecy and metaphor is the writer’s intention; the literal sense includes everything which the sacred writer meant to say.”<sup>66</sup> In addition, Hugh seeks readers of the sacred text for whom reading results not in the satisfaction of personal ambition or idle curiosity, but in edification (hence the building metaphor) and in a certain way of life—a way of life informed by the “knowledge of God’s sacrificial love” depicted in Scripture, and directed toward living life “in imitation of this divine virtue.”<sup>67</sup> Thus text becomes life, to borrow from *De doctrina christiana*<sup>68</sup>; and that Thomas Aquinas knew and had absorbed the exegetical principles of both Hugh of St. Victor and of Augustine will be borne out.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didasc.*, Taylor, VI.4, 141.

<sup>66</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 101.

<sup>67</sup> Harkins, “*Lectio exhortatio debet esse*: Reading as a Way of Life at the Twelfth-Century Abbey of St. Victor,” 104.

<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 142, 144. In IV.27, Augustine says that “more important than any amount of grandeur of style to those of us who seek to be listened to with obedience is the life of the speaker.” And in IV.28, he says that a preacher who is not eloquent should live as “an example to others, so that his way of life becomes, in a sense, an abundant source of eloquence.”

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Prügl, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by R. van Nieuwenhove and J. Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 391.

*Exegetical Influences: Richard of Saint Victor*

Among Thomas Aquinas' leading Latin-Christian sources is Richard of Saint Victor,<sup>70</sup> who, interestingly, appears with Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great among the souls of the wise and learned in Dante's *Paradise*, where he is described as one "whose contemplations made him more than man."<sup>71</sup> While Richard alludes to Hugh by name only twice in all his writings, he perpetuates Hugh's approach to reading Scripture through history, allegory, and tropology in the *Liber Exceptionum*<sup>72</sup>; and it seems evident that in his own writings, Richard has used Hugh's teachings in the *Didascalicon* and other works and expanded them "toward their logical spiritual conclusion."<sup>73</sup> As a supporter of Hugh's educational aims<sup>74</sup> and a teacher in his own right, Richard "planned a vast encyclopaedia on the lines indicated in the *Didascalicon* as a help to students of Scripture,"<sup>75</sup> of which we possess the original plan and some fragments. Smalley describes Richard as a mystic who embraced Hugh's teaching on the necessity of the

---

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Fidora, "Augustine to Aquinas: Latin-Christian Authors," *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50.

<sup>71</sup> These twelve souls include Solomon, Dionysius the Areopagite, Bede, and Peter Lombard. See Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume III: Paradise*, trans. Mark Musa (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1986), Canto X, (especially 130-132, with reference to Richard).

<sup>72</sup> Ineke van't Spijker, "The Literal and the Spiritual: Richard of Saint-Victor and the Multiple Meaning of Scripture," in *The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Christian and Medieval Culture*, ed. Ineke van't Spijker (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 227.

<sup>73</sup> Steven Chase, *Angelic Wisdom: The Cherubim and the Grace of Contemplation in Richard of St. Victor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 142.

<sup>74</sup> Smalley calls Richard Hugh's pupil, but Victorine scholars debate whether Richard arrived at the abbey before or after Hugh's death in 1141. Regardless, the first abbot, Gilduin, was still at the abbey when Richard came—and he and Hugh had shaped Saint Victor from its early years. Richard would have come under Gilduin's influence, in addition to the academic and literary legacy left by Hugh. Richard himself praises Hugh as a great theologian and as his master; and his work shows clear evidence of dependence on the works of Hugh. See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 105; and Zinn, "Introduction," *Richard of St. Victor*, 3; and especially the discussion in Chase, *Angelic Wisdom: The Cherubim and the Grace of Contemplation in Richard of St. Victor*, 142-146.

<sup>75</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 106.

letter, and as a scholar and lover of the truth who was willing to attempt to glean a literal meaning that had perhaps been overlooked by previous investigations into biblical texts.<sup>76</sup> One notable example is Richard's exposition of Ezekiel's visions, which Gregory the Great had declared had no literal meaning, but only a spiritual meaning.

With this state of affairs Richard was not content. For Richard, as for Hugh, "a satisfactory allegorical interpretation of the Bible could come only from a sound grasp and good understanding of the text's literal meaning."<sup>77</sup> This appreciation for the literal meaning led Richard, in his treatise on Ezekiel, *In visionem Ezechielis*, to include numerous drawings of the temple as described in Ezekiel's visions—a sort of "visual exegesis" intended to "convince the reader of the truth" of Richard's explanation of Ezekiel's visions and their importance.<sup>78</sup> What Richard is illustrating is what the prophet himself believed concerning a future physical fulfillment of his vision.<sup>79</sup> And in adhering to the letter of Ezekiel's vision, Richard demonstrates not a historical or doctrinal literalism,<sup>80</sup> but a literalism concerned with what Ezekiel saw and believed. In other words, such a visually literal approach to Ezekiel's vision seems to indicate Richard's interest in the prophet as a human agent, as Smalley herself intimates: regarding the intricate detail of the measurements found in Ezekiel's vision, she observes that "the very minuteness of the description teaches us how actual the building was to the mind of

---

<sup>76</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 108-109.

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Delano-Smith, "Maps and Plans in Medieval Exegesis: Richard of St. Victor's *In visionem Ezechielis*," *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 8-9.

<sup>78</sup> Delano-Smith, "Maps and Plans in Medieval Exegesis," 8, 9.

<sup>79</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 295.

<sup>80</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 299.

Ezekiel,”<sup>81</sup> and that Richard’s painstaking reconstruction of the temple is therefore most appropriate.

As this brief survey of *In visionem Ezechielis* has indicated, Richard’s interest in the historical or literal sense is instrumental rather than intrinsic. For him, the literal sense is a necessary means to a contemplative and personal appreciation of divine matters. As van’t Spijker observes, in some of his sermons, “Richard’s interest in the literal meaning of the Old Testament does not imply an interest in history. The literal sense represents either the carnal, or a shadow, a veil over the real image.” And yet Richard’s interest in and commitment to the literal sense does persist; and like Hugh, he does value the literal and historical for its contribution to the soul’s journey toward beatitude. Thus, Richard’s mystical writings deftly combine both the intellectual and the affective elements of one’s approach to knowing God; and his influence on Bonaventure and on the Franciscan tradition must be acknowledged.<sup>82</sup>

#### *Exegetical Influences: Andrew of Saint Victor*

Andrew of Saint Victor is another Victorine who contributed to Thomas Aquinas’ mode of exegesis. Andrew made a conscious decision to specialize in the historical sense, excluding both spiritual exposition and doctrine, and limiting his scholarly efforts to that which will help him understand the letter.<sup>83</sup> Andrew’s work on the literal sense was influential, as is seen in the fact that Peter Comestor, Peter the Chanter, and Stephen

---

<sup>81</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 109.

<sup>82</sup> Zinn, “Introduction,” *Richard of St. Victor*, 5-6.

<sup>83</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 120-121; De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 271.

Langton all relied upon Andrew's elucidation of the literal sense.<sup>84</sup> And in choosing to study the historical-literal sense, Andrew was simply taking Hugh's separation of history and allegory in the *Didascalicon* to its logical conclusion; but where Hugh separated in order to clarify, and reunited the senses of Scripture in the building of a structure of knowledge, Andrew was content to be a technical specialist.<sup>85</sup>

Despite these concerns, Andrew does have lasting contributions to make to exegesis. Evans observes that from Thomas Aquinas' time, "a movement which had begun a century or so earlier took a definitive form. Twelfth-century scholars had begun to work more seriously upon the literal sense, looking into the Hebrew (e.g., Andrew of St. Victor) and suggesting that its foundational purpose was in fact an important one."<sup>86</sup> Andrew's commentary on the Pentateuch's literal sense led to "an explosion of interest in the literal sense of the laws of the Old Testament."<sup>87</sup> His great service to exegesis was to look to the text itself to find answers to the questions posed by the text, and to seek historical sources to provide answers when the text remained intractable. Smalley describes Andrew's approach to exegetical problems in this way: "His contemporaries try to solve the problem subjectively by moral and philosophical arguments; Andrew solves it objectively from the text. Fastening on this, he treats it as a unity and tries to deduce the

---

<sup>84</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 281-282.

<sup>85</sup> Where Smalley praises Andrew's pioneering spirit, de Lubac justly criticizes Andrew for falling short of Hugh's full program and its goal. See de Lubac's discussion in *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 269-273 and 308-311.

<sup>86</sup> G. R. Evans, "The History of Biblical Interpretation," *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 888.

<sup>87</sup> A. Paretsky, O.P., "The Influence of Thomas the Exegete on Thomas the Theologian: The Tract on Law (Ia-IIae, qq. 98-108) as a Test Case," *Angelicum* 71 (1994): 560.

meaning of the author.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, Andrew’s goal is not simply to come up with an answer, using whatever tools are at hand; he wants to grapple with the text, using logic and reason to understand what it is saying, and keeping in mind the author as well as the human and historical context provided by the author’s situation.<sup>89</sup>

But what recourse does Andrew have if the text, the author, and logic and reason prove inadequate? Here Andrew is something of a pioneer: he consults Jewish scholars. He is willing to use them and their rabbinic tradition as a living historical source.<sup>90</sup> The tendency of the school of Rashi to prefer rationalistic or naturalistic explanations to supernatural explanations resonated with Andrew’s own inclinations, and Andrew’s use of the commentaries of Rashi, as well as a contemporary Jewish scholar, Joseph Kara, is evident in his works.<sup>91</sup> He does not receive their opinions uncritically, but dialogues freely with his Jewish advisers. Yet there are times when he prefers a Jewish interpretation of a problem passage to the traditional Christian reading; this inclination earns him sharp criticism from, for example, Richard of St. Victor—particularly when Andrew has used Jewish exegesis to drain Christological significance from a text.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 134.

<sup>89</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 138, 139.

<sup>90</sup> Frans van Liere, “Christ or Antichrist? The Jewish Messiah in Twelfth-Century Christian Eschatology,” in *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, ed. E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 348-349.

<sup>91</sup> Van Liere, “Christ or Antichrist? The Jewish Messiah in Twelfth-Century Christian Eschatology,” 349. Van Liere notes that the Paris synagogue was a short walk from the Abbey of Saint Victor.

<sup>92</sup> See de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 3, 308-309; Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 163; van Liere, “Christ or Antichrist? The Jewish Messiah in Twelfth-Century Christian Eschatology,” 350-351. One example cited is Isaiah 7:14-16, where in Andrew’s work the virgin conceiving is not the Virgin giving birth to Christ but the wife of Isaiah delivering a child as a sign of Israel’s imminent political deliverance.

Based on manuscripts of Andrew's works, and on allusions to and quotations of his thought,<sup>93</sup> Andrew's influence was widespread, despite the element of controversy arising from his willingness to prefer Jewish opinions to Christian. His commentaries provided insight into both Jewish exegesis and issues of Hebrew and Latin philology; and his philological work featured in the thirteenth-century *correctoria* that provided alternative readings to the Latin Bible of the day.<sup>94</sup> Even those scholars who disagreed with his findings valued his advances in scholarly methodology, as Roger Bacon conveys:

In this, however, he is very praiseworthy: he stirs us up about the doubtful passages of our translation, in many cases, though not always, and sends us to the Hebrew, that we may seek our explanations more surely at the root. Few would take thought for the true explanation of this passage and of many others, unless they had seen how Andrew treats it.<sup>95</sup>

And Chenu credits Andrew with "following in the footsteps of Saint Jerome whom he claims as his patron," as he commits himself to as direct and literal an interpretation of Scripture as possible.<sup>96</sup>

The contributions of these three Victorines—Hugh, Richard, and Andrew—are weighty indeed. But preeminent among them stands Hugh of Saint Victor, who sought to bring to fruition Augustine's subjection of all learning to the exploration of the meaning of Scripture; and who saw how such learning could elucidate the literal sense, which in

---

<sup>93</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 175, 178.

<sup>94</sup> Frans van Liere, "Andrew of Saint-Victor and His Franciscan Critics," in *The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Christian and Medieval Culture*, ed. Ineke van't Spijker (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 292.

<sup>95</sup> Roger Bacon, *Compendium*, viii, ed. Brewer (Rolls Series), 482-483; quoted by Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 175.

<sup>96</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 238. Chenu also credits Andrew with influencing Hugh of Saint Cher, who taught at the school of Saint Jacques in Paris, where Thomas was educated.



turn would support doctrinal teaching and moral instruction. Richard and Andrew expanded Hugh's return to the literal sense in somewhat idiosyncratic ways—Richard with his “visual exegesis” and Andrew with his reliance on Jewish exegesis. But it seems that their lasting contribution to Hugh's program was twofold: applying a concern for the literal sense to their own work and teaching, always remaining tightly focused on the text; and examining who the author was and what the author intended the text to convey. A reliance on the literal sense as primary, an interest in what the text actually says, and a concern for the intention of the author will be features of the exegesis of Thomas Aquinas.

### *Exegetical Influences: Albert the Great*

Albert the Great went to Paris in the early 1240s, at a time when the “new Aristotelian learning” was making its first impact on the city.<sup>97</sup> He commented on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* for a few years and then began teaching as a master in theology in 1245, when Thomas Aquinas came to Paris. As Albert's student, Thomas would have attended lectures and disputations conducted by Albert,<sup>98</sup> including a cycle of lectures on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>99</sup> In teaching Scripture, Albert, interpreted it according

---

<sup>97</sup> James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 40.

<sup>98</sup> That Thomas spent these early years in Paris studying under Albert is not as well documented as other periods of Thomas' life. Torrell allows for the possibility of Thomas being Albert's student in Paris; Weisheipl is more positive, due to the chronology of Albert's lectures on Pseudo-Dionysius. See J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1. The Person and His Work*, trans. by Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 24; and Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 40-41.

<sup>99</sup> James A. Weisheipl, “Thomas D'Aquino and Albert His Teacher,” in *The Gilson Lectures on Thomas Aquinas*, Etienne Gilson Series 30 (Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008), 4-5.

to the traditional four-fold method of exegesis, addressing the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses.<sup>100</sup>

After a few years of studying at Paris, Thomas Aquinas accompanied Albert to Cologne, for the purposes of setting up a new Dominican *studium generale*.<sup>101</sup> While there, Thomas studied further under Albert, taking courses on Pseudo-Dionysius' *Divine Names*, and on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, on which Albert was writing a commentary.<sup>102</sup> It was Thomas' responsibility to transcribe and perhaps edit his master's commentary on this particular work of Aristotle.<sup>103</sup> Albert eventually addressed the entire Aristotelian corpus—a twenty-year project that had as its goal making this entire body of knowledge understandable for the Latins.<sup>104</sup> However, Albert was not an uncritical Aristotelian; he was a Dominican and master of theology first, and a keen thinker who knew what of Aristotle's thought to discard, as well as what of Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and other Platonic thinkers to retain.<sup>105</sup> McInerny notes that by the time Thomas left Cologne to return to Paris, he was well grounded in both Aristotle and

---

<sup>100</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 2, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 38.

<sup>101</sup> The school of St. Jacques in Paris served both as a school for friars and as a teachers' college. Between 1220 and 1245, the expansion of the Dominican order, the increase of convents requiring lectors, and the vast geographical territory now covered by the Dominicans required the founding of schools like St. Jacques—*studia generalia*—in Cologne, Bologna, Montpellier, and Oxford. Such general houses of study functioned as the Dominican order's "university schools." See Mulchahey, "*First the Bow is Bent in Study...*," 351-352.

<sup>102</sup> Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol 1. The Person and His Work*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Mark D. Jordan, "Aquinas Reading Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 229; Ralph McInerny, "Introduction," *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Ralph McInerny (London: Penguin Books, 1998), x.

<sup>104</sup> Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 41.

<sup>105</sup> See Weisheipl's discussion in *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 42-3.

Neoplatonism, thanks to the efforts of Albert.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, during his three-year stay in Cologne, Thomas heard Albert lecture on the Bible on a regular basis.<sup>107</sup>

While continuing to teach Scripture according to the accepted four senses, Albert's exegesis gives evidence of the change that had been in the air due to the Victorines' influence<sup>108</sup>—a change that involved re-establishing the importance of the literal sense. Smalley gives an example of Albert taking a traditional spiritual interpretation and redirecting it to the literal sense in reference to an allusion to the bones of the minor prophets found in Ecclesiasticus 49:12. Where Stephen Langton disparagingly likened their dry bones to the literal sense, and marrow to the spiritual sense, Albert chose to compare the prophets' bones "to the literal sense, not because they are dry, but because they are solid, taking their solidity from 'the truth of things.'"<sup>109</sup> And in his reading of Christ's temptation in the wilderness to change stones into bread, Albert refuses to adopt the traditional reading of comparing the stones to the Law or to sinful hearts; his verdict is that such readings are absurd, and "contrary to the mind of the author."<sup>110</sup> Verger describes Albert's valuation of the literal sense in this way: "il a, nous y reviendrons, posé avec une particulière fermeté le primat absolu du sens littéral, face

---

<sup>106</sup> McInerney, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, xi.

<sup>107</sup> Weisheipl states that Albert's published lectures on Psalms, Jeremiah, and Daniel date from this period. Some scholars date his lectures on the Gospels and on Revelation to this time, as well. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 46-47.

<sup>108</sup> Albert knew the work of Hugh of St. Victor. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 299. In describing Albert's exegesis, I am reliant on Smalley, given the dearth of information on how Albert read Scripture. Even de Lubac, in three volumes on medieval exegesis, mentions Albert only once. Like his student Thomas, Albert the philosopher has garnered more attention than Albert the exegete.

<sup>110</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 300.

aux, incertitudes de l'allégorie."<sup>111</sup> Thus it seems that the influence of Albert on his student Thomas was extensive, as Thomas received from Albert an appreciation of the life of a teacher, scholar, and son of the Church; a deep understanding of the thought of Aristotle, as well as Neoplatonist philosophers; and daily contact with a mode of teaching Scripture that included a concern for the foundational importance of the literal sense, as well as awareness of the significance of authorial intention.

### *Exegetical Influences: Bonaventure*

The life of Bonaventure parallels that of Thomas Aquinas in many ways. Both joined mendicant orders while in their teens, Bonaventure becoming a Franciscan and Thomas a Dominican. Both were students in Paris from approximately 1245 to 1248—Bonaventure studied under Alexander of Hales while Thomas was under the tutelage of Albert the Great. Both became doctors of the University of Paris in 1256, at the direct order of Pope Alexander IV.<sup>112</sup> And both taught Scripture and produced commentaries, although becoming the head of his order curtailed Bonaventure's exegetical output. His commentaries number five and include a lengthy commentary on the gospel of Luke; postills or brief expositions of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, and the gospel of John; and the *Collations of Saint John*, consisting of sermon outlines drawn from the *Postilla on the Gospel of John*.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Jacques Verger. "L'exégèse de l'université," in *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. by P. Riché and G. Lobrichon (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 204.

<sup>112</sup> G. R. Evans, *Fifty Key Medieval Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 120.

<sup>113</sup> See J. Guy Bougerol, O.F.M., *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), especially 94-98. In addition to Bonaventure's exegetical writings, we have hundreds of Bonaventure's sermons as testimony to his distinguished preaching career. See Bougerol, 143-151.

Like his contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure was aware of the rules for expounding Scripture laid out by Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*.<sup>114</sup> Bonaventure's re-statements of those rules appear in his commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.<sup>115</sup> They show his concern for understanding the purpose and literary style of a given text, and for beginning the study of a text through a consideration of the literal sense and what was in the mind of the author. Bonaventure cites the importance of knowing when to use a parallel passage for interpretive guidance—as well as the value of knowing when to leave a difficult problem unresolved. Bonaventure followed the practice, as did Thomas, of dividing the text of Scripture into progressively smaller segments in order to understand each part and then relate each part to the whole. An example is his commentary on Luke: Bonaventure divides this gospel into four large themed sections, the first of which is Luke 1-3, The Mystery of the Incarnation; this section then falls into forty-one subsections, each with its own title.<sup>116</sup>

Again like Aquinas, Bonaventure followed the exegetical practice of the day, reading Scripture in regard to its four senses: the historical or literal sense, and the spiritual sense subdivided into the allegorical sense, the moral or tropological sense, and the anagogical sense.<sup>117</sup> Bonaventure addresses the depth of Scripture, and “the multiplicity of its mystical understandings,” in his *Breviloquium*, a work intended to

---

<sup>114</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III, 30-37.

<sup>115</sup> See Bougerol's discussion in *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 94.

<sup>116</sup> Bonaventure, *Saint Bonaventure's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapters 1-8*, trans. Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001), xl-xlii.

<sup>117</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 2, 37.

provide for students and their teachers “a logical synthesis of theology.”<sup>118</sup> In the prologue to the *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure states that, in reading Scripture,

. . . besides its literal meaning, in many places it can be interpreted in three ways: allegorically, morally, and anagogically. Allegory occurs when by one thing is indicated another which is a matter of belief. The tropological or moral understanding occurs when, from something done, we learn something else that we should do. The anagogical meaning, a kind of “lifting upwards,” occurs when we are shown what it is that we should desire, that is, the eternal happiness of the blessed.<sup>119</sup>

Bonaventure describes the senses of Scripture similarly in *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, a short work meant to demonstrate how all learning serves to illuminate us, in order to bring us back to God. Regarding the light of Scripture, he notes that it is one in regard to the literal sense, and three in regard to the spiritual sense, with the allegorical sense teaching us “what to believe concerning the divinity and humanity”; the moral sense teaching us how to live; and the anagogical sense teaching us “how to cling to God.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, when John the Baptist prepares the crowd for the coming of “one more powerful” in Luke 3, Bonaventure reads John’s prophecy that this coming one “will gather the wheat into his barn” according to the three spiritual senses: this prophecy teaches us that the good will be rewarded, exhorts us to live fruitful lives, and moves us to look to the time “when the saints are gathered into one in glory.”<sup>121</sup> These three teaching points originate in the literal sense’s poetic understanding of wheat gathered into

---

<sup>118</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, trans. Dominic V. Monti (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005), xx-xxi. Monti notes that Thomas Aquinas wrote his *Summa Theologiae* for the same reason.

<sup>119</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, *prol.* 4, 13.

<sup>120</sup> Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1996), 7, 45.

<sup>121</sup> Bonaventure, *Saint Bonaventure’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapters 1-8*, 260.

a barn; and taken together, they are designed to move us from belief to action to our destiny with God.

Bonaventure sees a benevolent purpose in the multiple layers of Scriptural meaning. First, mystical truths are hidden “under the husk of the obvious literal meaning” of Scripture in order to humble the proud and stir up the idle. Second, since all kinds of people hear Scripture and its teaching, it is appropriate for Scripture to have “a manifold meaning so that it may win over every mind, meeting each at its own level while remaining superior to all, illuminating and setting afire with shafts of love every mind that searches it with care.”<sup>122</sup> Bonaventure insightfully links each of the three spiritual senses with the deeper purposes of Scripture, observing that “the whole of sacred Scripture teaches these three truths: namely, the eternal generation and incarnation of Christ, the pattern of human life, and the union of the soul with God. The first is concerned with *faith*; the second with *morals*; and the third with the *ultimate goal of both*.”<sup>123</sup>

For Bonaventure, the knowledge of Scripture represents the pinnacle of human knowledge and achievement, containing and subsuming all other forms of intellectual enterprises. Accordingly, “all our knowledge should come to rest in the knowledge of sacred Scripture, and particularly in the *anagogical* understanding of Scripture through

---

<sup>122</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, *prol.* 4, 15. While the latter image of the journey of the illuminated mind toward God is characteristic of Bonaventure, the former image of Scripture as a river that meets every mind at its own level owes something to Gregory the Great: in the epistle accompanying his *Moralia on Job*, he compares the teaching of Scripture to the course of a river, which may be diverted into side channels; which will rise or drop according to the level of the learner; but which will then return to the course laid out for it. See Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, *epist.* II. 11.

<sup>123</sup> Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 7, 45.

which any illumination is traced back to God from whom it took its origin.”<sup>124</sup>

Bonaventure’s exegesis represents an interesting tension between the literal sense, in which all of his interpretive work is grounded, and the anagogical sense, which represents the ultimate goal of Scripture—to move us forward in our journey back to God. Hence his exegetical method emphasizes presenting promises and exemplars (including the example of the teacher) that will lead the soul back to God, as opposed to the Thomistic emphasis on using argument and reason in a comprehensive presentation of doctrinal truth.<sup>125</sup> Thus, in the history of medieval exegesis, Bonaventure demonstrates how to read and teach the four-fold senses of Scripture in a way that serves the Franciscan view of the Christian life. Precisely how it is that the literal sense relates to the three mystical senses—a relationship that exegetes of Bonaventure’s day accepted and used unquestioningly in their work—is left for Thomas Aquinas to address in his *Summa Theologiae*.

### *Exegetical Authorities and Exegetical Tools*

Having considered the rich exegetical tradition, from Augustine to Bonaventure, that contributed to the exegesis of Thomas Aquinas, what of the actual context in which Thomas read and taught Scripture? From which previous teachers and exegetes did Thomas consciously draw, and what practical tools did he have at his disposal? In the Middle Ages, interpreters and teachers of Scripture had a wide range of Church Fathers and other thinkers from which to choose mentors and interlocutors. And in the thirteenth

---

<sup>124</sup> Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 7, 45, 47.

<sup>125</sup> Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 93.



century, an increasingly wide array of technical tools was available to assist the serious student of Scripture.<sup>126</sup>

Evans alludes to an accepted “hierarchy of Scripture, Fathers, and secular authors”<sup>127</sup> during the Middle Ages; Valkenberg and Baglow cite a similar ranking of authorities. Their list is a complex one, in descending order of importance: Scripture; the Fathers, including Latin and Greek Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, and church councils; philosophers; and finally, other interlocutors, with this category including Thomas’ medieval predecessors and contemporaries, as well as the various glosses.<sup>128</sup> Chenu appends to the Fathers “the sentences of the modern masters”—magisterial authorities of Thomas’ own period.<sup>129</sup> I will describe the authorities used by Thomas in his commentaries by considering the role of Scripture, followed by the Fathers and the masters, and finally addressing secular authors, with this last category including both philosophers and heretics. And then, given the close association of the Bible and the *Glossa ordinaria* during Thomas Aquinas’ day, an examination of glosses and other aids to exegesis will shed further light on the context in which Thomas interpreted and taught the Bible.

---

<sup>126</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 366-367.

<sup>127</sup> G. R. Evans, “Exegesis and Authority in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 93.

<sup>128</sup> Wilhelmus G. B. M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht New Series, 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 25-31; Christopher T. Baglow, “*Modus et Forma*”: A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the *Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios*, *Analecta Biblica Investigationes Scientifical in Res Biblicas* 149 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Institute Biblica, 2002), 99-100.

<sup>129</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 134-135.

### *Authorities: Scripture*

The title *auctor* was not readily bestowed in the Middle Ages. It signified someone who was a writer, an authority, and “someone not merely to be read but also to be respected and believed”—for an *auctor*’s work had to uphold Christian truth.<sup>130</sup> Reliance on *auctores* and authorities in the Middle Ages was the outgrowth of a long historical process. Chenu describes that process in this way:

. . . *auctoritas* originally signified that quality in virtue of which a man . . . was worthy of credit, of consideration, of credence. By metonymy, the word designated secondly the person himself who possessed this quality. Soon after, by a transposition of meaning from the human subject to his outward act, the word came to designate the writing, the document in which the judgment or the decision of this human subject was expressed. This instrument was invested with authority, or what comes to the same, was considered authentic.<sup>131</sup>

Thus, during the Middle Ages, an *auctor* possessed *auctoritas*. And a text could possess authority; or it could be dismissed for having no authority—a course of action taken by Thomas in a discussion of the powers retained by the soul after death.<sup>132</sup> For Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries, the ultimate authority was the Bible. As “the authoritative book *par excellence*,”<sup>133</sup> the Bible was “the most studied book of the Middle Ages,” and its study “represented the highest branch of learning.”<sup>134</sup> Scripture’s authority

---

<sup>130</sup> Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>131</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 130.

<sup>132</sup> “That book has no authority, and so what is there written can be despised with the same facility as it was said. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.77.8, regarding Pseudo-Augustine’s *De Spiritu et Anima*.

<sup>133</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 11.

<sup>134</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, xxvii.

rested in the fact that “the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect.”<sup>135</sup>

Therefore, to cite Scripture was to cite the most trustworthy authority—a practice that not only resonated with the medieval outlook but that also reflected the Church’s consistent strategy of reading the Bible in terms of its Christ-centered unity.<sup>136</sup> The use of Scripture to interpret Scripture had been articulated by Augustine in *On Christian Teaching* and demonstrated by exegetes through the succeeding centuries.<sup>137</sup> This method is evident in Thomas’ handling of the book of Hebrews, as he employs multiple Scripture citations to enrich the understanding of each phrase of this epistle. Weinandy alludes to the “staggering” variety and scope of Scripture passages used in Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews, observing that such a Scripture-enmeshed reading of Hebrews “demonstrates that Aquinas perceives the whole biblical narrative, Old and New Testaments together, as proclaiming the one complete gospel.”<sup>138</sup> To read Thomas’ work on Hebrews with its manifold Scripture citations is to witness Thomas’ conviction that all the books of the

---

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1.1.10.

<sup>136</sup> John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 25. O’Keefe and Reno ably describe the patristic period’s approach to reading Scripture as a unified work that points to Christ; see especially 24-44.

<sup>137</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.9, 37; he advises “using the evidence of indisputable passages to remove the uncertainty of ambiguous ones.” Gregory the Great used parallel passages or “testimonies” in order to relate the spiritual meaning of one passage to another. See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 34.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ *Commentary on Hebrews*, in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 224.

Bible complement and clarify one another, and that, in both the Old and New Testaments, it is God who speaks,<sup>139</sup> and Christ who is presented.<sup>140</sup>

*Authorities: The Fathers*

Scripture, then, was the ultimate authority for Thomas Aquinas in both his exegetical and non-exegetical works. The next level of authority cited by Thomas was the Church Fathers. While the driving force of Thomas' exegesis was his desire to explicate the literal sense, he nonetheless frequently incorporated the moral and mystical meanings of a text as found in the readings of the Fathers.<sup>141</sup> Among the Fathers used during Thomas' and Bonaventure's day, Bougerol lists Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom from the post-Nicene period, and the Latin Fathers including Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Bede.<sup>142</sup>

Such a list of authorities is imposing; even so, Thomas is no slavish devotee, but an independent thinker ready to challenge and even contradict an earlier authority. While Augustine is a favorite, Thomas will dispute him, as seen in the discussion of Hebrews 4:4 regarding God's rest from his works on the seventh day. Thomas here indicates that Augustine views the seventh day as "nothing other than the angelic knowledge related to the rest of God from His works." Then, in a *sed contra*, Aquinas asks, "If He rests on the seventh day, who then made it if it is not a work of God?" and adduces for support the

---

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. and ed. Chrysostom Baer (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2006), I.1 [15], 11. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Baer.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, I.1 [6], 8.

<sup>141</sup> Verger. "L'exégèse de l'université," 204.

<sup>142</sup> Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 25. Bougerol notes that medieval commentators only infrequently cite pre-Nicene Fathers.

statement in John 5:17 that the Father works until now. And then Thomas makes his declaration:

I respond that rest is taken there not according to its opposition to labor, but according to its opposition to motion. For even though God is not moved in producing, nevertheless because we do not speak of Him except through sensible things, in which there is no operation without motion, therefore every operation, speaking widely, is called motion, and in such a way God is said to have rested, because He ceased to produce new species. . . . And so God rests from the works of producing, because all proceeded forth in a certain manner, as has been said; nevertheless, He works even now in a certain manner, by conserving and governing that which He made.<sup>143</sup>

Other favored Church Fathers in the Hebrews commentary include, in descending order of frequency, Gregory the Great, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Jerome among the Latin Fathers, and John Chrysostom and Origen among the Greek Fathers. But Augustine, with forty-two direct citations and five citations as referenced in a gloss, is Thomas' favorite interlocutor in this commentary by far; references to Augustine and his works nearly equal the total of all the other allusions to patristic sources.

Evans has observed that “the old hierarchy of Scripture, Fathers, and secular authors was already beginning to give way in the twelfth century to a more complex structure in which the *moderni* themselves had a place as authorities.”<sup>144</sup> Ascribing authority to modern masters had become a necessity due to contemporary theological problems; grounds for giving masters or doctors this authority rested on their Church-sanctioned mission to teach.<sup>145</sup> Among those included in this category of authority were the great compilers—Peter Lombard, Gratian, and Walafrid Strabo.<sup>146</sup> The anthology

---

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 4.1 [204], 96.

<sup>144</sup> Evans, “Exegesis and Authority in the Thirteenth Century,” 93.

<sup>145</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 135.

<sup>146</sup> Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 25.

*Liber Pancrisis* also names William, bishop of Chalons; Ivo, bishop of Chartres; and Anselm and his brother, Radulphus, as modern masters.<sup>147</sup> Thomas Aquinas and other commentators recognized magisterial authority, albeit with a nod to the greater priority of the authority of the Fathers and the saints.<sup>148</sup>

#### *Authorities: Secular Authors*

The three-fold hierarchy of Scripture, Fathers, and authors is apparent in Thomas' references to non-Christian thinkers in his commentary on Hebrews. Such a practice was common among medieval scholars, who had available to them a list of both Christian and pagan writers who were considered to be *auctoritates*.<sup>149</sup>

While Thomas in his work on the gospel of Matthew cites Seneca,<sup>150</sup> and uses a quotation from Ovid to open the prologue to his commentary on Ephesians,<sup>151</sup> Latin writers do not appear in the Hebrews commentary. Greek philosophers do, but not to a significant extent, apart from Aristotle. In only one discussion does Thomas contrast the views of three Greek philosophers, and one Islamic philosopher, with what Scripture teaches. In considering how visible things are made from what is invisible in Hebrews 11:3, Thomas observes that Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Plato, and Avicenna all held that visible things were made from invisible rational ideas, rather from invisible rational ideas

---

<sup>147</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 135.

<sup>148</sup> Chenu quotes Thomas writing in *De malo* 3.14 that "According to the exposition of the ancient saints, according also to the magisterial exposition, the Holy Spirit may be said. . . ." Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 135.

<sup>149</sup> Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 24-25.

<sup>150</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 260.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. and intro. Matthew L. Lamb (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), Prologue [1], 39.

found in the Word of God—a point Thomas deduces from the declaration in Heb 11:3 that the visible universe was formed at God’s command, from what is invisible.<sup>152</sup>

It is Aristotle whom Thomas Aquinas cites the most frequently in this commentary. Aristotle’s statement that every evil is ignorance supports Thomas’ explanation of one of the effects of sin—the loss of the light of reason.<sup>153</sup> According to Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle and Augustine agree that “in every change there is a coming into existence and a ceasing to exist,” so that the perishing of the heavens in Heb 1:11 alludes to the ending of their present state, not to the end of their substance.<sup>154</sup> And in his discussion of faith as the substance and essence of things hoped for, Thomas uses Aristotle to elucidate the connection between belief and understanding, noting that in *Posterior Analytics*, the Philosopher said that “to believe befits him who learns”—a principle as applicable to the Christian faith as it is to the liberal sciences, wherein a student must accept the principles taught by his master.<sup>155</sup> Nine times Thomas turns to Aristotle and his works for assistance in the Hebrews commentary; and in each case he uses the Philosopher in a positive way. There are no challenges to or discussions of Aristotle’s philosophical views, nor are any excuses or justifications given for relying on a non-Christian thinker to this degree. That Thomas can speak of a point of view shared

---

<sup>152</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 11.2 [565], 233.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.2 [39], 22.

<sup>154</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 1.5, 37. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 11.1 [557], 229.

by Augustine and Aristotle demonstrates his support of Augustine's advice to plunder the treasures of the Egyptians and use whatever is true and valuable.<sup>156</sup>

### *Anti-authorities: Heretics*

There is an additional class of authors addressed by Thomas Aquinas in his Hebrews commentary, and that is the heretics whose beliefs contradict the teachings of the Church and of Scripture. In his *Summa*, Thomas defines heresy as “a species of unbelief pertaining to those who profess the Christian faith, but corrupt its dogmas.”<sup>157</sup> Thus heretics, for Thomas and his colleagues, constitute an anti-authority, and—as the Cathari had demonstrated—a genuine danger to the Church. There are two powerful reasons for Thomas to challenge heretics in his Hebrews commentary. First, as a *magister in sacra pagina* and as a teacher of future Dominican teachers and preachers, it was incumbent upon Thomas Aquinas to use his lectures on Scripture to confront heresy. For example, his commentary on the gospel of John, with its emphasis on the full divinity and full humanity of Christ, contains refutations of Arius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, and Eutyches.<sup>158</sup> Second, Thomas must challenge heretics because the book of Hebrews itself requires him to deal with doctrinal error. He acknowledges so in his opening statement of the first lecture on Hebrews 1: “He (the Apostle) wrote this epistle against the errors of those converts from Judaism who wanted to preserve the legal observances along with

---

<sup>156</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.40, 64-65.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.11.1.

<sup>158</sup> Daniel Keating and Matthew Levering, “Introduction,” *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), xxvi.



the Gospel, as though Christ's grace were not sufficient for salvation."<sup>159</sup> This opening statement is a harbinger of Thomas' persistent attacks on heretics throughout the Hebrews commentary, as eleven different heretics or heretical groups receive twenty-two mentions.<sup>160</sup>

The heretics addressed by Thomas Aquinas fall into three groups. First is an assortment of heretical figures whom he cites as their errors relate to the Hebrews passage under consideration. Thomas addresses four types of error in his first lecture, explaining Hebrews 1:1 and why it matters that God, in these last days, is speaking *in*, not *by*, the prophets. For God speaking 'in the prophets' excludes four errors: the error of Porphyry, who claimed the prophets feigned their prophecies and did not speak from the Holy Spirit; the error of those who view prophecy as a natural phenomenon, and not a divine speaking; the error of those who view prophecy as a human habit or skill, not the result of divine pleasure and divine illumination; and the error of Montanus and Priscilla, who held that the prophets did not understand what they were saying.<sup>161</sup>

Thomas also addresses an error in the early Church, as a result of which Jewish Christians found it "necessary for salvation to observe the ceremonies of the law, which consisted especially in partaking of certain foods, such as the paschal lamb . . . and in

---

<sup>159</sup> "Scripsit autem epistolam istam contra errors quorundam, qui ex Iudaismo ad fidem Christi conversi, volebant servare legalia cum Evangelio, quasi non sufficeret gratia Christi ad salutem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, I.1 [6], 5.

<sup>160</sup> I surveyed Thomas' commentaries on Hebrews, Galatians, Colossians, and Titus—epistles that either address the topic of heresy (Galatians, Titus) or that Thomas views as defending the Church against error (Hebrews, Colossians). Hebrews has 55 lectures and names heretics 22 times; Galatians has 41 lectures and names heretics only 5 times. Colossians has 14 lectures and names heretics 4 times; Titus has 9 lectures and names a heretic 1 time.

<sup>161</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, I.1 [17], 13.

abstaining from certain foods,” as specified in the books of Exodus and Leviticus.<sup>162</sup>

Here, rather curiously, Thomas also alludes to the error of the Nicolaitans, with their indiscriminate physical pleasures—but he maintains that the error of the Jewish Christians is primarily what the Apostle has in mind. Thomas Aquinas teaches that the kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink, but of God’s grace producing a commitment of the heart; and that those who rely on physical means fail to progress to the salvation of either the body or the soul.<sup>163</sup>

The other two heretics mentioned as needed by Thomas Aquinas are Pelagius and Origen. On one occasion, Thomas disputes Pelagius’ understanding of how people receive the grace of God.<sup>164</sup> And four times he addresses errors made by Origen, making this pioneer in exegesis his second-most frequent target. In discussing Heb 1:9 and why it is that God has anointed Christ, Thomas refutes Origen’s contention that Christ adhered so greatly to God and God’s justice that he merited God’s anointing—an argument that one Gloss evidently supports.<sup>165</sup> Thomas also will not allow Origen’s contention that the subjection to Christ of all things requires the salvation of all creatures, even demons<sup>166</sup>; in a similar vein, Thomas holds out no hope for the devil being destroyed by becoming

---

<sup>162</sup> “Unde sciendum est, quod in primitiva Ecclesia fuit unus error, quod ad salutem necessaria erat observantia legalium, quae praecipue consistebat in quibusdam cibis sumendis, puta agni paschalis, Ex. XII, iss., et in abstinendo a quibusdam cibis, sicut patet Lev. XI, et in aliis multis locis. Alius error fuit, quod passim licebat uti delectationibus corporalibus. Et iste fuit error Nicolaitarum. Et de utroque possunt haec verba exponi, sed magis proprie de primo.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 13.2 [742], 319.

<sup>163</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 13.2 [742], 301.

<sup>164</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 12.3 [689], 280.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.4 [63], 33.

<sup>166</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.6 [81-82], 42-43.

good, as Origen would have it.<sup>167</sup> And Thomas uses the Apostle's citation of Haggai 2:6, that once more will the heavens and earth be shaken, to counter Origen, "who believed that the world will be renewed an infinitude of times and be recovered."<sup>168</sup>

The second group of heretics, and the one attacked most frequently by Thomas Aquinas in his *Hebrews* commentary, is the Manichaeans. Thomas singles them out for attention in the *Summa*, as well, in a discussion of degrees of unbelief:

The second thing to be considered in unbelief is the corruption of matters of faith. In this respect, since heathens err on more points than Jews, and these in more points than heretics, the unbelief of heathens is more grievous than the unbelief of Jews, and that of the Jews than that of heretics, except perhaps in such cases as that of the Manichees, who, in matters of faith, err even more than heathens do.<sup>169</sup>

That the Manichees should be Thomas' most consistent target is puzzling until one remembers that the Cathari or Albigensiens were the medieval equivalent of the Manichaeans. The Cathari in southern France were more than once given the epithet "Manichaeans," indicating that the Church in the Middle Ages had the tendency to see contemporary dualistic heresies in terms of their Manichaean roots.<sup>170</sup> Both the Manichaeans and the Cathari possessed a dualistic view of reality,<sup>171</sup> associating the

---

<sup>167</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 2.4 [141], 69.

<sup>168</sup> ". . . quod est contra Origenem, qui voluit quod mundus in infinitum renovabitur ac recuperabitur." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 12.5 [721], 309.

<sup>169</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.10.6.

<sup>170</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 117, 120-121. Runciman cites a medieval authority who, after describing a group that was anti-marriage, anti-clerical, docetist, and dualist, then concludes, "Probati sunt esse Manichaei." Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, 117. Thouzellier likewise refers to Church correspondence from France and Germany in which the Cathari are given the nickname "Manichaeans." Christine Thouzellier, *Rituel Cathare*, Sources Chrétiennes 236 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1977), 139, 141, 144-145.

<sup>171</sup> Thouzellier notes the closeness of the Catharis' dualistic system to that of the Manicheans, and their belief in two absolute principles, one designated Light-Darkness and the other Good-Evil. Thouzellier, *Rituel Cathare*, 120.

material with evil and the spiritual with good; they also had a negative view of the Old Testament and a docetic view of Christ. Given the teachings of Hebrews that Christ represents the fulfillment of the Old Testament and that Christ has identified with his brothers in every way, even to the point of taking on flesh and suffering as one of them, Thomas could not write a commentary on Hebrews without attacking the Manichaeans. And, after all, it was partly because of the threat that the Cathari and their heretical views posed to the Church that the Dominican order had been founded—founded to preach and teach so effectively that truth would be promoted and heresy stamped out.<sup>172</sup> The order's concern regarding the Cathari led to the inclusion, in the early thirteenth century, of an “index of texts useful for preaching against the Manichees (that is, the Cathars)” in the Dominicans' pocket Bibles.<sup>173</sup>

In refuting the Cathari, Thomas loses no time, addressing the Manichaeans twice in his first lecture on Hebrews. First, he teaches that God has spoken to the fathers, through the prophets, and to us, through the Son—thus proving to the Manichaeans that “the author of the Old and New Testaments is the same.”<sup>174</sup> Also, since God made the world through the Son, the Manichaeans err when they claim that God did not make temporal things.<sup>175</sup> Thomas criticizes the Manichaeans for saying that Christ's death was imaginary, whereas the Apostle clearly states that when Christ tasted death (Heb 2:9), he

---

<sup>172</sup> Mark Edwards, “Aquinas on Ephesians and Colossians,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 153-154.

<sup>173</sup> Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, “*Staim invenire*: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 221.

<sup>174</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.1 [19], 14.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.1 [23], 16.

did so genuinely and effectively, on our behalf.<sup>176</sup> Thomas Aquinas also censures Manichaeus for saying that Christ had flesh and blood in appearance only; he maintains that, as the Apostle says in Heb 2:14, Christ had true flesh and blood, as we do, and “He communicated in them in the unity of the person.”<sup>177</sup> Thomas uses Heb 11:2-3 to show how the Apostle refutes the Manichaeans’ reliance on works, their unwillingness to believe in invisible things, and their contention that the Old Testament was made by the devil—since works are vain without faith, faith involves believing in the invisible, and God commended the people of the Old Testament for their faith.<sup>178</sup>

The third group of heretics addressed by Thomas Aquinas in his exegesis of Hebrews are those who have a defective understanding of the two natures of Christ. Keating has drawn attention to Thomas’ Chalcedonian Christology in the Hebrews commentary; this Christology is evidenced by “the frequency of ‘two-nature exegesis’, that is, an explication of a given text of Scripture according to one or both of the natures in Christ.”<sup>179</sup> Photinus sought to protect a strongly monotheistic view of God by diminishing the role and being of Christ to that of “a mere man adopted by God,”<sup>180</sup> and so Thomas twice counters his erroneous view that Christ became the heir of the universe and equal with God through merit.<sup>181</sup> Against Arius, Thomas twice addresses the fully

---

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 2.3 [126], 62.

<sup>177</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 2.4 [138], 68.

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 11.2 [566], 234.

<sup>179</sup> Daniel Keating, “Thomas Aquinas and the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘The Excellence of Christ,’” in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London: T&T Clark International, 2012), 86.

<sup>180</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1988), 237.

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [22], 12 and 1.4 [63], 31.

divine and unchanging nature of Christ.<sup>182</sup> In discussing how Christ ‘tasting’ death is meant to convey the genuine pain and death that Christ experienced, he attacks Apollinaris for saying Christ’s death was imaginary.<sup>183</sup> And to Nestorius’ claim that Christ had flesh and blood accidentally, Thomas responds that Christ had flesh and blood as we do—“that is, according to the truth of the thing, namely, in a personal and substantial way. For we partake of flesh and blood through our person; and Christ in like manner assumed them to his person: *the Word was made flesh* (John 1:14).”<sup>184</sup>

This last statement is clear evidence of Thomas’ commitment to a full two-nature/one-person, Chalcedonian Christology—and explains his concern to deal with the errors of Photinus, Arius, Apollinaris, and Nestorius, as well as the Manichaeans. Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on Hebrews, challenges heretics and their errors for thematic, doctrinal, and historical reasons, as a Dominican committed to the teachings of the Church; and he challenges them for pedagogical and even sacerdotal reasons, for the sake of his students, as a *magister in sacra pagina*.

### *Exegetical Tools: Versions of Scripture and Correctoria*

In his study and teaching of Scripture, Thomas Aquinas had a wealth of resources from which to draw: centuries of interpretation, whose practitioners, from Augustine to Bonaventure, had shaped the practice of medieval exegesis; an abundance of authorities to enrich and corroborate one’s interpretation—or to serve as doctrinal foils and foes; and

---

<sup>182</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.5 [77], 39 and 2.2 [119], 56.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 2.3 [126], 62.

<sup>184</sup> “. . . vel *eisdem*, id est, carni et sanguini, non quidem phantastice, ut delirat Manichaeus, ne accidentaliter, ut fingit Nestorius, sed *similiter*, scilicet nobis, id est, eo modo quo nos participamus, id est, secundum rei veritatem, scilicet personaliter et substantialiter. Nos enim participamus eis in persona, et Christus etiam similiter assumpsit ea in unitatem personae. Io. I, 14: *Verbum caro factum est*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 2.4 [139], 65.

finally, an array of practical aids to exegesis that included various versions of the Bible, *correctoria* and glosses, and concordances and other academic offerings.

Thomas Aquinas primarily used the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible edited by Alcuin that had come to be called the “Paris text.”<sup>185</sup> The Old Latin version of the Bible had endured for centuries; nevertheless, Jerome’s Vulgate increasingly became the dominant text during the Middle Ages, although “recourse was sometimes had to passages of the Old Latin versions transmitted by patristic writings and in a few manuscripts.”<sup>186</sup> Jerome’s Latin translation was not without problems, however; although it had been based on the best Greek and Latin manuscripts available to him, its textual inaccuracies led Charlemagne to charge Alcuin with making a thoroughgoing revision, which he presented to the emperor in 800.<sup>187</sup> Unfortunately, in the years following Alcuin’s recension, increasing textual uncertainty developed, leading to more versions, not fewer; they included four versions of the Vulgate, in addition to the versions produced by Alcuin and by Theodulf.<sup>188</sup> Such was the state of affairs until the Paris text appeared in the first part of the thirteenth century.

---

<sup>185</sup> Raphael Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 145.

<sup>186</sup> C. S. C. Williams, “The History of the Text and Canon of the New Testament to Jerome,” 39; J. Leclercq, “The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture: From Gregory the Great to St Bernard,” 187. In *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

<sup>187</sup> Lesley Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 39.

<sup>188</sup> McNally notes that after Alcuin’s efforts, Bishop Theodulf of Orleans (d. 821) produced another recension, and that “with these two recent recensions and the remnants of the Old Latin versions, there existed four different forms of the text of the *Vulgata latina*: Italian (C. Amiatinus, ca. 700), Gallican (C. Bigotianus, s. viii-ix), Irish (C. Armachanus, ca. 812), and Spanish (C. Cavensis, s. ix). The early medieval biblical scholar, therefore, was acquainted with the principal source of his study, the Bible, only through Latin translations, which were imperfect and uncontrolled.” Robert E. McNally, S.J., *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 22-23.

The Paris text represents the culmination of a trend evident from the end of the Carolingian era—a trend that caused the text “to become progressively more adapted so as to point specifically towards the exegetical treatment of the Fathers.”<sup>189</sup> This adaptation was achieved by heavy reliance on the *Glossa ordinaria*, using its interlinear and marginal comments drawn chiefly from patristic sources, to achieve the best reading. Various versions of Scripture were produced and published, with the assistance of the *Gloss*. At some point in the early thirteenth century, it seems that one particular version or codex, with the books of the Bible in a particular order,<sup>190</sup> became the exemplar of the Paris Bible.<sup>191</sup> Thus “this Paris Bible text is fundamentally an adaptation of the *Gloss*’s Bible text, in the form it had assumed at the time of *Gloss* ‘mass production’ in Paris” starting around 1230.<sup>192</sup>

Did the selection of this one codex then lead to textual consistency? Not at all! The Paris Bible was printed with the *Gloss*, and this state of affairs led to two interesting phenomena that engendered textual variety, not textual consistency. First, the *Gloss* noted and preserved variant readings of Scripture, frequently alluding to the Septuagint, for

---

<sup>189</sup> Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” 145. Loewe here notes “the organic interdependence of the text, in its twelfth-century form, and the *Gloss*”—and the dependence of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* on both.

<sup>190</sup> Christopher de Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2001), 121.

<sup>191</sup> Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” 145. To say that one version “was chosen” to be the exemplar seems to be going too far; Light argues that, in spite of the importance of the Paris Bible, it was never made a standard text, in addition to being produced in widely ranging physical formats. See Laura Light, “French Bibles c.1200-30: A New Look at the Origin of the Paris Bible,” in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 156-157.

<sup>192</sup> Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*, 40; Light, “French Bibles c.1200-30: A New Look at the Origin of the Paris Bible,” 156.



example<sup>193</sup>; and second, the degree to which Scripture and the *Gloss* were correlated varied widely, depending on which scriptorium produced which edition of the Paris text.<sup>194</sup> Loewe notes that “in one respect only did the Paris text achieve a uniformity that was to be perpetuated, and that was its canonical order and its revised chapter-division.”<sup>195</sup> Stephen Langton is held to have devised the chapter divisions; and Philip the Chancellor, a master at the University of Paris, popularized them,<sup>196</sup> as did the Dominicans, who incorporated them into their verbal concordances in the 1230s.<sup>197</sup>

Facing the twin problems of variant readings of Scripture and multiple versions of the Paris Bible, scholars developed two remedies. The first remedy was the Dominicans’ and Franciscans’ production of a scholarly apparatus called the *Correctoria*; it applied the textual criticism of the day and provided acceptable variants of problem texts in the Vulgate. Consulting the *Correctoria* produced readings of Scripture that were a distinct improvement over those used in the University of Paris under Stephen Langton.<sup>198</sup> The second remedy to the prevailing textual chaos was a decision made in 1236 by the Dominican Chapter General to standardize the Bibles used within the order. Their chosen

---

<sup>193</sup> Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*, 40.

<sup>194</sup> Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” 147.

<sup>195</sup> Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” 147.

<sup>196</sup> Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*, 41.

<sup>197</sup> Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, “*Statim Invenire*: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page,” in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 214.

<sup>198</sup> Verger. “L’*exègese* de l’université,” 203.

version of Scripture contained corrections made in the Province of France by Hugh of St. Cher and others.<sup>199</sup>

Thus, while Thomas Aquinas had the text of the Bible mandated by his Order, he also had access to a wide range of other versions of Scripture, with their variant readings and variable reliance on the *Gloss*. For example, in one of his later works, the *Postilla super Psalmos*, there is good evidence that he relied on the “Gallican Psalter” of the Vulgate, but that he also used at times the “Roman Psalter.”<sup>200</sup> In his Hebrews commentary, Thomas goes to another translation when dissatisfied with the proposed meaning of a word in Hebrews 4:12: “He then says, ‘The word [*sermo*] of God is living.’ This text of itself seems to have a difficulty; nevertheless, by considering another translation, it is more plain. For where we have *sermo*, in Greek there is had *logos*, which is the same as *word* [*verbum*]. Wherefore *sermo*, that is, *verbum*.”<sup>201</sup> Similarly, Thomas cites a variant Jeremiah text in order to explicate another phrase of Hebrews 4:12; in this case, he prefers the Septuagint’s reading of Jeremiah 17:9 to that of the Vulgate.<sup>202</sup> This textual variability troubles Thomas Aquinas not at all; he is confident that God is yet the author of all truth; and so, as Stump describes it, he will at times refrain from “choosing

---

<sup>199</sup> Loewe, “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate,” 149. Loewe cites Berger here, who credits MS Paris, B.N. lat. 17 as the textual basis for the Dominicans standard Bible, and says it is essentially the Paris text. See 149, fn. 2.

<sup>200</sup> See Ryan’s discussion of Thomas’ use of the Gallican, Roman, and *juxta hebraeos* psalters. Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 17-20.

<sup>201</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer 4.2 [217], 101. The English translation is Baer’s, not Larcher’s, who says that “this text” is “clearer than another text,” and who seems not to have omitted any role for *considerando*. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer 4.2 [217], 101. Here is the Latin from Larcher’s edition: “Dicit ergo ‘vivus est sermo Dei.’ Ista littera de se videtur habere difficultatem, tamen considerando aliam translationem, planior est. Ubi enim nos habemus ‘sermo,’ in Graeco habetur ‘logos,’ quod est idem quod ‘verbum.’ Unde ‘sermo,’ id est, ‘verbum.’” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.2 [217], 100.

<sup>202</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 4.2 [226], 104.

one of the alternatives as the more accurate or genuine reading” in favor of integrating “an exegesis of each alternative into his commentary.”<sup>203</sup>

### *Exegetical Tools: Glosses and Other Aids*

In addition to *Correctoria* and multiple versions of the Bible, Thomas Aquinas also had at hand the *Glossa ordinaria*, a running commentary on the books of the Bible. Historical references to glossed version of the Psalms appear as early as the tenth century,<sup>204</sup> and the earliest manuscript of a glossed text of Scripture is dated approximately 800.<sup>205</sup> During the early Middle Ages, exegesis had produced works that were physically separate from the Bible—works such as commentaries, *catena*, and *florilegia*. The latter two were great compilations chiefly of patristic sources, and were particularly characteristic of the Carolingian revival and the cathedral schools. But this situation changed with the creation of the *Glossa ordinaria*, which married Scripture text with exegesis by situating commentary on the page with the text it was treating. The *Gloss* typically placed brief quotations from older exegetical works in the margins, while the interlinear comments served to explain the meaning of individual words.<sup>206</sup> De Hamel notes that “by about 1135 the entire Bible was available with a standard set of

---

<sup>203</sup> Stump, “Biblical Commentary and Philosophy,” 255.

<sup>204</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 44-45.

<sup>205</sup> The glossed text is the book of Psalms, with the addition of nine Canticles. M. T. Gibson, “The Place of the *Glossa ordinaria* in Medieval Exegesis,” in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>206</sup> Nikolaus M. Häring, “Commentary and Hermeneutics,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable, and Carol D. Lanham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 180.

explanatory quotations” in a glossed format.<sup>207</sup> As a result, independent exegetical works produced before the mid-twelfth century tended to fade into obscurity, replaced by the technical innovation of the *Gloss* and surviving only as quotations or extracts.<sup>208</sup>

The *Gloss* consisted primarily of “extracts, paraphrases and re-workings (all known as ‘glosses’) from patristic and Carolingian material,”<sup>209</sup> as well as occasional and generally anonymous comments made by more recent writers. Favored sources for the material found in the *Gloss* included Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Cassiodorus, Gregory, Ambrose, Bede, and Origen, in addition to later exegetes like Alcuin of York and John Scot Eriugena. Comments in the *Gloss* are brief, and may label the sense of Scripture of the text—“*historice*,” “*moraliter*,” and “*mystice*,” for example—but generally “there is no development of discussion of the various senses.”<sup>210</sup>

The *Glossa ordinaria* used by Thomas Aquinas would have had both marginal and interlinear comments, and while the amount of the *Gloss* incorporated into a Bible might have varied with the scriptorium producing the manuscript, the text of the *Gloss* itself was quite stable.<sup>211</sup> Peter Lombard (c. 1100-1160) expanded the *Glossa ordinaria*’s entries dealing with the Psalms and the letters of Paul, in what is called his *Magna Glossatura*<sup>212</sup>; this gloss came to supersede the *Glossa ordinaria* for those teaching the

---

<sup>207</sup> De Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible*, 109.

<sup>208</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 37, 46; Rouse and Rouse, “*Statim Invenire: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page*,” 198.

<sup>209</sup> Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*, 41.

<sup>210</sup> G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 46-47.

<sup>211</sup> Gibson, “The Place of the *Glossa ordinaria* in Medieval Exegesis,” 19.

<sup>212</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 367.

Psalms and the Apostle. Generally, when Thomas Aquinas refers to the *Gloss* in the context of the Pauline epistles, he has in mind the *Magna Glossatura*.<sup>213</sup>

An excellent example of Thomas Aquinas' use of a gloss occurs in his prologue to the commentary on Ephesians. At the end of this prologue, he relies on a 'glossator,' who is Peter Lombard,<sup>214</sup> to identify the recipients of Paul's letter and explain the reason and circumstances for the letter. Thomas does so in a way that demonstrates both how the *Gloss*'s comments were attached to a text of Scripture, and how a lecturer incorporated the comments of the *Gloss* into his own exegesis. Thomas states that in the glossator's own prologue or summary at the beginning of the text of Ephesians, the glossator has provided valuable information "at *the Apostle praises them*."<sup>215</sup> In other words, at a spot on the page, where someone has written a note referring to Paul's praise of the Ephesians, further information regarding the Ephesians and this letter to them has been inserted. First, at this point in the text, the glossator describes the Ephesians as Asians, who have accepted Christianity, and who have been constant in their Christian faith. Thomas then continues: "At *the Apostle praises them* he adds the reason and circumstance for writing," which includes the reason for writing, the authorship of Paul, Paul's location in a Roman prison, and the identity of the bearer of Paul's letter, Tychicus.<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 270.

<sup>214</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 269.

<sup>215</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., and M. L. Lamb, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 39, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue [2], 178.

<sup>216</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Prologue [2], 179.

In both his exegetical and non-exegetical works, Thomas used the *Gloss* as a source. But he never did so uncritically, feeling free to omit or to critique the *Gloss* in favor of a source that better aided the explication of a scriptural text.<sup>217</sup> For example, Thomas notes that in Hebrews 1:3, the *Gloss* interprets “by the word of His power” to mean “by His command”; but then he goes on to show how the word “command,” when carefully defined, cannot apply to the divine action here.<sup>218</sup> Rouse and Rouse tellingly describe the problems associated with using the *Gloss*: while it represented the best efforts of the day to apply the insights of both the biblical and patristic periods to the teaching of the Bible, masters lamented “the superfluity of glosses that tended to obscure, rather than to illuminate, the biblical text,”<sup>219</sup> and they struggled to apply rightly the *Gloss*’s ascriptions in the face of copying errors and omissions and to decide correctly which spiritual sense to attach to the biblical text.<sup>220</sup>

Thomas Aquinas had access to other scholarly aids to his work of interpreting and teaching Scripture. In addition to the *Correctoria*, biblical concordances became available in the thirteenth century, with the first one compiled under Hugh of St. Cher at the school of Saint Jacques in Paris.<sup>221</sup> These concordances had grown out of the collections of *distinctiones* of the late twelfth century, whose purpose was to enable

---

<sup>217</sup> Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*, 224-225. See also Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools*, 258; Smalley notes Thomas’ willingness to contradict the *Gloss*.

<sup>218</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 1.2 [35], 20.

<sup>219</sup> Rouse and Rouse, “*Statim Invenire*,” 211. In addition to the negative factor of the challenges inherent to using the *Gloss*, there was a positive factor at play beginning in the second half of the twelfth century, wherein scholars showed an increasing desire to turn to an original and complete text for interpretive guidance, rather than relying on a third party’s copy of an extract from that text. See Rouse and Rouse, “*Statim Invenire*,” 222-223.

<sup>220</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 226.

<sup>221</sup> Verger. “L’exégèse de l’université,” 203.

scholars to “distinguish” the words of Scripture by providing “the various figurative and symbolic meanings of a noun that is found in Scripture, illustrating each meaning with a scriptural passage.”<sup>222</sup> Concordances also aided preachers in composing their sermons, especially thematic sermons that were devoted to the painstaking explication one verse of Scripture.<sup>223</sup> The concordance produced at Saint Jacques noted the book, chapter, and chapter section in which a particular word was found, and was in circulation by 1239. Later versions of the Saint Jacques concordance provided the context of the word, as well, citing four to seven words of the verse of Scripture in which the word occurred.<sup>224</sup> Other scholarly aids included alphabetical subject indexes of the works of the Fathers as well as those of Aristotle, and library catalogs designed to inventory the works of not just one library, but of the libraries of an entire region.<sup>225</sup> Mention must also be made of Peter Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica*, a summary of biblical history that integrated the information found in the Bible and its glosses into a narrative form; this work had become a standard reference work for Bible scholars of the Middle Ages,<sup>226</sup> and was one of the textbooks used in the Dominican schools.<sup>227</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, “The Development of Research Tools in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 222-223.

<sup>223</sup> Rouse and Rouse, “*Statim invenire*,” 216-217. Mulchahey also makes the connection between the writing of sermons and the compilation of concordances in “*First the Bow is Bent in Study*,” 209-213.

<sup>224</sup> Rouse and Rouse, “The Development of Research Tools in the Thirteenth Century,” 224-225.

<sup>225</sup> Rouse and Rouse, “The Development of Research Tools in the Thirteenth Century,” 226-239.

<sup>226</sup> Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 178-179; Matthew L. Lamb, “Introduction,” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, 26.

<sup>227</sup> Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 86.

## *Conclusion*

Having considered the authorities and exegetical tools at Thomas Aquinas' disposal, it must be acknowledged that an arresting feature of his exegesis is his reliance on the authority of other passages of Scripture in preference to human authorities. His scriptural allusions are numerous, but also brief and illuminating. Thomas may use references to the Church Fathers or to philosophers to further one's understanding of the text; but he may just as easily cite them to indicate where doctrinal issues and even heretical views have developed. Thomas Aquinas displays a willingness to use Scripture and reason to solve exegetical and doctrinal problems, without blindly relying on a previous authority to rubber-stamp a solution. And, as Smalley puts it, Thomas "distinguishes himself from most earlier commentators by keeping to the point, concentrating with a fierce single-mindedness on the text in hand."<sup>228</sup> Thus, in contrast to his peers, a commentary by Thomas Aquinas may represent the best of medieval exegesis in its conciseness and its clarity.

---

<sup>228</sup> Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools*, 261.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Thomas Aquinas' Approach to Hebrews: The Prologue

How does Thomas Aquinas approach the reading and interpreting of Hebrews? A consideration of medieval prologues will provide the background against which to appreciate Thomas' commentary prologues in general. A subsequent examination of Thomas' prologue to Hebrews will be a useful way of commencing the study of the work itself.

#### *Prologues to Medieval Commentaries*

Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews begins, not with an explication of the opening verses of Hebrews, but with a scriptural *accessus* and with a *prooemium* or prologue. It was Thomas' general custom to select a verse from another book of Scripture with which to open his prologue, in which he would then consider various introductory issues. This *accessus* verse could illuminate some aspect of the author of the book of Scripture, or it could address the themes or subject of the book itself. The selection of such a verse was highly intentional, given its status as "the one biblical verse that Thomas would use to characterize what it is essential to know about the biblical work"<sup>1</sup> in order to understand and analyze it properly. Having heard or read Thomas' explication of this opening verse and his application of it to the text at hand, and having considered Thomas'

---

<sup>1</sup> Christopher T. Baglow. "Modus et Forma": A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the *Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios*. *Analecta Biblica Investigationes Scientificae in Res Biblicas* 149 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Institute Biblica, 2002), 97.

prefatory observations in the prologue, the student or reader would thus be prepared for the ensuing exegesis of the text.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of using a prologue or *accessus ad auctores* reaches as far back as the fifth and sixth centuries BC, appearing in commentaries on various works by Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> By the Middle Ages, the use of a prologue was well established in a wide range of scholastic fields. Zinn notes that masters in the arts faculty of the University of Paris were using the *accessus ad auctores* “as a literary form and teaching device”<sup>4</sup> in the first quarter of the twelfth century. The typical prologue had, at a minimum, the *causa scribendi*, *materia*, and *intentio* of the work, and “was common to the grammarians, the theologians and the lawyers.”<sup>5</sup> Quain has found that the prologue or *accessus ad auctores* “was prominently used by commentators on medieval *grammatica*, *retorica* and *dialectica*, and in both civil and canon law,” and that it spread to the fields of theology, exegesis, and philosophy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.”<sup>6</sup> How the use of a prologue became an accepted part of writing a commentary on Scripture is somewhat obscure,<sup>7</sup> but its first appearance in medieval exegesis seems to be in commentaries

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Clifton Black, “St. Thomas’ Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Some Reflections on Its Character and Implications,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 682-683.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin A. Quain, “The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*,” *Traditio* 3 (1945): 262.

<sup>4</sup> Grover A. Zinn, Jr., “Hugh of St. Victor’s *De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris* as an *Accessus* Treatise for the Study of the Bible,” *Traditio* 52 (1997): 114, 121.

<sup>5</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 99.

<sup>6</sup> Quain, “The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*,” 261.

<sup>7</sup> Zinn, “Hugh of St. Victor’s *De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris* as an *Accessus* Treatise for the Study of the Bible”: 122.

written by Hugh of Saint Cher on the gospel of Mark and the Acts of the Apostles during the 1230s.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of how the prologue entered the world of biblical exegesis, it is evident that in the medieval era the writing of a prologue to a commentary became accepted practice, and that the prologue could appear in a range of forms. One popular form was the sermon type of prologue, which often opened with a Scripture citation that furthered the aim of the commentator's introduction.<sup>9</sup> The sermonic prologue would then consider the person, place, and time of the author of a book of the Bible.<sup>10</sup> Such interest in the author is evidence of the Middle Ages' regard for authors and their authority, for "in a literary context, the term *auctor* denoted someone who was at once a writer and an authority, someone not merely to be read but also to be respected and believed."<sup>11</sup> Notable exegetes using the sermonic prologue include Gregory the Great, the Venerable Bede, and Hugh of Saint Victor.<sup>12</sup>

The custom of opening a sermonic prologue with a Scripture citation from a different book of the Bible had its origin, appropriately enough, in the sermons of the day. In their preaching, Peter Lombard and Peter Comestor often quoted an outside text in the introduction to their sermons, and at some point in the latter part of the twelfth century it became customary for university lecturers to do the same—"to open one's

---

<sup>8</sup> A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100-c.1175: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 198.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 13; Beryl Smalley, "Peter Comestor on the Gospels and His Sources," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 46 (1979): 109-110.

<sup>10</sup> A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), 17.

<sup>11</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 17.

prologue with a text from Scripture, which would then be applied to the contents of the book in hand.”<sup>13</sup> Smalley states that while Peter Comestor was the first lecturer known to engage in thus beginning his prologues, he indicates that he did not originate this practice.<sup>14</sup>

While the sermonic prologue enjoyed a degree of popularity, more common was the type of prologue used by Boethius in his commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. As perhaps the only Latin writer of his day conversant with Greek thought, Boethius adopted the more developed prologue style used by Greek rhetoricians and by commentators on Greek philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Hunt and Minnis list the six categories of information that Boethius incorporated into the prologue to his commentary on Porphyry—categories that Boethius “claimed must be investigated and brought forth at the beginning of every book of philosophy.”<sup>16</sup> The six categories are the *operas intentio*, the intention of the work, to which medieval commentators sometimes added the *finis* or final cause; the *utilitas* or usefulness of the work; its *ordo*, wherein Boethius addressed the work’s place in the curriculum, as well as how the work proceeds; the authenticity of the work, *si eius cuius esse opus dicitur germanus propriusque liber est*; the title of the work, *quae sit eius*

---

<sup>13</sup> Beryl Smalley, “Peter Comestor on the Gospels and His Sources,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 46 (1979): 109. On the part of Thomas Aquinas, this practice is clearly a way to “interpret Scripture with Scripture” is unclear, as will be seen.

<sup>14</sup> Smalley, “Peter Comestor on the Gospels and His Sources,” 110.

<sup>15</sup> Quain, “The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*,” 263.

<sup>16</sup> Richard William Hunt, “The Introductions of the ‘Artes’ in the Twelfth Century,” in *Studia mediaevalia in honorem R. J. Martin* (Bruges: Apud Societatem Editricem ‘De Tempel,’ 1948), 94. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 18. Minnis and Hunt are both citing *In Isagogen Porphyrii commenta*, ed. S. Brandt, *Corpus Scriptuorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, xlviii (1906), 4-5.

*operis inscriptio*; and finally, the part of philosophy to which it pertains--*ad quam partem philosophiae cuiuscumque libri ducatur intentio*, or *pars philosophiae*.<sup>17</sup>

Peter Abelard may be credited with applying this type of *accessus ad auctores* to contemporary works, beginning with his own philosophical writings and then expanding this method to his biblical commentaries.<sup>18</sup> He alludes to Boethius' categories in his *Commentariorum super S. Pauli Epistolam ad Romanos libri quinque*, as well as in a commentary on Boethius himself.<sup>19</sup> Abelard's use of Boethius' method is evidence of the latter's profound influence during the Middle Ages. It is due to that influence that academic and religious prologues took on this more sophisticated form during the twelfth century.<sup>20</sup> Based on a statement made by Gerhoch of Reichersberg in the *prooemium* to his commentary on the Psalms, this approach was becoming common practice by the mid-twelfth century.<sup>21</sup>

During the thirteenth century, the prologue structure favored by Boethius underwent a transformation due to the introduction of the works of Aristotle. The catalyst for this transformation lies in the comprehensive discussions of causality found in two works, Aristotle's *Physica* and *Metaphysica*, which entered university curricula early in

---

<sup>17</sup> Hunt, "The Introductions of the 'Artes' in the Twelfth Century," 95. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolaus M. Häring, "Commentary and Hermeneutics," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Beneson, Giles Constable, and Carol D. Lanham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 185-186.

<sup>19</sup> Quain, "The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*," 261.

<sup>20</sup> Quain, "The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*," 263.

<sup>21</sup> Häring, "Commentary and Hermeneutics," 186. "Cum autem soleant in initiis librorum plura inquiri, quatuor hic non otiose quaeruntur: *Materia, intentio, modus tractandi, titulus libri*." Gerhoch of Reichersberg, *Commentarium in psalmos*, PL 193, 630C.

the thirteenth century.<sup>22</sup> The resulting “Aristotelian prologue” considered Aristotle’s four major causes—efficient, material, formal, and final—which were held to direct all activity and change in the cosmos. The categories addressed in the other types of prologues dovetailed nicely with the four Aristotelian causes, so that “the author would be discussed as the ‘efficient cause’ or motivating agent of the text; his materials, as its ‘material cause’; his literary style and structure, as twin aspects of the ‘formal cause,’ the *forma tractandi* and the *forma tractatus* respectively; while his ultimate end or objective in writing would be considered as the ‘final cause.’”<sup>23</sup> This new Aristotelian prologue became established some time between 1235 and 1245,<sup>24</sup> as members of the arts faculty at the University of Paris readily adopted it, and theologians used it to introduce commentaries on books of the Bible and on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.<sup>25</sup>

### *Thomas Aquinas’ Commentary Prologues*

In this section, a survey of the commentary prologues of Thomas Aquinas will provide a valuable backdrop for a consideration of his prologue to the commentary on Hebrews. In particular, a study of Thomas’ prologue to the book of Romans will be worthwhile, given the important parallels it has to the prologue to Hebrews.

---

<sup>22</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> A. J. Minnis, “The *Accessus* Extended: Henry of Ghent on the Transmission and Reception of Theology,” in *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 276.

<sup>25</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 29.

## *A Survey of Thomistic Commentary Prologues*

Thomas Aquinas consistently uses his commentary prologues to present important concepts and the theological framework that will undergird the commentary.<sup>26</sup> But he demonstrates some variability both in his use of the scriptural *accessus* and in the *prooemium* itself. Most of his commentaries do have a scriptural *accessus* to lead into his preface to the work. The first part of the prologue typically consists of a sermon on the scriptural *accessus*, using the Scripture citation as a lens through which to view the author and his task, as well as to perceive the purpose and themes of the book at hand. Thomas then usually adapts and interprets the *accessus* “in such a way as to explicate the core of the book immediately in question.”<sup>27</sup> A consideration of some or all of the four Aristotelian causes generally follows; an examination of the author, and his place and time, may be included. Thus a typical Thomistic prologue will be a synthesis of the sermon type of prologue and elements of the Aristotelian prologue.<sup>28</sup>

Thomas Aquinas’ prologues to the Psalms and to Ephesians provide excellent examples of such a blend of the sermonic and Aristotelian prologues. His prologue to the Psalms combines a sermon on Ecclesiasticus 47:9 (“In every work, he confessed to the

---

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Prügl, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 399.

<sup>27</sup> Black, “Thomas’s Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Some Reflections on Its Character and Implications,” 682-683.

<sup>28</sup> Prügl, in his otherwise excellent article, states, “Quite surprisingly, Aquinas did not employ the so-called Aristotelian prologue in his commentaries on the Scriptures, i.e., the type of prologue that discusses the introductory literary questions on the basis of the four *causae* (*materialis, formalis, efficiens, finalis*).” He errs. See Prügl, “Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture,” 412.

Holy and Most High, with words of glory”<sup>29</sup>), with a consideration of the four causes. In the first sentence of the prologue, Thomas states that the words from Ecclesiasticus apply to David in the literal sense and show us the cause of the book of Psalms. Then he proceeds to list the four causes—material, formal, final, and efficient—and embarks upon a discussion of how each of the four causes shapes the book of Psalms.<sup>30</sup>

Thomas’ commentary on Ephesians has Psalm 74:4 as its scriptural *accessus* (“The earth is melted, and all that dwell therein: I have strengthened its pillars”<sup>31</sup>), in order to highlight the work of Paul in strengthening the faith of the Ephesians. The ensuing preface begins as a sermon on the citation from the Psalms, but concludes with a succinct description of the causes of Paul’s letter: “The efficient cause of this letter is, of course, St. Paul; this cause was ascribed to the *I* of Psalm 74:4. The final cause is to fortify, designated by the *have strengthened*. The material cause is the Ephesians, as noted under *its pillars*. The formal cause will be understood in the structural divisions of the letter and its method of presentation.”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> “In omne opere suo dedit confessionem sancto, et excelso in verbo gloriae.” Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Psalmos David. Opera Omnia*. Parma, 1863. Photographic Reprint, New York: Musurgia, 1949, 14.148. Quoted by Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 159.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas d’Aquin, *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*, ed. Jean-Éric Stroobant de Saint-Eloy (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 33-39.

<sup>31</sup> “Liquefacta est terra et omnes qui habitant in ea: ego confirmavi columnas ejus.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. F. R. Larcher and M. L. Lamb, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 39, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue, 177.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “Prologue,” *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), 41. “Iam apparet quae sit causa huius epistolae efficiens, quia Paulus, quod notatur ibi *ego*. Finalis, quia confirmatio, quod notatur ibi *confirmavi*. Materialis, quia Ephesii, quod notatur ibi *columnas eius*. Formalis patet in divisione epistolae, et modo agendi.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. Larcher and Lamb, Prologue [1], 178.



Other prologues to Thomas Aquinas' Pauline commentaries are less developed, featuring a short, simple sermon based on the scriptural *accessus*, followed by a statement of the book's purpose and perhaps a mention of the book's author. The prologues to I and II Corinthians fit this description, as do the prologues to Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.<sup>33</sup>

While these prologues tend to be brief, they can be arresting, as demonstrated in Thomas' prologue to Galatians. Having opened with a scriptural *accessus* of Lev 26:10, 'You shall eat the oldest of the old store, and, new coming on, you shall cast away the old,'<sup>34</sup> Thomas states that the Apostle rebuked the Galatians with this very text. While Lev 26:10 does not feature in Paul's letter to the Galatians, the thought that it expresses most certainly does—the need to remove the old rites of the law in order to make room for the newness of the Gospel. Aquinas goes on to provide a fourfold explication of the new replacing the old: oldness of error, removed by the newness of the doctrine of Christ; oldness of the figure of the first testament, supplanted by the newness of grace and of Christ's presence; oldness of guilt, made new by the newness of justice, so that instead of growing old we walk in newness of life; and oldness of punishment, which will give way to the newness of glory.<sup>35</sup> Thus Thomas Aquinas, applying a verse from Leviticus to the

---

<sup>33</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., B. Mortensen, and D. Keating, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 38, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012); Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 40, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> "Comedetis vetustissima veterum, et vetera novis supervenientibus projicietis." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Prologue [1], 1.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Prologue, 1.

letter to the error-ridden Galatians, deftly demonstrates the four senses of Scripture (literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical) as he moves from the doctrine of Christ, to Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament, and from there to our new life and future glorification. Having succinctly demonstrated the advantages of the new over the old, this prologue has prepared the reader to hear the message of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Among Thomas Aquinas' commentary prologues, there are two atypical works that merit consideration. One is his prologue to Job; the other, his prologue to Romans. The former is unusual due to Thomas' purpose in writing the commentary; the latter is unusual due to its position in the Pauline corpus.

The prologue to the commentary on Job represents a departure from Thomas' prefatory pattern.<sup>36</sup> It has no opening verse of Scripture, no scriptural *accessus*. Nor does Thomas consider Job's authorship, place, or time at the end of the prologue; in fact, he explicitly states that doing so is not his intention.<sup>37</sup> Acknowledging that the traditional understanding of the man Job, and the accepted spiritual or mystical reading of the book of Job, had been shaped by the commentary that Pope Gregory wrote centuries earlier,<sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas concludes his prologue with the intention of leaving the spiritual sense of Job in Gregory's capable hands and expounding Job according to the literal sense. And the commentary itself will be shaped by Thomas' consistent application of the four Aristotelian causes to Job's situation.

---

<sup>36</sup> Prügl, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture," 400.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Prologue," *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, trans. Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Volumes 143, 143A, 143B (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1979).

Thus, rather than open with a scriptural citation, Thomas begins the prologue with a statement of the problem faced by Job, and by the human race, in knowing whether to attribute events to chance or to divine providence. In this commentary, Job the man or Job the originator of the text at hand is of less importance to Thomas Aquinas than Job the representative of humanity and of humanity's subjection to the course of history. This is not to say that Job's story is a parable, or that his existence is hypothetical; rather, Aquinas desires to discover what knowledge we can derive from this particular man's experience.<sup>39</sup> Thomas observes that "Just as in the case of things which are generated naturally there is a gradual development from the imperfect to the perfect, so it happens in the case of men with respect to the knowledge of the truth; for in the beginning what they have attained of the truth is slight, but afterwards, step by step as it were, they come to some fuller measure of the truth"—that is, the truth that "natural things are controlled by providence."<sup>40</sup> Throughout the commentary, as Thomas reads the book of Job in terms of the Aristotelian causes, he will seek to lead us to just such a providential understanding of human and cosmic affairs. Therefore, a prologue that states the problem faced by Job as humanity's representative is an appropriate beginning for a commentary on the literal, not the mystical, sense of Job, and the resulting depiction of the role of divine providence or causality in human affairs.

---

<sup>39</sup> Thomas declares that while Job's existence "makes little difference one way or another to the intention of the book, it is important as far as the truth itself is concerned," and cites the mentions of Job by name in Ezek 14:14 and James 5:11 as evidence that "one must believe that Job was a man in the nature of things." Thomas Aquinas, "Prologue," *The Literal Exposition on Job*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Prologue," *The Literal Exposition on Job*, 67.

### *The Prologue to the Romans Commentary*

Thomas Aquinas' prologue to the books of Romans is not the typical preface to an epistle, in that it serves not so much as an introduction to Romans as it does to the entire Pauline corpus.<sup>41</sup> Thomas does address issues that relate specifically to Romans at the end of the prologue—the time and place of its writing, as well its chronological relationship to I Corinthians. But his primary tasks in this prologue are twofold: to examine the apostleship of Paul, and to provide an overview of Paul's writings, applying the four Aristotelian causes in each case. And one thing Thomas does superbly well in this particular prologue is to demonstrate how the scriptural *accessus*, wisely chosen, can be expounded in such a way as to disclose both the fittingness of Paul's calling as an apostle, and the purpose and interrelationships of the letters that he wrote.

The scriptural *accessus* for this prologue is Acts 9:15: "And the Lord said to him: go your way; for this man is to me a vessel of election, to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."<sup>42</sup> The choice of Acts 9:15 is somewhat atypical for Thomas Aquinas, given that, in his commentary prologues, the connection between an *accessus* verse and the book of Scripture it prefaces is usually rather oblique. Not so in this case, as Acts 9:15 appears just after Paul's Damascus Road conversion, and serves as a command from the Lord to Ananias, to go to Paul and place his hands on this

---

<sup>41</sup> For Thomas Aquinas, there are fourteen New Testament letters written by Paul, not the thirteen accepted today. Even in Thomas' day, the Pauline authorship of Hebrews was questioned, and he discusses the problem in his prologue to the commentary on Hebrews. Today, Pauline authorship of Hebrews has been ruled out, and the authorship of Hebrews remains uncertain. See the discussion in Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 2-9.

<sup>42</sup> "Dixit autem ad eum Dominus: vade, quoniam vas electionis est mihi iste, ut portet nomen meum coram gentibus, et regibus, et filiis Israel." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue, 1. Henceforward, *Romans*, Larcher.

persecutor of the saints, in order to restore his sight. Thomas turns this verse and its description of Paul's future mission to great advantage, devoting the first part of the prologue to a rich discussion of Paul as a vessel chosen by God for a specific purpose. In this discussion, Thomas considers the construction of a vessel, its contents, its use, and its fruit: four categories that could be related to the efficient, material, formal, and final causes of Paul's apostleship, respectively.

Then Thomas makes a smooth transition to a discussion of the Pauline corpus by addressing the four causes of Paul's letters:

From the words of our text, therefore, we gather the four causes of this work, i.e., of Paul's letters, which we have before us. First, the author, in the word *vessel*; second, the matter, in the words *my name*, of which the vessel is full, because this entire teaching is about the teaching of Christ; third, the manner, in the word *carry*. For this teaching is conveyed in the manner of letters which were customarily carried by messengers: *so couriers went with letters from the king and his princes* (2 Chr 30:6). Fourth, the difference of the work in the usefulness mentioned.<sup>43</sup>

In terms of the four Aristotelian causes, Thomas Aquinas names Paul, the *vas electionis*, as the efficient cause of the letters. The Latin word *vas* means "vessel," and secondarily, "implement" or "instrument;" its Greek equivalent, *skeuos*, possesses the literal meaning of "vessel" and a frequent figurative meaning as "instrument," thus designating Paul as someone who has a particular function.<sup>44</sup> Hence Paul is the "instrumental" or efficient cause of his epistles—but this instrumental status does not reduce Paul to being an

---

<sup>43</sup> "Sic igitur ex verbis praemissis possumus accipere quatuor causas huius operis, scilicet epistolarum Pauli, quas prae minibus habemus. Primo quidem auctorem in vase. Secundo materiam in nomine Christi, quae est plenitudo vasis, quia tota doctrina haec est de doctrina Christi. Tertio modum in usu portationis; traditur enim haec doctrina per modum epistolarum, quae per nuntios portari consueverunt, secundum illud II Par. XXX, 6: *perrexerunt cursores cum epistulis ex regio imperio*, etc. Quarto distinctionem operis in utilitate praedicta." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [10], 4.

<sup>44</sup> W. F. Bauer, W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 754.

anonymous piece in a literary machine. Thomas Aquinas goes to great pains to describe Paul as uniquely and gloriously qualified to be God's chosen instrument and vessel, elaborating on Sirach 50:9 ("as a vessel of solid gold adorned with all kinds of precious stones"<sup>45</sup>) in order to portray Paul as "a golden vessel on account of his divine wisdom," a solid vessel "on account of the virtue of love," and a vessel bejeweled with all the virtues.<sup>46</sup>

Yet of what significance is a vessel unless it is filled with something, or an instrument unless it is used for something? Thomas observes that as God's vessel, Paul poured out "the mysteries of the most lofty divinity," such as wisdom, love and the virtues<sup>47</sup>; and, as a vessel he was "filled with some sort of liquid"—that is, with the most precious liquid of the name of Christ.<sup>48</sup> Through the imagery of the vessel, Thomas deftly keeps in view both the identity of the vessel and its instrumental purpose, while demonstrating that the contents of the vessel, and the sharing of those contents through Paul's letters, is what matters most.

Discussing authorship in the context of Scripture requires consideration of "the causation whereby the divine *auctor* had directed the human *auctores* to write"<sup>49</sup>—a

---

<sup>45</sup> "Beatus autem Paulus, quia vas electionis nominatur in verbis propositis, quale vas fuerit, patet per id quod dicitur Eccli. L,10: *quasi vas auri solidum ornatum omni lapide pretioso*." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [1], 1.

<sup>46</sup> "Aureum quidem vas fuit propter fulgorem sapientiae. . . .Solidum quidem fuit virtute caritatis. . . .Ornatum autem fuit omni lapide pretioso, scilicet omnibus virtutibus. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [1], 1.

<sup>47</sup> "Quale autem fuerit istud vas patet ex hoc quod talia propinavit: docuit enim excellentissimae divinitatis mysteria. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 2.

<sup>48</sup> "Secundo etiam ad vasa pertinere videtur ut liquore aliquo impleantur. . . . Hoc autem vas, de quo nunc agitur, plenum fuit pretioso liquore, scilicet nomine Christi. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2.

<sup>49</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 28.

reminder of the chain of causation that produced each book of Scripture. As Thomas observes in his *Summa*, in efficient causes which operate in order, “the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause,” which produces the ultimate effect.<sup>50</sup> Even so, as Thomas has shown us in his Romans prologue, “an *auctor* of Scripture, being a cause which existed between the first efficient cause (God) and the effect (the text), was granted his own personal purpose.”<sup>51</sup> And Thomas’ use of the vessel image gives us insight into his understanding of human authors as intermediate causes—a state in which these authors are not viewed as anonymous pieces of machinery but are allowed their own identity and value, as the image of the beautifully adorned vessel indicates. Thus, through the selection of Acts 9:15 for his scriptural *accessus*, and his exposition of Paul’s identity as a chosen vessel, Thomas Aquinas limns his view of the interrelationship of divine and human causality—but in a poetic way, through the picture of a golden vessel, that far outstrips a mundane discussion of cause and effect. Such devout yet artful exegesis is of a high order indeed.

Of the remaining three Aristotelian causes,<sup>52</sup> the material cause of the letters, which is their content,<sup>53</sup> consists of everything that the Apostle’s letters have to teach us about Christ. The formal cause, in terms of the form imposed by the author on his

---

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.2.3, 13. Also see discussion in John F. Wippel, “Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 114.

<sup>51</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 83.

<sup>52</sup> “Sic igitur ex verbis praemissis possumus accipere quatuor causas huius operis, scilicet epistolarum Pauli, quae prae manibus habemus. Primo quidem auctorem in vase. Secundo materiam in nomine Christi, quae est plenitudo vasis, quia tota doctrina haec est de doctrina Christi. Tertio modum in usu portationis; traditur enim haec doctrina per modum epistolarum, quae per nuntios portari consueverunt. . . . Quarto distinctionem operis in utilitate praedicta.” Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [10], 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 14.

materials, is to be found in Paul's composition of letters to be delivered by messengers, according to Thomas; just as the formal cause of the Psalms is their existence as prayers penned by David and ultimately attributable to Christ,<sup>54</sup> so the formal cause of Paul's writings is their identity as letters carried by messengers to specific churches. The final cause is something Thomas terms each letter's "usefulness," or the particular good achieved by each letter<sup>55</sup> in its contribution to "the working out of God's purposes in the nature of the universe and mankind that he had created"<sup>56</sup>—a subject that Thomas addresses next in his prologue to Romans.

Here Thomas Aquinas embarks upon a fuller discussion of the final cause of the Pauline corpus, as he returns to the identification of Paul in the scriptural *accessus* as the one who carries the Lord's name. Using this ascription as an organizational strategy, Thomas divides Paul's letters according to the specific groups of people to whom Paul took Christ's name. Thus, nine letters go to Gentiles, four to "kings," and one, Hebrews, to Israelites.<sup>57</sup> Then Thomas identifies the final cause of all the letters of Paul as teaching about the grace of Christ. In general, a work's final cause expresses the particular good toward which it is aimed; but in the case of books of Scripture, the final cause may also refer to "the efficacy of a work in leading the reader to salvation,"<sup>58</sup> given that for Thomas, the end to which Scripture is ordered is the revelation of the truths necessary for

---

<sup>54</sup> Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 14-15.

<sup>55</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Paul E. Sigmund, "Law and Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 218.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4.

<sup>58</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 29.



salvation.<sup>59</sup> And that is the case with the letters of Paul, with their promotion of the grace of Christ to three different populations which, in spite of their differences, represent the Church in its entirety: “the church of the Gentiles”; “the prelates and princes of the church, i.e., kings”; and “the people of Israel.”<sup>60</sup>

But in addition to the Pauline corpus having a final cause, each letter has one as well. In addressing this topic, Thomas combines the consideration of final causes with the making of *distinctiones*—divisions in which “meanings were broken down, divided into their constituent parts, so that the senses of key words were easier to grasp.”<sup>61</sup> The value of making such “distinctions” among the Pauline epistles lies in the usefulness of such an operation in identifying each of Paul’s letters, while making clear their interrelationships. Peter Lombard had adopted this procedure in the prologue to his commentary on the Psalms, setting forth divisions within the Psalter in which the first fifty psalms dealt with penitence; the second fifty with justice, mercy and judgment; and the last fifty with the praise of eternal life; each part relates to the others in portraying the three conditions of the Christian life.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> “Respondeo: Dicendum, quod sacra Scriptura ad hoc divinitus est ordinata ut per eam nobis veritas manifestetur necessaria ad salutem.” Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* 7.6.1, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1949), 146. Also see discussion in John F. Boyle, “Authorial Intention and the *Divisio Textus*,” 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), 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> “Scripsit enim quatuordecim epistolas quarum novem instruunt ecclesiam gentium; quatuor praelatos et principes Ecclesiae, id est reges; una populum Israel, scilicet quae est ad Hebraeos.” Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4.

<sup>61</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 64, 65.

<sup>62</sup> “Distinguitur autem liber iste per tres quinquagenas, quibus tres status Christianae religionis significantur, quorum primus est in poenitentia, secundus in iustitia, tertius in laude vitae aeternae.” Peter Lombard, “Praefatio,” “Psalms Davidicos Commentarii,” *PL* 191, 57A. See also Minnis, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 107.

Thomas had followed suit in his partial commentary on the Psalms by likewise creating divisions within the Psalter to create not only sets of fifty but also sets of ten within each fifty. Each set of ten has a theme that fits into the larger theme of the set of fifty to which it belongs.<sup>63</sup> Ryan identifies this literary move on Thomas' part as an element of the *divisio textus*,<sup>64</sup> but Minnis considers it a form of the *causa distinctionis*, with Thomas' purpose being to clarify the interrelationships of the psalms according to their literal sense.<sup>65</sup> The fact that *distinctio* is used by Thomas Aquinas in his prologues to the Psalms and to Romans suggests that such is the case.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, when Thomas is preparing to divide a text in order to comment on it, he uses the term *divisio*, not *distinctio*.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 20, 28.

<sup>65</sup> Minnis states, "The last of these headings (regarding the *distinctions* of the Psalms) is a variant of the *causa distinctionis* . . . For St. Thomas, the basic order or structure of the Psalter consisted in relationships existing between the various psalms understood in their literal sense . . ." See Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 87.

<sup>66</sup> "Sed antequam ad litteram veniamus, circa hunc librum tria in generali considerata sunt. Primo de translatione huius operis. Secundo de modo exponendi. Tertio de eius distinctione." "But before we come to the text, three things concerning this book must be considered in general. First, about the translation of this work. Second, about the mode of exposition. Third, about the distinction of the work." Thomas proceeds to make three distinctions, grouping the Psalms first into two groups of seventy and eighty psalms; then into five books; and finally into three groups of fifty. Thomas Aquinas, *Introduction to his Exposition of the Psalms*, trans. Hugh McDonald (The Aquinas Translation Project; <http://www4.desales.edu/~philtheo/loughlin/ATP/index.html>).

"Sic igitur ex verbis praemissis possumus accipere quatuor causas huius operis, scilicet epistolarum Pauli, quas prae minibus habemus. . . . Quarto distinctionem operis in utilitate praedicta." "From the words of our text, therefore, we gather the four causes of this work, i.e., of Paul's letters, which we have before us. . . . Fourth, the difference of the work in the usefulness mentioned." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [10], 4.

Larcher translates *distinctionem* as 'difference' in the *Romans* quotation, whereas McDonald, more helpfully, and more authentically in this context, translates it as 'distinction' in the *Psalms* quotation.

<sup>67</sup> In the Hebrews prologue, Thomas anticipates dividing the text of Hebrews in order to begin explaining it, using *divisio*, not *distinctio*: "Sed antequam accedamus ad divisionem . . ." See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue [5], 2. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher.

This practice bears similarities to the type of prologue popularized by Boethius and Peter Abelard, in which six categories of information on a work of philosophy were considered. One of the categories to be addressed was the part of philosophy to which the work in question pertained.<sup>68</sup> Understanding the nature of a work on its own was insufficient; it was necessary to relate it to comparable works and to situate it in its context. That is the task of Thomas Aquinas, as, having placed all of Paul's letters under the rubric of the grace of Christ, he now seeks to present each letter's distinctive use while relating it to its Pauline setting. Having done so, Thomas will close this section of the prologue to Romans with this statement: *Et sic patet ratio distinctionis et ordinis omnium epistolarum*—"And thus the principle of the distinction and order of all the epistles is evident."<sup>69</sup>

How does Thomas Aquinas relate, order, and distinguish Paul's fourteen epistles? He places all of them under the heading of the grace of Christ, which he says is the entire teaching (*doctrina tota*) of these letters.<sup>70</sup> Then he creates three sub-headings regarding Christ's grace and places each epistle where it best fits.<sup>71</sup> First, the grace of Christ in regard to him being the Head of the Mystical Body, the Church, is the subject of Hebrews. Second, the grace of Christ "as found in the chief members of the Mystical Body" is the subject of the Apostle's letters to the prelates; these letters include I and II

---

<sup>68</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 18. Minnis here cites *In Isagogen Porphyrii commenta*, ed. S. Brandt, *Corpus Scriptuorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, xlviii (1906), 4-5.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 5. Translation mine.

<sup>70</sup> "Est enim haec doctrina tota de gratia Christi, quae quidem potest tripliciter considerari." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4.

<sup>71</sup> "Uno modo secundum quod est in ipso Capite, scilicet Christo, et sic commendatur in epistola ad Hebraeos. Alio modo secundum quod est in membris principalibus Corporis Mystici, et sic commendatur in epistolis quae sunt ad praelatos. Tertio modo secundum quod in ipso Corpore Mystico, quod est Ecclesia, et sic commendatur in epistolis quae mittuntur ad gentiles. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4-5.

Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Third, the grace of Christ “as it is found in the Mystical Body itself” is the subject of Paul’s letters to Gentiles: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I and II Thessalonians. And then Thomas Aquinas further subdivides Paul’s epistles, assigning to each a final cause but also relating certain letters to each other. Thus, Romans describes the grace of Christ “as it is in itself,” while I and II Corinthians consider the sacraments of grace—the former treating the nature of the sacraments, the latter treating the minister of the sacraments.<sup>72</sup>

### *Thomas Aquinas’ Prologue to Hebrews*

Having surveyed Thomas Aquinas’ commentary prologues against the backdrop of medieval prologues in general, and having placed Hebrews in its Pauline context through the lens of the Romans prologue, what of Thomas’ prologue to the book of Hebrews? As is typical of many of his prologues, this introduction to the book of Hebrews begins with a scriptural *accessus*. It then moves to a sermon on that scripture citation in which primary themes of Hebrews are identified and elaborated. The prologue closes with a discussion of the causes of the epistle to the Hebrews, including a consideration of the authorship of the letter. To those topics we now turn.

### *The Scriptural Accessus*

The prologues to Thomas Aquinas’ commentaries on the fourteen letters of Paul begin with a scriptural *accessus*. Twelve of these scriptural citations are from the Old

---

<sup>72</sup> “. . . quarum haec est distinctio: nam ipsa gratia Christi tripliciter potest considerari. Uno modo secundum se, et sic commendatur in epistola ad Romanos; alio modo secundum quod est in sacramentis gratiae et sic commendatur in duabus epistolis ad Corinthios, in quarum prima agitur de ipsis sacramentis, in secunda de dignitate ministrorum. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4-5.

Testament. The other two are Acts 9:15, used for the Romans prologue, and Luke 12:39, used for Titus.

It appears that Thomas broke with his usual practice in choosing New Testament passages to introduce Romans and Titus; however, the suitability of Acts 9:15 as an introduction to the Pauline corpus is clear. In this verse, Paul is named as the Lord's chosen vessel or instrument to carry forth his name to Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel, via his fourteen letters as well as his personal ministry, as has already been discussed. The choice of scriptural *accessus* for Titus is likewise fitting: its prefatory verse is Luke 12:39, which describes the householder who, if he had known at what hour the thief was coming, would not have allowed his house to be robbed. And Thomas categorizes Titus as a defense against heretics, written to the prelates of the Church to instruct them regarding their duties in the face of heresy.<sup>73</sup> Thus it is evident that, regarding the opening scripture citations for Romans and Titus, using a verse from one New Testament book to shed light on another New Testament book is most appropriate.

Far more interesting, however, is Thomas' penchant for using a verse from an Old Testament book to illuminate each of the other twelve Pauline epistles. Of the twelve Old Testament scripture citations, four are from wisdom literature (both canonical and deuterocanonical) and two are from the Psalms; four are from the Pentateuch, with Genesis used three times and Leviticus once; and the prophets are cited once, with a verse from Isaiah, as is the deuterocanonical historical work of I Maccabees.<sup>74</sup> Judging by his

---

<sup>73</sup> "Praelatos vero Ecclesiarum instruit et spirituales et temporales. Spirituales quidem de institutione, instructione et gubernatione ecclesiasticae unitatis in prima ad Timotheum, de firmitate contra persecutores in secunda, tertio de defensione contra haereticos in epistola ad Titum." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 5.

<sup>74</sup> The scriptural *accessus* verses drawn from the Old Testament: I Corinthians, Wisdom 6:22; II Corinthians, Isaiah 61:6; Galatians, Lev 26:10; Ephesians, Ps 75:3; Philippians, Prov 4:18; Colossians, I

frequent selection of Old Testament verses as to introduce his New Testament commentaries, it seems that Thomas Aquinas deliberately “uses Old Testament citations like small spotlights, each shining from a different angle to illuminate another facet of the theological realities that he is expounding.”<sup>75</sup> Such a practice is certainly a reminder of the exegetical legacy Thomas had inherited from the church fathers, wherein asserting Christ as the key to interpreting all of Scripture made possible “a unified reading of the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>76</sup> As Healy puts it, for Thomas Aquinas, “as for the ancient and medieval tradition as a whole, the sacred books are not merely the record of a multiplicity of ancient theologies attributable to various authors addressing various concerns in various historical contexts, but a single source of revelation bearing witness to a single economy of salvation.”<sup>77</sup> Using an Old Testament verse to illumine a New Testament book attests to Thomas’ understanding of the genuine continuity to be found between the two Testaments.

Such a practice is especially suited to a commentary on the book of Hebrews, which draws on concepts like law, sacrifice, and priesthood to emphasize the interrelationship of the New Testament and the Old—an interrelationship that Thomas

---

Maccabees 3:3; I Thessalonians, Genesis 7:17; II Thessalonians, Gen 49:1; I Tim, Ecclesiasticus 10:4; II Tim, Gen 31:40; Philemon, Ecclesiasticus 33:31; and Hebrews, Ps 85:8.

While current practice may be to classify the Psalms as sapiential, the practice in the Middle Ages was to include in this category Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), and the Wisdom of Solomon. See Roland E. Murphy, “Preface,” *Medieval Exegesis of Wisdom Literature: Essays by Beryl Smalley*, ed. Roland E. Murphy (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), ii.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Healy, “Aquinas’s Use of the Old Testament in His Commentary on Romans,” *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 184-185.

<sup>76</sup> John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 74.

<sup>77</sup> Healy, “Aquinas’s Use of the Old Testament in His Commentary on Romans,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, 193.

consistently addresses in his Hebrews commentary. For example, in the commentary's first lecture, on Hebrews 1:1-2, he describes the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as that of promise and manifestation,<sup>78</sup> contrasting an earlier time of waiting and darkness, or expectation and shadows, with a present time of grace.<sup>79</sup> In his final lecture, on Hebrews 13:17-25, Thomas states that "Christ by his passion merited the glory of his resurrection for himself and for us" through the blood of the everlasting covenant. To reinforce the efficacy and everlasting nature of this covenant, Thomas then cites a New Testament reference, Phil 2:8, regarding Christ' humbling himself and being obedient to the point of death; and an Old Testament reference, Zech 9:11, which says that "by the blood of your testament you have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit."<sup>80</sup> Thomas here has used citations from the Old and New Testaments to present his understanding of sacrifice, resurrection, and covenant. And in this way, Thomas' commentary on Hebrews excels at enabling its readers to recognize "how Aquinas conceives the relationship between God's revelatory words and actions as narrated in the

---

<sup>78</sup> "Vetus vero Testamentum traditum est patribus, aspicientibus a longe et intuentibus Deum procul; istud autem nobis, scilicet apostolis, qui vidimus eum in propria persona. . . Unde patet quod illa locutio fuit promissoria. Gal. III, 16: Abrahæ dictæ sunt repromissiones. Ista locutio est exhibitoria. Io. I, 17: gratia et veritas per Iesum Christum facta est." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8-9.

<sup>79</sup> "Item illud *olim* in tempore expectationis et tenebrarum, sed istud *in diebus istis*, id est, tempore gratiæ. Rom. XIII, 12: nox præcessit, dies autem appropinquavit. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [14], 7.

<sup>80</sup> "Ipse vero Christus per passionem suam meruit sibi et nobis gloriam resurrectionis, ideo dicit quod *eduxit Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum de mortuis in sanguine testamenti æterni*. Phil II, 8: *humiliavit semetipsum*, et cetera. Zach. IX, 11: *tu vero in sanguine testamenti tui eduxisti vinctos de lacu, in quo non erat aqua*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 13.3 [768], 328.

Old Testament and their fulfillment within the person and work of the incarnate Christ”<sup>81</sup>—and his choice of the *accessus* verse is the first step in that endeavor.

*The Scriptural Accessus for the Hebrews Commentary*

For the opening to his prologue to the book of Hebrews, Thomas Aquinas chose Psalm 85:8 as the scriptural *accessus*: “There is none among the gods like unto you, O Lord: and there is none according to your works.”<sup>82</sup> It must be remembered that in selecting this verse, Thomas’ intent was to provide some kind of guiding principle to the forthcoming reading and interpreting of the book under consideration. This single citation of Scripture could serve the purpose of illuminating something of the author of a book, as is the case of the Romans prologue in which Paul is called God’s chosen vessel or instrument in Acts 9:15. Or the *accessus* could be used by Thomas Aquinas to elucidate the themes or subject of a book, which is the case here.

Psalm 85:8 is the structuring principle of Thomas’ prologue to the commentary on Hebrews. Thomas Aquinas opens the prologue by stating that this verse describes the uniqueness and excellence of Christ according to his identity and according to his effects: “In verbis istis exprimitur Christi excellentia quantum ad duo. Et primo quantum ad comparationem ad alios deos, cum dicit *non est similis tui in diis, Domine*, secundo per comparationem ad effectus, cum dicit *et non est secundum opera tua*.”<sup>83</sup> Thus Psalm 85:8

---

<sup>81</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ *Commentary on Hebrews*,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 225.

<sup>82</sup> “Non est similis tui in diis, Domine, et non est secundum opera tua.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue, 1. Due to the difference in the numbering of the psalms in the Latin Vulgate, which follows the Septuagint’s numbering, Ps 85 in the Vulgate is Ps 86 in the King James Version and others.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [1], 1.



serves to praise both the person and the works of Christ, and Thomas uses the opening sections of the prologue to preach a sermon considering Christ's excellence in those two areas. Thomas concludes his exposition of this verse by declaring that Christ's excellence "is thus clearly shown in these words; and this is the subject matter of this epistle to the Hebrews, and that by which it is distinguished from the other epistles."<sup>84</sup> No more weighty task could be entrusted to a single verse of Scripture.

Then in the second half of the prologue, Thomas reiterates the divisions and distinguishing themes of the Pauline letters, with some epistles treating Christ's grace as it applies to the Church and others as Christ's grace applies to individual leaders of the Church. Hebrews considers the grace of Christ as it pertains to his headship of the Church, which makes this letter of singular importance, since it is from the head of the body that life flows to the members of the body.<sup>85</sup> Thus, in Thomas' prologue to his commentary on Hebrews, the excellence of Christ and the headship of Christ are the twin foci.

Given Thomas Aquinas' statement that the excellence and headship of Christ are the governing themes of the book of Hebrews, the appropriateness of Ps 85:8 as this commentary's scriptural *accessus* is evident. But how did Thomas reach the decision to use this verse? Why is it, in Thomas' view, the single best verse of Scripture to shed light on the meaning and value of Hebrews? The answer may lie in the traditional reading of

---

<sup>84</sup> "Ergo manifeste in verbis istis demonstratur Christi excellentia, et haec est materia huius epistolae ad Hebraeos, quae ab aliis distinguitur." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

<sup>85</sup> ". . . in corpore enim Ecclesiae ista tria reperiuntur sicut et in corpore naturali, scilicet ipsum corpus mysticum, membra principalia, scilicet praelati et maiores, et caput, a quo vita fluit in totum corpus, scilicet Christus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

Psalm 85 as found in the glosses, a reading that in turn was derived from the comments of Augustine and Cassiodorus.

The introductions to Psalm 85 in the *Glossa ordinaria*<sup>86</sup> and the *Magna Glossatura*<sup>87</sup> are much the same. There are places in which Peter Lombard in the latter work has expanded the former's statements in order to clarify the prefatory description of the psalm; but the same quotations of the works of Augustine and Cassiodorus appear in both glosses. After identifying the psalm by its opening words, *Inclina, Domine*, and its title, a prayer of David (*oratio David*), the glosses note that this is the second psalm in the Psalter to be categorized as a prayer of David. Then, after a statement regarding Christ's divinity and humanity, the two glosses draw from Augustine's sermon on Psalm 85 in order to allude to the headship of Christ: "He both prays for us and prays in us, and is prayed to by us: He prays for us as our priest; He prays in us, as our head; He is prayed to by us, as our God."<sup>88</sup> Augustine's sermon further strengthens the case for viewing Psalm 85 in terms of Christ's headship, as its opening statement—one not included in either gloss—declares that God could have given the members of the Church no greater gift than "making His Word, by which He created all things, their Head, and joining them to Him as His members."<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*, ed. K. Froehlich and M.T. Gibson, volume 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 564-566.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Lombard, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, PL 191, 799C-800C.

<sup>88</sup> "Orat enim pro nobis et orat in nobis, et oratur a nobis: Orat enim pro nobis ut sacerdos noster; orat in nobis, ut caput nostrum; oratur a nobis, ut Deus noster." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 2, 564. Also St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, Vol. IV, Psalm LXXVI-CI (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1850), 184.

<sup>89</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [10], 184.

Augustine and Cassiodorus stress the relationship of David with Christ, and doing so allows them to assign the words of David in this psalm to Christ himself. Augustine points out that in his fleshly nature, Christ is David's son, but that in his divine nature, he is David's Lord. He then tells his hearers to hear the words of Christ himself in David's prayer, and to make David's words their own, as well: in a triple identification, in which David is first linked with Christ, and then Christ with his members, Augustine commands, "Let no one then, when he hears these words, say, Christ speaks not; nor again say, I speak not; nay rather, if he own himself to be in the Body of Christ, let him say both, Christ speaks, and I speak. Be thou unwilling to say anything without Him, and He says nothing without you. . . ." <sup>90</sup> Similarly, Cassiodorus observes that "the mention of *David* points to the Lord Saviour, either because of the meaning of the name . . . or because Christ is descended from his stock; for in His humanity He is David's son, and in His divinity the Lord Creator." <sup>91</sup> Lombard in the *Magna Glossatura* continues the identification of David with Christ, so that David's prayer in this psalm is also Christ's prayer. <sup>92</sup>

The triple identification of David, Christ, and Christ's body is significant for these commentators. The identification of David with Christ transfers the prayer of David to Christ; and the identification of Christ with us, as our head, reminds us that in his high priestly role, Christ prays for us. Both glosses note this identification of Christ with us, so

---

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [10], 184.

<sup>91</sup> Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms: Volume II, Psalms 51-100*, trans. P. G. Walsh, Ancient Christian Writers: the Works of the Fathers in Translation, No. 52 (New York, NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), 328.

<sup>92</sup> "Oratio ista attribuitur David, id est Christo toti." Peter Lombard, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, PL 191, 799D.

that the head and body speak in this prayer as if with one voice.<sup>93</sup> Cassiodorus further elaborates on Christ's headship in his sermon on Psalm 85; in describing the divisions of that psalm, he portrays Christ as both God and man, praying for us, as one of us, and as our Head:

The Lord Christ makes the prayer throughout the whole psalm, saying in the first section things clearly attributable only to Him. In the second part He prays in humbler vein for His members, whose Head He is. In the third part, reverting to His own person He says what we realise is relevant to Him in particular. But one and the same Christ, God and man, utters the entire psalm.<sup>94</sup>

Having surveyed the comments of Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Peter Lombard, their approach to prefacing Psalm 85 involves first declaring Christ's headship and priestly service of praying for us, and then demonstrating Christ's headship and prayer for us. In doing so, they name this psalm as a prayer of David, identify David with Christ, identify Christ with us, and remind us that this prayer is a demonstration of Christ speaking on our behalf through prayer.

It seems, then, that Thomas Aquinas had inherited a certain understanding of Psalm 85 from Augustine, Cassiodorus, Peter Lombard, and others—an understanding that the glosses encoded and juxtaposed with the text of the psalm. As a result, any reading of Psalm 85 would necessarily include the headship of Christ, his relationship to his body, and his priestly service on his members' behalf. Therefore, by choosing a verse from this psalm to open the prologue to his Hebrews commentary, Thomas Aquinas deliberately evoked all of the thematic echoes of that psalm regarding Christ's headship, and applied them to his understanding of Hebrews.

---

<sup>93</sup> "Hoc enim dicit Christus in nobis, et nos in illo, quia vox ista convenit capiti et corpori." Peter Lombard, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, PL 191, 799D. "Haec dicit Christus in nobis, et nos in illo." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 2, 565.

<sup>94</sup> Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 327.

Having chosen Psalm 85, Thomas' further selection of verse 8 pairs the headship of Christ with the excellence of Christ, and here the contributions of Augustine and Cassiodorus regarding Ps 85:8 outweigh those of Peter Lombard. Peter Lombard's approach is to refer to Ps 85:8 in the context of Ps 85:9, which describes the nations coming before God to worship him and to bring glory to his name. Lombard finds the reason for the nations' worship in verse 8: they worship and glorify God because there is no one like him. His one comment on verse 8 is a restatement of God's uniqueness, as he writes that there is no one like God, in essence or in operation.<sup>95</sup>

The comments made by Augustine and Cassiodorus on Psalm 85:8 serve to highlight the power and uniqueness of God in contradistinction to anything else that exists. The two are united in their approach, citing Ps 85:8, and then contrasting the one true God with the false gods of the pagans.<sup>96</sup> In distinguishing God from the pagans' gods, both exegetes allude to Ps 95:5,<sup>97</sup> which, in their reading, states that "the gods of the Gentiles are devils," which is the strongest possible contrast to draw between God and any pretenders to divinity. Unlike Thomas Aquinas, their reading of this verse is apologetic, not Christocentric—evidence that they are perhaps defending God in a setting in which paganism is a continuing challenge. But the fact that they do not read Ps 85:8 Christocentrically does not invalidate Thomas' doing so, given the traditional identification of David with Christ in this psalm.

---

<sup>95</sup> "Non est qui similis sit tui, in essentia vel in operatione." Peter Lombard, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, PL 191, 802C.

<sup>96</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [11], 185. Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 331.

<sup>97</sup> Psalm 96:5 for versions that do not follow the Septuagint's numbering.

Augustine continues his line of thought by drawing yet another contrast, between God and the angels. He notes that the angels are not to be worshiped, because they in fact worship God; and their doing so is further evidence of God's supremacy. The contrast between Christ and the angels is a theme that Thomas Aquinas develops in his prologue and in lectures on Hebrews 1.

In further support of God's supremacy, Augustine and Cassiodorus note God's unique role in creating and sustaining everything, taking great care to contrast God, the creator, with various aspects of his creation.<sup>98</sup> This topic of creation is yet another that Thomas Aquinas will address in his prologue, as Christ's excellence in the work of creation constitutes one of the three major themes of Thomas' commentary on Hebrews.<sup>99</sup>

And both exegetes note that Ps 85:8 tells us not what God is, but what He is not. In regard to Ps 85:8, "There is none among the gods like to thee, O Lord," Cassiodorus states: "But observe that this is not a statement of what God is, but that there is none like Him; this type of definition is termed in Greek *kat' aphairesin tou enantiou*, and in Latin *per privationem contrarii* of the thing being defined."<sup>100</sup> Augustine comments: "Therefore this man said, 'there is none like You, O Lord: there is not one that can do as you do.' But how much God is unlike them he said not, because it cannot be said. Let your Charity attend: God is ineffable: we more easily say what He is not than what He

---

<sup>98</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [11], 185. Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 331.

<sup>99</sup> ". . . ubi sciendum est quod triplex est opus excellens Christi. Unum quod se extendit ad totam creaturam, scilicet opus creationis. Io. I, 3: omnia per ipsum facta sunt." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2.

<sup>100</sup> Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 331.

is.”<sup>101</sup> Augustine then surveys every element of the created realm—the earth, the sea, and heaven, and the creatures that dwell in each of those realms—only to remark in turn, This is not God, that is not God.<sup>102</sup> Did Thomas Aquinas see in these reminders of God’s ineffability an implicit comparison to God’s incarnation in the form of Christ, the one offering up the prayer of Psalm 85, and the only one at whom we may look and conclude, This is God? If so, Augustine and Cassiodorus have recapitulated much of the argument of the opening verses of Hebrews, and underscored the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas in choosing Ps 85:8 as the *accessus* verse for his prologue to the Hebrews commentary.

### *The Prologue to the Commentary on Hebrews*

Thomas Aquinas’ prologue to his commentary on Hebrews falls into two parts. Like the prologue to his commentary on the Psalms, this prologue is a blend of the sermonic prologue with the Aristotelian prologue.<sup>103</sup> The first part of the prologue to Hebrews consists of a sermon explicating the two aspects of the excellence of Christ as delineated in the *accessus* verse, Ps 85:8—Christ’s excellence being the subject matter of this epistle.<sup>104</sup> The second part of the prologue has some features of an Aristotelian prologue, as it distinguishes the letter to the Hebrews from the other Pauline epistles, and considers the Pauline authorship of this letter.

---

<sup>101</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [11], 185.

<sup>102</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [11], 185.

<sup>103</sup> See Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 13-17.

<sup>104</sup> “Ergo manifeste in verbis istis demonstratur Christi excellentia, et haec est material huius epistolae ad Hebraeos. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

*The prologue's sermonic section.* In the sermonic beginning of his prologue, Thomas takes Ps 85:8—"There is none among the gods like unto you, O Lord: and there is none according to your works"<sup>105</sup>—and discusses the excellence of Christ first in regard to his person and then in regard to his works or effects. Thomas begins by considering the identity of the other gods to whom Christ is compared in Ps 85:8. He notes that, while there is only one God by nature, as Dt 6:4 famously tells us, by participation there are many gods, as I Cor 8:5 seems to indicate. Not many readers would use I Cor 8:5 to justify the existence of those who are gods by participation in the one God, given that the context of this verse is Paul's discussion of food sacrificed to idols. Nor did two of Aquinas' predecessors read Ps 85:8 in such a positive light; both Augustine and Cassiodorus take an apologetic and more negative stance, attacking the existence of pagan gods in their discussion of this verse.<sup>106</sup> In contrast, Thomas chooses to read Ps 85:8 Christocentrically and more positively, discussing angels, prophets, and priests in turn as the gods to whom he compares Christ. Why does Thomas make this rather unexpected exegetical decision? The answer lies in the contents and themes of the book of Hebrews itself.

One reason for Thomas' positive exegetical move is inherent in the organization of the book of Hebrews. As he observes in his first lecture on Hebrews 1, the epistle has two main sections, with the break between them occurring at Hebrews 11:1.<sup>107</sup> The first

---

<sup>105</sup> "Non est similis tui in diis, Domine, et non est secundum opera tua." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, [11], 185. Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 331. See discussion of the *accessus* verse Ps 85:8 in the previous section.

<sup>107</sup> "Unde et dividitur in duas partes. Primo enim multipliciter commendat excellentiam Christi, ut per hoc praeferat Novum Testamentum Veteri; secundo agit de his per quae membra iunguntur capiti, scilicet de fide infra, XI cap., ibi *est autem fides*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5.



ten chapters of Hebrews are an extended comparison of Christ with angels, prophets, and priests. Thomas outlines this section of Hebrews in his first lecture on chapter 1, noting that its purpose is to demonstrate the excellence both of Christ, and of the New Testament over the Old. Thomas states that in this part of Hebrews the Apostle will contrast the excellence of Christ and the New Testament with the angels, “through whom the Law was handed down”; with Moses, who is classed with the prophets, and by whom the Law was given; and with the priests, whose duty it was to administer the Law.<sup>108</sup> Thomas also notes that the epistle addresses these three topics beginning in chapters one, three, and five, respectively. Hence, the use of Ps 85:8 to demonstrate the surpassing excellence of Christ when compared to angels, prophets, and priests allows Thomas to outline and to summarize the massive first section of this epistle, while keeping in view the overarching theme of the excellence of Christ.

In making this comparison between Christ and angels, prophets, and priests, Thomas Aquinas may have also had in mind the introductory material on the book of Hebrews provided by Peter Lombard and the *Magna Glossatura*. While Thomas clearly has no compunction about breaking with exegetical tradition, the possibility of the influence of the *Gloss* must be considered, as Lombard’s introduction to Hebrews states that Paul puts forward the prophets, the angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood, only to prefer Christ and his work in each case. Lombard is quite eloquent on the subject of the eminence of Christ and the sufficiency of faith, declaring that in the epistle to the Hebrews, Paul has provided “multiple reasons and authorities for preferring the grace of

---

<sup>108</sup> “Intendit autem ostendere excellentiam Novi ad Vetus Testamentum per excellentiam Christi, quantum ad tres personas solemnes in ipso Veteri Testamento contentas, scilicet angelos, per quo lex tradita est. . . . Quantum ad Moysen, a quo, vel per quam data est. . . . Deut. ult.: *non surrexit ultra propheta*, et cetera. Quantum ad sacerdotium per quod ministrabatur. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5.

faith to the shadow of the law, and the priesthood of Christ to the Levitical priesthood, and the New Testament to the Old, and his one sacrifice to their many sacrifices”—for “there shadow, here truth.”<sup>109</sup> All of these things—the law, the Levitical priesthood, the Old Testament, the sacrifices—may be viewed as good in themselves; yet when they are compared to Christ, their inadequacy becomes clear. In just the same way are the angels, prophets, and priests cited by Thomas in his prologue both good in themselves and gods by participation; but the excellence, preeminence, and full deity of Christ must be seen to surpass them.

Thus it seems that the contents of the book of Hebrews provides justification for Thomas’ positive reading of the gods to whom Christ is to be compared in Ps 85:8. Another justification may lie in the theme of participation—an intriguing note for Thomas to sound here in the prologue to Hebrews. Angels, prophets, and priests, according to Thomas, are gods in some way by participation.<sup>110</sup> Citing verses from Job and Exodus, Thomas demonstrates that angels, prophets, and priests are termed “gods” in

---

<sup>109</sup> “Modus tractandi talis est: Primo proponit audienda esse verba Christi, sicut prophetarum; et amplius conferendo eum prophetis, et praeferendo, quia in eo locutus est Deus, ut in prophetis, et major est in eis. Deinde commendat eum alternatim secundum utramque naturam, humanam scilicet et divinam. Postea comparat eum angelis et praefert, multa interserens de ejus excellentia secundum utramque naturam. Deinde comparat eum Moysi, et praefert; deinde multis rationibus et auctoritatibus gratiam fidei umbrae legis praeferendam declarat, et sacerdotium Christi Levitico sacerdotio, et Testamentum Novum Veteri, ejusque sacrificium unum multis illius sacrificiis praeponeundum ostendit, quia ibi umbra, hic veritas. . . .” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*, ed. K. Froehlich and M.T. Gibson, volume 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 522-523. Also Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 400D-401A. This section of Migne’s edition of Lombard is consistent with (if not perfectly identical to) Froehlich and Gibson’s *Gloss*, and I consulted both in preparing this chapter. The translation work is my own.

<sup>110</sup> “Circa primum sciendum est, quod licet sit tantum unus Deus naturaliter . . . tamen participative et in caelo, et in terra sunt dii multi.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1.

the performance of their duties to the Lord: angels reflect the divine brightness, prophets receive the word of God, and priests minister before God.<sup>111</sup>

This theme of participation is particularly relevant for Hebrews. For while the other thirteen Pauline epistles apply the grace of Christ to the Church and its rulers, it is in the letter to the Hebrews that Paul most fully considers this grace in terms of the head of the body, Christ himself, “from whom life flows to all the members”<sup>112</sup>—an image used in the Hebrews prologue to communicate the vital importance of participation in Christ. In his first lecture on Hebrews, when considering Heb 1:2 (“Last of all, in these days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world”), Thomas describes Christ’s excellence as being “clear from his unique origin and from his relationship to other sons of God.”<sup>113</sup> Weinandy explains Thomas’ statement in this way:

Christ’s pre-eminence, for Aquinas, is thus twofold. First, it rests, not surprisingly, in his unique origin as the eternally begotten Son of the Father, which accounts for his full divinity. Secondly, Aquinas astutely observes, it resides also in his relationship to other sons in that they are sons only to the extent that they too share in and are so conformed by the word of the Son, for sonship resides in taking on the very likeness and image of the God of truth, that is, the Father.<sup>114</sup>

Our participation in Christ, therefore, is necessary to our status as adopted sons of the Father.

---

<sup>111</sup> “Sed angeli dicuntur dii, propter abundantissimam refulgentiam divinae claritatis.” “Prophetae vero dicuntur dii, quia ad ipsos sermo Dei factus est.” “Sacerdotes vero dicuntur dii, quia Dei ministri.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1.

<sup>112</sup> “In ista vero commendat ipsam gratiam quantum ad caput, scilicet Christum; in corpore enim Ecclesiae ista tria reperiuntur sicut et in corpore naturali, scilicet ipsum corpus mysticum, membra principalia, scilicet praelati et maiores, et caput, a quo vita fluit in totum corpus, scilicet Christus.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

<sup>113</sup> “Ergo patet Christi excellentia quantum ad proprietatem originis, et diffuse quantum ad alios filios Dei. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [18], 11.

<sup>114</sup> Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ *Commentary on Hebrews*,” 227.

Thomas again sounds this theme of participation in regard to bringing many children to glory in Heb 2:10, stating that God predestined those whom he would bring into glory, and that “these are all those who are participants in the sonship of His Son, since *if sons, heirs also*, as it says in Rom 8:17.”<sup>115</sup> And, in discussing the divine Son’s taking on of human flesh in order to destroy death (Heb 2:14), Thomas observes that “it was fitting that he be like them, not only because he confers on them a participation in the divine nature, which is from grace, but also because he assumed their nature.”<sup>116</sup> Thus Christ assumes our nature and becomes like us, so that we may assume his nature and become like him. The life of the members depends on the life supplied by their Head—and it is the participation made possible by faith in Christ which allows this life-giving union to occur.

Reinforcing this theme of participation is Christ’s role as our mediator—a role he is suited to fill due to his divine and human natures.<sup>117</sup> Thomas Aquinas links Christ’s work as our mediator with our participation in the divine in his discussion of Heb 8:6, where he says, “For every priest is a mediator. However, this one is a mediator of a better covenant, namely of man to God. For it is of a mediator to bring together extremes. This

---

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, 2.3 [127], 60. “Deus autem ab aeterno praedestinavit quos debet adducere in gloriam. Et isti sunt omnes illi, qui sunt participes filiationis filii eius, quia *si filii, et haeredes*, Rom. VIII, 17.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 2.3 [127], 60. Larcher inexplicably translates the key phrase “qui sunt participes filiationis filii eius” as “all those who are adopted sons of God.” Adoption as sons is the subject of Rom 8:15, but Rom 8:17 speaks of sharing Christ’s suffering in order to share his glory, further strengthening the case for using the latter Romans reference in this context and in support of the theme of participation.

<sup>116</sup> “. . . ergo conveniens fuit quod esset eis similis, non tantum quia impartitur eis participationem naturae divinae, quod est ex dono gratiae, sed etiam quia ipse naturam eorum assumpsit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 2.4 [137], 64.

<sup>117</sup> “Omnis enim sacerdos mediator est. Iste autem *mediator est melioris foederis*, scilicet hominem ad Deum. Mediatoris enim est extrema conciliare. Iste vero ad nos divina attulit, quia per ipsum facti sumus *divinae consortes naturae*, ut dicitur II Pet. I, 4.” Translation partially mine, as Larcher failed to translate the third sentence and the first part of the fourth (from “Mediatoris” to “attulit.”). Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [392], 171.

one in fact brings us to the divine, because through him we are made partners in the divine nature, as II Pet 1:4 says.” In his *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas devotes two articles to a consideration of Christ as the mediator of God and man. Thomas defines the mediator’s office as the task of joining together and uniting “those between whom he mediates, for extremes are united in the mean (*medio*)”<sup>118</sup>—an office for which Christ, as Scripture shows and as the book of Hebrews argues, is perfectly suited. And to which other mediators does Thomas compare Christ in this article of the *Summa*, in order to demonstrate his supreme worthiness? He compares him to angels, prophets, and priests, none of which are able to “unite men to God in a perfecting way”<sup>119</sup>—for only Christ can. Angels, prophets, and priests may prefigure the work of Christ in their service to both God and the human race, but only Christ as mediator can reconcile the two.

Hence it seems that Thomas Aquinas has ample justification for breaking with Augustine and Cassiodorus, and using Ps 85:8 to compare Christ, not to other pagan gods, but to those who participate in divinity as angels, prophets, and priests. Such a comparison surveys the subject matter of the first ten chapters of Hebrews while giving a nod to Peter Lombard and the *Magna Glosatura*; and it supports two topics of great significance in the letter to the Hebrews—participation in Christ and Christ’ role as the mediator between God and humans.

Having chosen to compare Christ to those who are gods by participation, Thomas next sets Christ side by side with angels, prophets, and priests. His procedure is to state how each of the latter participates in divinity without being fully divine and without being equal in status to Christ. Thus, angels possess the “rich splendor of divine

---

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.26.1, 845.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.26.1, 845.

brightness,” according to Job 25:3; but Christ is “the splendor of the Father’s glory” (Heb 1:3).<sup>120</sup> The prophets have the word of God spoken to them; Christ is “the substantial Word of God,” as Heb 1:2 indicates.<sup>121</sup> Priests are God’s ministers in the house of the Lord; Christ is God, and “the Son in his own house” (Heb 3:6).<sup>122</sup> Thomas thus uses both their similarity and dissimilarity to Christ to display Christ’s excellence. This extended comparison drawn from Scripture serves to illustrate Thomas’ statement in the *Summa Theologiae* that “participated being is limited by the capacity of the participator; so that God alone, Who is His own being, is pure act and infinite.”<sup>123</sup> Positively, in their participation in the divine and in their service to God, angels, prophets, and priests point to Christ. And negatively, in their creaturely status and finitude, and in their falling short of who Christ is and what He does, they still point to Christ and to his supremacy. Thomas’ conclusion to this section is very clear: “Christ, therefore, is the great God above all the gods, because he is the splendor, the Word, and the Lord.”<sup>124</sup> Any divinity possessed by angels, prophets, and priests is a reflected glory; Christ’s divinity and glory are essential.

---

<sup>120</sup> “Sed angeli dicuntur dii, propter abundatissimam refulgentiam divinae claritatis. Iob c. XXV, 3: *super quem non fulget lumen illius*, angeli vero non sunt similes Christo in diis, qui est *splendor paternae gloriae*, ut dicitur infra I,3.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1.

<sup>121</sup> “Prophetæ vero dicuntur dii, quia ad ipsos sermo Dei factus est. Io. X, 35 *illos dixit deos ad quos sermo Dei factus est*. Ergo multo excellentius est Deus Christus, qui est substantialiter ipsum Verbum Dei.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1. Heb 1:2 refers to the fact that in these days God has spoken to us by his son, as opposed to speaking to us previously through prophets as mentioned in Heb 1:1.

<sup>122</sup> “Sacerdotes vero dicuntur dii, quia Dei ministri. Is. LXI, 6: *vos sacerdotes Domini, vocabimini ministri Dei*. Sed Christus multo fortius, qui non est minister, sed *Dominus universorum*, Esth. XIII, 11; item Apoc. XIX, v. 16: *Dominus dominantium*; et infra: *tamquam Dominus in omni domo sua*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.75.5, 383.

<sup>124</sup> “Christus ergo Deus magnus super omnes deos, quia splendor, quia Verbum, quia Dominus est.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1.

Here again we see why the exegetical decision made by Thomas Aquinas to compare Christ to angels, prophets, and priests as “gods” works so well in this prologue to his commentary on Hebrews. Just as Thomas uses all of these faithful personages to point to Christ and display his excellence, so Hebrews consistently explains the identity and work of Christ and argues for his excellence. These arguments for Christ’s excellence in the first ten chapters give the letter’s readers every possible reason to place their faith in him, while the last three chapters give examples of such faith, and encourage such faith. As Thomas points out in his first lecture, in the first part of Hebrews Paul extols the excellence of Christ, and in the second part, “he discusses what unites the members to the head, namely, faith, at *now, faith is the substance* (Heb 11:1).”<sup>125</sup> The entire book of Hebrews has a strong positive directionality, urging people to Christ, to faith in Christ, and to the rewards of faith in Christ. For both exegetical and aesthetic reasons, a negative comparison to pagan gods is simply not in keeping with the forward-moving journey of faith motif that governs this epistle—and Thomas Aquinas has made the appropriate choice as he applies Ps 85:8 to his prologue to Hebrews.

Having demonstrated the excellence of Christ’s person through a comparison to angels, prophets, and priests, Thomas now turns to proving the excellence of Christ’s works—an excellence adumbrated by the *accessus* verse, Ps 85:8: “There is none among the gods like unto you, O Lord; and there is none according to your works.” The *Magna Glosatura* alludes to Christ’s excellence; it cites the superiority of his high priesthood, and reliance on faith in him, to the Levitical priesthood and reliance on the law—but it

---

<sup>125</sup> “Primo enim multipliciter commendat excellentiam Christi, ut per hoc praeferat Novum Testamentum Veteri; secundo agit de his per quae membra iunguntur capiti, scilicet de fide infra, XI cap., ibi *est autem fides*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5.

focuses on Christ's status and mentions no specific works.<sup>126</sup> In contrast, Thomas declares that the incomparable work of Christ has three chief aspects: the work of creation, which affects every creature; the work of illumination, which affects rational creatures whom Christ enlightens; and the work of justification, which affects the saints, whom Christ has "vivified and sanctified" by means of vivifying grace.<sup>127</sup> It is interesting that Thomas Aquinas here chooses three verses from the prologue to John's gospel to support his presentation of the three chief works of Christ—almost as if the discussion of Christ's identity as God and as the Word of God in the previous section had brought John 1 to Thomas' mind, in addition to the linking of brightness, the Word, and divinity in that section's concluding sentence.<sup>128</sup> At any rate, Aquinas ably uses John 1 to illustrate his points regarding Christ's works: "all things were made through him" (John 1:3) for the work of creation; "he was the true light which enlightens every man" (John 1:9) for the work of illumination; and "the life was the light of men" (John 1:4) for the work of justification.

After presenting the excellence of Christ in connection with the three great works of creation, illumination, and justification, Thomas Aquinas moves to contrast the efforts of Christ with the efforts of the other "gods" to whom he had previously been compared.

---

<sup>126</sup> The Apostle "gratiam Dei hic commendat per Christum verum pontificem" and "intendit Christi eminentiam, et fidei sufficientiam, nec non legis insufficientiam et inutilitatem ostendere." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 399D-400A and 400D.

<sup>127</sup> "... ubi sciendum est quod triplex est opus excellens Christi. Unum quod se extendit ad totam creaturam, scilicet opus creationis. Io. I, 3: *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*. Aliud quidem tantum ad creaturam rationalem, quae per Christum illuminatur, quod est illuminationis. Io. I, 9: *erat lux vera*, et cetera. Tertium est iustificationis, quod pertinet tantum ad sanctos, qui per ipsum per gratiam vivificantem vivificantur et iustificantur. Io. I, 4: *et vita erat lux hominum*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2.

<sup>128</sup> "Ergo multo excellentius est Desu Christus, qui est substantialiter ipsum Verbum Dei." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1. "Christus ergo Deus magnus super omnes deos, quia splendor, quia Verbum, quia Dominus est." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [2], 1-2.



And here those other gods possess no reflected glory that can point to the greater glory of Christ, for they are unable to work in any of the three ways credited to Christ. Rather, he completely surpasses each one of these “gods,” for angels are creatures, not creators; prophets are not enlighteners but are reliant on God for enlightenment; and priests cannot justify anyone, but require justification themselves,<sup>129</sup> as Thomas will state when discussing Heb 10:4 (“It is impossible that with the blood of goats and bulls that sin should be taken away”).<sup>130</sup> Thus in this first part of the prologue to the Hebrews commentary, Thomas Aquinas has used both halves of Ps 85:8 to demonstrate the excellence of Christ’s person and of his works; to compare Christ most favorably to angels, prophets, and priests; and to prepare his readers for his lectures on the first ten chapters of Hebrews.

*The prologue’s Aristotelian section.* Characteristic of an Aristotelian prologue is a discussion of the four causes: efficient, material, formal, and final. Thomas provides such a discussion in this second half of his prologue, although without clearly identifying the four causes. Such an approach is not unprecedented; it was the method adopted by Thomas in the preface to the Pauline letters found in his prologue to Romans, in which he refers to the author, matter, mode, and usefulness of the Pauline corpus, rather than its efficient, material, formal, and final causes.

---

<sup>129</sup> “His enim tribus modis non possunt operari dii praedicti, angeli enim non sunt creatores, sed creaturae. Ps. CIII, 4: *qui facis angelos tuos spiritus*, et cetera. Prophetiae etiam sunt illuminati, non illuminantes. Io. I, 8: *non erat ille lux*, et cetera. Sacerdotes etiam non iustificabant. Infra X, 4: *impossibile est enim sanguine hircorum et taurorum auferri peccata*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2.

<sup>130</sup> See the discussion of Heb 10:1-4 in Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [479-483], 210-212. Here I have translated literally the Latin Vulgate and the Nestle-Aland Greek version provided by Larcher, both of which specify “bulls and goats.” The Douay-Rheims version renders it “oxen and goats,” which both Larcher and Baer follow in their translations of Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews.

As Thomas opens the Aristotelian section of his prologue to the commentary on Hebrews, he alludes to the preceding sermonic section—“The excellence of Christ is thus clearly shown in these words” and then immediately states that this excellence is the *materia* of the letter—its material cause or contents.<sup>131</sup> Thomas suggests the formal cause by referring to Hebrews as “this epistle to the Hebrews,” which recalls his discussion of the Pauline epistolary corpus, in which the formal cause of each book was its existence as a letter, meant to be delivered to various cities and churches by messengers.<sup>132</sup>

Thomas next considers the final cause of the letter to the Hebrews in terms of the particular good towards which it is aimed. Given that the Pauline letters have a common theme of grace extended to the Church, this task requires Thomas to describe Hebrews in terms of this grace, and yet distinguish Hebrews from the other letters by determining its specific usefulness or *causa distinctionis*. Thomas had used such a procedure to clarify the interrelationships of individual psalms and groups of psalms<sup>133</sup>; now he applies the same method to the letters of the Apostle Paul. Here in the prologue to Hebrews, Thomas Aquinas recapitulates material from the Romans prologue regarding the themes and interrelationships of Paul’s letters, thus bookending the Pauline corpus by providing this thematic summary in both its first and final epistles.

---

<sup>131</sup> “Ergo manifeste in verbis istis demonstratur Christi excellentia, et haec est material huius epistolae ad Hebraeos, quae ab aliis distinguitur.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher Prologue [4], 2.

<sup>132</sup> “Sic igitur ex verbis praemissis possumus accipere quatuor causas huius operis, scilicet epistolarum Pauli, quae prae manibus habemus. Primo quidem auctorem in vase. Secundo materiam in nomine Christi, quae est plenitudo vasis, quia tota doctrina haec est de doctrina Christi. Tertio modum in usu portationis; traditur enim haec doctrina per modum epistolarum, quae per nuntios portari consueverunt. . . . Quarto distinctionem operis in utilitate praedicta.” Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [10], 4.

<sup>133</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 87.

As Thomas Aquinas makes clear in both the Romans and Hebrews prologues, the particular usefulness of Hebrews, which distinguishes it from the other Pauline letters, is its emphasis on Christ: the excellence of Christ, and grace as it pertains to him, our head. In the Romans prologue, Thomas opens his brief outline of Paul's letters with that thought: "For this entire teaching (Paul's letters) is about Christ's grace, which can be considered in three ways: In one way, as it is in the Head, namely, Christ, and in this regard it is explained in the letter to the Hebrews."<sup>134</sup> In the parallel passage in the Hebrews prologue, he closes with that thought: "But in this epistle to the Hebrews, he treats of this grace inasmuch as it pertains to the head, namely, Christ."<sup>135</sup> The letters to churches apply grace to the Mystical Body—grace in itself, grace through the sacraments, and the relationship of grace to unity; the letters to individuals apply grace to the Mystical Body's chief members or prelates in their role of leading and preserving the church. Only Hebrews considers grace as applied to Christ, the Mystical Body's head, "from whom life flows to all the members"<sup>136</sup>—and for Thomas Aquinas, this topic is the final cause of this letter.

The last cause to be considered in the Hebrews prologue is the efficient cause, and here Thomas Aquinas deals with the authorship issues associated with this epistle. The external efficient cause of a work is its author, and Thomas will devote his efforts to identifying Paul as the author of Hebrews. But doing so will require him to confront the

---

<sup>134</sup> "Est enim haec doctrina tota de gratia Christi, quae quidem potest tripliciter considerari. Uno modo secundum quod est in ipso Capite, scilicet Christo, et sic commendatur in epistola ad Hebraeos." Thomas Aquinas, *Romans*, Larcher, Prologue [11], 4.

<sup>135</sup> "In ista vero commendat ipsam gratiam quantum ad caput, scilicet Christum. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

<sup>136</sup> ". . . et caput, a quo vita fluit in totum corpus, scilicet Christus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

arguments against Pauline authorship—arguments that center on issues of style and rhetoric. Such issues are associated with a work’s internal efficient cause, which is an aspect of the efficient cause having to do with the author’s *modus agendi* or method of proceeding, as well as the author’s style.<sup>137</sup> And it is to the mode of proceeding and the style found in Hebrews that Thomas refers. Using differences in style and rhetoric to debate the authorship of a text was nothing new during the Middle Ages. Minnis cites a commentary erroneously credited to Albert the Great, in which the commentator contrasts both the way of proceeding and the style found in the gospel of John and in Revelation, only to conclude that the writer of the former cannot be the writer of the latter.<sup>138</sup>

In addressing the issue of the authorship of Hebrews, Thomas begins with the arguments against Pauline authorship, a controversy to which he applies the *terminus ad quem* of the Council of Nicaea. It was in fact at the Council of Carthage in 397 that Hebrews was accepted as canonical and placed at the end of the Pauline corpus.<sup>139</sup> Even so, Thomas’ citation of a church council is a clear indicator of the authority on which he will rely and the direction in which he will go in his assessment of the authorship of Hebrews.

The first argument against Pauline authorship has to do with this letter’s failure to “follow the pattern of the other epistles,” in that the opening of Hebrews contains no

---

<sup>137</sup> Minnis identifies the internal efficient cause with the internal formal cause or *forma tractandi*, and states that it includes an author’s ‘mode of proceeding’ and the stylistic features of a text. See discussion in Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 76-77, 118-119.

<sup>138</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 132-133.

<sup>139</sup> Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey, *Hebrews. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. X (Downers Grove, IL: InerVarsity Press, 2005), xviii.

salutation and names no author.<sup>140</sup> The second argument concerns the style of Hebrews: when compared to Paul's other letters, Hebrews is far more elegant; and when compared to other works of Scripture, none of them "proceeds in such an orderly manner in the order of its words, and arguments" as this particular letter.<sup>141</sup> Thomas admits that, based on these significant stylistic differences, some have concluded that the author of Hebrews is not Paul, but that instead this work should be attributed to Luke, or to Barnabas, or to Pope Clement, who wrote to the Athenians in this style. But Thomas immediately cites authorities in favor of Pauline authorship—"the old doctors," represented by Dionysius; and Jerome. The willingness of Hilary, Augustine, and Jerome to accept Hebrews as canonical, and the decision of the latter two to attribute Hebrews to Paul, played a large role in the letter's acceptance in the western church.<sup>142</sup> And Jerome, in his widely used preface to Hebrews, names Paul as the author and discusses the issues in favor of his authorship.<sup>143</sup>

Thomas Aquinas adopts some of Jerome's arguments as he explains, first, why Paul wrote Hebrews without using his name, and second, why the style of this letter is so

---

<sup>140</sup> "Et quod non, probant duobus argumentis. Unum est, quia non tenet hunc modum quem in aliis epistolis. Non enim praemittit hic salutationem, nec nomen suum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [5], 2.

<sup>141</sup> "Aliud est, quia non sapit stylum aliarum, imo habet elegantiores, nec est aliqua Scriptura quae sic ordinate procedat in ordine verborum, et sententiis, sicut ista." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [5], 2. Unlike Larcher and Baer, I chose to apply Thomas' apparent emphasis on "order" in my translation. Also, Larcher translates "verborum, et sententiis" as "words and sentences," which seems too literal and too unconcerned with the issues of style and rhetoric with which Thomas is dealing. Hence, I prefer Baer's "words and arguments." See Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, Prologue, [5], 6.

<sup>142</sup> See discussion in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 685-687.

<sup>143</sup> Jerome's preface appears consistently in the glosses. It is the preface to Hebrews in the *Glossa ordinaria* attributed to Walafid Strabo (PL 114, 643A). It begins Peter Lombard's discussion of Hebrews in the *Magna Glossatura* (PL 192, 399A). In the *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, it is the first paragraph of the Hebrews preface and is placed prominently in the center of the page, in larger script than the rest of the commentary. See *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522.

different from Paul's other epistles. Following Jerome, Thomas says that Paul did not mention his name because he was the apostle to the Gentiles, not to the Jews to whom this letter is addressed.<sup>144</sup> Following both Jerome and Peter Lombard, Thomas states that Paul knew that his name was odious to the Jews due to his position on the Law, and that attaching his name to this letter might cause the letter's valuable teaching to be rejected.<sup>145</sup> And then Thomas appends a third reason of his own for Paul's reticence: the fact that a prophet must always be without honor among his people, and that, in an intriguing comment, "the members of one's household do not suffer well the excellence of one of their own."<sup>146</sup> Here there is a possible allusion to John Chrysostom's homilies on Hebrews. In his opening summary of the epistle, Chrysostome explains Paul's anonymity as a reflection of the fact that his own people were opposed to him: for when a worthless man leaves his people, no one cares; but when a distinguished man leaves his people, "he exceedingly grieves and vexes them beyond measure."<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> "Haec causa est, quod ad eos scribens qui ex circumcisione crediderant, quasi gentium Apostolus et non Hebraeorum. . . ." Jerome, quoted by Peter Lombard, in *PL* 192, 399A and *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522..

" . . . quia non erat apostolus Iudaeorum, sed gentium." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [5], 3.

<sup>145</sup> Citing Jerome, Peter Lombard writes, "Ideo autem nomen suum huic Epistolae sicut et caeteris non praeponit, quia Hebraeis odiosus erat, quibus legum destructor videbatur. Quia ergo non eorum, sed gentium Apostolus erat, nomen suum odiosum eis tacuit, ne praescripti nominis invidia sequentis utilitatem excluderet lectionis. [Hieron.]. *PL* 192, 400B and *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522.

Thomas does not adopt the Lombard's preceding argument in favor of Pauline authorship, which runs along the lines of, "Since no one else's name appears in the title, why not credit it to Paul?" "Si enim ideo non est dicenda Pauli, quia nomine ejus praetitulata non est, ergo nec alicujus illorum, imo nullius omnino, cum nullius nomen habeat in titulo." *PL* 192, 400B and *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer, Prologue [5], 7. "Et domestici non bene sustinent excellentiam suorum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [5], 3.

<sup>147</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Prologue [1], *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 363.

Thomas, in discussing the stylistic differences found in the letter to the Hebrews, appeals to a redaction theory first proposed by Clement of Alexandria and cited by Eusebius.<sup>148</sup> Thomas first notes that the letter's elegance of style is due to the fact that Paul, a native speaker of Hebrew, was for once writing not in Greek but in Hebrew—the language he knew best of all.<sup>149</sup> And then Thomas credits Luke, a skillful writer himself, with translating Paul's "ornate" Hebrew text into Greek—an ornateness that Luke was able to retain in the translation. Here Thomas echoes both Jerome and Peter Lombard, as in the *Magna Glossatura* Lombard follows Jerome very closely in attributing the impressive style of Hebrews to Luke's ability to write and translate eloquently, and in a way that preserves Paul's sense and order.<sup>150</sup> Throughout his commentary on Hebrews, Thomas reinforces the Pauline authorship of the work by consistently referring to what "the Apostle" says—his preferred term for Paul in his other thirteen Pauline commentaries. In his final lecture on Hebrews, Thomas refers to Paul by name in conjunction with the personal request made by the writer of Hebrews for prayer on his

---

<sup>148</sup> Eusebius, in describing the *Hypotyposeis* of Clement, says this: "And as for the Epistle to the Hebrews, he says indeed that it is Paul's, but that it was written for Hebrews in the Hebrew tongue, and that Luke, having carefully translated it, published it for the Greeks; hence, as a result of this translation, the same complexion of style is found in this Epistle and in the Acts: but that the [words] "Paul an apostle" were naturally not prefixed. For, says he, "in writing to Hebrews who had conceived a prejudice against him and were suspicious of him, he very wisely did not repel them at the beginning by putting his name." Eusebius here also credits Clement with reporting that Paul refused to give his name to a Hebrew audience because of his status as the apostle to the Gentiles. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.1-4, trans. J. E. L. Oulton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932).

<sup>149</sup> ". . . tamen melius sciebat Hebraeam tamquam sibi magis connaturalem, in qua scripsit epistolam istam. Et ido magis ornate potuit loqui in idiomate suo, quam in aliquo alio." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [5], 3.

<sup>150</sup> From Jerome's preface to Hebrews as cited by Peter Lombard: "Hanc ergo Epistolam fertur Apostolus ad Hebraeos conscriptam Hebraica lingua misisse: cujus sensum et ordinem retinens Lucas evangelista post excessum apostolic Pauli Graeco sermone composuit." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522 and PL 192, 399A.

From Peter Lombard's preface to Hebrews: "Hanc autem scripsit Hebraica lingua, cujus sensum et ordinem retinens Lucas post excessum ejus Graeco sermone composuit." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 522 and PL 192, 400C.

behalf; describes “the Apostle” as the one who preached only to the Gentiles but who requested the Hebrews’ prayers; and names Timothy as this Apostle’s brother and fellow-prisoner.<sup>151</sup>

Thus it seems clear that, in the mind of Thomas Aquinas, the apostle Paul is the external efficient cause of the letter to the Hebrews, while its unique composition history is its internal efficient cause. The formal cause is found in Hebrews’ existence as a letter. The material cause is that best of all subjects, the excellence of Christ; and the final cause is the examination of grace as applied to Christ, the Mystical Body’s head, “from whom life flows to all the members.”<sup>152</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Thomas Aquinas has used the prologue to his commentary on Hebrews to achieve four goals. First, he has established the significance of the subject matter of Hebrews. The *accessus* verse, Ps 85:8, is used by Thomas to propose the twofold excellence of Christ—his excellence in regard to his person and in regard to his works. The ensuing sermon proves the excellence of Christ’s person when compared to angels, prophets, and priests. They participate in divinity as they reflect God’s brightness, receive God’s words, and minister in God’s house; but only Christ is the divine brightness, is the Word, and is the Lord of God’s house. Christ’s excellence in his works is also evident, for his work of creation affects every creature, his work of illumination affects every rational creature,

---

<sup>151</sup> “. . . secundo quomodo ad seipsum Paulum, ibi *orate pro nobis*, et cetera.” “Uno modo respectu ipsorum, quorum petit orationes: quia cum Apostolus Iudaeis non praedicaret, sed tantum gentibus, non videbatur eis acceptus.” “Consequenter recommendat illum, per quem scribit, dicens *cognoscite fratrem nostrum Timotheum dimissum*, scilicet a carcere, in quo cum Apostolo erat.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 13.3 [755], 324; [763], 327; [773], 330.

<sup>152</sup> “. . . et caput, a quo vita fluit in totum corpus, scilicet Christus.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.



and his work of justification affects every saint. And here again the angels, prophets, and priests fall short, as they are created, illumined, and unable to justify, respectively.

Second, Thomas Aquinas has given his students and readers a foretaste of the lectures on the first ten chapters of Hebrews. These chapters are an extended comparison of Christ to angels, to Moses and prophets, and to the Levitical priesthood. Thomas has in the prologue summarized most efficiently the contents of these ten chapters, with their various comparisons, and the overarching theme of these chapters, the excellence of Christ. Third, Thomas has framed the letter to the Hebrews in the context of the four Aristotelian causes, an increasingly common procedure at the University of Paris for those lecturing in theology or the arts.

Fourth, Thomas Aquinas has set forth the authority undergirding the letter to the Hebrews. By citing a church council, Dionysius, and Jerome, and by presenting the arguments in favor of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, Thomas Aquinas has completed the task he began in his prologue to Romans: reading the fourteen epistles from Romans to Hebrews as a Pauline corpus unified by its theme of grace: grace in relation to the members of the Church, grace in relation to the leaders of the Church, and most importantly, grace in relation to the head of the Church, Christ, who gives life to this mystical body's members.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Thomas Aquinas' Reading of Hebrews: The Excellence of Christ's Person

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the importance of Thomas Aquinas' prologues to his commentaries on books of the Bible cannot be overestimated. With each prologue, Thomas has a programmatic purpose in mind, as he uses his sermon on a carefully chosen *accessus* verse to reveal the theological concerns and material cause of the book under consideration. In the case of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Hebrews, Thomas' application of Ps 85:8 has allowed him to demonstrate that Hebrews addresses the excellence of Christ in terms of his person and his works.

Once Thomas begins lecturing on the substance of the book of Hebrews, he maintains this concentration on the dual excellence of Christ. Thomas understands very well that Christ's person and works are integrally related, since who Christ is determines the work that he does in order to save us.<sup>1</sup> This paired emphasis of person and work in the book of Hebrews mirrors the structure of the *Tertia Pars* of Aquinas' *Summa*, in which Thomas' goal is to consider "the Savior himself" as well as "his benefits to the human race."<sup>2</sup> The achievement of this goal requires that he examine "first, the mystery of the Incarnation, as this means God becoming man for our salvation; secondly, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, "Aquinas: God *IS* Man: The Marvel of the Incarnation," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 85; Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 83.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Prologus" to *Tertia Pars, Summa Theologiae*, vol. 48, *The Incarnate Word* (3a. 1-6), trans. R. J. Hennessey (London: Blackfriars, 1976), 2-3. Henceforth, *ST*.

things that our Savior, God incarnate, did and suffered”<sup>3</sup>—or, in simpler terms, the person and works of the incarnate Christ.<sup>4</sup> Therefore in the *Tertia Pars* the discussion of Christ’s person addresses the Incarnation in terms of the appropriateness of the union of the Word and the flesh, the mode of the union, and the implications of the union.<sup>5</sup> The discussion of Christ’s works follows a historical sequence: it begins with a study of the Virgin Mary; moves to an examination of the life of Christ, including his birth, ministry, passion, resurrection, and ascension; and culminates in a survey of the coming judgment.

This dual study of Christ requires a dual approach, wherein Thomas’ investigation of Christ’s person is heavily theological, while his examination of Christ’s life and mission requires recourse to the biblical record. Boyle notes the surprise with which some contemporary readers of Thomas Aquinas react when blocks of biblical material on the life of Christ appear in the text of the *Summa*, which so often is viewed primarily as a theological and philosophical—or “scientific”—opus.<sup>6</sup> Even a magisterial work such as Chenu’s *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* comes close to classifying the scriptural components of this part of the *Summa* as intrusions into the theological discussion at hand—although in Chenu’s defense he is more supportive of Thomas’ Biblicism than

---

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, “Prologus” to *Tertia Pars*, 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Tertia Pars*, questions 1-26 deal with the person of Christ in terms of the Incarnation, and questions 27-59 deal with the life and deeds of “our Savior, God incarnate.” Boyle finds that Thomas, in adopting this approach to Christology, shows no dependence on such peers as Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, or the Franciscans, who struggled in their efforts to organize a coherent Christology. See the discussion in John F. Boyle, “The Twofold Division of St Thomas’s Christology in the *Tertia Pars*,” *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 439-444.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “Prologus” to *Tertia Pars*, 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Boyle here cites M.-D. Chenu, who characterizes the material on Christ’s life as a “biblical zone,” in contrast to the “scientific zones” found in the rest of the *Summa*; and R. Murphy, who in the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa* terms Thomas’ use of this biblical material on Christ “innovative.” Boyle wryly notes that the amazement felt by modern students of Thomas “tells us much more about ourselves than about Thomas.” See Boyle, “The Twofold Division of St Thomas’s Christology in the *Tertia Pars*”: 439, 445, 447.

Boyle allows, and in fact decries the modern divide between the study of Scripture and the study of theology.<sup>7</sup> Boyle does, however, champion Thomas' commitment to Scripture in his declaration that "fundamentally the entire structure of the *Summa* is biblical."<sup>8</sup> Proof of this biblical structure is evident in the fact that Thomas takes exactly the same approach to the epistle to the Hebrews and the *Tertia Pars*, reading Hebrews and writing the *Tertia Pars* through the grid of the person and works of Christ. It seems that better acquaintanceship with Thomas' commentaries may produce better-informed readings of his *Summa*.

Clearly, Thomas Aquinas' goal in both the *Tertia Pars* and the Hebrews commentary is to delineate the constitutive relationship between Christ's person and works, since what Christ does on our behalf can only be understood in terms of Christ's identity. The purpose of this chapter and the next two, then, will be to consider how Thomas Aquinas uses the text of Hebrews to illuminate the person and works of Christ, examining what is unique to Thomas and unique to his reading of Hebrews in this endeavor. Recourse to Thomas' *Summa Theologiae* for the purposes of comparison and clarification will help us in two ways: appreciating more fully Thomas as teacher and exegete of the epistle to the Hebrews, and better understanding both how theological his Hebrews commentary is and how biblical the *Summa* is. Therefore, a consideration of lectures on Hebrews in which Thomas examines the person of Christ and compares him

---

<sup>7</sup> In his discussion of the structure of the *Summa*, Chenu describes "how the various 'events' that make up the economy of salvation are inserted in the plot of theological science" and observes that such a "crossing over from the historical to the scientific" is not always smooth. But he also notes the strongly scriptural sections in other parts of the *Summa*—for example, the study of the six days of creation in the *Prima Pars*, q. 67-74, and he encourages theologians to return to Scripture in order to avoid building theological systems that lose touch with religious reality. See M.-D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 315-316.

<sup>8</sup> Boyle, "The Twofold Division of St Thomas's Christology in the *Tertia Pars*": 445.

to angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood, followed by a study of the work of Christ, is in order.

In his initial lecture on Hebrews, Thomas Aquinas explains the Apostle's purpose in writing the letter and how this purpose informs the letter's structure. Thomas states that Hebrews has two parts: the first part in chapters 1-10 commends the excellence of Christ in many ways, and the superiority of the New Testament to the Old; and the second part in chapters 11-13 discusses faith in Christ, which unites his members to him as their head.<sup>9</sup> In the opening section of this first lecture, Thomas swiftly makes three assertions regarding Christ as the subject matter of Hebrews; these assertions will serve as organizing principles for our discussion of the excellence of the person of Christ. First, Thomas begins the lecture with a statement regarding the errors the Apostle combats through the writing of Hebrews; he declares that Paul "wrote this letter against the errors of those who, having been converted from Judaism to faith in Christ, wished to serve the legal observances with the Gospel, just as if the grace of Christ did not suffice for salvation."<sup>10</sup> Thomas' next assertion concerns the fact that the first part of Hebrews, chapters 1-10, serves to extol the excellence of Christ in various ways.<sup>11</sup> And Thomas' final assertion relates to establishing the New Testament's superiority to the Old, as the Apostle "proves Christ's preeminence over three sacred persons of the Old Testament"—

---

<sup>9</sup> "Unde et dividitur in duas partes. Primo enim multipliciter commendat excellentiam Christi, ut per hoc praeferat Novum Testamentum Veteri; secundo agit de his per quae membra iunguntur capiti, scilicet de fide infra, XI cap., ibi *est autem fides*." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 1.1 [6], 5. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher.

<sup>10</sup> "Scripsit autem epistolam istam contra errores quorundam, qui ex Iudaismo ad fidem Christi conversi, volebant servare legalia cum Evangelio, quasi non sufficeret gratia Christi ad salutem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5. Translation mine.

<sup>11</sup> "Primo enim multipliciter commendat excellentiam Christi . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5.

angels, through whom the Law was handed down; Moses, representing the prophets, since it was through Moses that the Law was given; and priests, who had the responsibility of administering the Law.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Thomas' goals in lecturing on Hebrews, particularly the letter's first ten chapters, are to counter errors regarding Christ, present the excellence of Christ, and discuss the Apostle's comparisons of Christ to angels, Moses, and priests. The first two goals are the subject of this chapter; the third goal, undertaking the comparisons of Christ to Old Testament personages, is the topic of the following chapter.

### *Countering Errors Regarding Christ*

The unusually prominent role played by heretics as anti-authorities in Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews has been discussed in Chapter Three, with Thomas citing a wider range of heretics far more frequently in this commentary than in the other Pauline commentaries. But Thomas does more than adopt a negative approach toward heresy by naming and refuting specific heretics; he also uses the positive approach of consistently presenting the excellence of Christ in terms of someone who, uniquely, is fully man and fully God. Woven into the fabric of Thomas' lectures are multiple explanations of, not just how Christ fulfilled a prophecy or a function, but how he fulfilled a prophecy or function in his humanity and also in his divinity. This presentation

---

<sup>12</sup> "Intendit autem ostendere excellentiam Novi ad Vetus Testamentum per excellentiam Christi, quantum ad tres personas solemnes in ipso Veteri Testamento contentas, scilicet angelos, per quos lex tradita est. Gal. III, 19: *ordinata per angelos in manu mediatoris*, et cetera. Quantum ad Moysen, a quo, vel per quem data est. Io. I, 17: *lex per Moysen data est*, et Deut. ult: *non surrexit ultra propheta*, et cetera. Quantum ad sacerdotium per quod ministrabatur, infra: *in priori tabernaculo semper introibant sacerdotes sacrificiorum, officia consummantes*, et cetera." *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [6], 5.

of a Chalcedonian understanding of Christ throughout the commentary allows Thomas to combat Christological error while also displaying Christ's preeminence.<sup>13</sup>

Weisheipl reports that Aquinas was "the first Latin scholastic writer to utilize verbatim the acts of the first five ecumenical councils of the Church," alluding to them in both the *Catena aurea* and the *Summa*.<sup>14</sup> And it is Keating's opinion that "the Chalcedonian definition of Christ as one person/hypostasis in two natures functions as a hermeneutical guide for how Aquinas teaches about Christ."<sup>15</sup> He sees Thomas organizing his Hebrews commentary in terms of the Chalcedonian macrostructure of the letter, addressing Christ's divinity in Hebrews 1, Christ's incarnation in Hebrew's 2, and Christ's humanity in regard to his "identity and work as priest" in Hebrews 4-10.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas' concern for a correct view of the two natures of Christ grounds both the Hebrews commentary and the *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa*, reminding us that Thomas read

---

<sup>13</sup> Thomas' intent here is not to espouse either anti-Semitism or supercessionism. Rather, his purpose is to uphold the *raison d'être* of the Dominican order, which is to preach the gospel and refute error; at the same time, it is incumbent upon Thomas, as a Dominican and as a *magister* to use his lectures to uphold the message of Hebrews, which encourages its readers not to fall back into old religious forms but to keep moving forward with Christ as exemplar and goal. While anti-Semitism certainly existed, we must also remember that in the academic community, people like Andrew of St. Victor and Nicholas of Lyra sought out rabbis for instruction in Hebrew and in Jewish exegesis.

<sup>14</sup> James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 164. Weisheipl states that Thomas "went out of his way to procure better and more accurate translations" of the documents of the councils of the Church and of the writings of the Greek Fathers. Some of these he himself found: the library at the Abbey of Monte Cassino in Naples and the papal archives in Orvieto had manuscripts of the early councils; Thomas worked in those cities between 1260 and 1263, and a citation of a conciliar document appears in book four of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, chapter 25, which has been dated to 1263. The libraries of his time, according to Chenu, had diligently preserved the originals of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Chrysostom, and John Damascene. Where translations were not available, Thomas commissioned them, as evidenced by his introductory letter to the *Catena aurea*'s section on Mark, in which he states that he had had various Greek texts translated into Latin in the course of preparing the *Catena aurea*. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*, 122, 163-165; Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, 136-138, 140; Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 47-48.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Keating, "Thomas Aquinas and the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'The Excellence of Christ,'" in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London: T & T Clark International, 2012), 85.

<sup>16</sup> Keating, "Thoma Aquinas and the Epistle to the Hebrews," 88.

Hebrews and wrote the *Tertia Pars* with the same Christological framework in mind. Indeed, after opening the *Tertia Pars* with a question on the fitness of the Incarnation, Thomas in questions 2-15 considers the various aspects of this union of the two natures of God and man in one person. The first article in question 2 asks whether the union of the Incarnate Word took place in one nature. Here Thomas cites such church fathers as Cyril, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and John of Damascus in order to demonstrate the different usages of the term “nature” before turning to the Council of Chalcedon and its determination that “We confess that in these last days the only-begotten Son of God should be acknowledged [in two natures] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures in no way being annulled by the union.”<sup>17</sup>

Thomas then determines that the union did not occur in a nature, but as article 2 shows, in the Person of the Word. In this second article he again cites the Council of Chalcedon and its finding that “we confess one and the same only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, not divided or separated into two persons,” with the union taking place in the person,<sup>18</sup> before stating this conclusion: “Since, therefore, the Word has a human nature united to himself, even though it does not form part of his divine nature, it follows that this union was effected in the person of the Word, not in the nature.”<sup>19</sup>

This concern for where to locate the union of Christ’s humanity and divinity was of contemporary relevance as well as historical importance for Thomas Aquinas. In the *Tertia Pars* he refers to some more recent masters or teachers who were following in the

---

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.2.1, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.2.2, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.2.2, 45.



footsteps of Nestorius, the heretic who separated the two natures of Christ and attributed to them only an accidental union.<sup>20</sup> Peter Abelard, the twelfth-century theologian, seems to be one of the recent masters Thomas has in mind.<sup>21</sup> While crediting Abelard with the desire to protect the unity of Christ's person, Thomas states that Abelard has separated the soul of Christ from the body of Christ, and allowed them only an accidental union to the Word.

In his commentary on John, Thomas says that such a heretical view is exactly what the Apostle John intended to forestall when he wrote, not that the Word assumed flesh, but that the Word was made flesh. John's selection of this particular verb is important, "for a thing is made or becomes something in order to be it," and the resulting union of the Word and man "is such as would truly make God man and man God."<sup>22</sup> Thomas also points out in the *Tertia Pars* that Abelard's illustration of Christ putting on man as a garment is inadequate, for it demonstrates no genuine unity of the two natures. Thomas' response is to take Abelard's example and use it to his own advantage:

Hence the human nature in Christ is likened to a habit—that is, a garment, not indeed in regard to accidental union, but inasmuch as the Word is seen by the human nature, as a man by his garment, and also inasmuch as the garment is changed, for it is shaped according to the figure of him who puts it on, and yet he is not changed from his form on account of the garment. So likewise the human nature assumed by the Word of God is ennobled, but the Word of God is not changed, as Augustine says.<sup>23</sup>

This last sentence—illuminating the unchanging Word of God as well as the ennobled human nature assumed by the Word—shapes Thomas' interpretive strategy as he deals

---

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.2.6, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Weinandy, "Aquinas: God *IS* Man: The Marvel of the Incarnation," 71.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 1.7 [170], 70.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.2.6, 717.

with the Incarnation throughout the book of Hebrews. Thus, it is not enough for Thomas to observe that Christ is God's heir in Hebrews 1:2. He must make us understand that in Christ there are two natures, divine and human: in his divinity, Christ is the natural heir of the universe; and in his humanity, Christ has been made a son of God, through David's line, and as the true Son of the Father has been constituted the heir of the universe.<sup>24</sup>

With these corrective theological reasons in mind, Thomas consistently demonstrates his understanding of Christ's two natures in one person in his exegesis of Hebrews. While Keating has ably pointed out the two-nature macrostructure of Thomas' commentary on Hebrews, Thomas' attention to Christ's two natures is readily apparent at the level of particular verses, phrases, and pericopes, as well. For example, regarding Hebrews 1:2, Thomas shows why it is appropriate for Christ to be the appointed and begotten heir and Lord according to his divine nature and his human nature.<sup>25</sup> And, through a fascinating discussion of what the word "today" in Hebrews 1:5 may signify, he explains the phrase "Today I have begotten thee" in terms of both Christ's eternal generation and his temporal generation.<sup>26</sup>

At a deeper level of the text, Thomas notices that in Hebrews, Christ is described as having "learned" certain traits or abilities. The fact that Christ is said to have learned mercy in order to become a merciful high priest, in Hebrews 2:17, and that he is also said

---

<sup>24</sup> "In Christo autem sunt duae naturae, scilicet divina et humana. Secundum ergo, quod est Filius naturalis, non est constitutus haeres, sed est naturalis; sed in quantum homo, factus est Filius Dei. Rom. I, 3: *qui factus est ei ex semine David secundum carnem*. Et secundum hoc est constitutus haeres universorum, sicut verus filius patris." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [20], 11.

<sup>25</sup> "Et quidem secundum divinam naturam competit Christo, quod sit haeres genitus, et Dominus." "Secundum humanam vero naturam competit etiam Christo, quod constitutus haeres et Dominus universorum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>26</sup> "... ista generatio non est temporalis, sed aeterna, quia *hodie genui te*." "Posset etiam hoc exponi de generatione temporali, ut dicat *hodie*, id est in tempore, *genui te*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [49], 24.

to have learned obedience in Hebrews 5:8, allows Thomas to discuss and endorse Christ's fully divine and human natures.

Thomas begins his discussion of Hebrews 2:17 and the mercy of Christ by defining the quality of mercy as having a heart made miserable by another's misery.<sup>27</sup> This definition parallels that found in the *Summa*, 2-2.30.1, in which Thomas cites Augustine's description of mercy as "heartfelt sympathy for another's distress, impelling us to succor him if we can."<sup>28</sup> Thomas in this article gives the etymology of *misericordia* or mercy in much the same way as he does in his Hebrews commentary, here in the *Summa* "denoting a man's compassionate heart (*miserum cor*) for another's unhappiness." And while in the final article on mercy Thomas prefers charity as the greatest virtue in regard to our relationship to God, he says that mercy is the greatest virtue in our relationship to our neighbor.<sup>29</sup> And it is as our neighbor, as one of us, that Christ powerfully experienced *our* misery in his passion, according to Thomas' reading of Hebrews 2:17.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas allows that as God, Christ has been merciful from all eternity, through his capacity to understand human suffering; but Christ also learned mercy by personally experiencing human suffering, particularly through his passion.

---

<sup>27</sup> "Dicendum est, quod miseratio dicitur quasi miserum cor super aliena miseria. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.4 [153], 70.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.30.1, *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. II, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 533. Henceforth, *ST*.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2-2.30.4, 536.

<sup>30</sup> ". . . et sic Christus potissime in passione expertus est miseriam nostram." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.4 [153], 70.

Knowing mercy as God and learning mercy as a man uniquely qualifies Jesus to be a faithful high priest who can help his people when they are tempted.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Thomas Aquinas uses his discussion of Hebrews 5:8 to show that although Christ from eternity has possessed full knowledge, including the knowledge of what obedience is, he also learned obedience through the experience of suffering difficult things such as his passion and death. Thomas in the *Tertia Pars* alludes to Hebrews 5:8 and a gloss on this verse in order to prove the same point: Christ possessed not only simple knowledge of obedience; he also possessed experimental or acquired knowledge of it.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas's analysis of this point in the Hebrews commentary provides interesting insights into the Son's assumption of human nature. Taking note of the Apostle's contention that a priest should be able to sympathize with those he represents, Thomas declares that such is Christ: because as God he could not suffer or sympathize, he assumed a nature in which he could suffer, which in turn would then enable him to sympathize.<sup>33</sup> Assuming this nature required that Christ willingly assume its infirmity and weakness and then learn obedience in the hardest of schools; for Christ experienced

---

<sup>31</sup> "Dicendum est, quod miseratio dicitur quasi miserum cor super aliena miseria, et hoc est dupliciter. Uno modo per solam apprehensionem, et sic Deus sine passione nostram miseriam apprehendit. *Ipse enim cognovit figmentum nostrum*, ut dicitur in Ps. CII, 14. Alio modo per experientiam, et sic Christus potissime in passione expertus est miseriam nostram. Et sic dicitur, ut qui erat misericors per apprehensionem nostrae miseriae, fieret misericors per experientiam." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.4 [153], 70.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.9.4, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 49, *The Grace of Christ* (3a. 7-15), trans. Liam G. Walsh (London: Blackfriars, 1974), 95.

"... quia *cum*, id est quamvis *esset Filius Dei*, natura deitatis unus Deus cum Patre, tamen secundum quod homo, *didicit*, id est expertus est, *obedientiam ex eis*, id est per ea *quae passus est*." Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 438A.

<sup>33</sup> "Cum enim sit Filius Dei ab aeterno, et secundum hoc nec pati posset, nec compati, assumpsit naturam in qua posset pati, et sic etiam posset compati." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.2 [259], 116.

“how burdensome it is to obey since He himself obeyed in the most burdensome and difficult things, all the way to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).”<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the Gloss here speaks of Christ willingly or voluntarily undertaking obedience, even to the point of death.<sup>35</sup> Thomas seems to have picked up on the voluntary nature of Christ’s assumption of human nature in his statement that “Christus autem voluntarie accepit infirmitatem nostram,” in order to contrast Christ’s willing assumption of our humanity and its weakness with the heavy and difficult obedience to which that assumption led him.

In his discussion of Hebrews 7:25, Thomas explicitly invokes the twofold nature of Christ, as he explains how it is that Christ is able to save eternally and effectively.<sup>36</sup> While Thomas’ Vulgate translation has Christ approaching God on our behalf through himself, as opposed to translations that have us approaching God through Christ,<sup>37</sup> he does succeed in showing how Christ’s human and divine natures make him the ideal intercessor and savior of a fallen humanity. Thomas undertakes this explanation by carefully parsing the phrase “approaching God through himself,” assigning the task of approaching to the human nature of Christ and the capacity to approach God ‘through himself’ to the divine nature of Christ. Thomas reasons that the necessity of “approaching” suggests some measure of distance between the one approaching and his

---

<sup>34</sup> “Christus autem voluntarie accepit infirmitatem nostram. Et ideo dicit, quod *didicit obedientiam*, id est, quam grave sit obedire: quia ipse obedivit in gravissimis et difficillimis: quia *usque ad mortem crucis*, Phil. II, 8.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.2 [259], 117.

<sup>35</sup> “Didicit: voluntarie suscepit obedientiam usque ad mortem.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*, ed. K. Froehlich and M.T. Gibson, volume 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 430. “Vel, didicit, id est voluntarie suscepit obedientiam. Ex, id est in his quae passus est, usque ad mortem.” Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 438A.

<sup>36</sup> “Respondeo. Dicendum est, quod Apostolus in verbis istis ostendit duplicem naturam. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.2.[371], 162.

<sup>37</sup> “Unde et salvare in perpetuum potest accedentes per semetipsum ad Deum: semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis.” Hebrews 7:25, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 7.4, 160.

object, and it was in his humanity that Christ was distant from God—not that this distant humanity implies any fault in Christ but rather points to Christ’s common human experience of contemplating God through the intellect and the affections. And only Christ’s divine nature can account for his power to approach God “through himself,” since one who was only human would never possess that ability.<sup>38</sup> As Thomas succinctly concludes his explanation, Christ “approaches insofar as He is man, but ‘through Himself,’ insofar as He is God.”<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the most powerful example of Thomas Aquinas’ determination to keep the twofold nature of Christ in view occurs in the second and third lectures on Hebrews 4. The second lecture covers Hebrews 4:9-13 and highlights Christ’s divinity; the third covers Hebrews 4:14-16 and features Christ’s humanity; and Thomas links the two lectures by cross-referencing them to each other. In the second lecture, the Apostle’s description of the efficacy of the living Word of God in Hebrews 4:12 leads Thomas to reflect at length on Christ’s divine nature, wherein he is the Word of the Father, and also to allude to Christ’s human nature, wherein he is our great high priest.<sup>40</sup> Thomas then prefaces the third lecture by referring to the second: “Having exhorted them to hasten to

---

<sup>38</sup> “Respondeo. Dicendum est, quod Apostolus in verbis istis ostendit duplicem naturam, scilicet humanam, secundum quam convenit ei accedere, quia in ipsa distat a Deo; non autem accedit a statu culpae ad statum gratiae, sed per contemplationem intellectus et affectus, et adeptionem gloriae. Et naturam divinam, per hoc quod dicit eum per semetipsum accedere ad Deum. Si enim esset purus homo, non posset per se accedere.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.2.[371], 162.

<sup>39</sup> “Ergo accedit inquantum homo, sed per semetipsum inquantum Deus.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [371], 162. Translation from Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer 7.4 [371], 159.

<sup>40</sup> “Haec autem ratio sumitur ex parte Christi. In ipso autem est duplex natura: una, scilicet divina, secundum quam est Verbum Patris; alia est humana, secundum quam pontifex offerens se in cruce.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.2 [216], 99.

enter into God's rest, and as an inducement citing Christ's greatness according to his divine nature, the Apostle here does the same in regard to his human nature."<sup>41</sup>

With respect to his divine nature, Christ is the Word of the Father, according to the second lecture. The second half of this lecture addresses the Apostle's warning to hurry and enter the rest God offers. Haste is necessary because the aforementioned Word of God is living, effectual, and penetrating; as such, Christ, the Word of the Father, is able to judge with power, justice, and wisdom. Thomas echoes the Apostle's warning by exhorting his hearers to hasten to enter rest, because this judge "is so powerful, so knowing, and so great."<sup>42</sup> Thomas closes the lecture with a word of hope made possible by recourse to the fact that this judge, while divine, is also human: he notes that "For just as God operates through middle causes, as closer to their effects, he accordingly judges men through the man Christ, so that the judgment might be sweeter."<sup>43</sup>

The shift to Christ's humanity evident at the end of the second lecture on Hebrews 4 characterizes the third lecture. Here, with respect to his human nature, Christ is the high priest who offered himself on the cross in our place. As a man, he possesses a unique priestly dignity, according to Thomas. For where other priests administer only temporal goods, this high priest also administers future goods<sup>44</sup>; where other priests entered the holy of holies once a year through the blood of a sacrifice, this high priest has entered

---

<sup>41</sup> "Supra Apostolus monuit ad festinandum ingredi in requiem Dei, et ad hoc inducendum posuit magnitudinem Christi quantum ad divinam naturam, hic ostendit idem quantum ad humanam naturam. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 4.3 [233], 106.

<sup>42</sup> "Et ideo, quia sic est potens, sic sciens, et sig magnus, festinemus ergo ingredi, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.2 [231], 104.

<sup>43</sup> "Sicut enim Deus per causas medias, tamquam propinquiores effectibus, operatur, ita iudicat per hominem Christum, homines, ut sit suavius iudicium." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 4.2 [232], 105. Translation mine.

<sup>44</sup> "Hic autem dicitur magnus, quia non est pontifex tantum bonorum temporalium, sed et futurorum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.3 [234], 106.

heaven through his own sacrificed blood; and where other priests had to be sons of Aaron, this high priest is the son of God.<sup>45</sup> Again, as a man, Christ our high priest is sympathetic and ready to help us, because he knows our misery through his own experience.<sup>46</sup> This high priest invites us to have confidence in him, and to approach him for the grace and mercy that we need.<sup>47</sup>

The third lecture's structure mirrors its predecessor in a chiastic manner. The second lecture focuses on the divinity of Christ and ends by touching on his humanity; the third lecture focuses on the humanity of Christ and ends by touching, if not explicitly on his divinity, implicitly so through a discussion of the royal throne in heaven from which Christ, the king, dispenses justice in the future and grace in the present. Reading these two lectures in sequence reveals how Thomas uses them to form one continuous argument in which Christ is depicted as the judge we fear and as the intercessor we need; and Christ fulfills these dual roles because of his dual nature as one who is fully God and fully human.

Thus it may be seen how committed Thomas Aquinas is to reading the letter to the Hebrews through a Chalcedonian framework, as "what is important for Aquinas is not simply that the Son or Word of God as truly divine is supreme, but equally that his

---

<sup>45</sup> "Duo autem pertinebant ad magnum pontificem: unum quo ad officum, scilicet semel in anno cum sanguine intrare in sancta sanctorum. . . . Hoc autem praecipue convenit Christo. Ille enim intrat cum sanguine in sancta figuralia; sed Christus per proprium sanguinem intravit in sancta, id est, sacra caelestia. . . . Secundum est quod debebat esse ex certa tribu, scilicet de stirpe Aaron. . . . Hoc autem competit Christo, qui est nobilioris originis: unde dicitur Filius Dei." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.3 [234], 106.

<sup>46</sup> ". . . et hoc quia scit, per experientiam, miseriam nostram, quam, ut Deus, ab aeterno scivit per simplicem notitiam." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 4.3 [235], 107.

<sup>47</sup> "Deinde cum dicit *non enim habemus pontificem*, ne forte credatur, quod non possit aliquid agere praeter id quod exigit eius iustitia, ostendit in ipso etiam esse misericordiam et pietatem, et ista respiciunt miseriam, et hoc praecipue convenit Christo." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 4.3 [235], 107.



supremacy resides within his incarnate glorified state as well.”<sup>48</sup> Whether he is dealing with the text at the level of phrases, verses, or pericopes, Thomas excels at highlighting the full humanity and the full deity of Christ, allowing theological principle to shape his exegetical method. Melding theology with exegesis not only allows him to combat Christological error; it also enables him to develop Hebrews’ portrait of Christ in all of its richness. By showing his readers the uniqueness and excellence of Christ, who in his divinity is powerful, knowing, and great, and who in his humanity is sympathetic, compassionate, and welcoming, Thomas has given them every possible reason to move forward in trusting this Christ.

### *Presenting the Excellence of Christ*

According to Thomas Aquinas, the Apostle intends the first ten chapters of Hebrews to commend in various ways the excellence of Christ. As he proceeds through those ten chapters, Thomas will follow the text and compare Christ to angels, prophets, and priests. But before developing those comparisons, it is essential to establish the excellence of Christ himself, as well as his excellence in relation to the Father. This Thomas does through finding three attributes that Christ shares with the Father, and four characteristics that speak of his uniqueness and excellence as the Son.

---

<sup>48</sup> Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ *Commentary on Hebrews*,” 228. Thomas’ goal in the commentary seems not to be so much a point-by-point consideration of Cyril and Nestorius, for example—Nestorius is mentioned only once in the commentary and Cyril not at all; rather his intent seems to be to reveal “the conciliar doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation residing within Scripture itself.” Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ *Commentary on Hebrews*,” 227.

### *Three Attributes Shared With the Father*

The three attributes Christ shares with the Father are coeternity, consubstantiality, and equality of power. Thomas Aquinas' second lecture on the book of Hebrews touches on all three divine attributes in spite of dealing with only one verse, Hebrews 1:3. The first half of this verse contains three phrases, each relating to one of these three divine attributes assigned to the Son: "Who, being the splendor of his glory and the figure of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power . . . ."<sup>49</sup> Being the splendor of the Father's glory relates to the Son's co-eternality; being the figure of the Father's substance relates to his co-substantiality; and in upholding all things by the word of his power, the Son displays power equal to that of the Father.<sup>50</sup>

In assigning and explaining these three attributes, Thomas is uncharacteristically brief. To some degree this brevity is the result of the fact that he has already discussed Hebrews 1:3a at some length in this lecture in order to support a separate point.<sup>51</sup> But this brevity also may be a reaction on Thomas' part to the *Gloss* on this verse. In this section of his Hebrews commentary, Thomas shows great independence from the *Gloss* in his terse treatment of the three divine attributes, where this section of the *Gloss* on Hebrews

---

<sup>49</sup> ". . . qui, cum sit splendor gloriae, et figura substantiae ejus, portansque omnia verbo virtutis suae. . . ." Hebrews 1:3. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.2, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas credits the Son with these same three divine attributes in his discussion of John 1:3, "All things were made through him," as he surveys the opinions of Chrysostom, Hilary, and Augustine, and concludes, "And so in saying "All things were made through him," you have, according to Chrysostom, the equality of the Word with the Father [equality of omnipotence]; the coeternity of the Word with the Father, according to Hilary; and the consubstantiality of the Word with the Father, according to Augustine." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, 1.2 [72], 31.

<sup>51</sup> This point is part of Thomas' argument regarding the four characteristics that speak of Christ's uniqueness and excellence as the Son; this argument will be addressed in the next section.

1:3a is lengthy and suggestive of a rich theological history, referencing Augustine, Ambrosius, and Chrysostom.<sup>52</sup>

The *Gloss* at times relies on terms such as fire, light, and brightness; and it includes in its section on “qui cum sit splendor gloriae” a statement made by Ambrosius that “The Father is glory, and the Son is the same with him, and makes him known to man, as a ray of the sun.”<sup>53</sup> Thomas scrupulously avoids such language in this part of his Hebrews commentary, even though earlier writers such as Gregory of Nyssa and Cassiodorus had found it helpful<sup>54</sup> to use an analogy that had its origin in the writings of Tertullian.<sup>55</sup> The section of Thomas’ *Summa* dealing with the Trinity also seems free of metaphors and illustrations,<sup>56</sup> and the reason may lie in the fact that Thomas holds that knowledge of the Trinity is possible only by faith, and not by the application of natural reason. His answer to the possibility of knowing the Trinity through reason runs as follows:

---

<sup>52</sup> The two vertical columns that appear on each page of the *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria* typically have 73 lines. The comments on these three phrases take up 10 lines at the bottom of the left-hand column, the entire right-hand column, and two-thirds of the left-hand column on the next page. In the *Patrologia Latina* version of the gloss, the comments run from the end of 402D through 406C—nearly four full columns. See *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 423-424; and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 402D-406C.

<sup>53</sup> “Pater est Gloria, et filius idem cum eo, et eum notificans homo factus, ut radius solem.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 423.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory of Nyssa and Cassiodorus both use the sun and ray as analogies of the Father and Son. See *Hebrews: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament, volume 10, ed. by Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> In *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian writes that “God sent forth the Word. . . just as the root puts forth the tree, and the fountain the river, and the sun the ray. . . . For the root and the tree are distinctly two things, but correlatively joined; the fountain and the river are also two forms, but indivisible; so likewise the sun and the ray are two forms, but coherent ones. . . . Now the Spirit indeed is third from God and the Son. . . as the apex of the ray is third from the sun.” Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 3.603, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> See *ST* 1.27-43.

It is impossible to attain to the knowledge of the Trinity of divine Persons by natural reason. For, as above explained (Q. XII, AA. 4, 11, 12), man cannot obtain the knowledge of God by natural reason except from creatures. Now creatures lead us to the knowledge of God, as effects do to their cause. Accordingly, by natural reason we can know of God that only which of necessity belongs to Him as the principle of all things. . . . Now, the creative power of God is common to the whole Trinity, and hence it belongs to the unity of the essence, and not to the distinction of the persons. Therefore, by natural reason we can know what belongs to the unity of the essence, but not what belongs to the distinction of the Persons.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore it is not surprising that Thomas' discussion of Trinitarian matters is free of root/tree/fruit or sun/ray/apex language, or any other language that depends on created objects to point back to their creator. Thomas' preferred approach is to rely neither on illustrations drawn from creation nor rational proofs; rather, his method is "to demonstrate how faith in God the Trinity may be reasonably conceived, not by proving the Trinity, but by showing God through the use of 'similitudes' (relation, the analogies of the word and love, the transcendentals, etc.)"<sup>58</sup>—these latter categories being notably non-material and non-created, and yet serving to make the Trinity "reasonably thinkable."<sup>59</sup> And this part of his Hebrews commentary provides an excellent example of Thomas' preferred methodology when writing about the Trinity.

Despite Thomas' conciseness, his statements regarding the divine attributes of Christ are important contributions to establishing the unique and fully divine nature of

---

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.32.1.

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Emery, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in St Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 62.

<sup>59</sup> Emery, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in St Thomas Aquinas," 48. Thomas' preferred way of describing the Trinity is to speak of the mind conceiving a word, and then producing love as result of loving itself. This mind/word/love analogy features both in Thomas' treatise on the Trinity in the *Summa* and in his discussion of the Trinity's three persons in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. See *ST* 1.27.1-5 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.26. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*, trans. Charles J. O'Neill (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

Christ. Christ's coeternality is evinced by the phrase "the splendor of his glory"—a divine attribute that Thomas must emphasize in view of the error of Arius and others.<sup>60</sup> If Christ is the splendor of the Father's glory, and the Father is eternal, then so must Christ be eternal, whereas any splendor possessed by creatures occurs in time and is therefore limited.<sup>61</sup> This discussion by Thomas may have its foundation in a statement made by Athanasius in one of his discourses against the Arians:

. . . forasmuch as the Apostle, writing to the Hebrews, says, 'Who being the radiance of His glory and the expression of His Person;' and David too in the eighty-ninth Psalm, 'And the brightness of the Lord be upon us,' who has so little sense as to doubt of the eternity of the Son? For when did man see light without the brightness of its radiance, that he may say of the Son, 'There was once, when He was not,' or 'Before His generation He was not.'<sup>62</sup>

Thomas, in similar language, proclaims that "splendor is that which is first emitted by something shining,"<sup>63</sup> thus indicating the unique and coeternal relationship that the Father and Son enjoy.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> "Per hoc enim quod est *splendor*, ostendit eius coaeternitatem cum Patre. . . . Et hoc est contra Arrium." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [36], 18. The Gloss also mentions Sabellius in its discussion of this phrase of Hebrews 1:3: "Attende qualiter hic duas rectas vias ingreditur, una quidem revocans nos a nefando errore Sabellii, alia ab arianicae impietatis errore. . . ." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 423. Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 402D.

<sup>61</sup> "In creaturis enim splendor est coaevus, sed ille est coaeternus. Et hoc est contra Arrium." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [36], 18.

<sup>62</sup> Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians*, 1.4.12. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 4 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 313.

<sup>63</sup> "Quoniam autem splendor est illud quod a fulgente primo emittitur. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [26], 15. Translation mine.

<sup>64</sup> Although Thomas seems to avoid concrete imagery in order to describe the Trinity, he does use the metaphor inherent in Christ being the splendor of the Father's glory, as seen here. He makes a similar comparison in the next lecture in order to clarify the Father-Son relationship in relation to the Son's eternal generation. In explaining the phrase in Heb 1:5, "Today I have begotten you," Thomas says that this is the sense of the phrase: "You are perfect, Son, and yet not only is your generation eternal, but you also are always being generated from me: just as light in the air is perfect, and yet is always proceeding from the sun." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [49], 24. Translation mine.

Having established Christ's coeternality, Thomas Aquinas next considers his consubstantiality. The defense of Christ's consubstantiality made by Thomas rests on Christ being the image or figure of the Father's substance in Hebrews 1:3a. Here Thomas observes that in the preceding argument regarding the Son's coeternality, the "something shining" and the splendor emitted by it are not of the same nature, and could imply that the Father and Son are different; therefore, the Apostle has been careful to establish their identity in terms of substance, through the use of the term "image" or "figure."<sup>65</sup> In both the Hebrews commentary and the *Summa* Thomas states that the idea of an image includes likeness of species.<sup>66</sup> But in the *Summa* he adds that "neither the likeness of species nor of figure is enough for an image, which requires also the idea of origin," so that there is a relation between the item and its image, with the latter proceeding from the former.<sup>67</sup> He further explains that there are two ways of understanding the image of something: "In one way it is found in something of the same specific nature, as the image of the king is found in his son. In another way it is found in something of a different nature, as the king's image on the coin." And it is in the first sense that Christ the Son "is the perfect image of the Father."<sup>68</sup> Thomas uses this sonship analogy earlier in the lecture to discuss how an image functions, noting that an image of something may be similar to it

---

<sup>65</sup> "Sed cum dicit imago *substantiae*, ostendit eius consubstantialitatem. Quia enim splendor non est eiusdem naturae cum resplendente, ne forte aliquis credat, quod non sit similis in natura, dicit quod est imago, vel *figura substantiae*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [36], 18.

<sup>66</sup> "Illud ergo proprie dicitur esse imago alicuius, quod habet similitudinem speciei eius, vel expressum signum speciei." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [27], 15.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.35.1.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.35.2.

“not only in representing, but also in being, just as a son is the true image of his father.”<sup>69</sup>

In this succinct statement, Thomas suggests both the immanent Trinity (“a son is his father’s true image”) and the economic Trinity (the son represents the Father),<sup>70</sup> and establishes the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father.

The final point to be addressed is the equality of power enjoyed by the Son. The third phrase of Heb 1:3a alludes to the Son and his “upholding all things by the word of his power.” Methodically considering the first and second halves of that phrase, Thomas’ intent is to discuss first what he upholds, and then how he upholds it. He immediately moves into a discussion of causality, stating that God, as the first cause and creator of all creatures, upholds everything in regard to its existence—for “once the cause is removed, the effect is removed.”<sup>71</sup> And since God as the first cause gives rise to secondary causes, he also upholds everything in regard to its operation or activity.<sup>72</sup> Thomas uses Heb 1:3 in a similar fashion in his *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, arguing that creatures are not only brought forth into being by God, but also conserved in their being by God.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, in

---

<sup>69</sup> “Aliquando vero assimilatur ei in specie, non tantum in repraesentando, sed etiam in essendo, sicut filius est imago vera patris.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [28], 15-16. Translation mine.

<sup>70</sup> In his Trinitarian theology, Thomas is reliant on Augustine and his analogy of word and love, found in *De Trinitate* IX, 12, 17-18. He is also reliant on Aristotle and his distinction between immanent and transitive actions. For discussions of how Thomas Aquinas relates the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, see Emery, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in St Thomas Aquinas,” 49-50, 62; and Michael J. Dodds, “The Teaching of Thomas Aquinas on the Mysteries of the Life of Christ,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 94-95.

<sup>71</sup> “Quantum ad primum sciendum est, quod id, quod de se nec stare nec ambulare potest, indiget portari. Omnis autem creatura de se nec subsistere, nec operari potest. Primum patet, quia remota causa, removetur effectus. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [31], 16.

<sup>72</sup> “Portat etiam omnia quantum ad operari, quia subtracta influentia eius, cessat omnis motio causarum secundarum, cum ipse sit causa prima, et causa prima plus influit, quam secunda.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [31], 16.

<sup>73</sup> “Loquendo ergo *absolute* de Dei potentia, sic Deus potest universam creaturam redigere in nihilum. Cuius ratio est, quia creatura non solum producitur in esse Dei agente, sed etiam per actionem Dei

the *Summa*, he cites Heb 1:3 to respond to the question of whether anything could be annihilated, stating

That things were brought into being from a state of non-being clearly shows the power of Him Who made them. But that they should be reduced to nothing would obscure that manifestation, since the power of God is conspicuously shown in His preserving all things in being, according to the Apostle: *Upholding all things by the word of His power* (Heb 1:3).<sup>74</sup>

Having determined that God upholds everything in creation, Thomas then asks how he upholds everything; and the answer is “by the word of his power.” Here Thomas turns to Heb 1:2, “through whom also he made the world,” in order to identify the Son as the agent of creation—and again a discussion of causality ensues. Thomas’ explanation of instrumental causality as applied to the Father and the Son is echoed in the Gloss, which instructs heretics not to suspect vainly that the Son exists as some instrument, or that the Father did not make all things through him; rather, “just as the Father is said to judge through the Son, because he is begotten as judge, thus also is he said to operate through the Son, because it is evident that he was begotten as creator.”<sup>75</sup> Thomas declares that the Son works both by his own power and the power of the Father, because the power is the same for them both<sup>76</sup>; and he strongly asserts the equality of power enjoyed by the Son with this conclusion: “And in this the Apostle shows the strength of his

---

conservatur in esse, secundum illud *ad Hebr.*, I, 3: *Portans omnia verbo virtutis suae.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, IV. q. 3, a. 1, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi (Taurini: Marietti, 1949), 74.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.104.4.

<sup>75</sup> “Non ergo ut tu, haeretice, suspicaris inaniter, tanquam aliquod instrumentum existit: neque per eum Pater dicitur fecisse, tanquam ipse facere non posset, sed sicut dicitur Pater judicare per Filium, quia iudicem genuit, sic etiam dicitur operari per Filium, quia eum constat opificem genuisse.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 424; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 406C.

<sup>76</sup> “Sed numquid non virtute Patris? Utique, et eius virtute, quia eadem est virtus utriusque. Operatur ergo et virtute propria, et virtute Patris, quia virtutem suam habet a Patre.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [33], 17.



power, because he has the same power as the Father; because by him the same things are done through the same power.”<sup>77</sup>

Thomas appends an excursus to this discussion in which he considers, and rejects, two erroneous readings of “by the word of his power.” In the first, Thomas addresses Basil’s interpretation of this phrase as an allusion to the Holy Spirit, with “his” referring to Christ and “the word” as that which proceeds from him, so that just as the Son proceeds from the Father as his Word, the Spirit proceeds from the Son as *his* Word. Thomas dismisses this reading on the grounds that the Spirit does not have this mode of procession.<sup>78</sup> In the second, the *Gloss* explains “by the word of His power” to mean “by his command,”<sup>79</sup> which, as Thomas understands it, would produce another Word conceived in the mind of the Son, leading to the blasphemous position of the existence of two eternal Words. Such strong language represents a development of the position on this matter that Thomas took in the *Summa*, in which he seems to view equating “word” and “command” in Heb 1:3 as a legitimate figurative reading, in contrast to Basil’s illegitimate figurative reading.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> “Et in hoc ostendit Apostolus potentiam virtutis suae, quia eandem habet cum Patre, quia eadem operatur et per idem, quo ille.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [33], 17. Translation mine.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas discusses Basil’s position in *ST* 1.34.2 and says that he “speaks improperly and figuratively” in calling the Holy Spirit the Word of the Son.

<sup>79</sup> In the *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, written above the biblical text of *omnia verbo* is the phrase *solo imperio*. *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 424. “Et ipse filius est *portans*, id est continens et gubernans, *omnia verbo*, id est solo imperio, *virtutis suae*. . . .” Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 406B.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas’ opinion in the *Summa* runs as follows: “When it is said of the Son, ‘Bearing all things by the word of His power,’ *word* is taken figuratively for the effect of the Word. Hence a gloss says that ‘word’ is here taken to mean command, since by the effect of the power of the Word things are kept in being, as also by the effect of the power of the Word things are brought into being.” Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.34.2.

D. L. Jeffrey has noted the confusion here between *logos* and *rema*. In Heb 1:3, the word for “word” is *verbo* in the Vulgate, and *rema* in the Greek, with *rema* referring to ‘that which is said or spoken’ (*Greek-English Lexicon*, Liddell & Scott). *Logos* is not used in this phrase of Heb 1:3. To give Basil credit,

Thomas ends this excursus by reiterating his position regarding the shared and co-equal power of the Father and Son. For support he adduces Augustine's reading of Jn 12:48, in which he identifies the word that Jesus has spoken with Jesus himself, the Word. Thus for Thomas, the expression "upholding by the word of his power" conveys how God creates and upholds all things through his Word, the Son.<sup>81</sup> In assigning the possessive pronoun "his" to the Father and choosing this interpretation, Thomas is following in the footsteps of Irenaeus and Chrysostom.<sup>82</sup>

It must be noted that many modern commentators do not read "by the word of his power" as an allusion to the Father and his equally powerful Son, the Word, as Thomas does. The tendency is to assign the possessive pronoun "his" to the Son and to read the statement "upholding by the word of his power" as a description of the power that the

---

he is attempting to distinguish between *logos* and *rema*, while Thomas avoids the issue. In this omission, he is joined by modern commentators such as Attridge and Thompson, who conflate *logos* and *rema* in their discussion of Heb 1:3. O'Brien and Johnson attempt to distinguish the two terms, giving *rema* its full due in this context and seemingly walking a fine line between Basil and Thomas. See Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 45; James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 35-36; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2006), 70; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 56-57; James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 35-36.

<sup>81</sup> "Ideo ad argumentum est dicendum, sicut exponit Augustinus illud Io. XII, 48: *sermo quem locutus sum, ille iudicabit eum*, id est, ipse ego, qui sum Verbum Patris, indicabo eum. Et similiter, in proposito, verbum *virtutis suae*, id est, seipso, qui est Verbum virtuosum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [36], 17-18.

<sup>82</sup> "... He is discovered to be the one only God who created all things, who alone is Omnipotent, and who is the only Father founding and forming all things, visible and invisible, such as may be perceived by our senses and such as cannot, heavenly and earthly, "by the word of His power." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies, Books 1-5 and Fragments*, 2.30.9, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Second Series (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007). In his sermon, Chrysostom elaborates on the great work done by Christ in upholding or governing all things, but then uses verses from John 1 to discuss the relationship of the Father with his Son, the Word. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews* 2.372, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series One. See also the discussion of Irenaeus' use of Heb 1:2-3 in D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Irenaeus and Hebrews," in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London: T & T Clark International, 2012), 55-58.

Son has in himself, apart from explicit consideration of his relationship to the Father.<sup>83</sup>

Borrowing from Philo, they characterize the Son's power in sustaining the universe as that of a manager or helmsman, keeping creation on course and headed toward its appointed end.<sup>84</sup>

But such a position does not suit the larger argument being made here by Thomas Aquinas, in which it is not just the Son's identity that is in view, but the Son's relationship to the Father. Thomas makes a comparable move in his commentary on the gospel of John. Just as he reads "his word" in Heb 1:3 in a manner that allows him to identify both the Father ("his") and the Son ("word"), so does he consider the nuances of the Father-Son relation as rendered by the words "in" and "with." As Thomas considers Jn 1:1b, "and the Word was with God," in the context of the Word's presence "in the beginning" (Jn 1:1a), his insight into the freight of theological import borne by lowly prepositions is impressive:

The preposition "in," as was said, principally signifies consubstantiality, as implying an intrinsic union and, by way of consequence, a distinction of persons, inasmuch as every preposition is transitive. The preposition "with" principally signifies a personal distinction, but also a consubstantiality inasmuch as it signifies a certain extrinsic, so to speak, union.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Thus, Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 45; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 48; Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, 70; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 56-57; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 35-36.

<sup>84</sup> This understanding of the Son's function as a helmsman or managerial agent relies on Philo's discussion of the Logos in his *De migratione Abrahami*, and some commentators use Philo's language in interpreting Heb 1:3. See Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 45; Robert P. Gordon, *Hebrews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 25; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 95; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Bible Commentary 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 187; R. McL. Wilson, *Hebrews*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 32-33.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, 1.1 [45], 22. See also the discussion in C. Clifton Black, "St. Thomas's Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Some Reflections on Its Character and Implication," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 688-691.

Given the grammatical and exegetical opportunity to expatiate on the Son's distinction from and unity with the Father,<sup>86</sup> Thomas will do so—just as he does in insisting that it is the Father's Word that upholds all things in his discussion of Heb 1:3. And interestingly, two modern commentators have observed the uncertainty inherent in the "his" in Heb 1:3: Johnson, despite his declaration that the "his" refers to the Son, admits that "the 'word' that God speaks now through his Son, then, is not utterly discontinuous with the 'word of the Son' that was spoken by God in creation and in prophecy"<sup>87</sup>; while Cockerill states that "the ambiguity as to whether it is the Son's or God's word only highlights the close identity between the two."<sup>88</sup>

Thomas concludes his discussion of Heb 1:3a not by restating the Son's eternity, divine substance, and power, but by twice asserting his coeternity, his consubstantiality, and his coequality of power.<sup>89</sup> The clue to Thomas' objective lies in his reference to the error of Arius: Thomas Aquinas is using his exegesis of the three phrases found in Heb 1:3a to recapitulate the teachings of the Nicene Creed. Just as Thomas is keenly focused on presenting the human and divine natures of Christ and the truths of the Symbol of Chalcedon, so is he acutely aware of the importance of emphasizing the true identity of Christ in terms of the Father-Son relationship and the truths of the Nicene Creed.

---

<sup>86</sup> Black, "St. Thomas's Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Some Reflections on Its Character and Implication," 690.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, 70.

<sup>88</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 95.

<sup>89</sup> "Per ista ergo tria, ostendit tria de Christo. Per hoc enim quod est *splendor*, ostendit eius coaeternitatem cum Patre. . . . Sed cum dicit imago *substantiae*, ostendit eius consubstantialitatem. . . . Sed quia Filius, et si sit eiusdem naturae cum Patre, si tamen sit infirmus, deficit a virtute Patris; ideo subdit *portans omnia verbo virtutis suae*. Apostolus ergo in his tribus commendat Christum a tribus, scilicet a coaeternitate, a consubstantialitate, et ab aequalitate potestatis." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [36], 18.

In connecting Heb 1:3 to the Nicene Creed, Thomas Aquinas is following a long interpretive history that includes such commentators as Athanasius, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.<sup>90</sup> All of them had the Nicene faith as their foundation, and all of them used Heb 1:3 as a proof-text in the conflict with the Arians—a verse of such theological potency that it led the Arians to remove Hebrews from their canon.<sup>91</sup> Thomas is also following allusions to the Nicene Creed found in the *Gloss* at this point. In elaborating on the phrase *figura substantiae*, the *Gloss* states that

When the persons of the Father and Son are referred to, they are referred to in the same way. For we say: The Father is light, the Son is light; similarly, the Father is glory, the Son is glory. And here there are one glory of two, one light, not two; and it is said of the Son glory of glory, just as light of light, and the first of the first, and God of God, not therefore two Gods, but one.”<sup>92</sup>

What evidence is there in the Nicene Creed of the three divine attributes of coeternality, consubstantiality, and coequality of power? The Creed may allude to the Son’s coeternity in the phrase “light from light”—an understanding that arises from interpreting the Son being the splendor of the Father’s glory in an active sense, with the

---

<sup>90</sup> For example, Chrysostom refutes Arius, among other heretics, in his sermon on Heb 1:3. Stating that here the Apostle “applies to the Son that which is proper to the Father,” he argues for Christ’s equality in power, eternal existence, and consubstantiality; and he connects Christ as the brightness of the Father’s glory to his being the “Light of Light.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NPNF 1 14.370-372.

<sup>91</sup> Frances M. Young, “Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London: T & T Clark International, 2012), 33-34.

<sup>92</sup> “Et quando ad personam referuntur, modo ad Patrem, modo ad Filium referuntur. Dicimus enim: Pater est lumen, Filius est lumen; similiter Pater est gloria, Filius est gloria. Et hi duo una gloria, unum lumen, non duo: et dicitur Filius gloria de gloria, sicut lumen de lumine, et principium de principio, et Deus de Deo, non tamen duo Dii, sed unus. . . .” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 423. Also Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 405C.

Son radiating and not simply reflecting the glory of the Father.<sup>93</sup> And certainly the anathema the Creed places on those who declare that there was a time the Son did not exist implies the eternality of the Son as the only legitimate position. The Nicene Creed in two places attests to the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, as he is first described as the only-begotten of or from the substance of the Father, and then as consubstantial or of one substance with the Father.<sup>94</sup> And the statement that it is through the Son that "all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth" communicates the coequality of power the Son enjoys with the Father; certainly, that is the direction Thomas' argument takes, as he uses Heb 1:2, "through whom also he made the world," to inaugurate his discussion of the fact that the Father and Son possess and work by means of the same power.<sup>95</sup>

Given that the writers of the Nicene Creed are separated from Thomas Aquinas by one thousand years of history and theological development, it will not do to assign to the Creed all that Thomas wishes to say about the relationship between the Father and the Son. Yet, if the Creed's primary task was to "affirm the Son's full identity and equality with the Father, out of Whose being He was derived and Whose nature He consequently

---

<sup>93</sup> O'Brien credits Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret, and Chrysostom with reading the Son's splendor in this active sense and connects their position to the phrase in the Nicene Creed. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 54-55. Cockerill also includes Basil and the orthodox Fathers with affirming this reading during the Arian controversy. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 94.

<sup>94</sup> I am relying on Hanson and Kelly's respective translations of the Nicene Creed. See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 163; and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Continuum, 2005), 232.

<sup>95</sup> "Sed per quid portat? *Verbo virtutis suae*. Quia enim Apostolus loquens de creatione rerum dixit, quod Deus omnia fecit per Filium, quia scilicet dixerat, *per quem fecit et saecula*." (Heb 1:2). Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.2 [32], 16.

shared,”<sup>96</sup> then that too is the task of Thomas Aquinas in teaching Heb 1:3. And inculcating in his students a full understanding of the Son’s coeternality, consubstantiality, and coequality of power, in anticipation of any theological errors that they may encounter in their own careers as preachers and teachers, seems a fitting thing to do.

#### *Four Characteristics of the Son’s Uniqueness and Excellence*

In his first lecture on Hebrews 1, Thomas states that the Apostle’s goal in this chapter is to show how Christ is superior to the angels. This task leads the Apostle to do two things: first, to show Christ’s excellence in Heb 1:2-3, and second, to prove how Christ is excellent and the angels are not. Thomas sees the writer of Hebrews establishing Christ’s excellence in order to compare him to angels and other Old Testament personages according to four parameters: the uniqueness of the Son’s origin; the greatness of his rule; the power of his activity; and the loftiness of his dignity.<sup>97</sup> The first three characteristics are dealt with in the first lecture on Hebrews 1; the fourth characteristic, Christ’s dignity, is the subject of the second lecture.

The statement in Heb 1:2 that God has spoken to us by his Son indicates the unique quality of the Son’s origin, and this is the first characteristic of the Son’s uniqueness and excellence addressed by Thomas Aquinas in this section. In this verse, the verb “has spoken” leads him into a discussion of the Son as the Word of God.

---

<sup>96</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 236.

<sup>97</sup> “Excellentiam vero Christi denotat quantum ad quatuor. Primo quantum ad proprietatem originis, vocando eum verum Dei Filium naturalem, cum dicit *locutus est nobis in Filio*; secundo quantum ad magnitudinem dominationis, ibi *quem constituit haeredem universorum*; tertio quantum ad virtutem operationis, ibi *per quem fecit et saecula*; quarto quantum ad sublimitatem dignitatis, ibi *qui cum sit splendor gloriae*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [7], 6.

Thomas makes a similar connection between the Son, the Word, and the Son's excellence or perfection in the *Summa*, observing that

For the Son's nativity, which is His personal property, is signified by different names which are attributed to the Son to express His perfection in various ways. To show that He is of the same nature as the Father, He is called the Son; to show that He is coeternal, He is called the Splendour; to show that He is altogether like, He is called the Image; to show that He is begotten immaterially, He is called the Word.<sup>98</sup>

Here in the Hebrews commentary, Thomas begins his discussion of the Word by assigning three elements to speaking: the conception of a word, by which what is to be spoken is preconceived in the mind; the expression of the conceived word; and the manifestation of the expressed thing itself, which makes it evident.<sup>99</sup> The first element, the conception of a word, he relates to the eternal generation of the Son, stating that "God, therefore, when speaking first conceived, so that there was but one conception and that from all eternity: *God speaks once* (Job 33:14). This eternal conception is the engendering of the Son of God . . . ."<sup>100</sup> The second element, the expression of what is conceived, is found in the bringing forth of creatures, the bringing forth of notions into the minds of angels and holy men, and the bringing forth of the Incarnate Word through the uncreated Word's assumption of flesh. The Incarnation also functions as the third element of God's speaking, as a manifestation of what God conceives and expresses.

---

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.34.2.

<sup>99</sup> "Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod tria requiruntur ad locutionem nostram. Primo, verbi conceptio, qua scilicet praeconciatur in mente id quod ore loquendum est; secundo ipsius verbi concepti expressio, qua insinuetur quod conceptum est; tertio ipsius rei expressae manifestatio, qua res expressa evidens fiat." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 7-8. In this analysis Thomas is heavily reliant upon Augustine. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.14.23-16.26, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 486-491; and *Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10*, 1.8-10, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 47-50.

<sup>100</sup> "Deus ergo loquendo, primo concepit, cuius conceptio una fuit, et ab aeterno Iob c. XXXIII, 14: *semel loquitur Deus*, et haec aeterna fuit Filii generatio. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.



Since by taking on flesh the Word was made man, this Word thus manifested himself to us clearly and brought to completion in us the knowledge of God.<sup>101</sup> Hence, Thomas' understanding of God in these latter days speaking to us more perfectly through his Son allows him to address both the Son's eternal generation and divine origin and nature, as well as his Incarnation in time and his human nature—a unique or peculiar origin that no creature may share.

And Thomas shows that in addition to possessing a unique origin, Christ also possesses a unique sonship. In a catena of Scripture citations he states that in comparison to those called sons in general, Christ is the designated heir and lord of all things. In comparison to those made sons of God, he is truly the Son, through whom the world was made. In comparison to those sons who hope for God's glory, He is the splendor of God's glory. In comparison to those called sons as made according to the Son's image, He is the image itself. And in comparison to those called sons because they have within themselves the word of God, he is that Son who carries all things by the word of his power.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> “Tertia vero, quae est per assumptionem carnis, ordinatur ad esse, et ad cognitionem, et ad expressam manifestationem, quia per assumptionem carnis, et Verbum factus est homo, et nos in cognitionem Dei perfecit. . . . Et se nobis expresse manifestavit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

<sup>102</sup> “Sed numquid est de illis filiis, de quibus dicitur in Ps. LXXXI, 6: *ego dixi: dii estis, et filii Excelsi omnes*? Absit, quia illi dicuntur filii cum universitate, iste est constitutus haeres, et dominus universorum. Numquid est de illis filiis, de quibus dicitur Io. I, 12: *dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*? et cetera. Non quidem, quia illi dicuntur facti filii, iste vero est Filius, *per quem fecit et saecula*. Numquid est de illis filiis, qui gloriantur *in spe gloriae filiorum Dei*? Rom. V, 2. Non quidem, quia illi sunt filii per spem gloriae Dei, quam habent, iste vero ipsius gloriae splendor. Alii dicuntur filii, quia facti ad imaginem huius Filii. Rom VIII, 29: *quos praescivit conformes fieri imaginis filii eius*; iste autem est ipsa imago, et *figura substantiae eius*. Alii dicuntur filii, ut in se Verbum Dei continentes, secundum illud Phil. II, 15: *ut sint sine querela, et simplices filii Dei, sine reprehensione in medio nationis pravae et perversae, inter quos lucetis sicut luminaria in mundo, verbum vitae continentes*. Iste autem Filius portat omnia verbo virtutis suae.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [18], 10-11.

Thomas ends this discussion with this declaration: “Therefore, Christ’s excellence is clear with respect to his unique origin, and fully in respect to other sons of God.”<sup>103</sup>

The second characteristic of the Son’s uniqueness and excellence is the greatness of his rule. The magnitude of the Son’s dominion is suggested by the statement in Heb 1:2 that God has appointed him heir of all things—a finding echoed in Thomas’ final statement in the *Tertia Pars* as he considers Christ the judge and concludes that God has established no one else as authority over the earth.<sup>104</sup> As is his wont, Thomas first considers why Christ merits being the heir, according to both his divine and human natures, and then determines of what Christ is heir.

In regard to his divine nature, Christ is the begotten heir and Lord for three reasons. First, he is the power of God and the agent of creation, through whom the Father made all things; and if the Father merits the title Lord because of creation, so does the Son.<sup>105</sup> Second, he is the wisdom of God by which all things are governed; and if the Father is titled Lord because he governs all, so should the Son.<sup>106</sup> Third, since all things are ordered to the Father as Lord as their first principle and end, and since the Son

---

<sup>103</sup> “Ergo patet Christi excellentia quantum ad proprietatem originis, et diffuse quantum ad alios filios Dei. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [18], 11. Translation mine.

<sup>104</sup> “For these reasons God has given to no other rule over the entire earth.” Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.59.6, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 55, *The Resurrection of the Lord* (3a. 53-59), trans. C. Thomas Moore (London: Blackfriars, 1976), 135.

<sup>105</sup> “Et primo quidem, quia ipse est *Dei virtus, et Dei sapientia*, I Cor. I, 24, per quem Pater omnia facit. Et ideo si Pater dicitur Dominus omnium, ratione creationis, similiter et Filius, per quem omnia producuntur in esse, Dominus est.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>106</sup> “Secundo quia Filius est Patris sapientia, qua omnia gubernat. . . . Si ergo Pater dicitur Dominus ratione gubernationis Sap. XIV, 3: *tu autem, Pater, gubernas omnia*, etc., et Filio competit Dominium.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

precedes all things, he too is Lord.<sup>107</sup> Throughout this section, Thomas is once again emphasizing the uniqueness and excellence of Christ in terms of his coequality with the Father; and by repeatedly using the term *Dominus* or Lord, he drives home the indisputable fact of the Son's dominion, domination, and lordship.<sup>108</sup>

In regard to his human nature, there are again three reasons for Christ to be the constituted heir and Lord of everything. The first reason relates to the union of man and God in the person of the Son, whom God has exalted to sit at his right hand, according to Thomas' citations of Acts 5:31 and Eph 1:20-21.<sup>109</sup> Thomas clarifies this reason in the *Summa*, in which he explains Christ's position at the Father's right hand in three ways: first, due to his equality with the Father due to his divine nature; second, due to the grace of union, wherein Christ as man is also the Son of God; and third, due to Christ's habitual grace—a grace that is “more abundant in him than in all other creatures,” so that “even the human nature of Christ is in blessedness greater than that of other creatures, over whom he exercises royal and judiciary power.”<sup>110</sup> The second reason is the power over all things that has been given to Christ, according to Matt 28:18.<sup>111</sup> And the third reason

---

<sup>107</sup> “Item Pater est Dominus, inquantum ad ipsum omnia ordinantur, sicut ad primum principium, et finem omnium; similiter et Filius, qui est Dei sapientia, praecedens omnia, Dominus est.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>108</sup> The noun *Dominus* is used frequently, and the nouns *dominium* and *dominatio* also appear.

<sup>109</sup> “Primo quidem ratione unionis, ex hoc scilicet ipso, quod assumptus est homo ille in persona Filii Dei. Act. V, 31: *hunc Deus Dominum salvatorem constituit*. Eph. I, 21: *constituit eum super omnem principatum, et potestatem*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.3.

<sup>111</sup> “Secundo ratione potestatis, quia omnia ei obediunt, et serviunt. Matth., ult.: *data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

is the subjection of all things to Christ, according to Phil 2:10.<sup>112</sup> Here Thomas in the Hebrews commentary demonstrates the magnitude of Christ's rule according to his human nature through his exaltation to the highest place, above all principality and power, enjoying all power, with all things obeying him and every knee bowing before him. Thus, "Christ as man sits at the right hand of the Father, possessing his Father's goods to a greater degree than other creatures, that is, with a greater happiness and with judiciary power."<sup>113</sup> And as the appointed heir, he has dominion over the whole of nature and over the entirety of the human race; thus, as Est 13:11 says, he is Lord of all.<sup>114</sup>

The third characteristic of the Son's uniqueness and excellence to be addressed by Thomas Aquinas in this section is the power of his operation or activity. The evidence for the unique and excellent scope of his power and activity lies in the fact that it was through the Son that the Father made the world.<sup>115</sup> Lest the use of the preposition "through" suggest that the Son must be inferior to the Father, Thomas embarks upon a thorough discussion of causality, including final, formal, and efficient causes; a very similar discussion occurs in the *Summa* regarding whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.<sup>116</sup> Thomas' point is that "through" can designate the cause of an action from the point of view of the thing that has been made. Using the example of an

---

<sup>112</sup> "Tertio ratione subiectionis. Phil. II, 10: *in nomine Iesu omne genu flectatur, et cetera.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 3.58.3.

<sup>114</sup> "Sed dicit *universorum*, quod refertur ad totius naturae universitatem, in qua accepit Dominium, secundum illud Ps. VIII, 8: *omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius*. Item refertur ad omne genus hominum. . . . Et de hoc dicitur Esth. XIII, 11: *Dominus omnium tu es.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>115</sup> "Consequenter cum dicit *per quem fecit et saecula*, ostendit virtutem operationis Christi. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [22], 12.

<sup>116</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.36.3. Thomas' discussion of how the artisan makes things "through" the hammer section is nearly identical to that found in the Hebrews commentary.

artisan and a hammer, Thomas explains that “the hammer is not the cause of the artisan, who makes things; but it is the cause of the thing being made, that something of iron proceeds from the artisan.”<sup>117</sup> Hence, it is in this way that the Son is the cause of things being made, as the Father works through the Son. In a manner reminiscent of the method found in his *Summa*, Thomas returns to the implied objection to the instrumental way in which the Father works through the Son, and the implication of the Son’s inferiority. He dismisses this objection in short order, stating that because the power and activity of the Father and Son, as well as their nature and being, are one, no such inferiority exists.<sup>118</sup>

The fourth and final characteristic of Christ’s uniqueness and excellence is his dignity, and this topic is the subject of Thomas’ second lecture, on Hebrews 1:3. He opens the lecture with this statement: “Earlier, the Apostle showed the excellence of Christ as to his unique origin, the majesty of his dominion, and the power of his activity, and in this he shows his excellence as to the loftiness of his glory and dignity.”<sup>119</sup>

Thomas finds that possessing a facility for dignity necessitates three qualities—wisdom, noble lineage, and power in execution—which Christ possesses to the utmost. Thus, treating the first three phrases of Heb 1:3 in turn, Christ is not only wise, but wisdom itself, as the brightness of the Father’s glory; he is not only noble, but nobility itself, as the figure of the Father’s substance; and he is not only powerful, but power itself, as he

---

<sup>117</sup> “Martellus enim non est cause artificis, quod agat; sed est cause artificiatio, quod ab artifice procedat, ut ferro. . . et sic Filius est causa facti, et Pater operatur per Filium.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [22], 13. Translation mine.

<sup>118</sup> “Sed numquid Filius est minor Patre? Videtur quod sic, quia illud quod est causa facti, ut fiat, videtur habere rationem instrumenti. Sed ad hoc dicendum est, quod si non esset eadem virtus numero in Filio et Patre, et eadem operatio, teneret obiectio. Nunc ergo eadem est virtus et operatio patris et filii, sicut et eadem natura et esse. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [23], 13.

<sup>119</sup> “Superius ostendit Apostolus Christi excellentiam quantum ad originis proprietatem, quantum ad dominii maiestatem, et quantum ad operationis virtutem, hic autem ostendit eius excellentiam quantum ad gloriae et dignitatis sublimitatem.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [24], 14. Translation mine.

upholds all things by the word of His power.<sup>120</sup> And these three superlative qualities make Christ suitable for great dignity.

The fourth phrase of Heb 1:3 concerns Christ making purgation for sins. This work also qualifies Christ for great dignity, because of the industry and vigor with which he accomplished it.<sup>121</sup> Thomas sees the involvement of both the divine and human natures of Christ. It was fitting for Christ in his divinity to purge our sins, because only God can repair sin and evil, whose seat is in the will, which only God can move.<sup>122</sup> And it was fitting for Christ in his humanity to purge our sins as well, by means of the suffering he underwent in the nature he had assumed.<sup>123</sup>

Thomas at this stage moves into a long discussion of the effects of sin on humanity's relationship with God, and the effects of sin experienced by humanity itself. He has four points to make in each of these categories, all of which enhance the dignity deserved by the divine and human Son who provided the necessary purgation of sins. Regarding sin's impact on humanity's relationship with God, sin first of all is a transgression of the eternal law and of God's rights, both of which derive from the eternal

---

<sup>120</sup> "Et quantum ad ista tria Apostolus ostendit in Christo facilitatem ad dignitatem praedictam. Primo quia non solum est sapiens, sed etiam ipsa Sapientia; unde dicit *cum sit splendor gloriae*. Secundo quia non solum est nobilis, sed est ipsa nobilitas, quia est *figura substantiae eius*. Tertio quia non solum est potens, sed est ipsa potentia *portans omnia verbo*, et cetera. Tria autem sunt, ut supra dictum est, quae faciunt hominem idoneum ut magnam dignitatem assequatur." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [25], 14.

<sup>121</sup> "Deinde cum dicit *purgationem peccatorum faciens* ostendit, secundum, quod facit ad idoneitatem dignitatis eius, scilicet strenuitas, et industria, quam habuit in operando." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [37], 18.

<sup>122</sup> "Convenit etiam Christo purgare, ratione divinae naturae, et ratione proprietatis filii. Ratione divinae naturae, quia culpa seu peccatum proprie est malum rationalis creaturae. Hoc autem malum, sive peccatum non potest reparari nisi per Deum. Nam peccatum in voluntate consistit, voluntatem autem solus Deus potest movere." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [38], 18.

<sup>123</sup> "Fuit enim hoc magnae industriae, ut quod ei competebat ex natura, qua Deus est, ipse meruerit per passionem in natura assumpta." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [37], 18.

Lord; and since Christ is the Word, cleansing from such sin is appropriate for him.<sup>124</sup>

Second, in sin there is a loss of the light of reason and therefore of God's wisdom;

therefore, Christ who is divine wisdom can rectify the ignorance that leads to evil.<sup>125</sup>

Third, sin deforms our likeness to God; but as the image of the Father, the Son can

correct that deformity.<sup>126</sup> And fourth, sin causes the loss of our eternal inheritance, as the

expulsion from Paradise signified; but as Son and heir, Christ makes our adoption as sons

possible.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> "Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod in peccato, primo quidem est transgressio legis aeternae et iuris divini, cum omne peccatum sit iniquitas, quae est transgressio legis. Is. C. XXIV, 5: *mutaverunt ius, dissipaverunt foedus sempiternum*. Cum ergo lex aeterna et ius divinum sit a Verbo aeterno, manifestum est quod ad Christum competit purgatio peccatorum, in quantum est Verbum. Ps. CVI, 20: *misit verbum suum, et sanavi eos*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>125</sup> "Secundo est in peccato amissio luminis rationis, et per consequens sapientiae Dei in homine, cum huiusmodi lumen sit participatio quaedam divinae sapientiae. Bar. III, 28: *et quia non habuerunt sapientiam, ideo perierunt*. Prov. XIV, 22: *errant omnes qui operantur malum*. Et secundum Philosophum, omnis malus est ignorans. Rectificatio autem ad divinam sapientiam, competit ei qui est divina sapientia. Hic autem est Christus. I Cor. I, 23 s.: *praedicamus Christum, Dei virtutem, et Dei sapientiam*. Sap. IX, 19: *nam per sapientiam sanati sunt, quicumque placuerunt tibi, domine, a principio*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>126</sup> "Tertio in peccato est deformatio similitudinis Dei in homine. Prov. XV, 7: *cor stultorum dissimile erit*. Unde dicitur Lc. XV, 13 de filio prodigo, quod abiit in regionem longinquam. Et ideo competit huiusmodi deformationi rectificari per Filium, qui est imago Patris. I Cor. XV, 49: *sicut portavimus imaginem terreni, portemus imaginem caelestis*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>127</sup> "Quarto amissio aeternae haereditatis, in cuius signum homo post peccatum exclusus est a Paradiso, Gen. III, 23. Reparatio autem ad hoc proprie convenit filio, qui est haeres. Rom. VIII, 17: *si filii, et haeredes*. Gal. c. IV, 4 s.: *misit Deus filium suum, natum ex muliere, factum sub lege, ut eos, qui sub lege erant, redimeret, et adoptionem filiorum Dei reciperemus*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

In reference to Christ's assumption of our humanity, the question may arise as to whether it was necessary for Christ to share in our sin nature as well as our human nature, in order for his humanity to be a fitting instrument for the Word, in his divinity, to save us. Thomas deals with this issue in *ST* 3.15.1, which discusses whether there was any sin in Christ. Thomas states emphatically that Christ has no sin, and that taking on sin as well as our humanity was not required for him to represent us. The opposite is the case, because, as he declares, "sin does nothing to authenticate human nature," and it forms no part of a human nature that "has God for its cause." Rather, sin is contrary to nature, having been introduced by the devil. Thomas explains further in the article that Christ received his human nature from Adam only in the material sense, so that he inherited no tendency to sin. He takes his understanding of Christ's situation from Augustine, who in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* holds that Christ received the visible material of his flesh from the Virgin's flesh; however, the principle of his conception did not come from an earthly father, but from above—from the Holy Spirit. Hence "Christ took from the Virgin a flesh that was without fault." See

Regarding sin's effects on the human race, Thomas Aquinas lists four deeds done by Christ for the purgation of sins. Christ has bestowed sanctifying grace to correct the perversity of the human will that causes us to retreat from the good.<sup>128</sup> He gave his own blood to remove the stain in the soul caused by the perversity of the will.<sup>129</sup> He offered himself as a sacrifice to God in order to satisfy the debt of punishment we owed God.<sup>130</sup> And finally, Christ redeemed us in order to free us from slavery to sin, which is also slavery to the devil.<sup>131</sup> All four of these deeds fall into the category of gifts freely given by Christ to a fallen race, as he gives justifying grace, gives his blood, gives himself as a sacrifice, and gives us our freedom from slavery to sin and the devil.<sup>132</sup> Thomas' emphasis on the purgation of sin as a gift is reminiscent of Chrysostom's comment on this phrase of Hebrews 1:3—that "the gift, being truly great, was made even greater by the fact that it was through the Son."<sup>133</sup>

---

Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.15.1 and 3.14.3, ad. 1; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* X.20.35, in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 420-421.

<sup>128</sup> "Sed quomodo fecit purgationem peccatorum? Ex hoc patet. In peccato enim primo est perversitas voluntatis, qua homo recedit a bono incommutabili, et ad hanc rectificandam, exhibuit Christus gratiam iustificantem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [40], 19.

<sup>129</sup> "Secundo est macula relictā in anima ex perversitate voluntatis, et ad hanc lavandam praebuit sanguinem suum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [40], 19.

<sup>130</sup> "Tertio est reatus poenae cui homo addicitur ex culpa, et ad satisfaciendum per hanc obtulit semetipsum Dei hostiam in ara crucis." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>131</sup> "Quarto servitus diaboli, cui homo efficitur obnoxius peccando, quia qui facit peccatum servus est peccati, et ad eripiendum nos ab hac, redemit nos." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19-20.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas' parallel structures are very clear in the Latin, so that the four statements run as follows: to rectify this, he bestowed; to cleanse this, he gave; to satisfy this, he offered; to deliver us, he redeemed.

<sup>133</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2.2. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 373.



Thomas Aquinas concludes this lecture with a discussion of the fifth and final phrase of Heb 1:3, in which the Apostle affirms the height of Christ's dignity by describing him as sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high. In this he follows the *Gloss*, which says that the Apostle, having commended Christ regarding his two natures, his power, and his kindness, now commends him regarding his dignity as he sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, above all places and dignities<sup>134</sup>; he also follows Chrysostom, for whom this "'sitting together' implies nothing else than equal dignity."<sup>135</sup> Thomas finds that "sitting" connotes both the authority of the one who sits while his servants minister, and the stability that is grounded in divine power and permanence.<sup>136</sup> This connection of position with power is one that Thomas also makes in his *Summa*, where in his discussion of whether Christ alone sits at the Father's right hand, he declares that "The right hand implies divine happiness, but to sit at the right hand of the Father means more than a simple possession of happiness. Happiness with power of dominion, as it were natural and proper, in the one possessing them, is meant. To Christ and to no other creature does this apply."<sup>137</sup>

Being Thomas, he must discuss the fact that God can be said to sit only through the use of helpful similitudes. And then, as Thomas does whenever he can, he goes on to explain Christ's sitting at the right hand according to his divine nature, wherein equality

---

<sup>134</sup> In the *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, just below *sedet* in the text of Heb 1:3 appears the phrase *super omnia loco et dignitate*. *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 424. "Sedet: postquam per naturam, et potestatem, et benignitatem Christum commendavit, commendat eum per dignitatem." Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 406D.

<sup>135</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2.2, NPNF 1 14:373.

<sup>136</sup> "In verbo autem sessionis tria solent importari. Unum est sedentis auctoritas. Iob c. XXIX, 25: *cumque sederem quasi rex circumstante exercitu*, et cetera. . . . Secundum est sedentis stabilitas. Lc. ult: *sedete in civitate*, et cetera." The third thing is humility, which Thomas rules out in this context. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [41], 20.

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.4, ad. 2.

with the Father is indicated, and according to his human nature, wherein Christ's status as being among the more superior goods of the Father is indicated.<sup>138</sup> This latter statement Thomas explains more clearly in the *Summa*, maintaining that "Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, because by his divine nature he is equal to the Father and by his human nature he surpasses all other creatures in his possession of divine goods."<sup>139</sup>

Thomas sees Christ's equality with the Father and superiority to all other creatures continuing to unfold in the remaining words of the phrase "he sits at the right hand of the majesty on high." Having explained the significance of Christ sitting, and then of Christ sitting at the right hand, Thomas now teaches that Christ sitting at the right hand of the majesty demonstrates his unique identity with and yet distinction from the Father: "But Christ, even if he sits in this way at the right hand of majesty, has majesty in the same way and in himself, because he has the same majesty as the Father."<sup>140</sup> And Christ sitting "on high" indicates that he is in a position elevated above every creature—a unique and powerful position that the Apostle applies to Christ alone.<sup>141</sup>

These four characteristics of Christ—the uniqueness of the Son's origin, the greatness of his dominion and rule, the power of his activity, and the loftiness of his dignity—are touched on once more in Thomas' discussion of Christ's excellence in himself. The context is a discussion of Christ's power, based on the phrase in Hebrews

---

<sup>138</sup> "Sed addit Apostolus, quod *sedet ad dexteram*. Quod, si referatur ad divinam naturam, est sensus: ad dexteram, id est ad aequalitatem Patris. Si vero ad humanam, est sensus: ad dexteram, id est in potioribus bonis Patris." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [41], 20.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.4.

<sup>140</sup> "Christus autem etsi sic sedeat ad dexteram maiestatis, habet tamen et ipse maiestatem, quia habet eandem cum Patre." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [43], 21.

<sup>141</sup> "Dicit etiam non solum maiestatis, sed etiam *in excelsis*, id est, super omnem creaturam. Eccli. XXIV, 7: *ego in altissimis habito*. Sic ergo sedet in excelsis, quia elevatus est super omnem creaturam. Ps. VIII, v. 2: *quoniam elevata est magnificentia tua super caelos*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [44], 21.

2:7, “(You) have set him over the works of your hands.” Thomas says that Christ’s power over the works of God can be understood in three ways: in regard to Christ being set over all places, as seen in the Ascension; in regard to him being set over all things, as seen by his dignity; and in regard to him being set over every creature, as seen by his power.<sup>142</sup> These “three ways” seem to correspond to Christ’s dominion over all places, his position of the highest dignity, and his power over all created beings, respectively. Thomas then appends a statement that correlates to the uniqueness of the Son’s origin, noting that as God, Christ was born the heir, not appointed, but that as man, he was indeed appointed, as Heb 1:2 indicates.<sup>143</sup>

What is important to note is that Thomas Aquinas has, with great care, proved the excellence of Christ in his relationship to the Father, and also in and of himself. With the four criteria of Christ’s excellence in regard to his origin, dominion, power, and dignity established, he can now move forward in following the Apostle’s strategy of comparing Christ to the angels, to Moses, and to the Old Testament priesthood—but always in a way that shows the inadequacy of the latter and the supremacy of the former.

---

<sup>142</sup> “Quantum ad primum dicit *constituisti*, quod potest tripliciter intelligi. Uno modo quod constitutus est super omnia loca, et hoc in ascensione. Eph. IV, 10: *ascendit super omnes caelos, ut adimpleret omnia*. Secundo dignitate. Eph. I, 20 s.: *constituens eum ad dexteram suam super omnem principatum et potestatem*, et cetera. Tertio potestate, quia super omnem creaturam. Matth. ult.: *data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.2 [115], 55. Baer’s translation uses the Eph 1:20 reference to expand “Secundo dignitate” to mean “he is set over all things by his dignity.” See Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer 2.2 [115], 58.

<sup>143</sup> “Sed Christus in quantum Deus non est constitutus, sed natus; sed constitutus est in quantum homo. Supra I, 2: *quem constituit haeredem universorum*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.2 [115], 55.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Excellence of Christ's Person: Comparing Christ to Angels, Prophets, and Priests

For Thomas Aquinas, the unique origin, dominion, power, and dignity of Christ are important points of reference for understanding the excellence of Christ's person in Hebrews. They serve as benchmarks for Thomas' examination of Christ's superiority in comparison to angels, Moses, and the Old Testament priesthood. From Thomas' outline of Hebrews 1-10 in his first lecture on the letter, the material comparing Christ and angels comprises Heb 1-2; that comparing him to Moses covers Heb 3-4; and the section addressing Christ in comparison to the priesthood of Aaron consists of Heb 7-10. For the writer of Hebrews, it is essential that his readers comprehend the overwhelming superiority of Christ to all of these Old Testament personages, making the decision to choose Christ and the New Testament, and the salvation that they bring, that much more reasonable.

#### *Comparing Christ to the Angels*

Thomas' warrant for establishing the excellence of Christ in comparison to angels is found in the argument initiated in Heb 1:4—"Being made so much better than the angels as he has inherited a more excellent name than they." In opening his lecture on Heb 1:4-7, Thomas states his intention to compare Christ to angels according to the four points of reference he had previously presented:

Just as was said above, the Apostle in this entire chapter intends to prefer Christ to angels regarding his excellence; whence he lays out four things pertinent to the excellence of Christ, namely regarding his origin, because he is the Son; regarding

his dominion, because he is the heir; regarding his operation, because he made the world; and because of his honor, because he sits at the right hand of majesty. Now the Apostle in this part shows that Christ exceeds the angels in these four qualities: first, regarding his sonship [Heb 1:5]; second, regarding his dominion, where it says *and again, when he brings* [Heb 1:6]; third, regarding his operation in creation, where it says *and you, Lord, founded the earth in the beginning* [Heb 1:10]; and fourth, regarding the Father's confession, where it says *for to which of the angels* [Heb 1:13]."<sup>1</sup>

Thomas deems these four characteristics, and Christ's excellence regarding each one, so important that he uses the next four lectures on Heb 1 to establish Christ's superiority to the angels in these four areas. Each lecture begins with a summary statement as to which areas of Christ's excellence have been addressed and which one is the subject of the current lecture.

#### *Christ's Origin Compared to the Angels*

Thomas' opening discussion of Christ's supremacy to the angels in regard to his origin or filiation revolves around the statement that Christ was made better than the angels, from Heb 1:4. Recourse to Christ's divine nature alone or to his human nature alone provides no explanation for that statement; instead, for Thomas, it is the two natures together in the union that establishes Christ's superiority. For in his divine nature, he was not made, but begotten, making a comparison to the angels is invalid; and in his human nature, he is both lower than the angels, due to the weakness of human flesh, and

---

<sup>1</sup> "Sicut supra dictum est, Apostolus in toto capitulo intendit praeferre Christum angelis quantum ad excellentiam, unde posuit quatuor pertinentia ad excellentiam Christi, scilicet quantum ad originem quia *Filius*, quantum ad dominationem quia *haeres*, quantum ad operationem quia *ipse fecit saecula*, quantum ad honorem quia *sedet ad dexteram maiestatis*. Modo Apostolus in parte ista ostendit, quod Christus quantum ad ista quatuor excedit angelos; et primo quantum ad filiationem; secundo quantum ad dominationem; ibi *et cum iterum introducit*; tertio quantum ad operationem creationis, ibi *et tu in principio, domine, terram fundasti*; quarto quantum ad Patris confessionem, ibi *ad quem autem Angelorum*." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 1.3 [45], 22. Translation mine. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher.

higher than the angels, due to his plenitude of grace, making a comparison to the angels equivocal. Therefore, Thomas justifies the Apostle's claim that Christ was made better than the angels on the grounds of "the union of human nature with the divine."<sup>2</sup> Only in that sense can Christ said to be "made"—and with no loss in status, as "by effecting that union he became better than the angels, and should be called and really be the Son of God."<sup>3</sup> Thomas' approach of relying on the union of Christ's two natures is a significant advance over the argument found in the *Gloss*, which teaches that Christ being made better than the angels refers to his human nature and the plenitude of grace that Jesus possessed according to his human nature.<sup>4</sup>

Christ's origin proves his superiority to the angels in other ways, as well. Christ has inherited both the name and status of "Son of God," as Heb 1:4 indicates; he is the Son essentially, for "the procession of the Word in God is called generation, and the Word Himself proceeding is called the Son."<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the angels are sons only by participation, and, having been given the title of angel or messenger, the angels' status is that of servants.<sup>6</sup> In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas further demonstrates Christ's

---

<sup>2</sup> "Sed hic non est intellectus. Apostolus enim non intelligit, quod melior fuerit quantum ad gratiam, sed propter unionem humanae naturae ad divinam. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [46], 23.

<sup>3</sup> ". . . et sic dicitur factus, inquantum per illius unionis factionem pervenit ad hoc quod esset melior angelis, et diceretur et esset Filius Dei." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [46], 23.

<sup>4</sup> "De eo ergo sermo versatur secundum humanam naturam, secundum quam et minor fuit angelis passione, et major ac melior etiam gratiae plenitudine, de qua etiam ipsi angeli ad mensuram accipiunt. Ideo ait et ipse Christus: *Tanto melior*, id est dignior, *angelis est effectus*, id est evidenter secundum hominem factus. . . ." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*, ed. K. Froehlich and M.T. Gibson, volume 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), vol. 4, 424; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 407D-408A.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.27.2.

<sup>6</sup> "Et quantum ad hoc nomen, ostendit differentiam quantum ad tria, scilicet quantum ad nominis significationem, quia proprium nomen angelorum est quod dicuntur angeli, quod est nomen ministri, angelus enim idem est quod nuntius. Nomen autem proprium Christi est, quod dicitur Filius Dei. . . . Sed

superiority to the angels in regard to the question of origin: they are creatures, he is the creator, and the Son is responsible for the angels' origin, bringing into being every angel and every order of angels.<sup>7</sup> And in contrast to the creaturely status of multiple angels, Christ's sonship is eternally generated and possessed by him alone; as shown in Heb 1:5 by the phrase "you are my Son," it is Christ's "unique property to be the natural Son of God"<sup>8</sup>; and as indicated by the phrase "today I have begotten you," his existence as the Son is the result of his eternal generation—signified by "today's" unchangeableness and by the perfect tense of the Son's begetting.<sup>9</sup>

The incarnation also indicates the distinctiveness of the Son, for the Apostle declares that regarding no angel did God ever say, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" in Heb 1:5b. Thomas analyzes this declaration in the light of Christ's incarnation, given that Christ's eternal sonship constitutes his person, whereas his temporal sonship is the outcome of his temporal birth.<sup>10</sup> Thomas' application of his training in grammar and logic is fascinating here, as he observes that while the statement "you are my son" in Heb 1:5a alludes to Christ's eternal generation due its use of the

---

forte dices, quod etiam angeli dicuntur filii Dei. . . . Dicendum est, quod si dicuntur filii Dei, hoc non est essentialiter et per naturam, sed per quamdam participationem. Ipse autem est essentialiter Filius Dei, et ideo habet nomen differentius prae illis. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [47], 23.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Four: Salvation*, 4.7.17, trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 59.

<sup>8</sup> ". . . generatio ista est singularis, quia dicit *Filius meus es tu*, quasi dicat: etsi multi alii filii dicuntur, tamen esse Filium naturalem est sibi proprium. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [49], 24.

<sup>9</sup> ". . . ista generatio non est temporalis, sed aeternal, quia *hodie genui te*. Differt autem tempus ab aeternitate, quia tempus variatur sicut motus, cuius mensura est in variatione et successione. Et ideo nominatur per successionem praeteriti et futuri. Aeternitas autem est mensura rei immobilis, et ideo non est ibi variatio per successionem, sed semper est praesens; et ideo notatur per adverbium praesentis temporis, scilicet *hodie*, id est, in aeternitate." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [47], 23.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.3.5, ad. 1.

present tense, the future tense in Heb 1:5b (“I will be/he shall be”) denotes the Son’s incarnation at a point in time future to that statement’s original setting in II Sam 7:14.<sup>11</sup> Thomas also analyzes the “I will be/he shall be” statements in Heb 1:5b in the context of a cause, the resulting movement, and the final effect. Thomas explains that, since the initiative belongs to the divine, it is God who speaks first of his Fatherhood (“I will be to him a Father”) in terms of assuming the human into a union with the person of the Son. And the second statement, “he shall be to me a Son,” describes the resulting effect, because he was assumed into a personal union with the Son.<sup>12</sup>

### *Christ’s Dominion Compared to the Angels*

Christ’s superiority to the angels in regard to dominion is Thomas’ next subject. Over the course of two lectures, Thomas sees Christ’s dominion over the angels established in Heb 1:5-6, with the angels’ part in this relationship specified in Heb 1:7, and Christ’s part specified in Heb 1:8-9. In Heb 1:6, the Apostle quotes Ps 97:7 and says that when he, the Father, brings the first begotten into the world, all the angels of God are to adore him—a statement that for Thomas establishes the Son’s dominion over the angels and in turn the angels’ duty to worship the Son.<sup>13</sup> The angels’ adoring

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas here notes the error of the *Gloss* in crediting the book of Isaiah as the source of the declaration, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” See *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 424 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 408C.

<sup>12</sup> “Et quia omnis motio fit per operationem alicuius terminatam ad aliquem effectum, ideo primo ponit operationem facientis, quia non virtute humanitatis facta est assumptio, sed divinitatis, cum dicit *ego ero illi in Patrim*, id est, assumam eum ad unionem personae Filii. Et subiungit effectum consecutum, quia scilicet est susceptus in unitatem personalem Filii, *erit mihi in Filium*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [52], 25.

<sup>13</sup> “Adoratio enim non fit nisi Domino; ergo si angeli eum adorant, Dominus illorum est.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [55], 26. Interestingly, where the Septuagint has for Ps 97:7 “Worship him, all you his angels,” the Masoretic text has “Worship him, all you gods”—and it is the Septuagint version that Thomas quotes. This substitution of “angels” for “gods” (*angeloi* for *elohim*) is reminiscent of the move made by Thomas in reading Ps 85:8, his *accessus* verse (“There is none among the gods like unto



acknowledgement of Christ's dominion is a consequence of their respective identities: angels are ministers, whereas Christ is the one principally begotten by the Father and therefore above them. Hence it is fitting and right that they adore him.<sup>14</sup> Thomas similarly explains the angels' subjection to Christ in terms of his identity in the *Tertia Pars*, noting that Christ has dominion over them due to his divine nature, as one would expect; but Christ also has dominion over them due to his human nature, due to this nature's union with God and experience of the passion. By being united to God, Christ in his human nature is filled to overflowing with more truth than any angel can possess; and by undergoing the passion, Christ in his human nature merits exaltation, so that, as Phil 2:10 says, all creatures will bend the knee at the name of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

Thomas goes on to describe the work of the angels in two ways: they are messengers, through whom God illuminates the human intellect, as angels faithfully declare the things of God; and they are mediators, used by God to advance divine works.<sup>16</sup> In either case, angels, in all that they do, always refer to the glory of God.<sup>17</sup> Thomas closes the lecture with citations of Scripture in which good angels adore and

---

you, O Lord") in terms not of false gods, but of angels, prophets, and priests, as was discussed in chapter 3. This citation of Ps 97:7 in Hebrews 1:6 has been the subject of many studies. See O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 70-71.

<sup>14</sup> ". . . iam dictum est, quod Christus est Filius prae angelis; ergo est principaliter a Patre genitus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [55], 26. "Deinde cum dicit *et ad angelos*, etc., ponitur ratio ex parte angelorum quare eum adorant, quasi dicat: isutim est quod adorent, quia sunt ministri. Unde dicit *qui facit angelos suos spiritus, et ministros suos flammam ignis*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [58], 27.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.59.6. This article of the *Tertia Pars* also argues for Christ's dominion over the angels.

<sup>16</sup> "Inquantum ergo illuminat per ipsos, dicuntur nuntii. Nuntii enim est nuntiare ea quae sunt in corde domini sui. In quantum vero sunt mediators operum divinorum, dicuntur ministri." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [58], 27.

<sup>17</sup> ". . . ita angeli et boni ministri, omnia quae agunt, semper referunt in gloriam Dei. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [58], 27-28.

bless their God—just as they adore God’s Son. Thus, in this first lecture on Christ’s dominion, Thomas Aquinas shows that angels carry God’s messages, advance God’s work, and bring God and his Son glory. Thomas’ description of the angels’ subordinate work and status serves to heighten the contrast between the angels and the Son, as the next lecture explicates Christ’s royal authority, and the equity and goodness of his rule, according to the Father’s proclamation in Heb 1:8-9.<sup>18</sup>

This lecture considers three aspects of Christ’s dominion, in regard to his throne, scepter, and anointing. Thomas finds in the allusion to the Son’s eternal throne a reference to royal majesty, “for a throne is the king’s seat, a chair is the teacher’s seat, and a tribunal is the judge’s seat”—all three of which belong to Christ.<sup>19</sup> The throne befits Christ according to his divine nature, as God and king of the whole earth, and according to his human nature, due to the merit of his passion, victory, and resurrection. In a later lecture, Thomas joins Chrysostom in marveling at God’s kindness toward the human race as seen in the decision to take hold, not of angels, but of the seed of Abraham; quoting one of Chrysostom’s sermons, Thomas states that “indeed it is great and wonderful and fully amazing, that our flesh sits on high, and is adored by angels and archangels. Turning this over in my mind very often, I am powerfully moved, imagining great things about the human race.”<sup>20</sup> Not to angels is this privilege given, but to humanity—and in a way that augments the greatness and dominion of Christ.

---

<sup>18</sup> “Circa primum tria facit; primo commendat Christi regiam auctoritatem; secundo eius regiminis aequitatem, ibi *virga aequitatis*; tertio regiminis bonitatem, ibi *dilexisti iustitiam*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.4 [59], 29.

<sup>19</sup> “Est enim *thronus* Regis sedes, sed cathedra magistri, tribunal autem sedes iudicis. Quae omnia conveniunt Christo. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.4 [60], 29.

<sup>20</sup> “Ista autem apprehensio naturae humanae in unitatem personae Filii Dei, naturam nostram supra modum exaltat; unde dicit Chrysostomus: *magnum revera et mirabile et stupore plenum est, carnem*

Christ's "scepter of justice" describes the character of his kingdom, as one ordained to its subjects' benefits, according to Thomas. And the fact that *virga* may mean rod as well as scepter leads him to compare a king to a shepherd who uses his rod or scepter to correct, sustain, and defend his flock. The Apostle has commended the goodness of Christ's kingdom; now Thomas sees him commending the goodness of its ruler, as one who loves justice and hates iniquity—unlike some rulers who maintain justice for lesser motives, such as dread, glory or fear; or who love justice but fail to correct iniquity.<sup>21</sup>

The last subject of Christ's dominion to be addressed is his anointing by God to rule in Heb 1:9b, which states "therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows." Thomas questions the appearance of the word "therefore" and embarks upon a lengthy discussion of the Apostle's intention.<sup>22</sup> In so doing, Thomas diverges from the *Gloss*, which merely states that the Son is anointed because he loves justice and hates iniquity, as Heb 1:9a has described.<sup>23</sup> Thomas' concern here is that Christ might be seen to have merited this spiritual anointing, which would be equivalent to meriting grace, which is against Scripture and the teaching of the Church. And yet Origen and Photinus proposed such a reading of this verse. Origen maintained that all

---

*nostram sursum sedere, et adorari ab angelis et Archangelis. Hoc ego saepius in mente versans excessum patior, magna de genere humano imaginans.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.4 [148], 69. The quotation of Chrysostom is from *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 5.1, NPNF 1 14:388.

<sup>21</sup> "Quidam enim servant aequitatem, non tamen propter amorem iustitiae, sed magis propter timorem, vel gloriam, vel metum, et tale regimen non durat. Sed iste servat aequitatem propter amorem iustitiae. . . . Sed aliqui quidem diligunt iustitiam, sed sunt remissi in correctione iniquitatis; sed Christus odit, id est, reprobatur iniquitatem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.4 [62], 30-31.

<sup>22</sup> ". . . ubi dubitation est de hoc, quod dicit *propterea*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.4 [63], 31.

<sup>23</sup> "Et *propterea*, scilicet ut haec tibi essent, id est ut diligeres justitiam et odires iniquitatem, *unxit te*, vel *propterea*, scilicet quia dilexisti justitiam et odisti iniquitatem." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 424 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 411A.

spiritual creatures, including the soul of Christ, were created in the beginning and varied in their free choice to turn to God or not. Thomas cites Origen's opinion in the *Peri Archon* that Christ merited the highest status and this anointing because his soul adhered so vehemently to God in his love of justice and hatred of iniquity.<sup>24</sup> Photinus held that Christ merited the anointing, as well as divinity, as the result of his passion.<sup>25</sup> Such errors Thomas cannot leave uncorrected.

Accordingly, Thomas proposes two possible solutions to explain the connection between Christ loving justice and hating iniquity and his anointing—a connection signified by the word “therefore.” His first solution is to state that in terms of Christ's divine nature, the question of merit does not even apply to him; but in terms of his human nature, Christ has merited by his passion to be manifested everywhere as God, and he has been given the name and anointing befitting that identity.<sup>26</sup> This solution qualifies as a “meritorious” or efficient cause for Christ's anointing.

But Thomas' better solution has “therefore” refer to a final cause, not a meritorious cause. Here he argues that because Christ has the other attributes of

---

<sup>24</sup> Origen presents these opinions in the *Peri Archon*, I, chapter 6, 8, and 9 (PG 11.166, 178, 229). Thomas argues against him in the *ST* 1.47.2 and 1.39.4, and deals directly with the question of human souls being created at the beginning of the world in *ST* 1.118.3, concluding that “souls were not created before bodies, but are created at the same time as they are infused into them.” Thomas deals with this issue in *SCG* 2.83 and *SCG* 4.33, as well.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas argues against Photinus in the *ST* 3.2.11, stating that Christ was not a mere man who merited becoming the Son of God, but “that from the beginning of His conception this man was truly the Son of God, inasmuch as having no other hypostasis but that of the Son of God, according to Luke, “The holy one which from you is to be born will be called the Son of God.” And therefore every operation of this man was subsequent to the union. Thus no operation of his could have merited the union.” Similar arguments are found in *SCG* 4.4, in which Thomas succinctly states that Photinus claims Christ was man and then merited being God, whereas the Apostle clearly shows in Phil 2:6 that Christ was God and then became man. Thomas follows Augustine's practice of labeling anyone ‘Photinian’ who holds these heretical beliefs, and his treatment of heretics in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.4 mirrors that in Augustine's *De haeresibus* 8, 10, 44, 45 (*Patrologia Latina* 42).

<sup>26</sup> Chrysostom also adopts this solution, stating simply, “Then again with respect to the flesh “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee.” Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Homily 3, NPNF 1 14:376.

kingship—an eternal throne, a scepter of justice, the right way of ruling—it is fitting that his kingship be manifested and distinguished by an anointing that sets him above all others. Just such an anointing marked and distinguished the kings, priests, and prophets of the Old Testament; and this anointing also befits Christians, who derive their anointing from Christ’s, and who, like him, have a kingly, priestly, and prophetic function in the world. Hence Thomas, in the course of discussing a preposition, is able to refute errors, depict the kingship and dominion of Christ; and, by touching on Christ’s kingly, priestly, and prophetic roles, Thomas gives to Christ’s followers a sense of their purpose and place in the world. Thus this lecture’s exegesis of Heb 1:8-9, and its attendant analysis of Christ’s throne, scepter, rule, and anointing, provides a comprehensive description of the Son’s great and uncontested dominion—a dominion in which angels are denizens, not rivals.

### *Christ’s Power Compared to the Angels*

The Apostle and Thomas have demonstrated Christ’s supremacy to the angels in terms of his origin and dominion; Thomas now moves to establish his excellence in the power of his activity, since it was through him that the Father made the world.<sup>27</sup> Thomas begins his lecture on Heb 1:10-12 by showing that Heb 1:10, regarding the Lord’s founding of the earth and the heavens’ existence as the work of his hands, applies both to the Father and the Son.<sup>28</sup> He then goes on to contrast earth and the heavens, providing

---

<sup>27</sup> “Supra praemiserat Apostolus quatuor, in quibus Christus excellit angelos, et probavit duo illorum, scilicet et quod excedit eos, quia est filius, et quia est haeres, nunc probat tertium, scilicet quod excedit eos in virtute operationis, quia per eum Pater fecit et saecula.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.5 [67], 34.

<sup>28</sup> “Sciendum est autem circa primum [creationem terrae], quod hoc potest dupliciter legi: uno modo, ut sit sermo prophetae directus ad patrem, ut sit sensus *tu, Domine*, scilicet Deus Pater, *fundasti terram in principio*, id est in Filio tuo, qui est principium. . . . Alio modo, quod sit sermo directus ad

three different interpretations, in each of which the earth is lower in some way and the heavens are higher. But the elevated status of the heavenly realm and its creatures is not an end in itself; rather, heaven and its creatures more fully reveal the creator's divine power, since, from Wis 13:5, it is "by the greatness of the beauty and of the creature, the creator of them may be seen."<sup>29</sup>

Hence heavenly creatures such as angels serve to point to the excellence of their creator. And the statement in Heb 1:11 that the heavens and earth will perish but that the Lord will continue discloses two more qualities of the creator in which he excels his creation, namely, eternity and immutability.<sup>30</sup> The state of the heavens is mutable, says Thomas, whereas with their creator there is no change or shadow of vicissitude, only permanence. Here he cites Heb 13:8, in which Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever, in order to make clear the identity—and the excellence—of this creator.<sup>31</sup>

---

Filium, sic: *et tu, Domine*, scilicet fili, *fundasti terram in principio*, scilicet temporis. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.5 [68], 34.

In applying Heb 1:10 to the Father and the Son, Thomas differs from the Gloss, which speaks only of the Son. "Et: *tu in principio*. Post humanitatis excellentiam iterum redit ad aeternitatem Filii ostendendam, utens auctoritate Prophetarum, qui de Filio et ad Filium ait ita: Et *tu, o Domine*, fili Dei, *in principio* rerum, id est antequam res essent. . . ." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 425 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 411D. However, such a move on Thomas' part is not without precedent in this commentary, given his concern to show that the Son's work in creation, as an example of instrumental causality, does not make him less than the Father.

<sup>29</sup> "Tertio ut ostendat, quod in caelis magis refulgent virtus divina creatoris, secundum Glossam; nihil enim est in creaturis, in cuius conditione appareat tantum virtutis Dei, et hoc propter magnitudinem ipsorum et ordinem. Sap. XIII, 5: *a magnitudine enim speciei et creaturae, cognoscibiliter poterit horum creator videri*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.5 [70], 36. I have followed Baer's translation here as being clearer than Larcher's. See Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Baer 1.5 [70], 38.

<sup>30</sup> "Consequentur cum dicit *ipsi peribunt*, ostendit differentiam inter creatorem et creaturam, et hoc quantum ad duo, quae sunt propria creatori: primum est aeternitas; secundum est immutabilitas, de qua ibi *et omnes ut vestimentum veterascent*, et cetera. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.5 [71], 37.

<sup>31</sup> "Hic ostendit permanentiam creatoris, quasi dicat: in te *nulla est transmutatio nec vicissitudinis obumbratio*, ut Iac. I, 17 dicitur, et Thren. V, 19: *tu autem, Domine, in aeternum permanebis, solium tuum in generatione et generatione*, quod potest etiam intelligi de Christo homine. Infra ult.: *Iesus Christus heri et hodie ipse et in saecula*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.5 [73], 37.

### *Christ's Dignity Compared to the Angels*

In this last lecture comparing Christ to angels, Thomas sees the Apostle depicting Christ's unique dignity as a result of sitting at the right hand of God—a dignity that the angels do not share,<sup>32</sup> and which God did not offer them, as Thomas points out.<sup>33</sup>

Drawing from a comment in the *Gloss*, Thomas amplifies the exclusiveness of this invitation to Christ in the *Tertia Pars*, stating “it is written, God has never said to any angel, Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for you. At my right hand is to share my greatest possessions or to be equal to me in divinity. Has he offered this to any angel? As if to reply, To no one.”<sup>34</sup> Thomas then reiterates the argument used regarding Heb 1:3 and Christ sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high: Christ's seat is based on his divine nature, in which he is equal to the Father, and based on his human nature, in which he excels all other creatures in possessing the divine goods.<sup>35</sup> As Thomas observes in the *Tertia Pars*, “Both of these characteristics are proper to Christ alone”; and to him alone, and no other creature, human or angelic, does it belong to sit at the Father's right hand.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> “Supra probavit Apostolus tria de Christo, in quibus excedit angelos, hic probat quantum, quod praemiserat de ipso, scilicet quod sedet ad dexteram maiestatis, quod pertinet ad dignitatem eius.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [79], 40.

<sup>33</sup> “Dicit ergo *ad quem autem angelorum dixit aliquando* Deus, quasi dicat: non invenitur, quod hoc Deus dixerit angelo, sed dixit Christ.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [80], 40.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.4. See also *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 425 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 413B.

<sup>35</sup> “Hoc autem, quod dicit *sede a dextris meis*, potest referri ad divinam naturam, in qua Christus aequalis est Patri, quia habet et iudicariam et regiam potestatem aequalem Patri. . . . Potest etiam referri quantum ad humanam naturam, secundum quam sedet in bonis potioribus Patrem.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [80], 40.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.4.

Additionally, Christ alone is the one whose enemies will be made his footstool, a divine promise that leads Thomas to consider the nature of Christ's power. Echoing the Gloss, Thomas briefly relates the footstool to Christ's humanity—Christ's head being God and Christ's feet being his humanity—and understands the footstool as representing the subjection of Christ's enemies to both his divinity and humanity.<sup>37</sup> Returning to the topic of Christ's power, Thomas finds that while Christ has authority over all things, the exercise of his power is not yet fully implemented, since all things will not be subject to him until the end of the world.<sup>38</sup> The metaphor of the footstool signifies full and complete subjection for Thomas, leading him to refute Origen's error in equating the subjection of all creatures to Christ with the salvation of all creatures in Christ. Thomas corrects Origen's mistake by astutely observing that subjection occurs in two modes: through the will of the subjects, who voluntarily submit to their lord, and through the will of the lord, who imposes his will and punishes those who refuse it. Thus Thomas differentiates the good and the wicked, the former associated with Christ's throne in heaven and the latter with his footstool, in a position of defeat and restraint.<sup>39</sup>

Such is Christ's dignity, a dignity that is appropriate only to him and not to angels. Rather, their dignity is that of being "ministering spirits" to those who possess the

---

<sup>37</sup> ". . . quia sicut Deus est caput Christi I Cor. XI, 3: *caput Christi Deus* ita pedes Christi, humanitas eius. Ps. CXXXI, v. 7: *adorabimus in loco ubi steterunt pedes eius*. Ponam ergo *scabellum*, id est, non solum subiiciam inimicos tuos tuae divinitati, sed etiam humanitati tuae." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [81], 41. *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 425 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 413C.

<sup>38</sup> "Et sciendum est, quod aliquid potest esse in potestate alicuius dupliciter. Uno modo quantum ad auctoritatem, et sic omnia ab aeterno . . . subiecta sunt Filio Dei in quantum Deus, sed a principio conceptionis in quantum homo." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [81], 40-41.

<sup>39</sup> "Unde sciendum est, quod duplex est modus subiectionis. Unus per voluntatem subditorum sicut boni ministri subiiciuntur domino suo, puta regi, et sic soli boni subiiciuntur Christo. Alius per voluntatem domini, et sic est quaedam violentia ex parte subditorum. Et sic mali subiiciuntur Christo, non quod velint dominium eius, sed quia Christus faciet de ipsis voluntatem suam, puniendo eos, qui noluerunt hic facere voluntatem suam." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [82], 41.



salvation offered by Christ, as described in Heb 1:14. The next part of the lecture is a dialogue with Gregory, who held that some angels minister and some assist, forcing Thomas to explain how assisting is equivalent to ministering. Thomas also refers to the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and John Scotus Eriugena in laying out his understanding of the orders of angels—the lower orders being sent to assist in the work of salvation, and the higher orders sending their power to the lower orders to be given to others. The fruit of the angels’ work, Thomas says, is evident in those who receive the inheritance of salvation. And thus the dignity of Christ is amplified, as the purpose of the angels’ work is to see that the number of the elect be completed.<sup>40</sup>

### *Comparing Christ to Moses*

Thomas’ purpose throughout his study of the first ten chapters of Hebrews has been to compare Christ, “the author of the New Testament,” to three personages connected to the Old Testament and the law: the angels, through whom the law was given; Moses, the promulgator and legislator of the Old Testament; and Aaron and the Old Testament priesthood, whose responsibility it was to administer the law.<sup>41</sup> Thomas has produced a thorough study of Christ’s superiority to the angels in the last four of his six lectures on Heb 1, in which he establishes Christ’s superiority to the angels vis-à-vis the categories of origin, dominion, power of activity, and dignity.

---

<sup>40</sup> “Vel rursus cum dicit *propter eos qui haereditatem*, etc., ponitur executionis fructus, qui est, ut homines haereditatem capiant salutis. Propter hoc enim est totus ordo actionis circa nos, ut compleatur numerus electorum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.6 [88], 44.

<sup>41</sup> “Sicut supra dictum fuit, lex vetus ex tribus habuit auctoritatem, scilicet ex angelo, ex Moyse, et ex Aaron pontifice. Apostolus autem supra praetulit Christum auctorem Novi Testamentum angelis, per quos lex data fuit, hic intendit ipsum praeferre Moysi, qui fuit promulgator, et quasi legislator Veteris Testamenti.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [155], 73.

Here in his first lecture on Heb 3, covering the first six verses, Thomas similarly compares Christ to Moses. But he does so in a much more succinct fashion, as he addresses the four standards of comparison in this one lecture. Three times does Thomas state that the Apostle prefers Christ to Moses: first in regard to their dignity; then in regard to their power; and finally in regard to their state or rank—a term that, in the context of the Hebrews passage, encompasses both their respective origins and dominions.<sup>42</sup>

### *Christ's Dignity Compared to Moses*

In Heb 3:1, the Apostle calls his readers to consider Christ, the apostle and high priest of our confession. In embarking on a comparison of Christ to both Moses and Aaron, Thomas frames his argument by citing as a prefatory comment Heb 12:2, which has a very similar structure and message in its exhortation to “look on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.” As Thomas Aquinas uses these two verses to compare Moses the ‘apostle’ or sent one and Aaron the high priest to Christ, he succeeds not only in depicting the brothers’ worth but also their inadequacy, convinced as he is that the Apostle’s intention is to ascribe to Christ the dignity of both.<sup>43</sup>

Moses and Aaron are each like Christ in that the former was sent, from Ps 105:26, and the latter was high priest, from Exod 28:1. But both Christ’s sending and his work as high priest are more excellent. Moses asked the Lord to send someone else in Ex 4:13—

---

<sup>42</sup> “Apostolus enim in sequentibus praefert Christum Moysi et Aaron. . . .” “Deinde cum dicit *amplioris enim gloriae*, praefert Christum Moysi. . . .” “Deinde cum dicit *et Moyses quidem*, praefert Christum Moysi. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher [157], 74; [160], 76; [165], 77.

<sup>43</sup> “Apostolus enim in sequentibus praefert Christum Moysi et Aaron, et ideo adscribit ei utriusque dignitatem. . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher [157], 74.

an indication, says Thomas, that someone better was to be sent.<sup>44</sup> And Aaron did not live forever, as does Christ, who is “a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech” (Ps 110:4).<sup>45</sup> Hence, Moses began inadequately, and Aaron finished inadequately, whereas Christ both began and finished his mission excellently, as the author and finisher of faith. This strategy of assessing Christ in terms of the beginning and ending of his work may have been suggested by the *Gloss*, which links him as an apostle with being sent to us by God, and as high priest with his return to God.<sup>46</sup> But Thomas’ application of Heb 12:2 as a justifiable parallel to Heb 3:1 surpasses the meager comments of the *Gloss* and succeeds in establishing the superior dignity of Christ in comparison to both Moses and Aaron. And he explains the “wherefore” in the injunction “wherefore, consider. . .” as the Apostle’s way of saying that his readers should disregard the attempts made by Moses and Aaron to be apostle and high priest, and consider only the apostle and high priest whom we confess.<sup>47</sup> Moses and Aaron had a certain dignity for a time, but their dignity pales in comparison to the dignity of Christ.

Heb 3:2 states that just as Christ was faithful “to him that made him,” so was “Moses in all his house”—a reference, Thomas observes, to the Lord’s vindication of Moses in Num 12:7. Aaron and Miriam’s opposition to their brother had occasioned this

---

<sup>44</sup> “Christus autem excellentius missus fuit Apostolus, quam Moyses. Ex. IV, 13: *obsecro, Domine, mitte quem missurus es*, quasi dicat: alium digniorem missurus es.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher [157], 74

<sup>45</sup> “. . . quasi dicat: alium digniorem missurus es. Item ipse est pontifex et sacerdos. Ps. CIX, 5: *tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher [157], 74

<sup>46</sup> “*Apostolum*, scilicet quem nobis Deus misit, *et pontificem*, scilicet per quem itur ad Deum.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 427 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 424C.

<sup>47</sup> “Quasi ergo preaemittit hic conditionem suam principalem, dicens *unde*, id est, ergo, *fraters, considerate apostolum*, quasi dicat: praetermittatis considerare illum apostolum, id est, missum Moysen et pontificem Aaron, *et considerate apostolum et pontificem confessionis nostrae*, id est, illum quem nos confitemur.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [157], 74-75.

vindication, in which the Lord commended Moses “more highly than in any other place in the Bible.”<sup>48</sup> But Thomas’ intent is to take these words praising Moses and apply them to Christ in such a way that once again his superior dignity becomes evident. Such a move is allowable, given that just as Moses was “faithful to him that made him” (Heb 3:2), so was Christ as man faithful to the one who made him.

It was the Father who made Christ an apostle and high priest, according to his human nature.<sup>49</sup> And Christ in turn demonstrated his faithfulness to the Father who made him in three ways: by attributing all that he had to the Father, not himself; by seeking the Father’s glory, not his own; and by obeying the Father perfectly, even to the point of death.<sup>50</sup> Thus yet again Thomas has turned the analysis of some facet of the excellence of Christ into a depiction of his unique relationship as Son to God the Father. As Weinandy puts it, Thomas uses this discussion to “define the authentic nature of sonship. A son always acknowledges, in gratitude, his dependence upon his father for his existence. He equally, therefore, seeks the glory of the one upon whom he is dependent, and finally this

---

<sup>48</sup> “Ubi, si bene attendimus, magis commendatur Moyses, quam in aliquo loco Bibliae. Et ideo Apostolus tamquam excellentissimum ad commendationem Moysi hoc accipit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [159], 75.

<sup>49</sup> “Hoc autem potest convenire et Christo et Moysi. De Moyse enim patet ex ipsa historia allegata. De Christo etiam intelligitur, quia ipse secundum quod homo, *fidelis est ei qui fecit eum*, scilicet Deo Patri, qui fecit eum, scilicet apostolum et pontificem, non secundum divinam naturam, quia sic non est factus, nec creatus, sed secundum humanam.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [159], 75. The Gloss likewise reads this verse in the light of Christ’s human nature, noting that according to the flesh Christ was of the seed of David. “*qui fecit eum, ex semine David secundum carnem.*” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 427 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 424D.

<sup>50</sup> “Fidelis autem fuit Deo patri, primo non attribuens sibi quod habebat, sed Patri. Io. C. VII, 16: *mea doctrina non est mea*. Secundo quia gloriam eius quaerebat, non suam. Io. VIII, 60: *ego gloriam meam non quaero*. Et VII, 18 dicitur: *qui quaerit gloriam eius, qui eum misit, hic verax est, et iniustitia in illo non est*. Tertio, quia perfecte obedivit patri. Phil. II, 8: *factus obediens usque ad mortem*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [159], 75-76. Here the Gloss also notes that the Son’s faithfulness surpasses that of Moses, because Christ sought the Father’s glory, not his own, and because he did not ignore the Father’s commands. “Moysi vero ita comparat, ut sit prae Moyse fidelis, quia non suam, sed Patris gloriam quaesivit, non ejus mandata abscondit.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 427 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 424D.

gratitude and solicitousness is expressed in his perfect, loyal filial obedience.”<sup>51</sup> As such a Son of such a Father, Christ possesses a dignity that far transcends the dignity of Moses.

### *Christ’s Power Compared to Moses*

In considering the power of Christ compared to Moses, Heb 3:2b provides a transition from the subject of dignity to that of power. Where Moses was faithful to God in all his house—that is, among the Jews—Christ was faithful to God in all his house in terms of both the entirety of the faithful and the entirety of the world.<sup>52</sup> Thomas reads this description of Moses as also applying to Christ; but he contends that the universal sphere in which Christ operates augments his dignity when compared to Moses, and also indicates a greater power than that of Moses. The first part of Heb 3:3 continues the transition, explicitly stating that Christ is worthy of greater glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house merits greater honor than the house itself. It is at this point that Thomas perceives the power of Christ on display, because this Christ who built the house is also God, the builder of all things and the one who created everything.<sup>53</sup> The house or

---

<sup>51</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ *Commentary on Hebrews*,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 234.

<sup>52</sup> “Fidelis ergo est Christus ei qui fecit eum. *Sicut et Moyses*, et hoc *in omni domo eius*, quae domus est universitas fidelium . . . Vel *in omni domo eius*, id est, in toto mundo non tantum in Iudaea, sicut Moyses.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [159], 76.

<sup>53</sup> “. . . quia ista domus de qua loquitur, a Christo fabricata est, ibi *qui autem omnia*.” “Deinde cum dicit *qui autem creavit omnia*, *Deus*, probat quod Christus sit istius domus aedificator, ipse enim est Deus qui fecit omnia.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [162], 76; [164], 77.

creation these verses allude to may be the whole world, or it may be the Church, which Christ has put together of various elements, such as Jews, Gentiles, slaves and free.<sup>54</sup>

In both cases, the creation is an example of *creatio ex nihilo*. Thomas uses John 1:3 to describe Christ's part in the creation of the world, that all things were made by him, and without him nothing was made; in his commentary on John's gospel Thomas explains the sense of this verse as indicating that "all things were made through the Word in such a way that there is nothing participating in existence that was not made through him."<sup>55</sup> And regarding the creation of the Church, Thomas says that the Church was made "from nothing, namely from the state of sin to the state of grace."<sup>56</sup> Due to this evidence of Christ's supreme power in the creation of the world and the creation of the Church, Thomas is led to this conclusion: "Therefore, Christ, by whom he made all things, *by whom also he made the world* (Heb 1:2); *all things were made by him: and*

---

<sup>54</sup> "Aggregatio autem fidelium, quae est Ecclesia et domus Dei, ex diversis collecta est, scilicet Iudaeis et gentibus, servis et liberis. Et ideo Ecclesia sicut et omnis domus ab aliquo uniente fabricatur." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [163], 77. "Deine cum dicit *qui autem creavit omnia, Deus*, probat quod Christus sit istius domus aedificator, ipse enim est Deus qui fecit omnia. Et si hoc intelligitur de toto mundo, planum est. Ps. XXXII, 9: *ipse dixit, et facta sunt*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [164], 77.

There is a wealth of ancient commentary noting the various shades of meaning of 'house' in these verses, ranging from a domestic structure to the temple, and from a household to the people of God. See Chrysostom, 5.4, 390; and excerpts of Photius, *Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3.3, and Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* in *Hebrews. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 10, eds. Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 53-54. See also Johnson's discussion on the different directions in which the writer of Hebrews takes the metaphor of 'house.' Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2006), 109.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 1.2 [84], 36.

<sup>56</sup> "*Deus* ergo istam domum, scilicet Ecclesiam, ex nihilo, scilicet de statu peccati, in statum gratiae creavit." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [164], 77.

*without him was made nothing* (John 1:3); is more excellent, since he has the power of making, than Moses, who was only the proclaimer.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Christ's Dominion and Origin Compared to Moses*

The last comparison Thomas Aquinas makes between Christ and Moses concerns their condition or state, based on Heb 3:5-6. That Thomas has in mind Christ's supremacy regarding both dominion and origin is evident from the nature and vocabulary of the discussion, which is replete with master/house and Son/servant language. With the repetition of the terms “dominus” (master or lord) and “domus” (house), in particular, it is difficult not to conceive of the arguments of the Apostle and Thomas in terms of Christ's dominion.

Thomas opens the discussion with a lucid summary of the Apostle's argument for preferring Christ to Moses. He states that “it is well known that a master is of greater prestige in his own home than is a servant in the master's home. But Moses is faithful just as a servant in the master's home, and Christ certainly is as the master in his house.”<sup>58</sup> Moses' faithfulness as a servant is indisputable; but his status as a servant in another's house indicates that his service was governed by another's purposes—and Thomas identifies that other person as Christ.<sup>59</sup> Thus, he concludes, because Moses was a servant

---

<sup>57</sup> “Ergo Christus per quem fecit omnia supra I, 2: *per quem fecit et saecula*. Io. I, 3: *omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso*, etc., est excellentior, utpote quia habet potestatem factoris, quam Moyses, qui solum fuit pronuntiator.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [164], 77.

<sup>58</sup> “Ratio autem sua talis est: constat quod amplioris gratiae est dominus et in domo propria, quam famulus et in domo domini. Sed Moyses est fidelis sicut servus et in domo domini, Christus vero sicut dominus et in domo sua.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [166], 77. Translation mine.

<sup>59</sup> “Ex quo patet, quod quia erat fidelis famulus, illa quae dicebat ordinabantur ad alium, scilicet ad Christum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [167], 78.

in someone else's house, and because the things he said pointed to Christ, Moses is in every way lesser than Christ.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast to Moses the servant, Christ is the Son in his Father's house—a house that is also his own, because he is the natural heir, a point that the *Gloss* also makes.<sup>61</sup> Thomas at this juncture cites Heb 1:2, regarding Christ as the appointed heir of all things and the one by whom God made the world. In his first lecture on Heb 1, Thomas had expounded Heb 1:2 to show the greatness of Christ's dominion, along with his status in his divinity as the natural Son and heir, and his status in his humanity as the true Son of the Father who has been appointed heir of all things.<sup>62</sup> The echo of that exposition reinforces the uniqueness of Christ's origin and dominion, as do the subsequent citations of Ps 2:7 on the Son the Lord has begotten this day, and Matt 3:17 on the Son with whom the Father is well pleased. All three intertextual references serve to establish both Christ's unique origin as the Father's unique Son, and His dominion throughout creation and the Church.

### *Comparing Christ to the Old Testament Priesthood*

Thomas Aquinas has maintained from the beginning of Hebrews that the Apostle's purpose is to show that Christ is more excellent than any personage to whom the Old Testament law owed its authority. After comparing Christ to angels and to

---

<sup>60</sup> “Quia ergo erat famulus, ideo erat non in domo propria, sed in aliena; et quia ea quae dicebat errant in testimonium eorum quae dicenda erant de Christo, ideo Moyses omniquaque minor fuit Christo.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [167], 78. Translation mine.

<sup>61</sup> “*Christus vero fidelis est, tanquam Filius, qui haeres est, in domo, cum ipso Patre . . .*” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 427 and Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192 425C.

<sup>62</sup> “Secundum ergo, quod est Filius naturalis, non est constitutus haeres, sed est naturalis. . . . Et secundum hoc est constitutus haeres universorum, sicut verus filius patris.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [20], 11.



Moses, and finding him to be more excellent than either, Thomas Aquinas declares that the Apostle's goal beginning in Heb 5 is to show the eminence of Christ's priesthood over the priesthood of Aaron. He uses his introduction to the first lecture on Heb 5 to recapitulate the first two comparisons, to angels and Moses, and to state his intention to proceed to the third comparison regarding the Old Testament priesthood.<sup>63</sup>

This section of Hebrews is long, running from Heb 5:1 to 10:18 in Thomas' schema. And it is diffuse, containing excursuses—some an entire chapter long, as in the case of Heb 6—as well as exhortations to the readers of the epistle. Yet Thomas holds that this section of Hebrews functions as a coherent unit of text—a view that is shared by contemporary exegetes. O'Brien comments that this section comprises "the main theological exposition" of the letter.<sup>64</sup> Attridge's outline of 5:1-10:18 categorizes this material as addressing the identity and sacrificial work of Christ as high priest.<sup>65</sup> Cockerill divides Hebrews into three movements: divine sonship, the Son's high priesthood, and the perseverance of God's people, with the middle section covering 5:1-10:18, with the addition of the last three verses of Heb 4.<sup>66</sup> Guthrie observes that the two hortatory units of 4:14-16 and 10:19-25 serve to frame or set off this block of expository text, and that 5:1-10:18 itself divides into two subsections. One, according to

---

<sup>63</sup> "Sicut a principio huius epistolae dictum fuit, intentio Apostoli est ostendere Christum excellentiorem esse omnibus his ex quibus lex habet auctoritatem, scilicet angelis, quorum ministerio data fuit, Gal. III, 19: *ordinata per angelos*, et Moyse, qui fuit legislator, Io. I, 17: *lex per Moysen data test*, et sacerdotio et pontificatu Aaron, per quem lex administratur. Expeditis ergo duobus primis, hic prosequitur de tertio, scilicet de eminentia sacerdotii Christi ad sacerdotem Aaron." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [239], 109.

<sup>64</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 34, 187.

<sup>65</sup> Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 17-19.

<sup>66</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 62.

Guthrie, addresses “The Appointment of the Son as a Superior High Priest” in 5:1-7:28; and the other concerns “The Superior Offering of the Appointed High Priest,” in 8:3-10:18.<sup>67</sup> In other words, this major portion of the book of Hebrews has to do with the person and work of Christ, from the point of view of the Old Testament priesthood.

And reading Hebrews in terms of the person and work of Christ has been the goal of Thomas Aquinas throughout his commentary. Thomas in his prologue indicated as much in his selection of Ps 85:8 as his *accessus* verse, “There is none among the gods like unto you, O Lord; and there is none according to your works,” disclosing his intention to reveal the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ in terms of both his person and works. It is according to this person/work dichotomy that Thomas organizes this major expository block of Heb 5:1-10:18. The opening of the first lecture on Heb 5 states that the purpose of this part of Hebrews is to show the eminence of Christ’s priesthood over that of Aaron; and in the introduction to the first lecture on Heb 8, Thomas advances this approach, stating that “above (in chapters 5-7) the Apostle has proven the excellence of the priesthood of Christ over the Levitical priesthood on the part of the person, and here he proves the same of the part of the priesthood itself.”<sup>68</sup> That is, having demonstrated the suitability and excellence of Christ’s person for the priesthood, the Apostle now examines the efficacy and excellence of Christ’s work as a priest.

Guthrie’s view of the function of Heb 5:1-10:18 harmonizes with that of Thomas. Having established that Heb 5:1-7:28 concerns the Son as a superior high priest, and that

---

<sup>67</sup> George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 119-120. In Guthrie’s structural scheme, Heb 8:1-2 functions as an intermediary transition between 5:1-7:28 and 8:3-10:18.

<sup>68</sup> “Supra probavit Apostolus excellentiam sacerdotii Christi ad sacerdotium Leviticum ex parte personae, hic probat idem ex parte ipsius sacerdotii . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [377], 165. Translation mine.

8:3-10:18 deals with this superior high priest's offering, Guthrie describes the structure and purpose of these two units of text in this way: "Thus, in each of the two primary embedded discourses of Heb 5:1-10:18 an introduction is followed by the demonstration of an institution's superiority to the old covenant priesthood based on Old Testament proof texts. Building on the latter, the author then sets forth the superiority of Christ's ministry."<sup>69</sup> Guthrie further explains the logical development of Hebrews' expositional material as showing how "The Son, on the basis of his identification with men, is taken from among men and appointed high priest," and then indicating that, "because of his appointment, he is able to offer a superior offering in heaven."<sup>70</sup> Both Thomas Aquinas and Guthrie, then, read this part of Hebrews in terms of the superior person and work of Christ as priest.

Because this bifurcated approach to this part of Hebrews is what the scriptural text requires, Thomas Aquinas modifies the comparative strategy he had previously used. In considering the person of Christ in and of itself, and Christ's excellence, Thomas had adopted the four criteria provided by Heb 1:2-3.<sup>71</sup> Heb 1:2 states that God in these last days "has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world." These three phrases each indicate three important characteristics of Christ: the uniqueness of the Son's origin, the greatness of his dominion and rule, and the power of his activity. Heb 1:3 provides the fourth characteristic, the loftiness of the

---

<sup>69</sup> Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, 120-121.

<sup>70</sup> Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, 127.

<sup>71</sup> "Excellentiam vero Christi denotat quantum ad quatuor. Primo quantum ad proprietatem originis, vocando eum verum Dei Filium naturalem, cum dicit *locutus est nobis in Filio*; secundo quantum ad magnitudinem dominationis, ibi *quem constituit haeredem universorum*; tertio quantum ad virtutem operationis, ibi *per quem fecit et saecula*; quarto quantum ad sublimitatem dignitatis, ibi *qui cum sit splendor gloriae*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [7], 6.

Son's dignity, as this verse describes the Son as the splendor of the Father's glory and the figure of his substance, and credits him with upholding all things by the word of his power, making purgation of sins, and sitting at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Thomas used the text of Heb 1:2-3 to prove the excellence of Christ himself in regard to these four characteristics. He then at length proved the excellence of Christ in comparison to the angels in Heb 1:4-14, and Christ's superiority to Moses more succinctly in Heb 3:1-6. Both of those sections of Hebrews are considerably shorter and more coherent than is the passage that addresses Christ's comparison to the Old Testament priesthood, Heb 5:1-10:18; and both of those passages lend themselves to a successful application of Thomas' four criteria of the origin, dominion, power, and dignity of Christ. The priestly material, with its length and complexity, and its evident focus on the person and work of Christ as priest, requires a modification, which Thomas readily makes. He uses the categories of person and work provided by this section of the text of Scripture, and he collapses his four criteria of origin, dominion, power, and dignity into them. Thus, origin and dignity become two aspects of discussing the person of Christ as high priest; and dominion and power become two aspects of discussing the work of Christ as high priest.

The importance of the commentary of Thomas Aquinas on Heb 5:1-10:18 must not be underestimated. Outside of the *Summa Theologiae*, III.22, the work on this Hebrews passage provides our only glimpse of how Thomas understands the priesthood of Christ.<sup>72</sup> The introductions to the lectures on Heb 5:1-10:18 serve as signposts for how

---

<sup>72</sup> Colman E. O'Neill, "Appendix 5: The Priesthood of Christ," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Volume 50: The One Mediator (3a. 16-26) (London: Blackfriars/Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965), 245. Evidence for the close relationship of question 22 in the *Tertia Pars* with the Hebrews commentary is

Thomas sees the Apostle arguing for the superiority of Christ's priesthood, and for which phase of the argument is under consideration.

The two lectures on Heb 5 are prefatory, describing the office of the high priest and then establishing that Christ is such a high priest.<sup>73</sup> Heb 6 is a hortatory excursus and does not figure into this argument. The four lectures on Heb 7 address the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the Old Testament priesthood in terms of his person. The first lecture shows that Christ is like Melchisedech; and the second lecture proves that Melchisedech's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.<sup>74</sup> The remaining two lectures demonstrate that Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.<sup>75</sup> The focus throughout is on Christ as a person, on who Christ is as our high priest, in relation to the Old Testament priesthood.

Heb 8:1-10:18 addresses the superiority of Christ's work as our high priest. Thomas sees the Apostle arguing in general terms for this superiority in Heb 8.<sup>76</sup> Heb

---

seen in the fact that the opening objections to Christ's priesthood in the first article, and their answers, have to do with whether Christ is superior to angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood.

<sup>73</sup> "Primo ostendit, quae requirantur ad pontificem; secundo ostendit illa convenire Christo, et sic concludit ipsum esse pontificem, ibi *sic et Christus non semetipsum*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [239], 110.

<sup>74</sup> ". . . primo ostendit similitudinem Christi ad Melchisedech; secundo, ex hac similitudine praefert sacerdotium Christi Levitico, ibi *intuemini autem* (Heb 7:4)." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [326], 144.

"Supra ostendit Apostolus quomodo Melchisedech assimilatus est Filio Dei, hic ostendit praeeminentiam sacerdotii Melchisedech ad sacerdotium Leviticum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.2 [335], 148.

<sup>75</sup> "Supra probavit Apostolus praeeminentiam sacerdotii Melchisedech ad Leviticum, hic ab eodem concludit excellentiam sacerdotii Christi, respectu sacerdotii Levitici." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.3 [347], 153.

"Supra Apostolus ex una parte auctoritatis Psalmistae probavit, quod sacerdotium Christi praefertur Levitico, et ipsum evacuat, hic idem probat ex aliis duabus partibus. . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [364], 160.

<sup>76</sup> "Supra probavit Apostolus excellentiam sacerdotii Christi ad sacerdotium Leviticum ex parte personae, hic probat idem ex parte ipsius sacerdotii, et circa hoc facit duo. Primo enim ostendit sacerdotium

8:1-6 and the opening lecture on those verses function as a transition from the subject of Christ's person to Christ's work, as this material recapitulates the discussion in previous chapters of Christ's identity and person, but then moves on from considering the office-holder to surveying the office of high priest itself. The second and third lectures on Heb 8 show that Christ's ministry pertains to better things, with better effects, respectively.<sup>77</sup> According to Thomas, Heb 9:1-10:18 examines in more specific terms the superiority of Christ's work as high priest, with an extensive appraisal of the Old Testament's provision for sin and its inadequacy, in contrast to the New Testament's provision for sin and its efficacy, as a result of Christ's superior priesthood.<sup>78</sup>

There are times in this massive section of the epistle when it is not possible for Thomas to keep separate Christ's person from Christ's work, due to the content of the text at hand, and due to the nature of the subject of this analysis. But on the whole, Thomas succeeds in proposing and teaching according to either Christ's person or work, using his skill at dividing the text to elucidate the Apostle's message to the Hebrews. These categories—Christ's person as priest, and his origin and dignity, and Christ's work as priest, and his dominion and power—will govern our reading of Thomas Aquinas' commentary on this complex section of Hebrews.

---

Christi esse excellentius sacerdotio veteris legis, et primo hoc in generali; secundo in speciali, ibi *habuit quidem et prius*, scilicet IX cap." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [377], 165.

<sup>77</sup> "Supra Apostolus probavit Christum esse pontificem, et per consequens ministerium sacramentorum, non tamen secundum veterem legem, hic ostendit ipsum esse ministerium maiorum et meliorum, quam illa fuerint." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [390], 170.

"Supra posuit Apostolus conditiones Novi Testamenti ex editione ipsius nunc ponit tres effectus ipsius." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [405], 176.

<sup>78</sup> "Supra ostendit Apostolus dignitatem Novi Testamenti respectu Veteris in generali, hic ostendit idem in speciali, descendendo ad singula, quae errant in utroque Testamento." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.1 [413], 181.

"Supra exposuit Apostolus illa, quae agebantur in Veteri Testamento, et aperuit illorum mysticam expositionem, hic ex his arguit ad propositum, scilicet quod Novum Testamentum praefertur Veteri; quia potest quod non poterat Vetus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.4 [447], 197.

### *Hebrews 5: Prefatory Discussion of the High Priesthood*

In lecturing on Hebrews 5, Thomas Aquinas uses the first lecture and part of the second to show what is required of a high priest, and how Christ, primarily in terms of his person, meets those requirements. He finds the Apostle first describing the priesthood according to three categories: the office of a high priest, the compassion of a high priest, and the attainment of the high priesthood, in Heb 5:1-4.

According to Thomas, the Apostle proposes four things regarding the high priest's office: its loftiness, utility, material, and act.<sup>79</sup> The office of high priest is lofty, for the priest is one taken from among men, because he excels the others.<sup>80</sup> Such a priest is provided because "God willed that man have should have someone like himself to whom he might run," understanding the utility of the high priesthood in terms of the benefit that accrues to those whom the priest serves.<sup>81</sup> The matter of the priestly office is that which that pertains to God, in contrast to temporal things. And the act of a high priest is to offer up gifts that are freely given, as well as sacrifices for sins in order to provide satisfaction for them.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> "Circa officium quatuor ponit. Primo gradus altitudinem, ibi *ex hominibus assumptus*; secundo pontificatus utilitatem, ibi *pro hominibus*; tertio materiam, ibi *in his quae ad Deum*; quarto ad actum, ibi *ut offerat dona*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [240], 110. The four characteristics of the priestly office as described by Thomas in this section come close to aligning with the four Aristotelian causes, so that the priest's loftiness as a man taken from among men could correspond to a formal cause; the fact that a priest is ordained for the benefit of others is similar to a final cause; the matter or material cause of a priest's office is the things that pertain to God; and the efficient cause is the priest's work of offering gifts and sacrifices for sins.

<sup>80</sup> "Dicit autem *assumptus*, quia debet alios excellere, sicut patet de Saule, I Reg. X, 23." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [241], 110.

<sup>81</sup> "Voluit autem Deus, ut homo habeat similem sui, ad quem currat." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [241], 110. "Finis et utilitas est quia *pro hominibus constituitur*, id est, pro ipsorum utilitate." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [242], 110.

<sup>82</sup> "Sicut ergo illa quae pertinent ad Dei cultum excedunt temporalia, ita dignitas pontificalis excedit omnes alias dignitates." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [243], 110. "Actus pontificis est,

Compassion is a quality necessary to the high priest office. The high priest knows human infirmity through experience, and has been called to serve as a mediator between God and people. Thomas describes such a priest's merciful and intercessory work in this way: "Therefore, just as at one extreme he ought to touch God through the devotion of prayer, just so through mercy and compassion he ought to touch the other extreme, namely man."<sup>83</sup> And it is upon the divine initiative alone that the attainment of the high priestly office rests. Heb 5:4 shows that no one elevates himself to this priestly honor, but that it comes from above, as the result of God's call.

Thomas' description of a high priest in these lectures touches at times on what a priest does, but the emphasis is on who the priest should be. The origin of any man's high priestly office lies with God himself, who, in a display of divine initiative and calling, selects every high priest from among men (Heb 5:1). In addition to its divine origin, the high priestly office confers a double dignity upon its holder: first, as one taken from among his fellows, because he excels them; and second, as one who has been set over "the things that appertain to God." Thomas compares the dignity of a high priest to the dignity of a ruler of a city; but a high priest's dignity surpasses that of a worldly ruler, because those things that pertain to the worship of God transcend temporal things.<sup>84</sup>

A high priest is distinguished by his office, by the compassion with which he exercises that office, and the way in which he attains his office. Now, in Heb 5:5-10

---

*ut offerat dona*, id est, voluntarie oblata, non extorta . . . . *Et sacrificia pro peccatis*, id est, quae sibi offeruntur pro satisfactione peccatorum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [244], 111.

<sup>83</sup> "Sicut ergo per devotionem orationis debet tangere Deum tamquam unum extremum, sic per misericordiam et compassionem debet tangere alterum extremum, scilicet hominem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [246], 111.

<sup>84</sup> "Sicut ergo illa quae pertinent ad Dei cultum excedunt temporalia, ita dignitas pontificalis excedit omnes alias dignitates." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [243], 110.



Thomas turns to demonstrating that Christ is such a high priest, using the same three categories as above but in a slightly different order. Hence, he proceeds to consider first Christ's attainment of the high priesthood, then the nature of his priestly office, and finally, in the second lecture on Heb 5, the mercy with which he discharges his office.<sup>85</sup>

Christ's attainment of the priestly office is due not to his glorification of himself, but to the Father promoting and glorifying him. On the one hand, the Father glorifies him by divine judgment in Heb 1:5, as his Son begotten from eternity; on the other hand, it is as man that Christ receives his priesthood from God.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, the Son's unique origin makes him especially suited for this priestly and mediatorial office. And the priestly office held by Christ carries with it a unique dignity, says Thomas, because the office is forever and eternal, both in terms of the truth of which it consists and the eternal life it is empowered to provide.<sup>87</sup>

Regarding the priestly office itself, what pertains to it is also pertains to Christ. First, he is man, and as such taken from among men to be their high priest.<sup>88</sup> As Thomas

---

<sup>85</sup> "Circa primum tria facit. Primo enim ostendit, quod Christus factus est pontifex non a se, sed a Deo; secundo agit de ipsius officio, ibi *qui in diebus carnis*; tertio de ipsius misericordia, ibi *et quidem cum esset*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [250], 112.

<sup>86</sup> "Clarificatus autem est divino iudicio, quia, scilicet Dominus, *locutus est ad ipsum*, in Ps. II, 7, *filius meus es tu*, et cetera. Et hoc est expositum supra. Item Matth. IX, 17: *hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi complacui*, et cetera. Cum ergo ostendit eum ab aeterno genitum, ostendit gloriam eius. Supra I, 3: *qui cum sit splendor gloriae*, et cetera. Pontificatus etiam accipitur a Deo in quantum homo, *quaemadmodum in alio loco dicit*, scilicet in Ps. CIX, 5: *tu es sacerdos*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [252], 113.

<sup>87</sup> "Et ne credatur tale esse sacerdotium Christi, sicut fuit in veteri lege, distinguit ipsum quantum ad duo. Primo quantum ad dignitatem, quia *in aeternum*. Illud enim fuit temporale, erat enim figurale, et ideo non est perpetuum, sed transit veniente figurato. Sed sacerdotium Christi est aeternum, quia est de veritate, quae est aeterna. Item hostia eius habet virtutem introducendi in vitam aeternam. Item durat in aeternum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [252], 113.

<sup>88</sup> "Conditio eius est, quod fuit unus ex hominibus, quia, ut dictum est, pontifex ex hominibus assumitur. Et ideo dicit *qui in diebus carnis suae*. Ponitur autem hic caro pro tota natura humana, sicut illud Io. I, 14: *Verbum caro factum est*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [254], 113.

says in the *Tertia Pars*, Christ “shared the lot of men living on earth who are raised to the priesthood.”<sup>89</sup> Christ’s identity as man and God is essential to his high priestly work, for “in order to free the human race from its common sin, someone had to satisfy who was both man and so proportioned to the satisfaction, and something above man that the merit might be enough to satisfy for the sin of the whole human race.”<sup>90</sup> This picture of Christ the high priest as someone who is man and yet is above man is consistent with Thomas’ understanding of Christ’s priestly office in the book of Hebrews.

Second, Christ carries out the act of a priest through the prayers and supplications mentioned in Heb 5:7—prayers offered as spiritual sacrifices to God, on our behalf as well as his own in his passion.<sup>91</sup> The fact that Jesus prayed is a reminder that he shared the lot of humanity: his prayers show that “Christ as man and as possessing a human will” needed to pray; here Thomas understands prayer as the expression of the will,<sup>92</sup> and notes that Christ’s human will required divine help in order for its desires to be fulfilled.<sup>93</sup>

Third, Christ’s work as our priest is efficacious, for he was heard for his reverence, according to Heb 5:7. This verse suggests the setting of Gethsemane and Christ’s prayers before his passion; and the manner in which Christ prayed here, with a

---

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.1, ad. 1.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* 4.54.9, 232.

<sup>91</sup> “Actes autem eius fuit, quia obtulit *preces et supplicationes*. Hoc est spirituale sacrificium, quod Christus obtulit. Dicuntur autem *preces*, id est, petitiones. Iac. ult.: *multum enim valet deprecatio iusti assidua*. Supplicationes vero dicuntur quantum ad humilitatem orantis, sicut genuflexiones. Matth. XXVI, 39: *procidit in faciem suam orans*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [255], 114.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.21.4. Vol 50

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.21.1.

strong cry and tears, is proof of the efficacy of his prayers.<sup>94</sup> His prayer that the cup would pass from him was not answered, and such a negative response could suggest that his prayers were not always effective. To this charge, Thomas replies in both the Hebrews commentary and the *Tertia Pars* that Christ's will was directed toward fulfilling his Father's will, and thus in this way his prayers were always heard and granted.<sup>95</sup> And Thomas notes that Christ wept not for himself, but for those whom his passion would benefit. The final evidence of Christ's prayers being heard is the fact of his exaltation described in Phil 2:9.<sup>96</sup>

Not only does Christ meet the high priestly requirements regarding attaining and holding that office; he also discharges the office of high priest with mercy and sympathy. These qualities Christ learned through experience, through what he suffered. As Thomas explains, "For since from eternity Christ was God, and according to that nature he could neither suffer nor sympathize, he assumed a nature in which he could suffer, and thus also be able to sympathize."<sup>97</sup> Learning through what he suffered equipped Christ to be our high priest, as he acquired distinctively human knowledge through his active intellect,

---

<sup>94</sup> "Efficacia ostenditur ex modo orandi. Duo autem sunt necessaria oranti, scilicet fervens affectio; item dolor et gemitus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [256], 114.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.21.4. "Dicendum est, quod Christus in omnibus, quae voluit fieri, fuit exauditus . . . Sed voluntate consequente rationem deliberatam, volebat mori. Unde dicit, Lc. XXII, 42: *verumtamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [257], 114-115.

<sup>96</sup> "Non tamen flevit pro se, sed pro nobis, quibus passio sua profuit. Sibi autem profuit, inquantum per ipsam meruit exaltari. Phil. II, 9: *propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum*, et cetera. Et ideo *exauditus est pro sua reverentia*, quam scilicet super omnes habebat ad Deum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [256], 114.

<sup>97</sup> The close relationship between suffering and sympathizing is clearer in the Latin, with the use of the verbs *patior* and *compatior*, respectively. "Cum enim sit Filius Dei ab aeterno, et secundum hoc nec pati posset, nec compati, assumpsit naturam in qua posset pati, et sic etiam posset compati." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.2 [259], 116.

and, more relevantly here, through discovery or experience.<sup>98</sup> In his reading of Heb 5:9, Thomas finds that Christ's suffering affects his activity as our high priest, so that he can sympathize with us; Christ's suffering also affects the outcome of his work as our high priest, so that only he was able to achieve both his glorification and our eternal salvation, as our high priest.<sup>99</sup>

In these two prefatory lectures on Heb 5, Thomas has depicted the person of the ideal high priest, using the Apostle's words, and he has shown that Christ is just such a person and high priest. A high priest is like his fellows, taken from among them—and yet he excels them. A high priest is for his fellows—but is for them in regard to the things of God. A high priest is compassionate, merciful, and understanding, and those qualities infuse the work that he does as a mediator between God and humans. A high priest owes his office to a divine origin, and performs it from a position of dignity that befits the worship of God. Who the high priest is—his person, origin, and dignity—determines the work the high priest does, according to Thomas' introductory lectures on the Old Testament priesthood in Heb 5. Such was the case for all human high priests; and such is the case for our high priest, Christ, who surpasses all human priests as the only high priest able to provide eternal salvation, through the offering of himself. Just as the angels and Moses point to Christ in many ways, and yet fall short of him in regard to both the excellence of their persons and the effectiveness of their work, so it is with the Old Testament priesthood. The Levitical priesthood prefigures Christ, but, as Thomas

---

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.9.4, ad. 1 and 2.

<sup>99</sup> “Deinde cum dicit *et consummatus*, etc., ostendit fructum passionis, qui fuit duplex. Unus in Christo, alius in membris eius. In Christo fructus fuit glorificatio . . . Quia enim per meritum obedientiae pervenit ad istam consummationem. Prov. XXI, v. 28: *vir obediens loquitur victorias ‘factus est omnibus obtemperantibus sibi causa salutis,’* non temporalis, sed ‘*aeternae.*’” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.2 [260], 117.

observes in the *Tertia Pars*, “a type cannot adequately represent the reality which it symbolizes. For this reason the Old-Law priest, though he foreshadowed Christ, fell short of that perfection which would have made sacrificial reparation unnecessary for him. Not so with Christ himself; he had no need to make personal reparation”<sup>100</sup>—being innocent of sin, as declared by the Council of Ephesus and cited by Thomas.<sup>101</sup>

The material in Heb 5 may seem rather introductory, and it does indeed serve as a fairly straightforward opening to the deeper discussion of Christ’s superior priesthood that is to follow. But two valuable lessons regarding Thomas’ exegesis of Hebrews may be gleaned from this chapter. The first lesson to be drawn from Thomas Aquinas’ exegesis of Heb 5 has to do with his attention to context, and how the background against which Thomas reads Scripture affects his interpretation of Scripture. A comparison here of the Hebrews commentary with the *Tertia Pars* is instructive, for Thomas’ approach to Heb 5:1 depends entirely on the identity of the priest. Heb 5:1 states that “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

In the Hebrews commentary on this verse, Thomas has in view the work of any human priest. He sees the work of such a priest as unidirectional, aimed toward God, intended to redress the people’s relationship with God. Therefore, Thomas says in the commentary, this priest offers gifts to God that have been voluntarily given by their human givers, not extorted; and this priest makes sacrifices to God for sins, for the purpose of satisfaction. Even in the second part of the lecture, when Thomas is showing how Christ meets these priestly criteria, the focus is on the limitations of the human

---

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.4, ad. 3.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.4.

office of the priesthood, as not only are the sacrifices offered by Christ done so in a Godward direction, but so are the gifts. Thomas has Christ offering himself to the Father, as a priest,<sup>102</sup> and also offering to the Father the spiritual sacrifice of prayers and supplications, for which his priesthood was ordained.<sup>103</sup>

But in the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas reads Heb 5:1 with only Christ in mind as the priest. He reads this verse bidirectionally and uses it to frame Christ's priestly work as mediator between God and people, calling this position as mediator the characteristic or particular work of a priest. Thomas says that such a work, in general terms, has the priest not giving gifts from the people to God, but giving the things of God to the people; and this priest, instead of making sacrifices for sins, offers prayers to God on the people's behalf, in reparation for their sins.<sup>104</sup> Thomas then shows in this article how Christ specifically has fulfilled both aspects of this priestly work. By means of his sacrifice, Christ has reconciled humanity to God; Thomas uses Col 1:19-20 to remind us that the fullness of the Father dwells in Christ, through whom all things are being reconciled to himself. Additionally, Christ has brought divine gifts to men, including great promises and the privilege of partaking of the divine nature, from II Pet 1:4. Thus it may be seen that in the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas uses his interpretation of Heb 5:1 to demonstrate the completeness and efficacy of the bi-directional work of Christ. These arguments made in the *Tertia Pars* regarding the excellence of Christ as mediator will appear in Thomas'

---

<sup>102</sup> "Dicit [the Apostle] autem *sacerdos*, quia se obtulit Deo Patri. Eph. V, 2: *dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis oblationem et hostiam Deo*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [252], 113.

<sup>103</sup> "Actus autem eius fuit, quia obtulit *preces et supplicationes*. Hoc est spirituale sacrificium, quod Christus obtulit . . . . Ad istud sacrificium spirituale ordinatur sacerdotium Christi. Unde respondet ei quod dictum est supra *ut offerat dona*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.1 [255], 114.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.1.

Hebrews commentary in the exegesis of other passages, just not here at Heb 5:1—evidence of how Thomas allows text and context to drive his exegesis.

Thomas uses his discussion in this article of the *Summa* to show that Christ has fulfilled to a maximal degree the functions that any human priest can fulfill to only some degree, demonstrating that he is a priest in the fullest sense possible.<sup>105</sup> Thus, for Thomas Aquinas, who the priest is affects the work that he does, whether it is the work of a human priest directed only from man to God, or whether it is the mediatorial work of Christ in giving divine gifts to humans and reconciling erring humans to God. And who the priest is also affects the extent to which he can do this work: only of Christ may it be said that through him God is reconciling all things unto himself. Thus, a comparison of these two readings of Heb 5:1, and Thomas' conclusion regarding the supremacy of Christ's priesthood in the *Tertia Pars*, provide *in nuce* the strategy that he will adopt in his consideration of Christ as priest throughout Heb 5:1-10:18.

The second lesson to be drawn from Thomas Aquinas' exegesis in Heb 5 pertains to larger methodological issues. Thomas' procedure in doing a comparative study of Christ is to begin by understanding who Christ is in and of himself. In his exposition of Heb 1-3, he carefully establishes the excellence of Christ in regard to his origin, dominion, power, and dignity. Only then does Thomas undertake a comparison of Christ to angels and to Moses according to those four measures. And that approach carries over to this lengthy section of Heb 5:1-10:18. Thomas first sets forth the general attributes of a priest, and then uses those criteria to demonstrate how Christ meets them. It is only after proving that Christ is just such a high priest that Thomas will follow the Apostle's lead in

---

<sup>105</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.1.

Heb 7:1-10:18 in showing that Christ is a superior high priest, according to both his person and his work.

*Comparing Christ to the Old Testament Priesthood: His Person, Origin, and Dignity*

The task of Thomas Aquinas in Heb 7 is to understand how the Apostle, having proved that Christ is a priest, now proves the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the Levitical priesthood "on the part of the person of the priest himself."<sup>106</sup> The argument of Heb 7 is well known, and will serve to structure this discussion: Melchisedech is like Christ; Melchisedech's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood; therefore, Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. As such, the argument turns on the question of identity—who is like whom, and who is superior or inferior to whom. Hence, throughout the four lectures on Heb 7, discussions and comparisons based on terms such as name, dignity, birth, lineage, eternality, and other personal qualities predominate.

In establishing that Melchisedech is like Christ, Thomas begins by citing Melchisedech's name and his dignity as king of Salem and priest of the most high God. The fact that, according to Heb 7:1-2, Melchisedech "met Abraham returning," and both blessed him and received his tithes, signifies his priestly office, according to Thomas; for a priest is "in the middle between God and the people," and he "should confer something

---

<sup>106</sup> "Intendit enim probare excellentiam sacerdotii Christi ad sacerdotium leviticum." "Primo enim ostendit praerogativam sacerdotii Christi super Leviticum ex parte personae ipsius sacerdotis . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [326], 143.



on the people, namely spiritual goods, and receive something from them, namely temporal goods.”<sup>107</sup>

Thomas takes the phrase in Heb 7:2, “who first indeed,” to indicate that the Apostle has begun a comparison of Melchizedek and Christ, noting that he first establishes the likeness of their persons and then that of their priesthood.<sup>108</sup> Both Melchisedech’s name and kingly dignity signify Christ. Melchisedech is called king of justice and king of peace, and Christ likewise is a king, the king of justice, and the king of peace, as one who has been made for us wisdom, justice, and peace.<sup>109</sup> In these comments, Thomas follows Chrysostom in the *Gloss*, who there is credited with saying that Christ unites justice and peace, first ruling this world in justice and ruling the world of the future in peace.<sup>110</sup>

In regard to the question of origin, Melchisedech’s condition of being without father or mother also signifies Christ. Since the Father alone is the father of Christ, it was appropriate not to mention a carnal father in the nativity of the one prefiguring Christ; and given the eternal and spiritual generation of Christ, it was appropriate not to mention

---

<sup>107</sup> “Tertio describit eum ab officio, ibi *qui obviavit*, et cetera. Sacerdos enim medius est inter Deum et populum. Debet enim aliquid populo conferre, scilicet spiritualia, et aliquid ab eo accipere, scilicet temporalia.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [329], 144.

<sup>108</sup> “Deinde cum dicit *primum quidem*, ostendit similitudinem Christi et Melchisedech. Et circa hoc facit duo: primo enim inducit similitudinem quantum ad conditionem personae; secundo quantum ad sacerdotium, ibi *assimilatus autem Filio Dei*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [331], 145.

<sup>109</sup> “In Scriptura autem duo dicuntur de ipso. *Primum quidem*, nomen, scilicet Melchisedech, *qui interpretatur rex iustitiae*: et significat Christum, qui fuit rex . . . Aliud quod dicitur de ipso, est conditio. Unde dicitur *rex Salem, quod est rex pacis*. Hoc autem convenit Christo. Ipse enim est *pax nostra*, Eph. II, 14 . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [321], 146.

<sup>110</sup> “Et bene coniungit iustitiam et pacem, quia nullus facit pacem, qui non servat iustitiam. Is. XXXII, 17: *erit opus iustitiae, pax*. In mundo isto gubernantur in iustitia, sed in futuro in pace. Is. XXXII, 18: *sedebit populus meus in pulchritudine pacis*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [332], 146. The *Gloss* cites Chrysostom: “Quis homo est rex iustitiae et pacis, nisi Christus? Nullus. Item, nota prius dicturus rex iustitiae, post rex pacis, quia Christus regit prius suos hic in iustitia; post in futuro reget eos in pace aeterna.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 433; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 448C.

a carnal mother.<sup>111</sup> Here Thomas seems again to turn to the *Gloss*: he cites the verse “He is God without a mother, he is flesh without a father,” which in the *Gloss* reads “He himself is without a father according to his flesh, and without a mother according to his deity.”<sup>112</sup> Thomas refers Melchisedech’s lack of a genealogy to the ineffability of Christ’s generation and to his possession of priestly status independent of Levitical lineage.<sup>113</sup> And the statements made of Melchisedech having no beginning of days or end of life, but continuing as a priest forever, indicate in what way he prefigures the eternality of Christ—in both his divinity and humanity—and the perpetuity of his priesthood.<sup>114</sup>

Hence Thomas establishes the likeness of Melchisedech to Christ in regard to their kingly dignity, ineffable origin, and perpetual priesthood. His next task is to consider how the Apostle shows the superiority of Melchisedech’s priesthood to the

---

<sup>111</sup> “Illud autem, quod est proprium Dei, non debet attribui creaturae. Solius vero Dei Patris est esse Patrem Christi. Ergo in nativitate illius, qui ipsum praefigurabat, non debuit fieri mentio de patre carnali. Item quantum ad generationem aeternam dicit *sine matre*. Et hoc ne intelligas istam generationem esse materialem, sicut mater dat materiam genito, sed est spiritualis; sicut splendor a sole. Supra I, 3; *qui cum sit splendor*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [333], 146.

<sup>112</sup> “Unde versus: *est sine matre Deus, est sine patre caro*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [333], 147. “Ipse est etiam sine patre secundum carnem, et sine matre secundum deitatem . . .” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 433; Peter Lombard, *PL* 192, 448C. Translations mine.

Thomas makes a similar argument in *ST* 3.22.6, ad. 3, stating that the Apostle says of Melchisedech “that he is *likened unto the Son of God* who on earth is without father and in heaven is without mother and without genealogy—*Who shall declare his generation?* (Is. 53:8)—and who, as God, has neither beginning nor end of days.”

<sup>113</sup> “*Sine genealogia*. Et duplici de causa non ponitur genealogia eius in Scriptura: una ad designandum quod generatio Christi est ineffabilis. Is. LIII, 8: *generationem eius quis enarrabit?* Alia ad designandum, quod Christus, qui introducitur ut sacerdos, non pertinet ad genus Leviticum, nec ad genealogiam veteris legis. Et haec est intentio Apostoli.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [333], 147.

<sup>114</sup> “Unde subdit *neque initium dierum habens, neque finem vitae*. Hoc autem dicit, non quia Christus non sit natus in tempore neque mortuus, sed propter aeternam eius generationem, in qua natus est sine initio cuiuscumque temporis . . . Item *nec finem vitae*: verum est quantum ad divinitatem, quae est aeterna. Quantum etiam ad humanitatem, iam non habet finem vitae, quia *Christus resurgens ex mortuis, iam non moritur*, Rom. VI, 9.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.1 [333], 147. The *Gloss* states that “*manet sacerdos in aeternum*” is said mystically about the priesthood of Christ. “*manet sacerdos in aeternum*, vel in perpetuum, quia Scriptura obtinet quod alius ei successisset. Vel mystice per eum loquitur de sacerdotio Christi.” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 433; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, *PL* 192, 449A.

Levitical office. In this discussion, the language of dignity and origin is replaced by the discussion of lineage and relationships, as the argument is made that when Abraham receives Melchisedech's blessing and offers him his tithes, both Abraham and the yet unborn Aaron, with all of Aaron's priestly descendants, are acknowledging Melchisedech's superiority. In this, Thomas follows the Apostle closely, but he does pay great attention to the various prefigurations of Christ—for example, pointing out that when Melchisedech receives tithes not mandated by the Old Testament law, as a priest not descended from the Levitical line, his priesthood is a figure of Christ's priesthood, which is not subject to the Law.<sup>115</sup> In the *Tertia Pars* Thomas reasons that the gift of tithes from Abraham to Melchisedech represents the entire priestly order paying their tithes, making Melchisedech's priesthood superior to theirs.<sup>116</sup>

Because Melchisedech's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, and because Melchisedech and Christ are so much alike, all that remains is to make patent the superiority of Christ's priesthood. This superiority rests primarily on who Christ is, in light of the qualities that set him apart from any other priest; and in the lecture on Heb 7:11-19, Thomas hews closely to the text in order to bring those qualities to light. Just as Melchisedech had earlier served to prefigure the eternity of Christ and the perpetuity of

---

<sup>115</sup> "Deinde cum dicit *cuius autem*, ostendit quomodo excellentius conveniebat Melchisedech accipere decimas, quia nec ipse erat de genere Abraham; unde *generatio eius non annumeratur cum eis*, scilicet Levitis . . . Sed ille non ex mandato cuiuscumque legis, sed per se *sumpsit decimas*. Ideo sacerdotium eius erat figura sacerdotii Christi, quod non est subditum legi." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.2 [341], 150.

Interestingly, the *Gloss* sees a figure of Christ in Melchisedech blessing Abraham, but not in him receiving tithes apart from the law; whereas Thomas takes the opposite stance—which suits his larger argument of showing Christ's superiority to the Old Testament, especially its priesthood and laws. "*Cujus generatio non annumeratur in eis*, id est in Judaeis. Quasi dicat: Qui erat alienigena absque mandato, sua auctoritate . . . *Quod minus est benedicitur a majori*. Proinde typus Christi melior est promissiones habente . . ." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 433; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 450A-B.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.6.

his priesthood, now Christ is directly accredited with both of those qualities, given that he is a priest “according to the power of an indissoluble life” and the recipient of an eternal priesthood according to the order of Melchisedech (Heb 7:16-17). The Levitical priesthood, and the law on which it was based, brought nothing to perfection. In contrast, the priesthood of Christ has brought in a better hope (Heb 7:19), in which this newly arisen priest, because of who he is, draws his people near to God. At this point, Thomas anticipates the arguments the Apostle will make in Heb 7:25-27, and, in an uncharacteristically eloquent closing, provides four Scripture citations that describe the effectiveness of Christ’s priestly work in removing the sins that had separated us from God and in thus giving us peace with God.<sup>117</sup>

In the fourth and final lecture on Heb 7, covering verses 20-28, Thomas says that the Apostle is continuing to argue for Christ’s superior priesthood. In this lecture, the fact that Christ is a priest forever is reiterated in Heb 7:21. But now the Apostle intensifies the perpetual nature of Christ’s priesthood by basing it on God’s oath and promises—an indication, says Thomas, that Christ’s priesthood is firmer than any other because it is part of the immovable divine plan.<sup>118</sup> Thomas alluded to the immovable divine counsel of

---

<sup>117</sup> “Si enim novus surgit, est *secundum virtutem vitae indissolubilis*: hoc est antecedens; et *introductio melioris*, etc.: et hoc est consequens. I Pet. I, 3 *regeneravit nos in spem vivam per resurrectionem Iesu*. Item per ipsum proximamus Deo. Per peccatum enim disiungimur ab ipso. Is. LIX, 2: *iniquitates vestrae diviserunt inter vos et Deum vestrum, et peccata vestra absconderunt faciem eius a vobis*. Hic est ergo ille, qui hoc removet, quod facit nos approximare Deo; hic autem est ille novus sacerdos, scilicet Christus, *qui tollit peccata mundi*, Io. I, 29. *Iustificati ergo ex fide pacem habeamus ad Deum per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, per quem accessum habemus in gratiam istam* Rom. V, v. 1 s.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.3 [363], 158-159.

<sup>118</sup> “Quantum ad maiorem dicit *et quantum est*, supple quod, *non sine iureiurando, alii quidem sine iureiurando sacerdotes facti sunt; hic autem*, et cetera. Omnia ista ponuntur ad probandum, quod sacerdotium Christi sit firmitus, quia supra dictum est omnis promissio, facta in Veteri Testamento per iuramentum, signum est consilii divini immobilis.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [365], 161. The Gloss describes Christ’s eternal priesthood as predicted by the prophet and confirmed as an unshakeable truth. “Tu es sacerdos in aeternum. Et quod in aeternum, *juravit Dominus*. Hoc dixit propheta, id est

God in discussing the oath God made to bless and multiply Abraham in Heb 6, when God similarly swore to show the firmness of his promise. Thomas here explained that when something is pronounced pertaining to God's eternal counsel, God never repents nor withdraws this pronouncement. Thomas concluded this discussion by stating that "when God promises something under oath, it is a prophecy of predestination, which reveals the divine plan"; and such a promise is absolutely unchanging.<sup>119</sup> It is this immutable divine plan on which Christ's firmer priesthood is founded.

Thomas' conclusion to the discussion of Christ's superior priesthood pays particular attention to Heb 7:26: "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." He states that the opening phrase, "For it was fitting," signals the Apostle's intention to prove the excellence of Christ's priesthood from the excellence of Christ himself—yet again an instance of establishing the preeminence of Christ's person.<sup>120</sup> Thomas then proceeds to explain how these four attributes of Christ given by the Apostle characterize a superior priesthood. First, Christ is holy. Holiness suggests a purity that has been consecrated to God, which Christ possesses as someone who has been consecrated to God since the beginning of his conception.<sup>121</sup> Second, Christ is innocent. Thomas views

---

inconcussa veritate firmavit." *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 434; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 455B.

<sup>119</sup> "Quandoque vero pronuntiatur aliquid secundum quod respicit consilium Dei aeternum: et super hoc Deus numquam poenitet, nec illud retrahit . . . Tamen sciendum est, quod quandocumque dominus promittit aliquid sub iuramento, est prophetia praedestinationis, quae est ostensiva divina consilii; et ista promissio penitus immutabilis est." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 6.4 [322], 139-140.

<sup>120</sup> "Deinde cum dicit *talis enim decebat*, etc., ostendit ex excellentia Christi excellentiam eius sacerdotii." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [374], 163.

<sup>121</sup> "Ponit autem quatuor conditiones de ipso, quae debent esse in sacerdote legali. Primo quod sit *sanctus* . . . Hanc autem perfecte habuit Christus. Sanctitas enim importat puritatem consecratam Deo.

innocence as purity towards one's neighbors, which Christ has as one who is sinless and therefore completely innocent.<sup>122</sup> Third, Christ is undefiled, a quality that pertains to himself, as prefigured in the lamb without blemish of Ex 12:5.<sup>123</sup> And fourth, Christ is separated from sinners by the quality of his life, as he does not associate with the defiled, and yet does deal with sinners for the sake of their conversion.<sup>124</sup> Thomas echoes this thought in the *Tertia Pars*, stating that "Christ ought to be separated from sinners as regards sin, which he came to overthrow, and not as regards nature, which he came to save, and in which 'it behooved him in all things to be made like to his brethren,' as the Apostle says (Heb 2:17)".<sup>125</sup> So separated from sinners is Christ that even in his human nature he is raised up above all heavenly creatures—an exaltation that augments his effectiveness. As Thomas expresses it in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, "in order to free the human race from its common sin, someone had to satisfy who was both man and so proportioned to the satisfaction, and something above man that the merit might be enough to satisfy for the sin of the whole human race."<sup>126</sup> Having rung the changes on these ideal

---

Christus autem a principio conceptionis suae Deo consecratus fuit." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [375], 163.

<sup>122</sup> "Secundo quod sit *innocens* . . . . Proprie autem dicitur innocentia puritas ad proximum . . . . Christus autem summe innocens fuit, utpote qui peccatum non fecit." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [375], 163.

<sup>123</sup> "Tertio quod esset *impollutus*, et hoc quo ad se . . . . De Christo autem dicitur in figura. Ex. c. XII, 5: *erit autem agnus sine macula*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [375], 163.

<sup>124</sup> "Quarto quod non commisceretur cum coinquinatis . . . . Christus autem fuit perfectissime a peccatoribus segregatus. Ps., I, 1; *beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum*, et cetera. Quod quidem verum est quantum ad similitudinem vitae. Sap. c. II, 15: *dissimilis est aliis vita illius*. Non tamen quantum ad conversationem, quia *cum hominibus conversatus est*, Bar. III, 38. Et hoc propter illorum conversationem. Math. c. IX, 11; *quare cum peccatoribus manducat magister vester?*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [375], 163.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.4.6, ad 1. This article has strong overtones of this lecture on Heb 7, discussing Christ as one who is holy, innocent, and in need of no cleansing.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* 4.54.9, 232.

priestly traits, Thomas concludes that this Christ is an intensely sufficient priest—because of who he is.<sup>127</sup>

*Comparing Christ to the Old Testament Priesthood: His Work, Power, and Efficacy*

In lecturing on the excellence of the person of Christ and comparing his person to the Old Testament priesthood, Thomas to some degree retained the criteria used in the earlier comparisons to angels and Moses, employing the categories of origin and dignity to assist him in proving Christ's superiority to the Levitical priests. In teaching about the work of Christ and its excellence, Thomas will again use the earlier criteria to a degree. But where Thomas considered Christ's power and dominion in comparing him to the angels and to Moses, when comparing Christ's work to that of the Levitical priesthood it will be the language of power and efficacy that will prevail. The discussion regarding Christ, the angels, and Moses was more universal in scope and had more to do with Christ as the Son, and the dominion to which he is entitled. In considering Christ's priestly work, and the effect of that work on the saved, the focus is narrower. Therefore, rather than considering Christ as the Son, to whom dominion is given, this section of Hebrews will consider Christ the high priest, and what he has given, in terms of making possible an eternally effective and powerful salvation.

The plan of Thomas Aquinas in lecturing on Heb 8:1-10:18 is to show the excellence of Christ's priesthood generally in Heb 8 and then more specifically beginning in Heb 9. His first lecture on Heb 8 marks a transition from a study of the person of Christ to a consideration of the priesthood of Christ, as Thomas acknowledges in his

---

<sup>127</sup> "Et intantum segregatus est, quod etiam *factus est excelsior caelis*, id est, super omnem caelestem creaturam, sublimata est humana natura in ipso. Supra I, 3: *sedet ad dexteram maiestatis in excelsis*, et cetera. Ergo iste est sacerdos valde sufficiens." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 7.4 [375], 163.

introduction to the lecture.<sup>128</sup> While the discussion of Christ's priesthood in Heb 8:1-2 begins with the focus on his person, a shift to Christ's work occurs at Heb 8:3 in Thomas' handling of this section of the letter.

*Hebrews* 8. Explaining how it is that in Heb 8:1 we have "such a high priest" requires Thomas to discuss the dignity and office of this high priest in his first lecture on this chapter. Christ has dignity, because he is seated at God's right hand in a position of judiciary power.<sup>129</sup> As Thomas notes in the *Tertia Pars*, just as someone at a king's right hand shares rule and judgment with him, so does Christ co-rule with the Father and receive judiciary power from him.<sup>130</sup> Thomas used the statement in Heb 1:3 regarding Christ's position at the Father's right hand to consider Christ's co-equality with the Father, and also his divine and human natures; he does the same here. Christ sits where he does as God, because he has the same authority as the Father, but is distinct in person; and he sits where he does as man, as a human high priest, because his assumed humanity has a certain association with the deity.<sup>131</sup> As Thomas explains in the *Summa*, "by being assumed into heaven, Christ as man attained that honor which belongs to the divinity.

---

<sup>128</sup> "Supra probavit Apostolus excellentiam sacerdotii Christi ad sacerdotium Leviticum ex parte personae, hic probat idem ex parte ipsius sacerdotii, et circa hoc facit duo. Primo enim ostendit sacerdotium Christi esse excellentius sacerdotio veteris legis, et primo hoc in generali; secundo in speciali, ibi *habuit quidem et prius*, scilicet IX cap." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [377], 165.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas Aquinas associates Christ's position at the Father's right hand with his authority to judge not only here in his *Hebrews* commentary but also in the *Tertia Pars*, in which Question 58 considers Christ's sitting at the right hand of the Father, and Question 59 considers Christ's power as judge.

<sup>130</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.1.

<sup>131</sup> "Hoc autem quod dicitur consedere, vel consedet, potest referri ad Christum, secundum quod est Deus; et sic consedet quia habet eandem auctoritatem iudicandi, quam habet Pater, sed distinctus est in persona . . . . Vel secundum quod homo, et hoc magis proprie ad intentionem Apostoli, quia loquitur de pontificatu Christi, qui est pontifex in quantum homo. Et sic consedet, quia humanitas assumpta habet quamdam associationem ad deitatem, et consedet ad iudicandum . . . . Et sic apparet dignitas sacerdotis." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [381], 166.



The very same divine honor, however, was his as God, not by any assumption, but by eternal origin.”<sup>132</sup> Thus as both God and man Christ is entitled to sit in a position of judiciary dignity, from which he will judge humanity.

Having established the dignity of this high priest, Thomas moves to consider the dignity of his office as a minister of the holies. Christ is a minister of the holy precincts or sanctuary, doing this work more excellently than previous priests. In this position, the humanity of Christ functions as an instrument of his divinity, administering at the present time the sacraments of grace, and in the future, the sacraments of glory.<sup>133</sup> Christ is also minister of the true tabernacle, the Church, for which the original tabernacle served as a figure.<sup>134</sup> This reading of the Old Testament worship system, and Christ’s role in fulfilling it, is consistent with Thomas’ study of the ceremonial precepts in his *Summa Theologiae*, in which he determined that these ceremonial precepts were ordered to the two purposes of the worship of God and the foreshadowing of Christ.<sup>135</sup>

Hence Thomas Aquinas has reiterated the excellence of Christ’s person on the basis of his unique dignity: a dignity enjoyed in both his divine and human natures in his position at the Father’s right hand; a dignity commensurate with his co-equality with the Father; and a dignity to which the Old Testament’s ceremonial precepts point. Thomas now shifts to teaching on the dignity of Christ’s priestly office. In corroborating the

---

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.58.2, ad. 2.

<sup>133</sup> “Hoc autem excellentius habet Christus, qui est minister, non quidem inquantum Deus, quia sic est auctor, sed inquantum homo. Lc, XII, 37: *transiens ministrabit illis*. Humanitas enim Christi est sicut organum divinitatis. Est ergo *minister sanctorum*, quia ministrat sacramenta gratiae in praesenti, et gloriae in futuro.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [382], 166.

<sup>134</sup> “Item est *minister tabernaculi veri*, quod est, vel eius Ecclesia militans . . . . Vel triumphans.” “Dicit autem *veri*, propter duo. Primo propter differentiam ad Vetus, quod erat figurale istius.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [382], 167.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.102.2.

dignity of this office, Thomas finds the Apostle arguing along three lines: that Christ as priest offers gifts and sacrifices; that Christ is not a minister of the things of the Law; and that Christ, rather, is a minister of greater things than the Law could offer.<sup>136</sup>

It is at this point that Thomas' argument begins to shift from the excellence of Christ's person as our high priest to the excellence of Christ's work. This shift turns on the unique sacrifice offered by Christ—a sacrifice that consists of himself. Thomas takes the rather generic-sounding statement in Heb 8:3, that every high priest is to offer gifts and sacrifices, and applies it directly to Christ's death, stating that “because it was indeed necessary for Christ to have something that might be offered, he himself offered himself (*ipse seipsum obtulit*)”—a construction that nicely summarizes Christ's dual role as priest and sacrifice.<sup>137</sup> This dual identity is something to which Thomas devotes an article of the *Tertia Pars*, in a question considering Christ's priesthood. He finds that Christ does indeed fill the roles of priest and victim; Christ as priest placed himself before God as a sacrifice, of his own free will, for the purpose of reconciling us to God.<sup>138</sup>

The quality and uniqueness of this sacrifice determines the quality and unique effectiveness of this priest's sacrificial work, as Thomas shows in describing both the sacrifice and its result. Just as Thomas saw in the better hope brought to us by Christ (Heb 7:19) an opportunity to preach on the reconciling work done by our high priest, so here he sees the chance to preach on the perfect sacrifice offered by this priest, as he

---

<sup>136</sup> “Deinde cum dicit *omnis enim pontifex*, etc., explicat in speciali. Et circa hoc facit tria. Primo enim ostendit Christum esse ministrum aliquorum sanctorum; secundo quod non veteris legis, ibi *si ergo esset*; tertio quod aliquorum maiorum, ibi *nunc autem melius*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [383], 167.

<sup>137</sup> “Quia vero necesse fuit Christum habere quod offerret, ipse seipsum obtulit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [384], 167. Translation mine.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.2, ad. 1.

makes five statements regarding Christ's sacrifice. The first three declarations are descriptive. Thomas opens by stating that first, this sacrifice was pure, without the stain of sin. Second, he says that this sacrifice was fitting, because it was man making satisfaction for man.<sup>139</sup> In a similar section in the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas turns to Augustine to initiate the discussion of the appropriateness of Christ as man making satisfaction for the human race: "I answer that, as Augustine says, 'God was able to assume human nature elsewhere than from the stock of Adam, who by his sin had fettered the whole human race; yet God judged it better to assume human nature from the vanquished race, and thus to vanquish the enemy of the human race.'"<sup>140</sup> Third, Thomas declares that this sacrifice was suitable for immolation, since Christ's flesh was mortal.<sup>141</sup>

Having provided three descriptive statements regarding the quality of Christ's sacrifice, Thomas now makes two more complex statements regarding the effect of Christ's sacrifice. First, this sacrifice was the same as the one to whom it was offered, since the Son and the Father are one, from Jn 10:30. Second, this sacrifice makes as one those for whom it is offered and the God to whom it is offered; and here Thomas cites Jn 17:21, Christ's prayer that his disciples might share the oneness that he and his Father

---

<sup>139</sup> "Fuit autem talis oblatio munda, quia caro eius nullam maculam peccati habuit. Ex. XII, v. 5: *erit agnus sine macula, masculus, anniculus*. Item fuit congrua, quia contruum est, quod homo pro homine satisfaciatur. Infra IX, v. 14: *obtulit semetipsum immaculatum Deo*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [384], 167.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.4.6; Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIII, 18, *PL* 42, 1032.

<sup>141</sup> "Item apta ad immolandum, quia caro eius mortalis erat. Rom. VIII, 3: *mittens Deus Filium suum in similitudinem carnis peccati*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [384], 167.

In making these three descriptive statements, Thomas may have in mind this passage of the Gloss on Heb 8:1-7: "Quid enim tam congruenter pro hominibus offertur, quam humana caro? Et quid tam aptum immolationi, quam caro mortalis? Et quid tam mundum pro mundandis vitiis mortalium, quam sine ulla contagione carnalis concupiscentiae caro nata in utero, et ex utero virginali?" *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 435; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, *PL* 192, 458 A-B.

know.<sup>142</sup> In choosing these scriptural citations and writing these comments, Thomas must have had in mind another passage from Augustine's *De Trinitate*, which he quotes in

3.48.3 of his *Summa*:

Augustine also says, there are four things involved in every sacrifice: the one to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, and for whom it is offered. The one and true mediator himself reconciled us with God by the sacrifice of peace, in order that we might remain one with him to whom it was offered, in order to make those for whom it was offered one in himself, and that he himself might be both the one who offered and who was offered.<sup>143</sup>

Both Thomas Aquinas and Augustine are mindful of the reconciliation and union of God and man accomplished by Christ as priest, sacrifice, and mediator.

In this series of five statements, the declaration regarding the immolation of Christ's flesh is the linchpin, for it is the giving of Christ's flesh—a pure and fitting sacrifice—that makes possible this reconciliation and union. Thomas writes further in the *Tertia Pars* that a sacrifice provides remission of sin and the removal of the barrier between God and humans. Further, an immolated sacrifice preserves the offerer “in the state of grace, united at all times with God in whom are found his peace and salvation.”<sup>144</sup> And a holocaust offering, which also is burned until fully consumed, wins for the offerer's spirit a “perfect union with God, something which will be realized fully only in heaven.”<sup>145</sup> Thus each of these sacrifices prefigures some aspect of the saving efficacy of the one sacrifice of Christ, in which not only is he the priest, but the supreme

---

<sup>142</sup> “Item est idem ei cui offertur. Io. X, 30: *ego et Pater unum sumus*. Item unit Deo illos pro quibus offertur. Io. XVII, 21: *ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu, Pater, in me, et ego in te, ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [384], 167.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.48.3; Augustine, *De Trinitate* IV, 14, *PL* 42, 901. The Gloss also quotes this passage from Augustine, although without crediting him. See *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 435; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, *PL* 192, 458B.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.2. These offerings are also discussed in *ST* 1-2.102.3, ad. 8.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.2.

victim. As Thomas states in another discussion of the Old Testament sacrifices, the offering of Christ's body corresponds to and fulfills all of these offerings.<sup>146</sup> Hence, the excellence and completeness of Christ's sacrifice determines the excellence and effectiveness of the work that it does, enabling Thomas to build a case for the unique and supreme efficacy of Christ's sacrificial work.

Because of who Christ is, and because of the sacrifice he makes, the result is the reconciliation of God and humanity—a result indicative of Christ's mediatorial status and work. Christ as mediator of a better testament, established on better promises, is the subject of the second lecture on Heb 8. All priests are mediators, says Thomas, charged with the task of bringing together extremes.<sup>147</sup> And this Christ has done, carrying us to the divine and making us partakers of the divine nature; making offerings for us to God; and promising heavenly things to us.<sup>148</sup> This more excellent work of Christ shows that he is a better priest, better mediator, and better minister of a better testament. To underscore this finding, Thomas chooses to close this lecture by expounding on the first half of Heb 8:10, in which the Apostle cites Jer 31:33 and God's promise of a better testament; and then he uses the final lecture on Heb 8 to amplify what this better testament has

---

<sup>146</sup> "Istis omnibus in Novo Testamento respondet oblatio corporis Christi, quia per corpus Christi placatus est Deus. Scilicet in oblatione ipsius in cruce." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [486], 213.

<sup>147</sup> "Omnis enim sacerdos mediator est. Iste autem *mediator est melioris foederis*, scilicet hominis ad Deum. Mediatoris enim est extrema conciliare." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [392], 171.

<sup>148</sup> "Iste vero ad nos divina attulit, quia per ipsum facti sumus *divinae consortes naturae*, ut dicitur II Pet. I, 4. Ipse etiam nostra offert Deo. Et ideo dicit Apostolus I Tim. II, 5: *mediator Dei et hominum homo Christus Iesus*. Ibi promittebantur temporalia. Is. I, 19: *si volueritis et audieritis me, bona terrae comedetis*. Hic autem caelistia, sicut supra dictum est. Sic ergo istud melius est quantum ad id, quod dominus hominibus promittit." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [392], 171.

accomplished.<sup>149</sup> Thomas states that this better testament is indeed the New Testament; and where the Old Testament relied on instructing through exterior things,<sup>150</sup> the New relies on the Holy Spirit to instruct interiorly and to produce transformed minds, affections, and hearts.<sup>151</sup>

*Hebrews 9:1-10:18.* Thomas has indicated in his lectures on Heb 8 that, in general terms, the New Testament and its high priest have superseded the Old Testament and its priests. Now the first two lectures on Heb 9 serve to show in detail the inadequacies of the previous dispensation. Heb 9:1-10 summarizes much of the Old Testament ceremonial material in regard to the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the sacrifice mandated on the Day of Atonement. Thomas Aquinas does full justice to this material, as he explains the literal meaning of the text, shows how each ceremonial item or action prefigured Christ, and then provides a Christ-centered spiritual meaning. It is with the last three lectures on Heb 9 and his first lecture on Heb 10 that he is able to return to his focus on the superior work of Christ as our high priest.

This he does by entering into a discussion of the high priest entering the holies in the greater tabernacle, a subject introduced in Heb 9:11-12. Thomas states that there are

---

<sup>149</sup> “Supra posuit Apostolus conditiones Novi Testamenti ex editione ipsius nunc ponit tres effectus ipsius.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [405], 176. These three effects are discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>150</sup> “Deinde cum dicit *quoniam ipsi non*, etc., ostendit defectum Veteris Testamenti ex eventu; et primo quantum ad culpam, et ideo dicit *quoniam ipsi non permanserunt in testamento meo*, quia scilicet non erat scriptum in cordibus ipsorum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [402], 174.

<sup>151</sup> “Alio modo interius operando. Et hoc proprium est Dei . . . Et hoc modo datum est Novum Testamentum, quia consistit in infusione Spiritus Sancti, qui interius instruit. Non autem sufficit tantum cognoscere, sed requiritur operari. Et ideo primo illuminat intellectum ad cognoscendum . . . Item ad bene operandum inclinatur affectum, unde imprimatur cordi. Et quantum ad hoc dicit *in corde eorum superscribam eas*, id est, super cognitionem scribam caritatem. *Super omnia autem caritatem habete*, etc., Col. III, 14, et Rom. V, 5: *caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [404], 175.

five considerations in this discussion: who entered, and where, how, when, and why he entered the greater tabernacle.<sup>152</sup> The discussion of this last element, the reason the better high priest entered the better tabernacle, carries over from the third lecture on Heb 9 to the fourth lecture. These five topics were previously addressed in the first two lectures on Heb 9, when, as Thomas noted, the Apostle provided the signification of the things that pertain to the Old Testament and the first tabernacle; now it is appropriate to do the same for the New Testament and the second tabernacle.<sup>153</sup>

Who it is that enters this tabernacle is Christ, whom Thomas calls the prince of the priests, in his role as high priest.<sup>154</sup> His predecessors had dispensed temporal goods as ministers of the prior testament; Christ, as minister of this testament, dispenses heavenly goods and future goods—the good things to come of Heb 9:11.<sup>155</sup> And this high priest, by virtue of his position, is a mediator between God and man: he “assists the Father through actively interceding for us”; and he “likewise assists us through actively helping us.”<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> “Sciendum est autem quod si considerentur supradicta, quinque dicta sunt de secundo tabernaculo, scilicet quis intrabat, quia solus pontifex; secundo, dignitas et conditio loci quo intrabat, quia dicebatur sancta sanctorum; tertio, quomodo intrabat, quia cum sanguine; quarto, quando intrabat, quia semel in anno; quinto, quare intrabat, quia pro expiatione peccatorum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [436], 192. The application of these five categories to this passage of Hebrews seems to be Thomas’ own; the Gloss does not adopt this approach. See *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 438; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 470A-471B.

<sup>153</sup> “Supra posuit Apostolus significationem eorum, quae pertinent ad Vetus Testamentum et primum tabernaculum, hic ponit conditiones eorum, quae pertinent ad secundum tabernaculum, quod repraesentabat Novum Testamentum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [435], 192.

<sup>154</sup> “Et primo quis sit ille qui intrat, quia *Christus*. Pontifex enim est princeps sacerdotum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [436], 192.

<sup>155</sup> “Ille ergo pontifex erat bonorum temporalium. Sed Christus est pontifex bonorum caelestium. Matth. V, 12: *gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in caelis. Est ergo pontifex futurorum bonorum*, quia per pontificatum eius introducimur in bona futura.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [435], 192-193.

<sup>156</sup> “Pontifex enim mediator est inter Deum et populu: Christus vero mediator est . . . Et ideo ipse assistit Patri ad interpellandum pro nobis . . . Item assistens nobis ad auxiliandum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [436], 193. Translations mine. The *Gloss* echoes this view of Christ as mediator:

Where this active and excellent high priest enters is the greater and more perfect tabernacle. Having called Christ the prince of priests, Thomas is conscious of the need to convey the dignity of the place that he enters.<sup>157</sup> It is a greater and more perfect tabernacle because, in contrast to its predecessor, it is unmovable; it is a place of heavenly glory; it is the seat of pilgrims, which they find only by grace; and it represents an immense multitude of good things for the people of God.<sup>158</sup>

How our high priest enters this tabernacle is with blood. The blood of calves and goats sufficed in the Old Testament; but Christ has entered by his own blood, “which for our salvation he sacrificed (*immolavit*) on the cross.”<sup>159</sup> The fact that the blood of many goats and calves is mentioned shows that the previous priests had to make multiple offerings—a failing that leads Thomas to the “when” of our high priest’s offering: Christ entered once, for all time, and poured out his blood once.<sup>160</sup>

As to why Christ entered this better tabernacle, Thomas explains that it was in order to make an offering for the ignorance of the people. In describing this work by Christ, Thomas alludes to his power: the blood of Christ itself is more powerful,

---

“*Christus assistens pontifex Patri interpellandum pro nobis, vel fidelibus ad auxiliandum dator . . .*” *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 438; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 470C.

<sup>157</sup> “Secundo ostendit dignitatem interioris tabernaculi, quia dicit *per amplius*, et conditionem, quia *et perfectius* . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [437], 193.

<sup>158</sup> “Secundo ostendit dignitatem interioris tabernaculi . . . utpote quia est immobile. . . . Hoc autem est tabernaculum caelestis gloriae . . . . Dicitur autem tabernaculum, quia est locus peregrinorum. Non enim debetur nobis ex conditione naturae; sed tantum per gratiam . . . . Est ergo peramplius propter multitudinem bonorum immensam . . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [437], 193.

<sup>159</sup> “Tertio ostendit quomodo intrabat, quia non sine sanguine . . . . Ideo dicit *neque per sanguinem hircorum aut vitulorum, sed per proprium sanguinem*, quem pro salute nostra immolavit in cruce.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [439], 194.

<sup>160</sup> “Quarto quando intrabat, quia ssemel in anno: Christus autem per totum tempus, quod est quasi annus. *Introivit semel in sancta*, et semel etiam fudit sanguinem suum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [440], 194.



obtaining our redemption; and our redemption is forever, because Christ's power is infinite. Thomas' argument here is that because of the power of Christ and the power of his blood, the saving work that he does has the greatest possible efficacy. In contrasting the effect of the blood of sacrificed animals with that of Christ's blood, Thomas finds the Apostle making this point: "accordingly, I have said that through his own blood he wrought eternal redemption, in which appears his greatest efficacy."<sup>161</sup>

And again, when the Apostle says, "how much more shall the blood of Christ," Thomas finds the Apostle demonstrating the efficacy of Christ's blood through three things.<sup>162</sup> First, Christ's blood cleanses, as the Old Testament sacrifices could not; this cleansing power of Christ's blood fulfills the prophecy of Mt 1:21 and the giving of the name Jesus to God's Son. Second, Christ made this sacrifice by the Holy Spirit, who also has a cleansing power, as well as by the love for God and neighbor prompted by the Spirit. Third, Christ's own clean and unblemished condition indicates the efficacy of his sacrifice.<sup>163</sup> Thus, in making this unmatched sacrifice, Christ has, as the Apostle says in Heb 9:14, powerfully and effectively cleansed our consciences from dead works so that

---

<sup>161</sup> ". . . quasi dicat: ita dixi, quod per proprium sanguinem fecit aeternam redemptionem, in quo apparet eis maxima efficacia." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [442], 195.

<sup>162</sup> "Et ponit Apostolus tria, quae ostendunt efficaciam sanguinis Christi. Primo quis est ille cuius est sanguis ille, qui scilicet est Christus. Ex quo patet quod eius sanguis mundat. Matth. I, 21: *ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum*. Secundo causam quare Christus sanguinem suum fudit, quia hoc fuit Spiritus Sanctus, cuius motu et instinctu, scilicet caritate Dei, et proximi, hoc fecit . . . Spiritus autem mundat . . . Tertio conditionem eius, quia est *immaculatus*. Ex. XII, 5: *erit agnus absque macula masculus anniculus*. Eccli. XXXIV, 4: *ab immundo quis mundabitur?*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [444], 195-196.

<sup>163</sup> Thomas makes the same point—that being sinless, Christ's flesh was most efficacious for the cleansing of sins—in the *Tertia Pars*. See ST 3.48.3, ad 1.

we may serve the living God—a cleansing that occurs by faith, being cleansed from sins and to God’s service.<sup>164</sup>

The next lecture on Heb 9 continues this discussion of the effect and efficacy of Christ’s work as our mediator, demonstrating that Christ and the New Testament do what the Old Testament could not. The bulk of the lecture, and the scriptural text that it covers, concerns the inadequacy of the previous testament; but Thomas’ opening exposition of Heb 9:15 addresses Christ’s superiority. Thomas alludes to Christ entering the holies, which was the subject of the previous lecture, and then proves that the superior effect of his entry—our eternal redemption, a redemption that leads us to eternal things—testifies to a different and superior testament, of which Christ is clearly the mediator.<sup>165</sup> Thomas states that in every testament something is promised and something serves to confirm the testament. Regarding this new and better testament, Christ’s death to redeem us from sin is the confirmation of it, and the inheritance of eternal glory is the subject of the promise.<sup>166</sup> This depiction in Heb 9:15 of Christ’s work as mediator, as one who redeems us by atoning for our sins, and who gives us a heavenly inheritance and spiritual things, is echoed in Thomas’ *Summa*. Here Thomas describes a mediator as an intermediary whose office is to bring two parties together, bearing what belongs to one over to the other. This

---

<sup>164</sup> “Sciendum tamen quod sanguis illorum animalium mundabat tantum ab exteriore macula, scilicet a contactu mortui; sed sanguis Christi mundat interius conscientiam, quod fit per fidem.” “Item ille mundabat ut possent accedere ad figurale ministerium, sed sanguis Christi ad spirituale obsequium Dei.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.3 [446], 196.

<sup>165</sup> “Dicit ergo: *et ideo*, quia scilicet Christus intravit in sancta, aeterna redemptione inventa, id est, perducens ad aeterna, quod Vetus non poterat facere, unde oportet quod istud Testamentum sit aliud ab illo, sicut novum a veteri . . . *Ideo huius Novi Testamenti mediator est* Christus inter Deum et hominem.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.4 [448], 198.

<sup>166</sup> “In omni autem testamento est aliquid quod promittitur, et aliquid per quod testamentum confirmatur. In Novo autem Testamento promittuntur caelestia et spiritualia. Item ista promissio per mortem Christi confirmata est. Et ideo Christus *mediator est Novi Testamenti, ut repromissionem* aeternae beatitudinis ac *haereditatis aeternae, recipiant qui vocati sunt*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.4 [448], 198.

Christ does as man, uniting man with God, “which he does by setting before men the divine commandments and gifts and by atoning and interceding for men with God.”<sup>167</sup>

The remaining two lectures on this section cover Heb 9:23-28 and Heb 10:1-18, respectively. Their task is to continue to show how the ceremonies of the Old Testament prefigured what Christ has done in the New Testament, with Christ’s sacrifice serving to render void the previous system in a superior and definitive way. These two lectures reiterate much of the discussion found in the earlier lectures on Heb 9. But in order to clarify the scriptural material in these last two lectures, Thomas picks up once again the categories used to discuss Heb 9:11-15 in terms of who entered the holies, and where, how, when, and why he entered. Then the subject was Christ entering the better tabernacle, as our high priest; now, the subject is Christ entering the better tabernacle in order to offer himself, as our sacrifice.

Thomas Aquinas swiftly recapitulates the who, where, and how, stating that earlier the Apostle had said that Christ is the high priest in question, who entered the holy place, with blood. Now the Apostle adds the fourth category as he declares when it is that Christ enters.<sup>168</sup> And in the final lecture in this series, which is the first lecture on Heb 10, the Apostle will consider the fifth category, namely, the why of Christ’s entering and offering, in terms of the purpose and effect of his sacrifice. In treating these last two categories of when and why, Thomas seems to view the Apostle’s approach as consisting

---

<sup>167</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.26.2.

<sup>168</sup> “Sciendum est autem quod Apostolus supra dixerat tria de Christo. Primo scilicet quod est pontifex; secundo quae sit dignitas loci quem intravit; tertio quomodo introivit, scilicet cum sanguine; ista autem tria iam declaravit: hic declarat quando intravit, quia sicut pontifex legalis semel in anno, Christus semel tantum. Et hoc erat quartum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [468], 205.

of three steps: first, showing what was done in the Old Testament; second, comparing the Old and New; and last, establishing the superiority, efficacy, and finality of the New.<sup>169</sup>

Regarding the “when” of Christ’s entry, he entered and offered himself only once, just as the high priest would enter the tabernacle just once a year, every year, with the blood of another.<sup>170</sup> In comparing the Old Testament with the New, Thomas finds that the repetitive nature of the high priest’s yearly sacrifice, which had as its purpose the expiation of the sins of the people of Israel, is not germane to Christ’s sacrifice; for, as the Apostle notes, then Christ would have had to suffer often from the beginning of the world, given that he was made the propitiation for our sins and the sins of the entire world, from I Jn 2:2.<sup>171</sup> But in the New Testament, we are told that Christ has appeared once; and Thomas says that the Apostle gives two reasons for Christ appearing once since he was offered only once. First, in the Old Testament sins were not taken away; this removal is made possible only by the sacrifice of Christ. Second, the high priest did not offer his own blood; only Christ did. Therefore, says Thomas, while the former sacrifices are repeated, the sacrifice of Christ is not.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> “Unde circa hoc tria facit. Primo enim ostendit quid fiebat in Veteri Testamento; secundo quod esset inconueniens istud fieri in Novo Testamento, ibi *alioquin*; tertio ostendit quid fiat in Novo Testamento, ibi *nunc autem semel*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [468], 205.

<sup>170</sup> “In Veteri enim Testamento pontifex, licet non intraret nisi tantum semel in anno, tamen quolibet anno ex praecepto legis oportebat ipsum intrare cum sanguine alieno . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [469], 205-206.

<sup>171</sup> “Non sic autem est de Veteri hostia, quia illa offerebatur pro peccatis filiorum Israel. Ille autem populus incepit spiritualiter quando data fuit lex, et ideo non oportet eam offerri ab origine mundi. Christus autem seipsum obtulit pro peccatis totius mundi, quia ipse propitiatio nostra factus est pro peccatis nostris et totius mundi, I Io. II, 2. Et sic, si saepe offerretur, oportuisset ipsum nasci, et pati ab origine mundi, quod fuisset maximum inconueniens.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [470], 206.

<sup>172</sup> “In isto autem Christus semel apparuit, cuius ponit duas rationes, quia scilicet semel tantum offerebatur. Prima est, quia in Veteri Testamento non auferebantur peccata, quod fit per hostiam Christi. Alia est, quia sacerdos legalis non offerebat proprium sanguinem, sicut Christus. Unde dicit, quod *apparuit ad destitutionem peccati per hostiam*, scilicet sui ipsius, et ideo illa reiteratur, non autem ista. I Pet. III, 18: *Christus semel pro peccatis nostris mortuus est*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [472], 207.

This sacrifice of Christ's own blood is the topic of the remainder of this lecture, while the removal of sin by Christ's sacrifice is the subject of the next. Regarding the sacrifice of Christ's blood, Thomas draws a connection between the experience of man and that of Christ: just as it is appointed once for man to die (Heb 9:27), and then face judgment, so Christ was offered only once (Heb 9:28), although not to face judgment, since he had no sin.<sup>173</sup> Human death is the effect of sin, and so is inescapable; but Christ's death was voluntary; its effect is to destroy sin, exhausting the sins of many (Heb 9:28).<sup>174</sup> In the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas develops further the effect of Christ's death on sin and its effect, the death of the human race. He states that "the effect of Christ's death is judged in relation to its removal of those things which are hindrances to our salvation, namely, the death of the soul and the death of the body." Hence, Christ's death not only destroys sin; it also destroys the deaths of the soul and body.<sup>175</sup> Thomas does qualify the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, noting that while it is sufficient for all, it is efficacious only for those who are to be saved, for those who are subject to Christ through faith and good works.

Having established the "when" of Christ's offering of himself, and touched on the effect of that offering on sin, Thomas considers more fully the removal of sin effected by Christ's sacrifice in the lecture on Heb 10:1-18. Herein lies the "why," the purpose and

---

<sup>173</sup> "Secundam explicat [sacerdos legalis non offerebat proprium sanguinem, sicut Christus] per similitudinem aliorum hominum, unde circa hoc facit duo. Primo enim ostendit, quid accidit aliis hominibus; secundo ostendit, quid accidit in Christo, ibi *sic et Christus semel*. In quolibet enim homine duo invenimus, scilicet necessitatem moriendi; item quod resurgat, non ut emundetur, sed ut iudicetur de factis eius." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [473-474], 207.

<sup>174</sup> "Secundo differt, quia mors nostra est effectus peccati. Rom. VI, 23: *stipendia peccati mors*. Sed mors Christi est destructiva peccati. Ideo dicit *ad multorum exhaurienda peccata*, id est, removenda. Nec dicit *omnium*, quia mors Christi, etsi sit sufficiens pro omnibus, non tamen habet efficaciam, nisi quantum ad salvandos. Non enim omnes subiiciuntur ei per fidem et bona opera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 9.5 [477], 208.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.50.6.

effect of Christ's death, and the last of the five categories to be considered.<sup>176</sup> In this lecture, Thomas sees the Apostle proving that the Old Testament was unable to cleanse sins, whereas Christ could. The discussion of Heb 10:1-4 underscores both the operation of the Old Testament system and its futility. The futility of the Old Testament sacrifices is seen in their frequent reiteration, which is evidence of their failure to cleanse.<sup>177</sup> This futility is also seen in the fact that the yearly sacrifices constitute a commemoration of the sins of the people, which is evidence of the sacrifices' failure to abolish sins.<sup>178</sup> If any sins were ever remitted, says Thomas, it was on account of the power of Christ's blood, which the Old Testament sacrifices prefigured.<sup>179</sup>

Heb 10:11-14 is the focus of the comparison of the Old and New Testaments in Thomas' exegesis of this passage. It was God's will—God's immovable divine plan—that the oblation of Christ's body should bring about our sanctification.<sup>180</sup> Thomas notes the daily sacrifices made by the priests, as they stand to offer repeatedly the same

---

<sup>176</sup> "Supra Apostolus consideratis his, quae aguntur in utroque testamento, ostendit praeeminentiam Novi Testamenti ad Vetus, hic probat unum quod supponit, scilicet quod Vetus non poterat mundare peccata. Et hoc est ultimum illorum quinque, quae praemisera de Christo." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [479], 210.

<sup>177</sup> "Ad probandum autem quod lex non mundabat perfecte, assumit duo. Primum est quod in ipsa fiebat frequens reitatio earundem hostiarum . . . Quia ergo non cessabant idem semper offerre, signum est quod non mundabantur." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [482], 211.

<sup>178</sup> "Secundum quod praemittit est, quia in Veteri Testamento fiebat commemoratio per singulos annos de peccatis suis et populi, ergo non erant abolita." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [482], 212.

<sup>179</sup> "Solemnius enim quod erat inter ipsa, erat oblatio hircorum et vitulorum, quae fiebat in die expiationis. Et cum ista esset quaedam repraesentatio obscura et imperfecta caelestium, sicut umbra, *impossible est sanguine istorum auferri peccatum*. Quod verum est propria virtute. Sed si alicui dimittebantur, hoc erat virtute sanguinis Christi, qui in illo praefigurabatur." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [483], 212. Thomas makes the same argument in *ST* 1-2.103.2.

<sup>180</sup> "Deinde cum dicit *in qua voluntate*, exponit illud quod dixerat de voluntate Dei, ad quam implendam venit Christus, scilicet quae sit illa voluntas . . . Ideo dicit *in qua voluntate sanctificati sumus*, et hoc, *per oblationem corporis Christi Iesu*, scilicet factam. Eph. V, 2: *obtulit semetipsum oblationem et hostiam Deo*. Et hoc, *semel*. I Petr. III, 18: *Christus semel pro peccatis nostris mortuus est*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [493], 216.

sacrifices, and the contrast to Christ, who in his priesthood offered one sacrifice to take away sins, and now sits at God's right hand.<sup>181</sup> He sits there not as a minister or priest, but as the Lord, says Thomas, in consequence of both his co-equal power in his divinity and his superior goods in his humanity. Introducing Christ's lordship at this point is not trivial. As Thomas points out in his *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, the gravity of someone's suffering must be measured by the dignity of the sufferer, so that injury to a king is more serious than injury to a private person. Since Christ is divine, and so has infinite dignity, then his suffering is infinite, making it sufficient for the redemption of the human race.<sup>182</sup> Thus who Christ is—the nature and dignity of his person—determines the power and efficacy of his redemptive work.<sup>183</sup>

Throughout this lecture Thomas Aquinas has stressed the power of Christ's saving work, as his sacrifice alone provides eternal redemption, having eternal power

---

<sup>181</sup> "Dicit ergo *hic autem*, scilicet Christus, *offerens unam hostiam pro peccatis*, auferentem scilicet peccata. Illa vero vetus lex multas offerebat hostias non expiantes peccata; *hic ergo*, scilicet Christus, *offerens unam hostiam*, quia semel pro peccatis nostris semetipsum obtulit, *sedet*, non tamquam minister, sicut sacerdos legalis qui semper praesto est, sed tamquam Dominus . . . *In dextera Dei Patris*, quantum ad aequalitatem potestatis secundum divinitatem, sed in potioribus bonis secundum humanitatem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [497], 216.

<sup>182</sup> "Iniuria vel passio alicuius mensuratur ex dignitate personae; maiorem enim iniuriam patitur rex si percutiatur in facie, quam aliqua privata persona. Sed dignitas personale Christi est infinita, quia est persona divina. Ergo quaelibet passio eius, quantumcumque sit minima, est infinita; quaelibet ergo passio eius suffecisset ad redemptionem humani generis, etiam sine morte." Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* 2.1.2.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas addresses the question of divine suffering in *ST* 3.46.12, in regard to whether Christ's passion should be attributed to his divinity. His conclusion here is that what is impassible cannot suffer; and Christ's passion can be attributed to him not because of his divine nature, but because of his human nature. Thomas also considers this question in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.55 in a manner that is less theological than in the *Tertia Pars*, but that manages to be both pragmatic and poetic; Thomas states that Christ assumed flesh capable of suffering and death because it "was required by His mission as mediator: that, while He had in common with us flesh capable of suffering and death, but in common with God power and glory, He should take away from us what He had in common with us—namely, suffering and death—in order to lead us to that which was common to Him and God. For He was the mediator uniting us to God." Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* 4.55.14, 240-241.

sufficient to cover both sins already committed and sins yet to be committed.<sup>184</sup> Near the end of this lecture on Heb 10:1-18, Thomas provides a statement of the unmatched superiority of Christ's sacrifice:

And therefore he says that "by one oblation he has completed," that is, perfected, which he did by reconciling and joining us to God as at the beginning, "forever those who are sanctified," because Christ's sacrifice, who is God and man, has eternal power to sanctify. Heb 13:12: "Jesus, that he might by his own blood sanctify the people," et cetera. For through Christ we are perfected and joined to God. Rom 5:2: "through whom we have access to God."<sup>185</sup>

No other statement is necessary, except to reiterate the last verse of this pericope and remind the epistle's readers that this one powerful sacrifice has ended the need for any further sacrifices.

### Conclusion

In an argument running from Heb 1:4 to Heb 10:18, Thomas has meticulously proven the case for the superiority of Christ to the angels, to Moses, and to the Old Testament priesthood. When the unique origin, dominion, power, and dignity of Christ are placed alongside the equivalent qualities possessed by the angels and by Moses, Christ's status as Son and Lord overshadows their worthy but lesser status as creatures and servants.

---

<sup>184</sup> "Unde supra loquens de virtute sacrificii Christi attribuit ei virtutem perpetuam, dicens *aeterna redemptione inventa*. Quod autem habet virtutem perpetuam sufficit ad committenda, et commissa, et ideo non oportet ipsum amplius iterari. Unde Christus *una oblatione mundavit in aeternum sanctificatos*, sicut dicitur infra (Heb 10:14)." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [482], 212.

<sup>185</sup> "Et ideo dicit quod *una oblatione consummavit*, id est, perfecit, quod fecit reconciliando et coniungendo nos Deo tamquam principio, *sanctificatos in sempiternum*, quia hostia Christi, qui Deus est et homo, habet virtutem aeternam sanctificandi. Infra XIII, v. 12: *Iesus ut sanctificaret per suum sanguinem populum*, et cetera. Per Christum enim perficimur et coniungimur Deo. Rom. V, 2: *per quem accessum habemus ad Deum*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.1 [499], 217. Translation mine.

Both Baer and Larcher translate *principio* as "principle," but, because of the two time markers (*sempiternum*, "forever," and *aeternam*, "eternal") I chose to translate *principio* as "beginning." Christ by his sacrifice removing our sins, and reconciling and joining us to God "as at the beginning," fits the *exitus/reditus* pattern that one sees in the *Summa Theologiae*. It also corresponds to the three-fold work of Christ—creation, illumination, and justification—cited in the prologue to Thomas' Hebrews commentary.



And when Christ's high priesthood is compared to the Old Testament priesthood, the evidence for the efficacy of the former and the futility of the latter is overwhelming. While Christ's dignity as a priest may, at first glance, appear comparable to that of the Levitical priests, in actual fact his dignity far surpasses theirs. For while they have the honor of representing the people before their God, in an earthly tabernacle, and making sacrifices for their sins, Christ represents his people before God in a heavenly tabernacle, for which the earthly structure serves as a shadow and a figure. And the earthly sacrifices have no power to remove sins or cleanse a sinner, but serve in their futility to point to the one, fully efficacious sacrifice of Christ—a sacrifice that covers sins of the past and sins of the future.

Each time Thomas concludes his comparisons of Christ to angels, Moses, and the priests, he perceives in the Apostle's next topic a transitional exhortation to obey. For, "having shown in many ways the eminence of Christ over the angels, the Apostle from this concludes that the teaching of Christ is more worthy of obedience."<sup>186</sup> Likewise, having proved "that Christ is more excellent than Moses, the Apostle concludes that Christ is more worthy of obedience."<sup>187</sup> And finally, having shown

the far greater eminence of the priesthood of Christ with respect to the priesthood of the Law, the Apostle concludes this in his habitual way, with an instruction to adhere more faithfully to this priest. For this he always did previously in the epistle, that after commending Christ he set down an admonition, because he undertook to commend the grace of Christ for this purpose—that he might entice them to obey Christ, and to withdraw from the ceremonies of the law.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> "Supra ostendit Apostolus multipliciter eminentiam Christi ad angelos, hic ex hoc concludit, quod magis obediendum est doctrinae Christi, scilicet Novo Testamento, quam Veteri Testamento." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.1 [89], 45. Translation mine.

<sup>187</sup> "Supra probavit Apostolus, quod Christus est maioris excellentiae quam Moyses, hic concludit quod magis est obediendum Christo." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.2 [170], 80. Translation mine.

<sup>188</sup> "Postquam ostendit Apostolus multiplicem eminentiam sacerdotii Christi respectu sacerdotii legalis, hic iuxta consuetudinem suam concludit, monendo quod isti sacerdotio fideliter inhaerendum est.

Thomas Aquinas, through this careful reading and exposition of the major argument of Heb 1-10, has provided every bit of evidence available to show that this Christ—who has a unique origin and dignity, who possesses all power and dominion, and who, because of who he is—is able to save completely, and is to be followed and obeyed.

---

Hoc enim semper supra fecit, quod post commendationem ponit admonitionem, quia ad hoc suscepit commendare gratiam Christi, ut alliciat eos ad obediendum Christo, et recedendum a caeremonialibus legis.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.2 [501], 218. Translation mine.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Thomas Aquinas' Reading of Hebrews: The Excellence of Christ's Work

In his commentary on Hebrews, Thomas Aquinas framed his approach to the epistle by opening the prologue with Ps 85:8—"There is none among the gods like unto you, O Lord; and there is none according to your works." As Thomas noted, these words from the psalmist serve to describe the twofold excellence of Christ in terms of his person and his works. Throughout the commentary, Thomas has been careful to explicate the teachings of the Apostle in order to demonstrate that Christ's person and works are integrally related, and that this relationship is a pivotal one, since who Christ is determines the work that he does in order to save us. In addressing the excellence of Christ's person, Thomas has considered the excellence of Christ in himself, according to his unique origin, dominion, power, and dignity. He has also used those categories in order to address Christ's superiority when compared to angels, to Moses, and to the Old Testament priesthood. Having thus established both the inherent and comparative superiority of Christ to any person or institution that the Old Testament may offer, the task that remains is to study the excellence of the works of Christ.

While the introduction to Hebrews in the *Magna Glossatura* alludes to Christ's excellence, it focuses on Christ's person and anticipates the Apostle's comparison of Christ's high priesthood and faith in him with the Levitical priesthood and reliance on the Law. It makes no reference to the excellence of Christ's works.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Thomas

---

<sup>1</sup> The Apostle "gratiam Dei hic commendat per Christum verum pontificem" and "intendit Christi eminentiam, et fidei sufficientiam, nec non legis insufficientiam et inutilitatem ostendere." *Biblia Latina*

devotes a short section of his commentary's prologue to a consideration of the threefold work of Christ, which displays or manifests Christ's excellence just as fully as does his person.<sup>2</sup> Christ's threefold works or effects extend first to all creatures, through the work of creation; then to rational creatures who are illuminated by Christ, through the work of illumination; and finally, to the saints, who through Christ and through vivifying grace are vivified and justified by him.<sup>3</sup> When Christ's works are compared to the works of angels, prophets, and priests, it is their inability and his incomparability that are made manifest: for, as Thomas states, angels are not creators, but creatures; prophets cannot illuminate, but themselves need illumination; and priests cannot justify, but themselves require justification.<sup>4</sup> Thus, just as the examination of Christ's person established his inherent and comparative superiority, so will the examination of his works.

In order to investigate the works of Christ as presented in the letter to the Hebrews and expounded by Thomas Aquinas, it will be helpful to proceed in two ways. First, a consideration of the works of Christ and their excellence as seen in the prologue

---

*cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*, ed. K. Froehlich and M.T. Gibson, volume 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 422; Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 399D-400A and 400D.

<sup>2</sup> "Secundo manifestatur haec excellentia per effectus, cum dicitur *et non est secundum opera tua*, ubi sciendum est quod triplex est opus excellens Christi." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue [3], 2. Henceforward, *Hebrews*, Larcher.

<sup>3</sup> "Unum quod se extendit ad totam creaturam, scilicet opus creationis. Io. I, 3: *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*. Aliud quidem tantum ad creaturam rationalem, quae per Christum illuminatur, quod est illuminationis. Io. I, 9: *erat lux vera*, et cetera. Tertium est iustificationis, quod pertinet tantum ad sanctos, qui per ipsum per gratiam vivificantem vivificantur et iustificantur. Io. I, 4: *et vita erat lux hominum*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2. Translation mine.

<sup>4</sup> "His enim tribus modis non possunt operari dii praedicti, angeli enim non sunt creatores, sed creaturae. Ps. CIII, 4: *qui facis angelos tuos spiritus*, et cetera. Prophetiae etiam sunt illuminati, non illuminantes. Io. I, 8: *non erat ille lux*, et cetera. Sacerdotes etiam non iustificabant. Infra X, 4: *impossibile est enim sanguine hircorum et taurorum auferri peccata*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [3], 2.

will provide a foundation for further study. And then second, an analysis of places in the Hebrew commentary in which Thomas reflects on all three works of Christ—creation, illumination, and justification—will be most instructive in helping us to appreciate what Thomas does so distinctively with the book of Hebrews.

Such an approach is valid for three reasons. First, in the prologue Thomas distinguished these three themes as aspects of the threefold work of Christ. We have seen how programmatic the prologue is in regard to the excellence of Christ's person; the same will hold true of the excellence of Christ's works. Second, because the themes of creation, illumination, and justification are so vast in themselves and so pervasive throughout Hebrews, a study of each one, and its every occurrence in Hebrews, is beyond the scope of this work. This point necessitates the following point, which is that, third, these three themes do occur together in the Hebrews commentary five times, with their fulfillment expounded by Thomas in lecture 8.3, on Heb 8:10b-13. After that lecture, the three themes no longer appear in a group—only singly. Thus it seems that Thomas deliberately kept in view Christ's threefold work in creation, illumination, and justification, only as long as seemed exegetically appropriate. Because presenting and expounding those three themes as a triad would have been intentional on his part, reading his commentary with that intention in mind is fitting and should prove enlightening.

### *Christ's Works in the Prologue*

The first occurrence of the threefold work of Christ is in the prologue to his commentary on Hebrews, in which Thomas Aquinas states that the excellence of Christ is evident in his work in creation, illumination, and justification. Part of Thomas' method of exegesis involved the selection of verses from other books of Scripture to support the

points or comments made regarding the text at hand; the passages chosen to support the three excellent works of Christ are all drawn from the prologue to John's gospel, so that the work of creation is paired with John 1:3, the work of illumination with John 1:9, and the work of justification with John 1:4. Because Thomas evidently sees a strong degree of correlation between the Johannine prologue and Christ's works as presented in Hebrews, it will be helpful to look at Thomas' commentary on the gospel of John in order to see his views on those verses and understand how they relate to Christ's threefold work of creation, illumination, and justification.<sup>5</sup>

John 1:3, which Thomas has chosen to support Christ's work in creation, states that "all things were made through him" (John 1:3). In his commentary on the gospel of John, Thomas Aquinas uses his exposition of this statement to accomplish two tasks: first, to corroborate the divinity of the Son established in John 1:1-2; and second, to distinguish creation from its divine creator.<sup>6</sup> In an exegetical catena, Thomas shows how John 1:3 reveals "according to Chrysostom, the equality of the Word with the Father; the coeternity of the Word with the Father, according to Hilary; and the consubstantiality of

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Weisheipl, Thomas' commentary on John was written during his second Paris regency (1269-1272), a time frame with which Chenu and Torrell concur. Thomas had finished his work on the *Catena aurea*, which concludes with John, by 1267; Torrell states that the commentary on John draws from the Johannine part of the *Catena aurea*. Weisheipl holds that the commentary on Hebrews was also written during the years 1269-1272 in Paris, while Mandonnet would assign it to Thomas' years in the papal states, from 1259-1268. Either way, Thomas' work on Hebrews could have overlapped or followed his work on John, whether in the *Catena aurea* or the commentary. See James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), 118-119; 372-373. Also M.-D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 247; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1, The Person and His Work* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 139, 339.

<sup>6</sup> David B. Burrell, "Creation in St. Thomas Aquinas's *Super Evangelium S. Joannis Lectura*, in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 122.

the Word with the Father, according to Augustine”<sup>7</sup>—thus proving the uniqueness and divinity of the one through whom all things were made. Thomas also uses the findings of his three fellow commentators to show that Christ, the Word, is active in creation and yet separate from it: for to be coequal with God is fitting for one who is the principle of all creation<sup>8</sup>; to be coeternal with the Father indicates that the Word preceded the existence of any creatures<sup>9</sup>; and to be consubstantial with the Father disallows the Word’s possession of the substance of a creature.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the interplay between the excellence of Christ’s work in creation in Hebrews and Thomas’ comments on John 1:3 allows one to appreciate first, Christ’s divinity, and second, Christ’s causal relationship with creation as well as his distinction from creation.

Thomas’ second citation from the Johannine prologue is John 1:9, “he was the true light which enlightens every man,” which he applies to the excellence of Christ’s work of illumination. In his commentary on John, Thomas states that it was necessary for

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 1.2 [72], 31. “Sic ergo habes verbi aequalitatem ad patrem, secundum Chrysostom, coaeternitatem secundum Hilarium, et consubstantialitatem, secundum Augustinum per hoc quod dicit *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, trans. James A. Weisheipl (Albany, NY: Magi Books, no date), 1.2 [72], <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm> [accessed May 27, 2014]. These same three divine qualities were propounded by Thomas in his exegesis of Heb 1:3—yet another example of the close relationship he sees between Hebrews and the Johannine prologue. See Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.3 [36], 18.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2.1 [69], 30-31. “Esse enim principium omnium factorum proprium est Dei magni omnipotentis, iuxta illud Ps. CXXXIV, 6: *omnia quaecumque dominus voluit, fecit in caelo et in terra*. Verbum ergo per quod facta sunt omnia, est Deus magnus et coequalis patri.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 2.1 [69].

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2.1 [70], 31. “Ex quo sic argumentatur: si omne tempus ab ipso factum est; ergo nullum tempus fuit ante ipsum; nec cum ipso; quia ante omnia erat; ergo sunt ab aeterno coaeterni.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 2.1 [70].

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2.1 [71], 31. “. . . et si non est creatura, necesse est dicere ipsum esse eiusdem substantiae cum patre, cum omnis substantia praeter essentiam divinam facta sit. Substantia autem, quae creatura non est, Deus est. Verbum ergo, per quod omnia facta sunt, consubstantiale est patri, cum nec factum, nec creatura sit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 2.1 [71].

the Word to come in order to rectify the lack of divine knowledge in the world; here he cites John 18:37 and Jesus' statement that he was born and came into the world for the purpose of testifying to the truth.<sup>11</sup> Thomas points out that this lack of divine knowledge is due to a defect in humanity, not in God or in the Word.<sup>12</sup> Rather, the Word is the "true light," as John has written. "Light" implies a manifestation of spiritual things or of sensible things, although this term is better suited to the spiritual.<sup>13</sup> Light as a manifestation in turn suggests truth and knowledge; and, in the case of spiritual things, light denotes the knowledge of the Word that leads to salvation.<sup>14</sup> Not only is the Word "light," but he is the "true light," in a way that distinguishes him from any other source of light. Thomas states that the Word of God is the "true light" by his essence, in contrast to the false light provided by philosophers, the figurative and partial light found in the Old Testament law, and the participated light enjoyed by angels and holy men.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.5 [124], 52-53. "Necessitas autem adventus verbi videtur esse defectus divinae cognitionis, quae in mundo erat. Unde hanc necessitatem sui adventus assignat, dicens, infra XVIII, 38: *In hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.5 [124].

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.5 [124], 53. "Ad insinuandum ergo hunc divinae cognitionis defectum, duo facit Evangelista. Primo ostendit quod iste defectus non est ex parte Dei, neque ex defectu verbi; secundo ostendit quod est ex parte hominum, ibi *et mundus eum non cognovit.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.5 [124].

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.3 [96], 41. ". . . de quocumque nomen lucis dicatur ad manifestationem refertur, sive illa manifestatio sit in intelligibilibus, sive in sensibilibus." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.3 [96].

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.3 [97, 100, 98], 42. ". . . sicut sunt creaturae rationales, quibus non solum manifestatur hoc vel illud, sed ipsa veritas quae manifestabilis est et manifestativa omnium." "Et ideo Evangelista loquens de verbo dicit non solum esse vitam, sed etiam esse lucem, ne intelligas vitam sine agnitione . . . ." "Chrysostomus enim dicit quod Evangelista intendebat in isto Evangelio tradere nobis cognitionem de verbo, secundum quod ad salutem hominum ordinatur ." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.3 [97, 100, 98].

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.5 [125], 52-53. "Sed verbum Dei non erat lux falsa, non figuralis, non participata, sed lux vera, idest per essentiam suam. Et ideo dicit *erat lux vera.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.5 [125].



In support of Christ's excellence in regard to the work of justification, Thomas Aquinas uses John 1:4b, "the life was the light of men." With this citation in the Hebrews prologue, Thomas may have in mind the various explanations of John 1:4a-b ("in him was life, and the life was the light of men") provided by Augustine, Origen, Hilary, and Chrysostom, and quoted in his commentary on John. But it is Origen's view that is most relevant to Christ's justifying work as described in the Hebrews prologue. Origen, according to Thomas, first states that some things are said of the Son as he is in himself, such as his omnipotence; and some things are said of the Son in relation to humanity, such as his status as our Redeemer. Thomas then expounds Origen's interpretation of John 1:4 in this way:

And so Origen, explaining it along these lines [who Christ is as God, and who he is in relation to us], says that although in himself the Son is life, yet he was made life for us by the fact that he gave us life, as is said, "Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will come to life" (I Cor 15:22). And so he says 'the Word that was made' life for us *in himself was life*, so that after a time he could become life for us; and so he immediately adds, *and that life was the light of men*.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas, in the gospel of John and in the Hebrews commentary, sees a close relationship between light and life, which Origen also perceived. Origen's view corresponds with that of Thomas in the Hebrews prologue, in which he puts great emphasis on the life-giving power of Christ, and the position of Christ as the head from whom life flows to all the members of his body.<sup>17</sup> Thomas explicates the relationship between light and life further

---

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.2 [92], 39-40. "Secundum hoc ergo Origenes exponens dicit quod quamvis in seipso sit vita, tamen nobis factus est vita per hoc quod nos vivificavit, iuxta illud I Cor. XV, 22: *sicut in Adam omnes moriuntur, ita et in ipso omnes vivificabuntur*. Et ideo dicit quod *verbum quod factum est nobis vita, in ipso vita erat*, ut quandoque nobis fieret vita; et ideo statim subdit *et vita erat lux hominum*." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.2 [92]. Thomas uses this passage from Origen to explain John 1:4 in his *Catena aurea*, as well.

<sup>17</sup> "In ista vero commendat ipsam gratiam quantum ad caput, scilicet Christum; in corpore enim Ecclesiae ista tria reperiuntur sicut et in corpore naturali, scilicet ipsum corpus mysticum, membra

in his exegesis of John 8:12; he states that the light of Christ, who is the light of the world, is life-giving, so that our possession of life depends on our knowledge of, and participation in, the divine light of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

This consideration of Thomas' prologue to Hebrews, coupled with further study of the Johannine references he attaches to Christ's work of creation, illumination, and justification, leads to two conclusions. First, reading the statements in the prologue through a Johannine lens, one is led to appreciate that Christ is our source of corporeal life, through the work of creation; of intellectual life, through the work of illumination; and of spiritual life, through the work of justification. And second, by invoking the Johannine prologue in support of Christ's work in Hebrews, Thomas has adumbrated the duality of the natures of Christ—a duality that features powerfully in his discussion of Christ's person in Hebrews, as we have already seen, and that must be understood in order to appreciate fully Christ's incarnation. Whether Christ is considered as creator, light, or life, his divinity is evident; but also evident is his incarnate state, as one who has entered the created order, shone as light in a dark world, and come in order to give life. How explicitly Thomas Aquinas intended to link his Hebrews prologue to John 1 may be debatable; but his choice of these three verses from John's prologue to support the

---

principalia, scilicet praelati et maiores, et caput, a quo vita fluit in totum corpus, scilicet Christus.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher Prologue [4], 2.

<sup>18</sup> “. . . lumen vero istud vitam dat, quia vivimus in quantum intellectum habemus, qui est quaedam participatio illius lucis. Quando autem lux illa perfecte irradiabit, tunc habebimus vitam perfectam.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part II: Chapters 8-21, trans. Fabian R. Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1998), 8.2 [1145], <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm> [accessed May 27, 2014].

See also the discussion in Carlo Leget, “The Concept of ‘Life’ in the *Commentary on St. John*,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 165-166.

threefold work of Christ skillfully lays a foundation for the deeper discussion of Christ's person and works in the Hebrews commentary.

### *Christ's Works in the Commentary*

In the body of Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews, five considerations of Christ's threefold work occur. In his first lecture on Heb 1, Thomas Aquinas comments on the opening two verses of the epistle; in this lecture, he twice examines Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification—speaking of this triad first in regard to Christ as the Word, and second, in regard to Christ as the Lord. In the second lecture, he discusses sin and Christ's threefold work. Then in expounding Heb 2:12, Thomas touches on Christ's works in connection with declaring the Father's name to his brethren—an act that Thomas places in the context of the Church. Finally, Thomas discusses the fulfillment of Christ's works in a lecture on Heb 8:10b-13. Hence, Thomas' references to Christ's three works may be viewed as falling into something of a narrative sequence: who Christ is in himself, in terms of what he has done as Word and Lord; why sin made Christ's works necessary; Christ's declaration of the Father in reference to the Church; and the completion of Christ's works.

It must be pointed out how original to Thomas Aquinas it is to specify and apply Christ's three works of creation, illumination, and justification to his reading of the epistle to the Hebrews. Looking at sources such as the *Glosses*, and the sermons on Hebrews by John Chrysostom, points of contact between their expositions of the Hebrews passages and Thomas' lectures are evident in some of the verse-by-verse comments that he makes. These points of contact are especially evident in regard to the *Glosses*. For example, in dealing with Heb 8:11, which speaks of the least and greatest

knowing God without being taught, the *Gloss* of Peter Lombard and the *Magna Glossatura* state that the least and greatest can be distinguished according to the order of time or the order of dignity, but that all will accept their denarius from the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas makes the same three points, in addition to supplying the reference to the denarius found in Mt 20:9. An allusion in the *Glosses* influences Thomas' reading of Heb 2:12, as well, as we shall see. But in spite of there being some expository similarities between Thomas' commentary and his sources, Thomas' organizing principle of reading Hebrews according to Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification is unique to him.

#### *Hebrews Lecture 1.1: Christ's Works as Word*

The first use in the Hebrews commentary of the triad of creation, illumination, and justification occurs in Thomas' first lecture on the epistle. The discussion of Christ as the Word is prompted by the statement in Heb 1:1-2 that in times past God spoke in the prophets in various ways and at various times, but in these days he has spoken to us by his Son. Speaking, according to Thomas, has three aspects: first, a conception of the word, whereby one preconceives in the mind that which is to be spoken by the mouth; second, the expression of the word, which introduces what the mouth is to speak; and third, a manifestation of what is expressed, which makes it evident.<sup>20</sup> The conception of

---

<sup>19</sup> "Scient, dico, a minore usque ad majorum eorum . . . . Quod intelligi diversis modis potest, ut majores dicantur, vel tempore, vel dignitate, id est tempore priores, vel intelligentia digniores. Majores ergo intelliguntur, vel priores qui nos posteriores expectaverunt in denario accipiendo, vel scientia, vel virtute." Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 463A; *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, 436. The *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria* attributes the denarius allusion to Chrysostom, although his name does not appear in connection with that comment in Peter Lombard's *Gloss*.

<sup>20</sup> "Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod tria requiruntur ad locutionem nostram. Primo, verbi conceptio, qua scilicet praeconciatur in mente id quod ore loquendum est; secundo ipsius verbi concepti

the word Thomas associates with the eternal generation of the Son,<sup>21</sup> and the expression of the word he links to creation, illumination, and justification in the ensuing discussion.

God's word is expressed through the bringing forth of creatures. The Word makes this creative enterprise possible, since the Word exists in likeness to the Father and is also the likeness according to which all creatures were made<sup>22</sup>—two points echoed in the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>23</sup> Thomas explains that such a creative work has as its purpose the existence of things, according to the statement in Wis 1:14 that God created all things in order that they might be.<sup>24</sup> As a result, creation cannot, strictly speaking, be considered a manifestation or a speaking; however, this creative work does allow God to be made known, as Rom 1:20 asseverates, stating that the invisible things of God may be understood by created things.<sup>25</sup> Thomas maintains this same point later in the Hebrews

---

expressio, qua insinuetur quod conceptum est; tertio ipsius rei expressae manifestatio, qua res expressa evidens fiat." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 7-8.

Similar discussions of the Son as Word appear in *ST* 1.34.1-3 and in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV.11. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*, trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 79-90.

<sup>21</sup> "Deus ergo loquendo, primo concepit, cuius conceptio una fuit, et ab aeterno Iob c. XXXIII, 14: *semel loquitur Deus*, et haec aeterna fuit Filii generatio, de qua in Ps. II, v. 7: *Dominus dixit ad me: filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

<sup>22</sup> "Secundo, huiusmodi conceptum expressit, et hoc tripliciter. Primo in creaturarum editione, cum scilicet Verbum conceptum similitudo Patris existens, sit etiam similitudo ad quam omnes creaturae factae sunt. Gen. I, c: *dixit Deus: fiat lux*, et cetera." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

<sup>23</sup> "But in God to be and to understand are one and the same; hence the Word of God is not an accident in Him, or an effect of His, but belongs to His very nature." Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.34.2, ad. 1. "Word implies relation to creatures. For God by knowing Himself knows every creature. . . . But because God by one act understands Himself and all things, His unique Word is expressive not only of the Father, but of all creatures." Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.34.3.

<sup>24</sup> "Prima autem expressio, scilicet in creatione, non ordinatur ad manifestationem, sed ad esse, Sap. I *creavit Deus ut essent omnia*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

<sup>25</sup> "Cum ergo expressio non habeat rationem locutionis nisi prout ordinatur ad manifestationem, manifestum est, quod illa expressio non potest dici locutio, et ideo numquam dicitur, quod Deus loquatur creando creaturas, sed quod cognoscatur. Rom. I, 20: *invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8. D. L. Jeffrey notes that Jewish readers of Hebrews would have readily comprehended this point, given that *davar* (word) and *daver* (work) are

commentary, when he declares that the Lord had Moses build the tabernacle according to the heavenly pattern, because he wished thus to lead us through sensible things to intelligible and spiritual things.<sup>26</sup> Or, as Thomas expresses it in the *Summa Theologiae*, “material things must be understood according as they are abstracted from matter and from material likenesses,” so that “through material things thus considered we acquire some knowledge of immaterial things.”<sup>27</sup>

God’s word is also expressed in the work of illumination. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae* states that illumination, which he defines as an increase of the intellectual powers caused by divine grace,<sup>28</sup> is necessary for a created intellect to know God. In this the rational creature is reliant on God, because “for knowledge of any truth whatsoever, man needs divine help, so that the intellect may be moved by God to its act.”<sup>29</sup> Thus divine illumination is “the means by which human beings come to knowledge of the truth,” in order to know God<sup>30</sup>—which is a possibility only if “God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it,”<sup>31</sup> and illuminates the

---

indistinguishable when unpointed; to use this pair of words to describe God’s action in the world was a commonplace in Jewish literature.

<sup>26</sup> “. . . *et facito omnia secundum exemplar*, et cetera. Quia naturaliter inferiora tendunt in similitudine superiorum. Dominus enim per sensibilia voluit nos ad intelligibilia et spiritualia manuduci.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.1 [389], 169.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.85.1.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.12.6.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.109.1.

<sup>30</sup> A. N. Williams, “Argument to Bliss: The Epistemology of the *Summa Theologiae*,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (October 2004): 510.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.12.5.

created intellect as its efficient, exemplar, and governing or final causes.<sup>32</sup> This union and illumination is what the revelation of the Incarnate Son makes possible.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas states in the Hebrews commentary that in this work of illumination, sensible, intellectual, or imaginary notions that lie hidden in the Word are imparted to the minds of angels and holy men.<sup>34</sup> Thomas explains the term “notion” in his commentary on John, stating that it “names a conception of the mind precisely as in the mind, even if through it nothing exterior comes to be.” In contrast, a “word” Thomas holds to signify “a reference to something exterior.”<sup>35</sup> By referring to the notions that are latent in the Word (*in quibus species omnium rerum, quae in Verbo latebant, indidit*) Thomas on the one hand underscores the Word as the source of all wisdom and knowledge, and on the other hand reminds his readers of their absolute dependence on the Word and his work of illumination. Thomas cites as an example the prophet Jeremiah, to whom came the word of the Lord in Jer 1:2—an illuminating event made possible by God alone, in which all Jeremiah can do is be the willing recipient. Thomas says that such a manifestation from the Word is truly a speaking, because it is directed to the knowledge of divine wisdom.<sup>36</sup> As Thomas notes in one of his quodlibetal discussions, “whatever the Father knows, his

---

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Cuddeback, “Thomas Aquinas on Divine Illumination and the Authority of the First Truth,” *Nova et Vetera* 7, no. 3 (2009): 583.

<sup>33</sup> Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 165.

<sup>34</sup> “Secundo per quasdam notiones, puta in mentibus angelorum, in quibus species omnium rerum, quae in Verbo latebant indidit, et in mentibus hominum sanctorum: et hoc per revelationes sensibiles, vel intellectuales, vel imaginarias. Et ideo omnis talis manifestatio procedens a Verbo aeterno, locutio nuncupatur. Ier. I, 2: *factum est verbum Domini*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.1 [33], 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> “Secunda vero expressio, quae est editio specierum in mente angelica, vel humana, ordinatur tantum ad cognitionem sapientiae divinae, et ideo potest dici locutio.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

unique Word speaks in its entirety,”<sup>37</sup> so that in the Word, “God has said everything, has revealed all about Himself and His works, has communicated Himself to the full.”<sup>38</sup> Hence, the Word is the rational creature’s only source for the illumination and wisdom that will lead the creature to God.

Finally, God’s word is expressed in the work of justification, a work that in the prologue Thomas identifies with being vivified and sanctified by Christ and his grace.<sup>39</sup> Keating notes that Thomas associates justification with a broad range of concepts, including salvation, the infusion of grace, spiritual regeneration, and sanctification; this range of meaning also includes the giving of life, as we have seen from Thomas’ prologue to the Hebrews commentary. Thus, while remission of sin is included, it is not the only concept in view when Thomas is considering justification.<sup>40</sup> For example, regarding Eph 2:8 and being saved by grace, Thomas declares that “to be saved is the same as to be justified. For salvation brings with it liberation from dangers; thus, man’s perfect salvation will be in eternal life, when he is immune from all dangers, just as a ship is said to be safe when it has reached port.”<sup>41</sup> As Keating concludes, Thomas Aquinas

---

<sup>37</sup> “Unde quidquid Pater scit, totum unico suo Verbo dicit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi (Taurini: Marietti, 1949), IV.4.6, 75.

<sup>38</sup> A. Blanco, “Word and Truth in Divine Revelation: A Study of the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on John 14,6,” in *La Doctrine de la révélation divine de saint Thomas d’Aquin. Acts du Symposium sur la pensée de saint Thomas d’Aquin tenu à Rolduc, les 4 et 5 Novembre 1989*, ed. Leo Elders. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 31. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.1 [27], 15.

<sup>39</sup> “Tertium est iustificationis, quod pertinet tantum ad sanctos, qui per ipsum per gratiam vivificantem vivificantur et iustificantur.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher Prologue [3], 2.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel A. Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 144.

<sup>41</sup> “Idem enim est salvari et iustificari. Salus enim importat liberationem a periculis; unde perfecta salus hominis erit in vita aeterna, quando ab omnibus periculis immunis erit, sicut navis dicitur esse salvata, quando venit ad portum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and*



“understands justification in rather broad terms, as encompassing various aspects of the New Testament’s depiction of our incorporation into Christ.”<sup>42</sup>

Thomas maintains in the *Hebrews* commentary that this justifying and saving work is made possible by the Incarnation, by God’s Word assuming flesh.<sup>43</sup> Thomas at this point cites Augustine’s statement that the relationship between the incarnate Word and the uncreated Word is that of the word of the voice to the word of the heart.<sup>44</sup> Thus the Incarnation, according to Augustine, is the utterance of God to man, a call with a saving purpose in view. The Incarnation was ordered for the threefold purpose of being, knowing, and the express manifestation of God, according to Thomas: because it was through assuming flesh that the Word was made man, and it was through the Word being made man that we are brought into the full knowledge of God.<sup>45</sup> Thus Thomas both reiterates the Word’s roles in creation, illumination, and justification (“being,” “knowing,” “expressly manifesting”), and sums them up in terms of their telos or end, the full knowledge of God toward which the justifying work of the Word is meant to move

---

*Ephesians*, trans. F. R. Larcher and M. L. Lamb, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 39, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), *Commentary on Ephesians* 2.3 [93], 224. Translation mine.

<sup>42</sup> Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” 144.

<sup>43</sup> “Tertio per carnis assumptionem, de qua dicitur Io. I, 14: *Verbum caro factum est, et vidimus gloriam eius*, et cetera. Et ideo dicit Augustinus, quod hoc modo se habet Verbum incarnatum ad Verbum increatum, sicut verbum vocis ad verbum cordis.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine discusses this subject in *De Fide et Symbolo*, ii, 3. See *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 355.

<sup>45</sup> “Tertia vero, quae est per assumptionem carnis, ordinatur ad esse, et ad cognitionem, et ad expressam manifestationem, quia per assumptionem carnis, et Verbum factum est homo, et nos in cognitionem Dei perfecit. Io. XVIII, 37: *ad hoc natus sum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati*. Et se nobis expresse manifestabit. Bar. c. III, 38: *post haec in terris visus est, et cum hominibus conversatus est*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [15], 8.

us. Hence, as Heb 1:2 declares and as Thomas Aquinas has expounded, God truly has spoken most perfectly and fully in these days through his Son.

*Hebrews Lecture 1.1: Christ's Works as Lord*

The second set of allusions to Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification in this lecture occurs in conjunction with Thomas' discussion of Heb 1:2 and Christ's dominion as the appointed heir of all things.<sup>46</sup> The context has shifted from the Son as Word to the Son as Lord, with Thomas opening the discussion by stating that it is right that Christ, according to both his divine and human natures, be respectively the natural heir from eternity and the one made heir of all things.<sup>47</sup> But in Thomas' discussion of Christ's dominion, it is according to his divine nature that Christ's threefold work, in his position as heir and Lord, is demonstrated.<sup>48</sup>

First, regarding creation, Christ is heir and Lord. He enjoys this position because Christ, from I Cor 1:24, is the power and wisdom of God, through whom the Father made everything. Therefore, if the Father is called Lord of all, by reason of creation, then similarly the Son, through whom all things were brought into being, is Lord.<sup>49</sup> Second,

---

<sup>46</sup> "*Quem constituit haeredem universorum. Ostensa excellentia Christi quantum ad proprietatem originis, hic ostendit excellentiam eius quantum ad maiestatem domini, et quidem congrue coniungit locutus est in Filio, et constitutus est haeres, quia si filii, et haeredes, Rom. VIII, 17.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 11.

<sup>47</sup> "Sciendum est autem, quod in Christo sunt duae naturae, divina scilicet et humana; sed secundum divinam naturam, sicut non est constitutus Filius cum sit Filius naturalis ab aeterno; ita nec est constitutus haeres, sed ab aeterno est haeres naturalis. Secundum vero naturam humanam, sicut est factus Filius Dei . . . ita et factus est haeres universorum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 11.

<sup>48</sup> "Et quidem secundum divinam naturam competit Christo, quod sit haeres genitus, et Dominus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>49</sup> "Et primo quidem, quia ipse est *Dei virtus, et Dei sapientia*, I Cor. I, 24, per quem Pater omnia facit. Et ideo si Pater dicitur Dominus omnium, ratione creationis, similiter et Filius, per quem omnia producuntur in esse, Dominus est. Prov. VIII, 30: *cum eo eram cuncta componens.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

regarding illumination, Christ is Lord, because the Son is the wisdom of the Father, through which he governs all. Therefore, if the Father is called Lord by reason of governance, then the Son also is suitable for lordship.<sup>50</sup> And third, regarding justification, the Father is Lord in that all things are ordered to him as to the first principle and the end of all things. Similarly, the Son, who is the wisdom of God which precedes all things, is Lord.<sup>51</sup> Thomas' argument is clear: in all that the Son has accomplished, he merits the title Lord. Yet all that he has accomplished has been done in dependence on the Father, whose heir he is. Therefore, as the only begotten Son and heir of the Father, who is Lord of all, the Son is also Lord—as demonstrated by his works in the spheres of creation, illumination, and justification.

### *Hebrews Lecture 1.2: Sin and Christ's Works*

In its first two occurrences, Thomas Aquinas has used the triad of creation, illumination, and justification to begin a conversation regarding the unique and efficacious work of the Son as Word and as Lord. In the next occurrence of this threefold work, in Thomas' second lecture on Heb 1, the topic is the effect of sin on humanity, and how human sin necessitates Christ's work in all three areas. Heb 1:3 alludes to Christ's purgation of our sins, which he is uniquely qualified to cleanse, by reason of his divine

---

<sup>50</sup> “Secundo quia Filius est Patris sapientia, qua omnia gubernat. Sap. VIII, 1 dicitur de sapientia: *attingit a fine usque ad finem*, et cetera. Si ergo Pater dicitur Dominus ratione gubernationis Sap. XIV, 3: *tu autem, Pater, gubernas omnia*, etc., et Filio competit Dominium.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

<sup>51</sup> “Item Pater est Dominus, inquantum ad ipsum omnia ordinantur, sicut ad primum principium, et finem omnium; similiter et Filius, qui est Dei sapientia, praecedens omnia, Dominus est. Eccli. I, 3: *sapientiam Dei praecedentem omnia, quis investigabit?* Prov. XVI, v. 4: *universa propter semetipsum operatus est Dominus.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [21], 12.

nature.<sup>52</sup> Thomas' approach is to address the effects of sin on us, and the remedy Christ provides for those effects, touching on each of Christ's three works in the process.

Interestingly, he inverts the usual sequence of Christ's works, as in his discussion of the effects of sin and their remedies he considers our justification, our illumination, and our creation, in that order.<sup>53</sup>

First, because of sin, the human race needs Christ's work of justification. Sin is to be understood as transgression of the law—in this case, of the eternal law and divine right.<sup>54</sup> Because the eternal law and divine right are from the eternal Word, says Thomas, it is manifest that Christ, since he is that Word, has the prerogative to bring about the purgation of sin.<sup>55</sup> Thomas discusses the eternal law in his *Summa Theologiae*, explaining that the world is ruled by divine providence and governed by divine reason. Such an idea of God governing has the nature of a law; and “since the Divine Reason's conception of things is not subject to time but is eternal, according to Prov 8:23, hence it is that this kind of law must be eternal.”<sup>56</sup> In a *Summa* article on sin, Thomas defines sin as a bad and voluntary human act, which is evil in its failure to conform to human reason and

---

<sup>52</sup> “Convenit etiam Christo purgare, ratione divinae naturae, et ratione proprietatis filii. Ratione divinae naturae, quia culpa seu peccatum proprie est malum rationalis creaturae. Hoc autem malum, sive peccatum non potest reparari nisi per Deum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [38], 18.

<sup>53</sup> In this discussion of Christ's purgation of our sins, Thomas provides four effects and remedies, dealing with justification, illumination, creation, and sonship. The first three relate to Christ's divine nature as their cause, and apply to the present argument. The fourth relates to Christ's human nature and distinctive sonship as its cause, and pertains to our adoption as sons and heirs. See Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 18-19.

<sup>54</sup> “Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod in peccato, primo quidem est transgressio legis aeternae et iuris divini, cum omne peccatum sit iniquitas, quae est transgressio legis. Is. c. XXIV, 5: *mutaverunt ius, dissipaverunt foedus sempiternum*. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>55</sup> “Cum ergo lex aeterna et ius divinum sit a Verbo aeterno, manifestum est quod ad Christum competit purgatio peccatorum, inquantum est Verbum. Ps. CVI, 20: *misit verbum suum, et sanavit eos*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.91.1.

eternal law.<sup>57</sup> When a man sins, says Thomas, he cleaves to certain things against the light of reason and the divine law, producing a stain in the soul.<sup>58</sup> And how is this divine and eternal law promulgated? By the divine Word.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Thomas' point in the Hebrews commentary is that as the one who promulgates the divine law, the Word also has the right to make reparation for the transgression of this law, providing purgation of the stain of sin and thus justification for transgressors.

Second, because of sin, the human race stands in need of Christ's work of illumination. Thomas states that with sin comes the loss of the light of reason—a loss that in turn causes the loss of participation in the wisdom of God. Furthermore, all evil is ignorance, according to Aristotle.<sup>60</sup> The only one who can make amends for this loss of divine wisdom, and the evil produced by ignorance, is Christ: he can set things right according to divine wisdom, because he is divine wisdom himself.<sup>61</sup> Thomas addresses the identification of Christ with divine wisdom in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, stating succinctly that “the Son of God is the Word and conception of God understanding Himself. It follows, then, that the same Word of God, as wisely conceived by the divine mind, is properly said to be ‘conceived or begotten Wisdom’ and so the Apostle calls

---

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.71.6.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.86.1.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.91.1, ad. 2.

<sup>60</sup> “Secundo est in peccato amissio luminis rationis, et per consequens sapientiae Dei in homine, cum huiusmodi lumen sit participatio quaedam divinae sapientiae. Bar. III, 28: *et quia non habuerunt sapientiam, ideo perierunt*. Prov. XIV, 22: *errant omnes qui operantur malum*. Et secundum Philosophum, omnis malus est ignorans.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>61</sup> “Rectificatio autem ad divinam sapientiam, competit ei qui est divina sapientia. Hic autem est Christus. I Cor, I, 23 s.: *praedicamus Christum, Dei virtutem, et Dei sapientiam*. Sap. IX, 19: *nam per sapientiam sanati sunt, quicumque placuerunt tibi, domine, a principio*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

Christ: 'the Wisdom of God' (I Cor 1:24)."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, just as his position as the promulgator of divine law allows Christ to deal with transgressors of the law, Christ's position as the Word and Wisdom of God allows him to correct the loss of the light of reason and the wisdom of God.

Third, because of sin, Christ's creative work must be reapplied to the human race. Sin has caused a deformation of man's likeness to God. And Thomas invokes an element of willfulness on man's part, and a sense of man's deliberate choice, by referring to the prodigal son's decision to go away to a distant region in Luke 15:13.<sup>63</sup> If it is man who must be held responsible for his deformity and departure, it is the Son who can correct the deformity and bring about man's return, by virtue of his being the image of his Father.

Thomas discusses the creation of humanity in God's image in the *Summa*, and cites Augustine's statement that "man surpasses other things not in the fact that God Himself made man . . . but in this, that man is made to God's image."<sup>64</sup> And it is the return to this divine image, this created likeness to God, that is the goal of Christ's restorative work. Thomas affirms this point in the Hebrews commentary with his use of I Cor 15:49 and the Apostle's injunction that, as we have borne the image of the earthly, we are also to bear the image of the heavenly. As Thomas explains in his commentary on I Corinthians, it is as sinners conformed to the likeness of Adam that we bear the image of the earthly; now, in the life of grace, we ought to be conformed to the heavenly image

---

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV.12.3.

<sup>63</sup> "Tertio in peccato est deformatio similitudinis Dei in homine. Prov. XV, 7: *cor stultorum dissimile erit*. Unde dicitur Lc. XV, 13 de filio prodigo, quod abiit in regionem longinquam." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [39], 19.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.91.4, ad. 1.

of the man of heaven, in order to attain the life of glory.<sup>65</sup> Thomas reiterates this conformity to the image of Christ in his discussion of Rom 8:29, stating that our adoption as sons is equivalent to conformity to the Son's image and is the end or effect of our predestination.<sup>66</sup> Keating, in exploring Thomas' comments on this adoption, observes that in this endeavor,

The origin of all is God, who in his goodness wishes to communicate his very goodness to those made in his image. And the means of this communication is a participation in the Son, a conformity to him through grace, by which we attain to a share in God's very goodness. The eternal Son in his human nature came to share by grace in a participatory relationship with his divinity, so that through participation we too might share by grace in the goodness of God."<sup>67</sup>

Thus the divine image in which we were created is brought to its final fulfillment and perfection, all because of the one who "assumed human nature in order to repair it,"<sup>68</sup> and whose divine nature has removed sin's deformation of our likeness to God. Christ's work of re-creation restores in us the image of God.

---

<sup>65</sup> "Et ideo dicit *sicut portavimus*, etc., id est quamdiu peccatores fuimus, in nobis fuit similitudo Adae. II Reg. VII, 19: *ista est lex Adam, Domine Deus*, et cetera. Ut ergo possimus esse caelestes, id est pervenire ad vitam gloriae, *portemus imaginem caelestis*, per vitam gratiae. Col. c. III, 9 s.: *exuentes veterem hominem, induite novum hominem*, scilicet Christum. Rom. VIII, 29: *quos praescivit et praedestinavit conformes*, et cetera. Sic ergo debemus conformari caelesti in vita gratiae, quia alias non perveniremus ad vitam gloriae." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 38, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), *Commentary on I Corinthians* 15.7 [1998], 376.

<sup>66</sup> "Unde convenientius sic ordinatur littera: *quos praescivit, hos et praedestinavit fieri conformes imaginis Filii sui*. Ut ista conformitas non sit ratio praedestinationis, sed terminus vel effectus. Dicit enim Apostolus Eph. I, 5: *praedestinavit nos in adoptionem filiorum Dei*. Nihil enim aliud est adoptio filiorum quam illa conformitas. Ille enim qui adoptatur in Filium Dei, conformatur vero Filio eius." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 8.6 [703-704], 234.

<sup>67</sup> Keating, "Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas," 152-153.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.7 [168], 69. "Praeterea ad hoc verbum humanam naturam assumpsit, ut eam repararet. Ergo id reparavit quod assumpsit. Si ergo non assumpsit animam rationalem, non reparasset eam: et sic nullus fructus proveniret nobis ex verbi incarnatione, quod falsum est. *Verbum ergo caro factum est*, idest carnem animatam anima rationali assumpsit." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, 1.7 [168].

### *Hebrews Lecture 2.3: Christ's Declaration of the Father*

In a manner reminiscent of his treatment of Christ as the Word, Thomas connects Christ speaking with his threefold work of creation, illumination, and justification in the lecture on Heb 2:9-13. Thomas attributes Heb 2:12, which is a quotation of Ps 22:22, to Christ, with its statement that “I will declare thy name to my brethren; in the middle of the Church will I praise thee.”<sup>69</sup> For evidence that Christ fulfilled Heb 2:12, Thomas cites two verses from the gospel of John: Jn 17:6, which is Christ’s statement that he has manifested the Father’s name to his disciples; and John 1:18, which says that the only begotten has declared the Father.<sup>70</sup> And then Thomas considers what the second half of Heb 2:12 means, with Christ praising God in the middle of the church or congregation. At this point he unexpectedly produces a lyrical spiritual exposition:

Then he shows the fruit of this announcement, when he says “in the middle of the Church I will praise you,” as if to say: through this for you is united a great Church, in the middle of which I will praise you. And he says “in the middle,” because just as a pillar in the middle sustains the house itself, and a light in the middle illumines the house, and the heart in the middle vivifies the body, so Christ is in the middle of the Church.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> The word Thomas reads as ‘Church’ is *ekklesia* (*ecclesia* in the Vulgate) which other versions translate as ‘congregation’ (ESV) or ‘assembly’ (NIV2011). The Douay-Rheims version has ‘church.’

<sup>70</sup> “Sed nota quod dicit *non confunditur*, etc.; quia aliqui de vili plebe nati, si promoventur, confunduntur cognoscere consanguineos suos. Prov. XIX, 7: *fratres hominis pauperis oderunt eum*. Non sic autem Christus, sed dicit *nuntiabo nomen tuum fratribus meis*. Io. XVII, 5 s.: *Pater, manifestavi nomen tuum hominibus quos dedisti mihi*. Io. I, 18: *unigenitus qui est in sinu Patris*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.3 [131], 61.

<sup>71</sup> “Istius annuntiationis ostendit fructum, cum dicit *in medio Ecclesiae laudabo te*, quasi dicat: per hoc congregatur tibi magna Ecclesia, in cuius medio laudabo te. Et dicit *in medio*, quia sicut columna in medio domus ipsam sustenat, lucerna in medio domus illuminat, cor in medio corpus vivificat, ita Christus in medio Ecclesiae.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.3 [132], 62. Translation mine.



Here Thomas compares Christ to a pillar placed in the middle of a structure—an allusion gleaned, evidently, from the *Gloss*, which rather elliptically states, “Et ego positus *in medio Ecclesiae*, ut columna (as or like a column or pillar), *laudabo te*.”<sup>72</sup>

Thomas applies the pillar’s medial position and supporting function to Christ. Christ has fulfilled the office of a mediator in bringing two parties together. First, Christ has declared his Father to his brethren, announcing the things of God to the people; he has preached, and brought them to know God, and sanctified them.<sup>73</sup> And second, Christ has brought the things of the people to God, making his brethren burst forth in praise of God, out of affection for God.<sup>74</sup> And in this enterprise of joining man to God, it is Christ who is “in the middle,” serving as mediator and making the formation of God’s people possible. His declaration serves to bring this body of believers into existence, and sustains it, just as the central pillar holds up a house; it serves to illumine them in the knowledge of God, just as a lamp lights a house; and it serves to give them new life, just as the heart gives life to the body. Thus Christ’s role in creation, illumination, and justification is admirably explicated, through the thoughtful application of the phrase “in the middle” to his threefold work.

---

<sup>72</sup> Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 420C. The *Magna Glosatura* has the phrase *ut columna* as an interlinear gloss, written above *in medio ecclesiae*. *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 426.

<sup>73</sup> “Sacerdos autem populum sanctificans, medius est inter Deum et populum. Deut. V, 5: *ego illo tempore sequester fui*. Et ideo pertinet ad ipsum nunciare quae Dei sunt ad populum; secundo, quae populi sunt referre in Deum. Primum facit dicendo, et ideo dicit *nuntiabo nomen tuum fratribus meis*, id est, ducam eos in notitiam tui, et hoc est sanctificare eos. Io. XXVII, 17: *sanctifica eos in veritate*, et cetera.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.3 [132], 62.

<sup>74</sup> “Secundum faciendo, dum facit homines ex affectu in Deum prorumpere in laudem Dei, et ideo dicit *in medio Ecclesiae*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.3 [132], 62.

### *Hebrews Lecture 8.3: The Completion of Christ's Works*

The final appearance of the triad of creation, illumination, and justification occurs in Thomas' third and last lecture on Heb 8. In his lectures on Heb 7-8, Thomas Aquinas states that the Apostle's intention in these two chapters is to prove the excellence of Christ's priesthood compared to the Levitical priesthood: first in regard to the person of Christ in chapter 7, and then in regard to the priesthood of Christ in chapter 8. The three lectures on Heb 8:1-5, 6-10a, and 10b-13 prove first, that Christ is a priest and minister; second, that he is a minister of better things; and third, that his ministry has better effects.

Heb 8:8-12 is a quotation of Jer 31:31-34, used by the Apostle to contrast the old covenant and its inadequate effects with the new covenant and its transformative effects. The central verse is Heb 8:10: its first half refers to the Lord writing his laws on his people's minds and hearts; its second half states the result of the Lord being their God and the people truly being his. Thomas' sources consider Heb 8:10 as a unit but tend to overlook the significance of the second half of the verse. Thus, for example, John Chrysostom emphasizes the change in the giving of God's ordinances rather than the change in God's relationship to his people.<sup>75</sup> Peter Lombard in his *Gloss* discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in writing God's laws in our hearts and minds in a permanent manner, leading to the briefly described logical conclusion of a lasting relationship between God and people.<sup>76</sup> The *Magna Glossatura* has only interlinear comments on that

---

<sup>75</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Homily 14.10, NPNF 14, 435.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 462A-C.

transformed relationship, but, like Peter Lombard, much to say about having God's law written interiorly.<sup>77</sup>

Thomas Aquinas takes a completely different approach to Heb 8:10, in that he formally divides the verse. Doing so enables him to use the first half of Heb 8:10 to close one lecture, to use the second half of the verse to open the next lecture, and to link that half with the following two verses. Thus, uniquely, he treats Heb 8:10b-12 as a unit, and uses the three declarations in that unit to point to the fulfillment of Christ's work in creation, illumination, and creation.

Thomas ends his second lecture on Heb 8 with Heb 8:10a. For Thomas, the new covenant or testament given by the Lord to the house of Israel, in which he places his laws into their minds and writes them on their hearts, is constitutive of the work and ministry of Christ—a ministry of greater and better things than had formerly existed.<sup>78</sup> This ministry is the stated subject of this second lecture, and the exposition of Heb 8:10a allows Thomas to discuss the better way in which the New Testament has been given, in comparison to the Old. The Old Testament was given through externals, relying on words and the understanding of those words.<sup>79</sup> The New Testament is given inwardly, in a manner exclusive to God, by the infusion of the Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup> The giving of the New Testament relies on the interior instruction of the Holy Spirit; Thomas here equates the

---

<sup>77</sup> *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 4, 436.

<sup>78</sup> “Supra Apostolus probavit Christum esse pontificem, et per consequens ministerium sacramentorum, non tamen secundum veterem legem, hic ostendit ipsum esse ministerium maiorum et meliorum, quam illa fuerint.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [390], 170.

<sup>79</sup> “Modus autem tradendi duplex est. Unus per exteriora, sicut proponendo verba ad cognitionem alicuius. Et hoc potest homo facere, et sic traditum fuit Vetus Testamentum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [404], 175.

<sup>80</sup> “Alio modo interius operando. Et hoc proprium est Dei. Iob XXXII, 8: *inspiratio omnipotentis dat intelligentiam*. Et hoc modo datum est Novum Testamentum, quia consistit in infusione Spiritus Sancti, qui interius instruit.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [404], 175.

giving of God's laws into our minds with the Holy Spirit illuminating the intellect to know, and those laws being written on our hearts is the Spirit's work of inclining the affections to act well.<sup>81</sup>

Thomas' exposition here is a remarkable description of the work of illumination carried out by the Holy Spirit and made possible by Christ, the mediator of this new and better covenant. Reading this part of the second lecture in tandem with the next lecture, which covers the three effects of Christ giving this new testament, provides a glimpse of the cosmic use to which Thomas puts Heb 8:10. For if one looks at the three works of Christ—creation, illumination, and justification—in light of an *exitus-reditus* pattern, then creation would mark the outflow of all things from God, and justification would mark the renewed right standing of all things with God, and participation in the life of God. The turning point, then, is illumination, taught by Thomas at the end of the second lecture on Heb 8. It is with the work of illumination made possible by Christ that rational creatures cease their prodigal son-like journey to a far place, and begin their return to God. And it is the condition of those who have returned, or are returning, to God that Thomas describes in the third lecture on Heb 8, as he outlines the fulfillment of the threefold work of Christ and the three effects on his people.

It is evident that Thomas Aquinas knew of and used the *exitus-reditus* pattern. Alexander of Hales, who was the first to adopt Lombard's *Sentences* as a textbook while teaching in Paris in the 1220s, referred to the scheme in his *Gloss* on the *Sentences*, and

---

<sup>81</sup> "Non autem sufficit tantum cognoscere, sed requiritur operari. Et ideo primo illuminat intellectum ad cognoscendum. Et ideo dicit *dabo leges meas*, et cetera . . . Item ad bene operandum inclinat affectum, unde imprimitur cordi. Et quantum ad hoc dicit *in corde eorum superscribam eas*, id est, super cognitionem scribam caritatem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [404], 175.

Thomas applied it to his own commentary on the *Sentences*.<sup>82</sup> This pattern also structures the *Summa Theologiae*, given Thomas' prologue to *ST* 1.2, in which he says

Because the chief aim of sacred doctrine is to teach the knowledge of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the beginning of things and their end, and especially of rational creatures . . . therefore, in our endeavour to expound this science, we shall treat: (1) Of God (Part I); (2) Of the rational creature's movement towards God (Part II). (3) Of Christ, Who as man, is our way to God (Part III)."<sup>83</sup>

Torrell considers 'Christ as the way which leads us to God' to be the foremost theme and structuring principle of Thomas' theology; he notes that in the writing of the *Summa*, following this pattern in order to describe humanity's return (*reditus*) to the Creator after having described its departure (*exitus*) is most effective.<sup>84</sup> Thomas himself cites this dual pattern of movement in the *Tertia Pars*; in discussion Christ's assumption of human nature, he states that we should "take into account the two kinds of relationship between creatures and God. The one is based on the fact that they are created by him and depend

---

<sup>82</sup> Este ordo rerum prout exeunt a Creatore a Recreatore vel Reparatore, et sic proceditur in hoc opere. Et est ordo rerum prout reducuntur ad Creatorem . . . " Alexander of Hales, *Glossa in quattuor libros Sententiarum* I, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Quaracchi: Bibliotheca Franciscanum Scholastica, 1951), 4.

Thomas, in his commentary on Lombard's work, divided the *Sentences* into two halves; the first half he denominated the *exitus*, dealing with origination and outward movement of creatures from God; the second half he termed the *reditus*, dealing with the return of creatures to God. See the discussion in Romanus Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought from St Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1990), 1-2, 9-10.

<sup>83</sup> Chenu is credited as the first to offer the *exitus-reditus* motif as a structuring principle for the *Summa* in a 1939 journal article; it also appears in his introduction to Thomas Aquinas, See M.-D. Chenu, "Le plan de la Somme théologique de S. Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 45 (1939): 93-207; and Chenu's *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), 310-313. For a more recent treatment, see Jean-Marc Laporte, "Christ in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*: Peripheral or Pervasive?," *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 221-247.

<sup>84</sup> ". . . il est important de rappeler que Thomas propose un enseignement clair et fourni et qu'il donne déjà des indications très fermes aux endroits névralgiques de son oeuvre: 'Dans son humanité, le Christ est pour nous la voie qui mène vers Dieu.'" And, "Car c'est bien de cet homme-là qu'il veut décrire le retour (*reditus*) vers son créateur après en avoir décrit la sortie (*exitus*)." Jean-Pierre Torrell, "Le Christ dans la 'spiritualité' de saint Thomas," in *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, ed. Kent Emery, Jr. and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 197, 199.

on him as the first source of their being. . . . Another relationship rests on the fact that all things are being brought back to God as their end.”<sup>85</sup> Hence, it seems that the *exitus-reditus* pattern is one organizing principle used by Thomas Aquinas to understand God’s work and humanity’s situation. Consequently, in dividing Heb 8:10, Thomas’ goal is to explicate Heb 8:10a in order to depict the illumination required to end our *exitus* and begin our *reditus*; and the purpose of his exposition of Heb 8:10b-12 is the delineation of our return and the concomitant fulfillment of Christ’s work in us in the areas of creation, illumination, and justification.

Thomas opens the third lecture on Heb 8 with a succinct statement of Christ’s threefold work. He says that the giving of the New Testament, which has Christ as a better minister of better things, has three effects: first, the perfect joining of man to God, as described in Heb 8:10b; second, the perfect cognition of God, starting at “and they shall not teach” in Heb 8:11; and third, the remission of sins, at “because I will be merciful” in Heb 8:12.<sup>86</sup>

Thomas’ initial consideration is the perfect joining of man to God, which represents the culmination of Christ’s work in creation. Thomas, in reading Heb 8:10b, notes that first it is said that God will be our God, and only then is it said that we shall be his people; he sees in this order a manifestation of divine grace. Without this grace, it would be impossible for man to be united to God, given that we cannot achieve this union

---

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.6.1, ad. 1.

<sup>86</sup> “Supra posuit Apostolus conditiones Novi Testamenti ex editione ipsius nunc ponit tres effectus ipsius. Primus est hominis ad Deum perfecta coniunctio; secundus est Dei perfecta cognitio, ibi *et non docebit*; tertius est peccatorum remissio, ibi *quia propitius ero*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [405], 176.

by our own power.<sup>87</sup> And indeed, Thomas has framed the Apostle's epistles in terms of the grace of the New Testament, and the resultant life that flows from the head, Christ, to all the members,<sup>88</sup> so that the same directionality, from God to man, is maintained.

Thomas continues the discussion of God being his people's God, and his people being his, using the argument that who they are determines what they do, just as who Christ is determines what he does as high priest. Thus, God is shown to be his people's God in terms of universal providence. He is our God when he has care for us and draws our hearts to himself, especially in regard to the just; that is, it is in the salvation and return to God on the part of the justified that God's providential care is most fully revealed.<sup>89</sup> And it is in our response to God that our new and fully realized relationship is best seen, as Thomas holds that being God's people requires showing ourselves to be God's people. At this point, Thomas brings in Augustine's definition of a people, from *The City of God*, declaring that when a people consent to the right of divine law in order to be useful to each other and to apply themselves to God—then are they truly God's people.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> "Circa primum sciendum est, quod ad hoc quod homo iungatur Deo, requiritur auxilium divinae gratiae, quia ad hoc non potest propria virtute. Ier. XXXI, 3: *in caritate perpetua dilexi te, ideo attraxi te miserans*. Primo ergo tangitur illa coniunctio ex parte Dei; secundo ex parte hominis, ibi *et ipsi erunt*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [406], 176.

<sup>88</sup> "Quia in quibusdam epistolis agitur de gratia Novi Testamenti quantum ad totum corpus mysticum Ecclesiae . . . In quibusdam vero quantum ad membra principalia . . . In ista vero commendat ipsam gratiam quantum ad caput, scilicet Christum . . . a quo vita fluit in totum corpus, scilicet Christus." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

<sup>89</sup> "Dicit ergo *ero illis in Deum*. Nomen Dei significant universalem providentiam. Tunc ergo est nobis in Deum, quando habet curam de nobis, et corda nostra ad se trahit, et hoc est respectu iustorum specialiter." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [406], 176.

<sup>90</sup> "Sicut enim dicit Augustinus, II *de Civit. Dei*, c. 21: *populus est coetus multitudinis, iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatus*. Quando ergo consentiunt in ius divinae legis, ut sint adinvicem utiles et tendant in Deum, tunc est populus Dei." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [406], 176.

What Thomas Aquinas has described in this discussion is the fulfillment of our creation in God's image and its culmination in the knowledge and love of God. In the *Summa Theologiae* 3.3.8, Thomas undertakes a discussion of the salvation made possible by the Son's assumption of human nature—a salvation so comprehensive that Thomas compares it to a re-creation. He states that “the first creation of things is by the power of God the Father through the Word. Hence the second creation ought to be by the power of God the Father through the Word, so that re-creation corresponds to creation, according to the text, ‘God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself.’”<sup>91</sup>

And to view our salvation as a re-creation is appropriate, given that God is both the cause and end of humanity: “all things, whether they were made by Him immediately, or by means of secondary causes, are ordered to God as their end.”<sup>92</sup> Because all things are ordered to God as their end, “each thing intends to be united to God as its last end”<sup>93</sup>—a union expressed in a relational way in the Hebrews passage through God being his people's God, and they being his people. Further, this end of being united to God, belonging to him, is the first cause of the human race, as well; as Thomas explains, “for a thing is not moved towards a proximate end except for the sake of the last end. Therefore the last end is the first cause of all. Now it must necessarily befit the First Being, namely God, to be the first cause of all, as we proved above. Therefore God is the last end of all.”<sup>94</sup> And we enjoy God as our end by the participation in the divine that the incarnate

---

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.3.8, ad. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 17, in *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 436.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 25, 443.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 17, 437.



Christ has made possible. Our final and complete happiness consists in the vision of God<sup>95</sup>; and this is “a happiness surpassing man’s nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (II Pet. 1:4) that by Christ we are made ‘partakers of the divine nature.’”<sup>96</sup> It is this kind of participatory relationship, for which we were created, that is described in the Apostle’s reappropriation of Jeremiah’s statement: “And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Second, the perfect cognition of God represents the culmination of Christ’s work of illumination. Heb 8:11 continues the extended quotation from Jer 31 and states that people shall no longer teach neighbor or brother to know that Lord, “for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest of these.” Thomas says that the cessation of teaching is a sign of perfect cognition, because “teaching ceases when knowledge has been perfectly acquired.”<sup>97</sup> This condition of complete illumination marks Christ’s undoing of man’s first sin; as Thomas notes, it is “therefore fitting that man, who turned away from God by a disordered craving for knowledge, should be brought back to God by the Word of true wisdom.”<sup>98</sup>

As to when this condition of perfect knowledge will be in effect, Thomas says that in the present age, only the Apostles enjoyed such knowledge, having received

---

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.3.8.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.62.1.

<sup>97</sup> “Signum perfectae cognitionis est, quando quis non indiget doceri, quia doctrina est via ad acquisitionem scientiae, et ideo cessat doctrina, acquisita perfecte scientia.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [408], 177.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.3.8.

infused wisdom from Christ<sup>99</sup>; but in the future, in heaven, all will be brought to perfect knowledge.<sup>100</sup> The last statement of Heb 8:11, that all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest, leads Thomas to the beatific vision: quoting I Jn 3:2, he says that we shall see God as he is, and in that vision will be found beatitude. The blessed will have this teaching from God alone, and not from one another.<sup>101</sup> Thomas then uses the *Gloss* and provides two readings as to whom the “least” and the “greatest” might be<sup>102</sup>: one possibility relies on the order of time, so that older saints are greater; the other possibility relies on the differentiation of rewards received, because, as Thomas explains, while all will know, one will know more than another.<sup>103</sup>

Even so, the emphasis is on the fact that in the future, every rational creature will no longer require teaching, or progress in illumination, because all will know God as fully as possible. In addition to the relationship to and participation in the divinity made possible by Christ’s work of creation, the full knowledge of God is another end for which humans were created—an end which Christ’s work of illumination makes possible.

---

<sup>99</sup> “Dicendum est quod hoc quod dicitur hic, potest dupliciter intelligi. Uno modo de praesenti statu, et sic non verificatur universaliter de omnibus, sed tantum de primis fundatoribus Novi Testamenti, scilicet Apostolis, qui immediate fuerunt instructi a Deo, quando *aperuit illis sensum, ut intelligerent Scripturas*. Lc. ult. Apostoli ergo facti sunt perfecte cognoscentes, et non ab aliis instructi, sed simul a Christo acceperunt sapientiam infusam.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [408], 177.

<sup>100</sup> “Alio modo, quod referatur ad statum patriae futurum, ad quam per Novum Testamentum introducimur, non per Vetus. Et sic universaliter verum est quod dicitur hic.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [408], 177.

<sup>101</sup> “Haec est causa quare unus non docebit alium, quia omnes noscent Dominum. I Io. III, 2: *videbimus eum sicuti est*. In hac vero visione consistit beatitudo . . . Et hanc doctrinam habent beati non ab aliquo alio, sed a solo Deo tantum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [410], 177-178.

<sup>102</sup> The *Gloss* suggests a differentiation based on “tempore vel dignitate.” Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 463A; *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*, 436.

<sup>103</sup> This point is developed in the *ST* 1.12.6, in which Thomas says that “one intellect will have a greater power or faculty to see God than another”—a faculty that “does not belong to the created intellect naturally but through the light of glory.” Thomas’ reasoning seems to be that the one who has more charity will have more of the light of glory, and therefore see God more perfectly.

Having the knowledge of God as the end of rational creatures is a subject Thomas discusses in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

Now, seeing that all creatures, even those that are devoid of reason, are directed to God as their last end, and that all reach this end in so far as they have some share of a likeness to Him, the intellectual creature attains to Him in a special way, namely, through its proper operation, by understanding Him. Consequently, this must be the end of the intellectual creature, namely, to understand God.<sup>104</sup>

This knowledge is not only the end of the human race; it will also be our greatest happiness, for “man’s ultimate happiness will consist in that knowledge of God which the human mind possesses after this life.”<sup>105</sup> And Christ’s work of illumination, which extends to rational creatures, as Thomas stated in the Hebrews prologue, will be complete.

Third, the remission of sins represents an important aspect of the culmination of Christ’s work of justification. Justification is “a movement away from sin and towards justice” that involves a reordering of that which sin has disordered.<sup>106</sup> Heb 8:12 states that God will be merciful regarding his people’s iniquities and will remember their sins no more—an indication, says Thomas, that the Old Testament was unable to provide for the removal of guilt, but that the New Testament does, by implication.<sup>107</sup> Thomas invokes Heb 10:4 and the impotence of the blood of bulls and goats to remove sin, in contrast to the efficacious sacrifice made by Christ. Discussing Christ’s sacrifice in the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas explains that sacrifices are necessary to remit sins, and that Christ’s sacrifice

---

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 25, 442-443.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 48, 467.

<sup>106</sup> J. Mark Armitage, “Certain Rectitude of Order: Jesus and Justification According to Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 47.

<sup>107</sup> “Deinde cum dicit *quia propitius*, etc., ponit tertium effectum, qui est culpae remissio, quod non poterat Vetus Testamentum. Infra X, 4: *impossibile est sanguine taurorum et hircorum auferri peccata*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [411], 178.

indeed had the effect of blotting out our sins.<sup>108</sup> It is due to Christ's sacrifice that the rupture between man and God occasioned by human sin has been healed; for while "God loves in all men the nature which he has made, what he hates in man is the sins which men commit against him."<sup>109</sup> But because of Christ's passion, "the cause for hatred has been removed, both because sin has been wiped away and because compensation has been made in the form of a more agreeable offering."<sup>110</sup> Hence the remission of original sin, as well as the sins arising from it, has been accomplished by Christ's passion; and so God shows mercy in the face of our iniquities and chooses not to remember our sins.<sup>111</sup>

In the *Hebrews* commentary, Thomas goes on to distinguish between iniquity and sin, noting that iniquity is an injury or injustice committed against another, whereas sin is a disordered act committed against oneself—although he concludes that in practical terms there is little difference between the two categories.<sup>112</sup> Justification's reordering of that which sin has disordered, accomplished uniquely by Christ's sacrifice, is a subject Thomas addresses at length in the *Tertia Pars*. It is due to his assumption of human nature that his sacrifice has this justifying and restorative effect; for, being our exemplar and the one on whom we are patterned, he can correct the damage caused by sin.<sup>113</sup> As Wawrykow explains, the sin of humanity "has deformed God's handiwork. Thus, just as

---

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.2.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.49.4, ad. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.49.4, ad 4.

<sup>111</sup> Cessario, *The Godly Image*, 165; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.49.5.

<sup>112</sup> "Differunt autem iniquitas et peccatum, quia iniquitas opponitur iustitiae, quae quidem proprie semper est ad alium. Ideo iniquitas dicitur, qua quis nocet alteri . . . Peccatum autem dicitur omnis defectus actionis, quia importat deordinationem. Et sic iniquitas proprie est in proximum, sed peccatum est in seipsum: et hoc proprie loquendo, large tamen idem est iniquitas et peccatum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [411], 178.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.3.8.

the craftsman with regards to his handiwork, when it has fallen into ruin, restores it by the intelligible form of his art according to which it was first made, so, Thomas suggests, it is wholly fitting that the restoration of fallen humanity”—its second creation—should be patterned after its first creation, which in turn owes its identity to Christ, the Word and exemplar.<sup>114</sup> Thus, Christ, because of who he is, accomplishes the work of justification that heals human nature of the disorder caused by iniquity and sin. Because of Christ’s incarnation, like is now joined to like; and because of his sacrifice, the disorder caused by sin is removed, so that humans may “be restored to their eternal and changeless perfection through the Word’s being united, not participatively, but in person with the creature.”<sup>115</sup>

The effect of Christ’s work of justification is not only evident in human nature; it is also seen in God’s response to the justified. Thomas differentiates between the two clauses in Heb 8:12. First, God being merciful to our iniquities he refers to the present life, and God relaxing punishment; second, God not remembering our sins Thomas applies to the future, when God will not repent that he remitted our present sins, as though to punish them at that time.<sup>116</sup> Rather, those saved by Christ will continue to experience the effect of his sacrifice and remission of their sins, both in this age and the age to come. Sacrifices were always intended by God not only to remit sin, but also to preserve man in a state of grace, and to unite the spirit of man to God, in glory. All three

---

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Wawrykow, “Wisdom in the Christology of Thomas Aquinas, in *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, ed. Kent Emery, Jr. and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 182.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.3.8.

<sup>116</sup> “Et quantum ad hoc dicit *quia propitius ero iniquitatibus eorum*, scilicet in praesenti poenam relaxando, *nec memorabor peccatorum eorum*, scilicet in futuro peccata puniendo . . . id est, Deus non poenitet, quod hic peccata remiserit, quasi iterum puniendo.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.3 [411], 178.

of these effects have been achieved by Christ's sacrifice, as our sins have been blotted out, we have presently received the grace of salvation, and through Christ we anticipate the future perfection of glory.<sup>117</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In a manner that is distinctive to his exegesis, Thomas Aquinas has used the threefold work of Christ as set forth in the prologue to read and expound the first eight chapters of the book of Hebrews, so that in the midst of understanding who Christ is, we can appreciate what Christ has done for us. Through the Word, creation came to be, indirectly providing a manifestation of God; through the incarnate Word, the illumination necessary for knowing God, and the justification and salvation necessary for union with God, were made available. In discussing Christ as Lord, Thomas touches on his dominion in regard to creation, in regard to wisdom and governance, and in regard to being the cause and end of all things. Thomas also addresses the effect of sin in the areas of Christ's three works: because of sin, man's likeness to God has been damaged, and man has turned away from God; because of sin, man has lost the light and wisdom characteristic of God—a loss that in itself is constitutive of sin; and because of sin, man is guilty of transgressing God's eternal law. Only Christ's threefold work can undo what sin has caused.

Then, in the final two appearances of the triad of creation, illumination, and justification, Thomas shows the effect of Christ's three works in this world. As God's Word, declaring him to his brethren, Christ is responsible for inaugurating and sustaining the Church: he founds and supports the Church as a central pillar, he gives light and

---

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.2.

illumination to the Church, and he gives sanctifying life to his Church, as well. With the final usage of Christ's threefold work, we see the universal scope of what Christ has done, in terms of the *exitus-reditus* motif and its apotheosis. As the Word and as the one through whom God has fully and truly spoken, Christ has provided the illumination needed to stop man's flight from God and initiate man's return to God. And Thomas has described the final outcome of Christ's work on our behalf in terms of creation, illumination, and justification. His work in creation can truly be termed a re-creation: it is the fulfillment of our creation in God's image, leading to a participation in the divine, so that, as Jeremiah had prophesied, God is truly our God, and we are truly his people. Christ's work regarding illumination will lead each of God's people to know him to the fullest extent possible, and to see God in the beatific vision—a knowledge that will be our greatest happiness. And, in regard to justification, Christ's sacrifice has both removed our sins, ending the estrangement between God and man, and reordered human nature, so that we are restored fully to the image of God in which we were created.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Thomas Aquinas as Teacher and Exegete of Hebrews

It may still be true that, given the lasting influence of his two great *Summae*, Thomas Aquinas' reputation as a theologian surpasses his reputation as a biblical exegete. But as this exposition of his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews has demonstrated, Thomas' lectures provide ample opportunity for him to marry exegesis and theology, whether seen in his use of Hebrews to teach his students about the Father-Son relationship and other aspects of the Trinity, for example, or the person of Christ with his two natures, or the errors of heretics. In short, exegesis and theology are, for Thomas, inseparable. Thomas' commentary on Hebrews is an excellent demonstration of the fact that the Christian faith "rests on the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books."<sup>1</sup> As a result of that relationship, "theological argumentation is principally and properly based on scriptural authority"<sup>2</sup>; or, to put it in terms used in Thomas' time, the line between *sacra doctrina* and *sacra pagina* is a slender one, indeed. Given Thomas' dual roles as a one who both expounded Scripture and engaged in theological argumentation, it seems appropriate to tender some observations on his work as a teacher and exegete of the epistle to the Hebrews.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.8, ad. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin T. Harkins, "Docuit Excellentissimae Divinitatis Mysteriorum: St. Paul in Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Steven R. Cartwright (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 239.



### *Thomas Aquinas as Teacher of Hebrews*

Wherever he taught, it was the responsibility of Thomas Aquinas to prepare his students for their work as priests, preachers, and teachers. His lectures on the epistle to the Hebrews fulfilled that preparatory purpose as he divided and taught the text. In addressing how Thomas teaches Hebrews, there are various aspects of his approach to instruction to consider. The first is the numerous strategies Thomas uses to organize and structure what he taught. The second aspect of his teaching worthy of being addressed is Thomas' citations of the Fathers, of heretics, and of Scripture, in which we see evidence of his dialectical approach to teaching. And the third aspect of Thomas' teaching that we will examine is the direct hortatory comments he makes to his students.

#### *Thomas' Organizational Strategies*

Thomas uses several organizational strategies both in doing his exegesis and in shaping it into lectures. This analysis will examine them, beginning with the more apparent ways that Thomas structures his exegesis of the text, and proceeding to features that arise from the text itself. Strategies to be examined include the use of prologues; the *divisio textus*; the emphasis on studying words and phrases; reliance on the literal sense; and the application of categories to larger expanses of text.

While writing commentary prologues was standard academic practice during the Middle Ages, Thomas uses them to remind his readers that God is the author of all of Scripture, and to guide his readers in placing and understanding individual books of the Bible. First, through the careful selection of an *accessus* verse from another book of the Bible, Thomas indicates issues he will pursue during his exegesis, using the juxtaposition of an unrelated verse to cast a new light on the book under consideration. And second,

especially in the case of the Romans and Hebrews prologues, Thomas uses his introductory remarks to supply a scriptural framework within which to understand the book at hand.<sup>3</sup> Because all of Paul's letters have to do with the grace of Christ, Hebrews is to be read as pertaining to the grace of Christ as it relates to Him as the head of his body—whereas other Pauline letters consider the grace of Christ as it relates to the whole body of the Church or to its principal members. Such a structure may appear contrived to modern sensibilities; but bearing in mind the grace and headship of Christ would have aided Thomas' students in understanding, and in the future recalling and teaching, the letter to the Hebrews.

The reliance on the *divisio textus*, and the study of Scripture according to the words and phrases found therein is, for many contemporary readers, a somewhat tedious part of accessing medieval commentaries. But in an age when not every student had a copy of the Bible, when reliance on memory was paramount, and when chapter divisions were still something of an innovation, the value of an orderly and sequential presentation of the pericopes, words, and teachings of Scripture must be appreciated.<sup>4</sup> For example,

---

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012, Prologue [11]; and *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012, Prologue [4].

<sup>4</sup> Regarding memory, Hugh of St Victor, writing in the 1120s, says that "Those who devote themselves to learning must have a high aptitude and a powerful memory." And, "It is necessary, therefore, that we recollect the things that we have analyzed in the process of learning and entrust them to memory. To recollect is to reduce the things that have been written or discussed at greater length to a certain concise and compendious summary." Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, Book Three, chapters 7 and 11, in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 124, 126. Rouse and Rouse state that Hugh "stands in the tradition of memory training or 'artificial memory' that reaches back to Antiquity." See Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, "Statim invenire: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page," in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 193.

Thomas' opening lecture, on Heb 1:1-2, provides an overall division of the book of Hebrews into two parts, each with its distinctive theme, and further separates the first division into three clearly defined sections. And in his subsequent lectures, Thomas nearly always begins with an allusion to the previous lecture, the theme of the present lecture, the first large division of the present lecture, and the first subdivision of that division, as in the opening of his lecture on Heb 1:3:

Above the Apostle has shown the excellence of Christ in regard to his distinctive origin, the majesty of his dominion, and the power of his operation; here he shows his excellence in regard to the sublimity of his glory and dignity. And this is divided in two parts. For first he shows Christ to be worthy of his dignity; second he presents this dignity, where the text says "sits at the right hand." He shows him to be truly worthy of this dignity for two reasons which render someone suitable for something great: one is his facility in administering; the other is his industry and vigor in execution. Therefore he first shows his facility; second, his vigor, at "making purgation for sins."<sup>5</sup>

Over the previous century, the *Gloss* had evolved from a running commentary on Scripture to a visual layout on the manuscript page, comprising a central block of Scripture text, with interlinear comments above the lines of text and longer discussions flanking the blocks of text.<sup>6</sup> In a similar way, Thomas provides for his students not a visual but an aural layout of a text of the Bible, by providing introductory, and sometimes mid-lecture, organizational outlines. Students taking notes of Thomas' lectures would therefore receive from him not only the text of Scripture, but also an organization of Scripture based on the logic and development inherent to a given pericope; onto these

---

<sup>5</sup> "Superius ostendit Apostolus Christi excellentiam quantum ad originis proprietatem, quantum ad dominii maiestatem, et quantum ad operationis virtutem, hic autem ostendit eius excellentiam quantum ad gloriae et dignitatis sublimitatem. Et pars ista dividitur in duas. Primo enim ostendit Christum esse idoneum ad dignitatem istam; secundo ponit ipsam dignitatem, ibi *sedet ad dexteram*. Idoneitatem vero ostendit ex duobus, quae reddunt aliquem idoneum ad aliquid magnum: unum est facilitas administrandi, aliud est industria et strenuitas exequendi. Primo ergo ostendit eius facilitatem; secundo eius strenuitatem, ibi *purgationem peccatorum faciens*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [24], 14. Translation mine.

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion in Rouse and Rouse, "*Statim invenire*: New Attitudes to the Page," 196-199.

organizational components they would then be able to layer Thomas' exegetical comments.

In a manner analogous to the improved *Glossa ordinaria*, such an organizational scheme constitutes what Rouse and Rouse term a “finding device,”<sup>7</sup> or an aid to memory, because this scheme has as its foundation the primary teachings of the biblical text. This systematic approach to Scripture taught by Thomas would be an effective aid to memory, because, as Hugh of St Victor explains, “every discussion has a particular principle on which its entire truth and the power of its argument rest, and everything else in the discussion returns back to this principle. To search for and reflect on this principle is to recollect.”<sup>8</sup> Hence by finding and organizing these principles, and incorporating them into his lectures, Thomas bequeathed to his students not only his teaching, but enduring access to his teaching, with these “particular principles” functioning as aids to memory.

Thomas' devotion to teaching the words and phrases of Scripture in sequential fashion continues this systematic and memory-assistive approach to the biblical text. He notes in his opening lecture that “in this epistle it is singular that every single word has its own single purpose, and maintains its order”<sup>9</sup>—and he teaches Hebrews accordingly. For instance, he views Heb 1:1 as describing the Old Testament in order to display the superiority of the New Testament in Heb 1:2, and he breaks the verse down into five constituent parts: “first, how it [the Old Testament] was handed down, “in many ways and in diverse manners”; second, the time, when he says “once”; third the author or giver,

---

<sup>7</sup> Rouse and Rouse, “*Statim invenire*: New Attitudes to the Page,” 196.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> “Hoc autem est in hac epistola singulare quod singula verba habent singulas sententias, et servant ordinem suum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [7], 6. Translation mine.

God; fourth to whom God handed it down, “to our fathers”; fifth, by which ministers, “in the prophets.”<sup>10</sup> Having thus outlined the verse, Thomas proceeds to expound each word or phrase. Such a logical and grammatical approach would aid his students in reproducing this information and applying it in their own preaching or teaching situations.

But it must be noted that Thomas’ attention to individual words or phrases does not mean that he is atomizing a pericope. His comments on small units of text are consistently made in the context of the larger organizational framework he has provided by means of his prologue, and the introductions and structural comments found in each lecture. Thus, it is in the context of this framework that his comments should be read. Looking at one comment on one word or phrase, and expecting to find something immediately instructive—without consideration for Thomas’ organizing principles—may be akin to excising one piece of a large stained-glass window, and expecting to see something beautiful. One must always keep in mind the medieval approach to interpreting Scripture, that divides the text, first, in order to analyze the constituent parts, and second, in order to understand those parts in terms of how they relate to each other, resulting in a unified final product. As Boyle explains, because the process of the *divisio textus* operates on the basis of a presumed conceptual unity, the commentary thus produced must be read and comprehended as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Chenu concurs, observing that the first step in medieval exegesis is “to treat the text, not by reference to the reader’s

---

<sup>10</sup> “Circa autem Vetus Testamentum quinque ponit. Primo modum tradendi, quia *multifarie multisque modis*, etc.; secundo tempus, cum dicit *olim*; tertio auctorem, sive datorem, quia *Deus*; quarto quibus sit traditum, quia *patribus nostris*; quinto quibus ministris, quia *in prophetis*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, 1.1 [8], 6.

<sup>11</sup> John F. Boyle, “The Theological Character of the Scholastic “Division of the Text” with Particular Reference to the Commentaries of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Christian Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 278.

own interests, difficulties, or enthusiasms, even if they are inspired by his faith, but rather according to the internal order governing the development of the text and the arrangement of its parts”<sup>12</sup>—so that, again, there is a presumption of an organic unity to the text, and it is only in the context of this unity that individual parts can be rightly understood.

It must also be noted that Thomas’ method of reading a text by examining the meaning and placement of individual words and phrases is entirely consistent with his commitment to presenting the literal sense of Scripture. Thomas makes two relevant statements regarding the literal sense in the *Summa Theologiae*: first, that all the senses of Scripture are founded on the literal sense, “from which alone can any argument be drawn”<sup>13</sup>; and second, that “nothing necessary to the faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense.”<sup>14</sup> By beginning with a small unit of text, and considering the meaning and placement of words and phrases; then moving to define and classify words or concepts as needed; and then searching for the reasons behind the content and direction of the text,<sup>15</sup> Thomas is able to present the literal sense of the text and also the doctrine or theology conveyed by the text. Grounding his students in the verbal content and literal sense of the Bible would have been an essential task; for, thus equipped, they would be able to answer questions, engage in disputations, and present the teachings of the Church.

---

<sup>12</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965), 250.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, 1, 10, ad. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, 1, 10, ad. 1.

<sup>15</sup> See Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 250-253.

Another aspect of Thomas' gift for systematizing and clarifying is his consistent application of categories to larger expanses of the biblical text. These categories arise from the text itself, so that they are the outgrowth of Thomas' attention to words, phrases, and grammar—and as such are yet another indication of his commitment to the literal sense. Several examples have arisen in the course of this dissertation, particularly in the previous three chapters. A case in point is the skill with which Thomas delineates the Father-Son relationship as presented by the book of Hebrews. Time and again it is the Father who is the originating principle, and it is the Son who is the expression and manifestation of the Father, whether he is being discussed as the Word, the Son, the agent of creation, the heir of creation, Lord, wisdom, or image. Thomas also excels at presenting Christ according to both his divine and human natures. For instance, in discussing the word of God as living and effectual in Heb 4:12, Thomas states that,

Then when he says *for the word of God is living*, etc., he presents the reason for this announcement of warning, and chiefly in regard to danger. However, this reason is adduced on the part of Christ. For in him are two natures: one, namely the divine, according to which he is the Word of the Father; the other is the human, according to which he is the high priest offering himself on the cross.<sup>16</sup>

In the body of the Hebrews commentary, there is almost a rhythm into which these presentations of the two natures of Christ fall, by dint of repetition; hence an able student, independently encountering a statement about Christ in the biblical text, would be trained to look for a one person-two nature, Chalcedonian depiction of Christ—and would be ready to teach and preach accordingly.

---

<sup>16</sup> “Deinde cum dicit *vivus est enim sermo Dei*, etc., ponit rationem praedictae monitionis, et praecipue quantum ad periculum. Haec autem ratio sumitur ex parte Christi. In ipso autem est duplex natura: una, scilicet divina, secundum quam est Verbum Patris; alia est humana, secundum quam est pontifex offerens se in cruce.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.2 [216], 99. Translation mine.

The foremost example of Thomas' ability to construct and apply categories in order to clarify and teach the text of Hebrews occurs in the commentary's prologue. Both the *accessus* verse and the first part of the prologue serve to present Thomas' primary concerns in the exposition of Hebrews: the excellence of Christ's person; the excellence of Christ's person in comparison to angels, Moses, and priests; and the excellence of Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification.

In his first two lectures, on Heb 1:1-2 and Heb 1:3, he establishes four criteria with which to consider the excellence of the person of Christ. They are his unique origin, the majesty of his dominion, the power of his activity, and his dignity.<sup>17</sup> These qualities Thomas relates to the phrases describing Christ in Heb 1:2-3, so that the excellence of Christ in himself is made manifest. Thomas also applies these categories to a discussion of Christ's power as alluded to in Heb 2:7.<sup>18</sup> Further, the four categories provide the basis for Thomas' comparisons of Christ to angels, Moses, and priests in his exegesis of Heb 1-2, 3-4, and 7-10, respectively. In every case, Christ is found to be preeminent; and while angels, Moses and other prophets, and priests fall short of Christ, they do so in a way that points to and prepares for his coming and his work, so that the necessity of the Incarnation and the excellence and uniqueness of the incarnate one are kept in view.

In addition, Thomas early in the commentary changes comparative directions and, in place of comparing Christ to creatures, he compares him to the Father. Thomas' exegesis of Heb 1:3 establishes that whereas Christ is superior to any created being, he is

---

<sup>17</sup> "Excellentiam vero Christi denotat quantum ad quatuor. Primo quantum ad proprietatem originis, vocando eum verum Dei Filium naturalem, cum dicit *locutus est nobis in Filio*; secundo quantum ad magnitudinem dominationis, ibi *quem constituit haeredem universorum*; tertio quantum ad virtutem operationis, ibi *per quem fecit et saecula*; quarto quantum ad sublimitatem dignitatis, ibi *qui cum sit splendor gloriae*." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [7], 6.

<sup>18</sup> See Lecture 2.2 [115] and the discussion in Chapter Five of this dissertation.



co-equal in every way with his Father—save in his relationship to the Father as his Son. Thomas shows that Christ shares with his Father the attributes of coeternity, consubstantiality, and equality of power, reminding us that Trinitarian theology has its role to play in Thomas' lectures.

But not only does Thomas adopt these two sets of categories to describe and teach the excellence of Christ's person; he also discerns in Hebrews a trio of works, wherein Christ's unique excellence is further displayed. The three works of Christ are creation, illumination, and justification, and they first appear in Thomas' discussion of Heb 1:2 and God definitively speaking in these last days through his Son. An explanation of how it is that God speaking through Christ, his Word, engenders creation, illumination, and justification ensues. Discussions of these three works on an individual basis run throughout Thomas' commentary on Heb 1-10; taken as a group, the three categories appear four more times, as Thomas applies them in relation to Christ as Lord, the effects of sin, the Church, and finally the fulfillment of Christ's threefold work.

One more instance of Thomas deriving categories from the biblical text and then using them in a nuanced application occurs in his examination of the excellence of Christ's person in comparison to the Old Testament priesthood. In comparing Christ to angels and to Moses, the categories origin, dominion, power, and dignity function superbly well, as Thomas is able to establish the superiority of Christ to either group. But in dealing with the extended comparison of Christ and the Old Testament priesthood found in Heb 5:1 to 10:18, the biblical text is far longer and more complex. It requires that Thomas depart from his focus on the person of Christ, and instead examine the suitability and excellence of Christ's person for the priesthood, and the efficacy and

excellence of Christ's work as a priest. And therefore Thomas modifies his comparative approach, so that the categories of origin and dignity are used to consider Christ's person in relation to the origin and dignity of Melchizedek and the Old Testament priests; and the categories of dominion and power are used to consider Christ's work as high priest, in contrast to the work of a human priesthood. Further, discussion of power at times gives way to discussion of saving efficacy. The fact that Thomas derives his comparative categories from Scripture, applies them assiduously as long as appropriate, and modifies them when the biblical text warrants indicates both his commitment to teaching the truth of Scripture to the best of his ability, and his skill and sensitivity in doing so. For one who is, perhaps, best known for his ability to categorize and systematize, there is a degree of suppleness to his exegesis.

Given the vast gulf that lies between the medieval and modern approaches to writing commentaries, it may be difficult to appreciate all that Thomas' penchant for systematizing brings to the teaching of Scripture. Certainly, some of Thomas' critics have had harsh words for his exegetical methodology, casting doubt on his skill as an interpreter of Scripture,<sup>19</sup> and faulting him for his lack of innovation.<sup>20</sup> Even those more favorably disposed to Thomas Aquinas are inclined to see in him the best and worst of

---

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, despite the greatness of his philosophical and theological efforts, "is least successful in the interpretation of Scripture." Frederick Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 269. Farrar also disparages medieval exegesis as fundamentally defective and rife with error. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 302.

<sup>20</sup> Froelich finds in Thomas' exegesis the high water mark of the biblical scholarship of his day, but criticizes his failure to be an innovator. Karlfried Froelich, "Thomas Aquinas," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. D. K. McKim (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 89. Froelich may be wrong in his estimation of Thomas' lack of exegetical innovation; Mulchahey notes that, while Thomas' commentaries won respect, they had little immediate influence, due to his tendency to swim "against the tide of his order's established preference in exegesis," as well as the fact that both he and Albert were, in their methods, uncomfortably far ahead of their colleagues' learning and abilities. See M. Michèle Mulchahey, "*First the Bow is Bent in Study....*": *Dominican Education before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 503-504. See also Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 275.

medieval exegesis.<sup>21</sup> The Victorines had directed their efforts toward teaching Scripture with organization, clarity, and consistency, with the literal-historical sense of Scripture as the foundation; with this project Thomas was in full accord. In his day, “excessively imaginative readings” of Scripture were not uncommon<sup>22</sup>; common as well was the confusion produced by multiple and poorly labeled senses, which in turn hindered the construction of clear arguments.<sup>23</sup> Thomas therefore seems to have adopted the Victorines’ educational goals and methods, emphasizing an orderly presentation of the literal sense, which teaches all the essentials of the faith and which makes possible meaningful debate.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the systematizing that is so unappealing in modern eyes would have been welcomed in the medieval classroom.

And, after all, in producing and applying his categories and organizational principles to the interpretation of the Bible, Thomas reflects the academic concerns of his times. In the second half of the twelfth century and the first part of the thirteenth, there was a growing emphasis on the whole work, with all its authority and authenticity, in preference to extracts. This interest in a work in its entirety in turn led to the necessity of dividing the work in order to understand and appropriate it. As Weinandy points out, these lectures on Hebrews were delivered to students, and Thomas’ goal was not to foster speculation or abstruse theological discussion, but to enable his students “to master the

---

<sup>21</sup> Lee Gatiss, “Grace Tasted for All: Thomas Aquinas on Hebrews 2:9,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63.2 (2012): 217, 235. Two of Thomas’ biographers, Chenu and Torrell, criticize his outline of the Pauline epistles as an “expedient” construction that treats examples of occasional literature as though they were “a work of Aristotle”—and in a way that the Apostle himself would not have recognized. See Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 251; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 256.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 43.

<sup>23</sup> Smalley, “The Bible in the Medieval Schools,” 213-215.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

inherent logic and content of the Letter itself.”<sup>25</sup> Hence Thomas, in providing outlines of texts, as well as categories through which to understand those texts, may be viewed as reflecting the scholarship of his day and doing his part to develop the *forma tractandi*, or “the way in which a book treats its subject matter,” of books of the Bible.<sup>26</sup> In the process, he gave to his students both memorable categories and methods to apply to their own study of Scripture.

### *Thomas’ Dialectical Approach*

The next topic to consider concerns the incorporation of citations of the Fathers, of heretics, and of other parts of Scripture in Thomas’ lectures on Hebrews. Thomas’ recourse to appeal to authorities, and on occasion, to anti-authorities, has been noted in this dissertation; and his penchant for using Scripture to support his exegesis of Scripture has been evident. Thomas brings into his commentaries so many other voices that his exegesis at times takes on the air of a conversation or a debate.

Spicq has noted the dialectical character of Thomas’ exegesis,<sup>27</sup> as has Chenu, who describes how, in the exposition of a biblical text, the medieval lecturer would move without pause from the *expositio* to the *quaestio*, because questions would inevitably arise from the study of the text. As a result, medieval exegesis “often develops along lines of doctrinal research, argumentation, arguing from suitabilities, and lengthily, at

---

<sup>25</sup> Thomas G. Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ Commentary on Hebrews,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, eds. (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 225.

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion in Rouse and Rouse, *Statim invenire*, 217-218. They note that the *forma tractandi* and *forma tractatus* (the ordered separation of a work into books and chapters) first appear in the 1220s, in the introduction by Jordanus of Saxony to his commentary on Priscian, the grammarian.

<sup>27</sup> “Caractères généraux de l’exégèse de S. Thomas: exégèse avant tout littérale, dialectique, dont la préoccupation dominante est, théologique, scriptuaire, traditionnelle . . . .” Ceslaus Spicq, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin exegete,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 15/1 (Paris: Letouzey, 1946), 695.

times, refuting errors.”<sup>28</sup> The *disputatio* as well was an occasion of dialectical argument. The presence of many voices and many questions is an indication of Thomas’ concern to reorient his students’ understanding to the event of the Incarnation and the teachings of Scripture.<sup>29</sup> To that end, he “draws upon all available sources to raise challenges as well as to resolve them, including logical, metaphysical and experiential arguments, and arguments from philosophers and theologians of the past.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, the citing of a range of authorities, and the asking of multiple questions, contributes to the dialectical nature of Thomas’ exposition of Hebrews—an epistle whose author was himself dialectically and rhetorically accomplished.<sup>31</sup>

The commentary on Hebrews contains many such questions, implied and direct. Thomas’ second lecture, on Heb 1:3, is an excellent example. It contains eight direct questions, and several indirect or implied questions, all of which serve to drive the discourse of the central portion of the lecture, with their repetition of “But what,” “But why,” and “But through what”, as well as “But then there is a question,” and “But still there is a question.”<sup>32</sup> Some of the questions have immediate answers—“But the figure of what? The figure of *his substance*.”<sup>33</sup> Other questions lead to a discussion in which multiple answers are presented before Thomas’ final decision is revealed. One instance is the question regarding the meaning of the phrase “by the word of his power” in Heb 1:3:

---

<sup>28</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 253.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas S. Hibbs, *Dialectic and Narrative in Aquinas: An Interpretation of the Summa contra gentiles* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 34.

<sup>30</sup> Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ceslaus Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, I.- Introduction (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1952), 365.

<sup>32</sup> “Sed cuius?” “Sed quare . . . ?” “Sed per quid . . . ?” “Sed tunc est dubium . . . .” “Sed hic adhuc est dubium . . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [28], [29], [31], [34], [35], 15-17.

<sup>33</sup> “Sed cuius? *Substantiae eius*.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [28], 15.

it could refer to the Word of the Father, or to the Word of the Son, which would be the Holy Spirit; it could also refer to the authority of the Son, as the *Gloss* maintains, or even to a second eternal Word, which Thomas says is blasphemy. After discussing each possibility, and identifying any shortcomings, Thomas draws his answer from Augustine and the gospel of John, in order to conclude that this word is the Word of the Father, Christ himself.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas' multiple citations of the Fathers and heretics demonstrate not only his desire as a teacher to acquaint his students with the wisdom of his predecessors and the errors of heretics, but also his willingness to engage multiple points of view in order to find a resolution. Black has a most helpful insight here, noting Thomas' willingness to allow the Fathers' readings to stand on their merits, in appreciation of how "the coalescence of their slightly different insights" produces a fuller yet nuanced reading.<sup>35</sup> A case in point is Thomas' skill in adducing Chrysostom, Hilary, and Augustine in order to establish Christ's coequality, coeternity, and consubstantiality with the Father, in his commentary on John. Each Father of the Church reads John 1:3 slightly differently, yet legitimately; and Thomas uses all three opinions to provide for his students a fuller understanding of who Christ is in relation to the Father.<sup>36</sup> Such practice affirms the

---

<sup>34</sup> "Sed tunc est dubium: quia Pater, cum dicit, producit Verbum. Ergo Filius cum dicit, produceret Verbum, et sic Verbum Patris esset Verbum Filii." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [34], 17.

"Ideo ad argumentum est dicendum, sicut exponit Augustinus illud Io. XII, 48: *sermo quem locutus sum, ille iudicabit eum*, id est, ipse ego, qui sum Verbum Patris, iudicabo eum. Et similiter, in proposito, *verbum virtutis suae*, id est, seipso, qui est Verbum virtuosum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [35], 18.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion in C. Clifton Black, St. Thomas's Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Some Reflections on Its Character and Implications," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 688-691.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 1.2 [72], 31. "Sic ergo habes verbi aequalitatem ad patrem, secundum Chrysostom, coaeternitatem secundum Hilarium, et consubstantialitatem, secundum Augustinum per hoc quod dicit *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*." Thomas

statement made by Thomas in one of his quodlibetal questions, to the effect that Scripture is intended for man's instruction, and this instruction of man cannot well take place "apart from the expositions of the Saints," or Fathers of the Church.<sup>37</sup>

That example from Thomas' commentary on John may be one of the finest in the Aquinas canon; but the Hebrews commentary also contains instances of Thomas' ability to cite multiple Fathers of the Church in a fruitful fashion. One example occurs in a section already mentioned, in which Thomas discusses the meaning of the phrase "by the word of his power" in Heb 1:3. The clinching argument is provided by Augustine, who states that this "word" is Christ; but the counter-example is provided by Basil, representing the Greek claim that as the Son is the image of the Father, just so is the Spirit the image of the Son in this context—an interpretation that Thomas rules out.<sup>38</sup> A second example has two Fathers contributing to Thomas' discussion of faith more harmoniously; the context is the connection Thomas makes between Heb 11:1, and faith having to do with things that appear not, and Jn 20:28, in which Thomas, the disciple, saw and believed. Here Thomas cites Augustine's statement that faith has to do with things that are seen, but in such a way that certain knowledge is ruled out; and he also uses Gregory to explain the experience of Thomas, the disciple, who "saw one thing and

---

Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, trans. James A. Weisheipl (Albany, NY: Magi Books, no date), 1.2 [72], <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm> [accessed May 27, 2014].

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*. XII.17, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi. (Rome: Marietti, 1949). 235. See the discussion in Walter H. Principe, "Thomas Aquinas' Principles for Interpretation of Patristic Texts," in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, VIII & IX, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt and E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1976), 111.

<sup>38</sup> "Et ad hoc dicunt Graeci, quod sicut Filius est imago Patris, ita Spiritus Sanctus est imago Filii. Et sic exponit Basilius *portans verbo virtutis suae*, id est, Spiritu Sancto. Nam sicut Filius est Verbum Patris, ita ut dicunt Spiritus Sanctus est Verbum Filii. Et ideo per ipsum facit Filius, sicut per Filius Pater." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [34], 17.

believed another, because he saw the humanity and believed the divinity.”<sup>39</sup> Thomas allows their statements to stand and proceeds to give his own views on the different senses of “faith.” Thus it may be seen that in the course of an argument or discussion, Thomas does not argue on the basis of authority alone; he is not interested in simply invoking someone’s name in order to close off discussion. He always provides the reasons that underlie a position, whether the reasons are his own or those of an authority such as Augustine.<sup>40</sup>

In regard to Thomas’ multiple citations of Scripture in the course of teaching Hebrews, his students would have been familiar with the intertextual links between parts of the Bible, given the practice of *lection divina*. Even so, witnessing Thomas’ use of Scripture to underscore a point or to resolve a difficulty would have been valuable preparation for these future preachers and teachers. For example, Thomas shows that God making the world “by” the Son in Heb 1:2 is not an indication of inferiority on the Son’s part; rather, because the Father and Son are equally powerful and consubstantial, it belongs to the Son as Word to be the one through whom the world was made. To prove this point, Thomas invokes three Scripture citations: John 5:19, that whatever the Father does, the Son also does; Heb 11:3, which states that the Word of God framed the world; and John 1:3, which says that all things were made by him, the Word who was from the beginning. Each citation supports the contention of Thomas that, in regard to the world’s

---

<sup>39</sup> “Alio modo communiter, et sic excludit omnem certam cognitionem, et sic loquitur Augustinus in *Quaest. Evangelii*, quod fides est de quibusdam quae videntur. . . . Et quidem de Thoma dicendum est, quod, sicut dicit Gregorius, aliud vidit, aliud credidit, quia vidit humanitatem, et credidit divinitatem.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 11.1 [560], 241.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen F. Brown, “The Theological Role of the Fathers in Aquinas’s *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 20.



creation, the Father and Son's power and activity, as well as their nature and being, are the same.<sup>41</sup> In answering a question suggested by the text of Scripture, Thomas models for his students the manner in which to use Scripture to reach a solution.

At times, Thomas' exegesis of Hebrews begins to take on the character of an article in the *Summa*, with its *sed contras* and *respondeos*: "But this seems to be against that which Gregory says," "But this is contrary to Dionysius, who says what he received from the Apostle," followed by Thomas' reply, beginning with "I respond."<sup>42</sup> But such practice is not evidence of the imposition of an Aristotelian system upon a text alien to such a mode of thought. Rather, in his use of objections and questions, and in his citations of Fathers, heretics, and other Scripture passages, Thomas is displaying a commitment to seeking the truth taught by the biblical text, using the method of dialectical inquiry—a method characterized by "the engagement of conflicting views and the refutation of adversaries."<sup>43</sup>

As a Dominican and as a teacher, it was incumbent upon Thomas Aquinas to teach the truth of the gospel and to combat heresy; and the tool of dialectical inquiry, and the techniques delineated above, enable him to do just that. His purpose is not to emerge the winner of a heated debate; it is to pursue the truth, and to encourage others in that same pursuit. For, as he states in the opening of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, "truth must

---

<sup>41</sup> "Sed numquid Filius est minor Patre? Videtur quod sic, quia illud quod est causa facti, ut fiat, videtur habere rationem instrumenti. Sed ad hoc dicendum est, quod si non esset eadem virtus numero in Filio et Patre, et eadem operatio, teneret obiectio. Nunc ergo eadem est virtus et operatio patris et filii, sicut et eadem natura et esse, et dicitur Pater per eum facera saecula . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [23], 13.

<sup>42</sup> "Sed contra hoc esse videtur illud quod dicit Gregorius . . . Respondeo." "Sed contra hoc est Dionysius, qui dicit quod accepit ab Apostolo . . . Respondeo." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.6 [86], [87], 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Hibbs, *Dialectic and Narrative in Aquinas*, 23.

consequently be the ultimate end of the whole universe, and the consideration of the wise man aims principally at the truth.”<sup>44</sup> Thomas finds in that statement a justification for the Incarnation, who is our exemplar of the truth; he also finds in that statement a way of life for the wise man, who will not only “meditate especially on the truth belonging to the first principle” and “teach it to others,” but will also do all he can “to refute the opposing falsehood.”<sup>45</sup> Such is the task of the *magister in sacra pagina*, who serves his students and makes a genuine contribution to knowledge (*scientia*) when he uses reason to answer questions rather than relying on the unthinking invocation of authority.<sup>46</sup> By applying the dialectical method in the classroom setting, Thomas instructs his students in the truths of the Christian faith and the errors of heretics; but additionally, he models the pursuit of truth, and shows his students how to engage in the pursuit of truth themselves.

### *Thomas’ Hortatory Comments*

We have seen how the systematic methodology applied by Thomas Aquinas to the teaching of Scripture—through prologues and their introductory statements, the *divisio textus*, the explanations of words and phrases, and the application of Scripture-based categories to the reading of Scripture—equipped his students with knowledge and with aids to remembering and recovering that knowledge. We have also seen that, in citing

---

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*: Book One: God, 1.2, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 60.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*: Book One, 1.3, 60.

<sup>46</sup> “. . . alioquin si nudis auctoritatibus magister quaestionem determinet, certificabitur quidem auditor quod ita est, sed nihil scientiae vel intellectus acquirat et vacuus abscedet.” Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, IV.9.3, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi (Taurini: Marietti, 1949). Thomas does state in this article that in argumentation with particular groups, there are authorities that are useful to invoke: one may use the Old Testament for the Jews and the New Testament for the Manichees; and both Testaments and any acceptable doctors may be used in dealing with schismatics and the Greeks. But his point remains that it is better to settle questions through reason rather than authority (“Ergo magis oportet determinare quaestiones per rationes quam per auctoritates.”).

numerous Fathers, heretics, and biblical texts, Thomas broadened his students' understanding of the Christian faith; and further, he trained them in contending for the faith and in pursuing the truth. Under his tutelage, students would be well prepared for their future roles as priests, teachers, and preachers.

But concomitant with Thomas' desire to prepare his students for the work that they will do is a concern for what kind of people they will be. It is not only in the life of Christ that person and work are integrally linked; just as who Christ is affects the saving work that he does, so is it the case for his followers that who they are matters as much as what they do. Hence, in the Hebrews commentary of Thomas, we find the occasional statement or spiritual interpretation that demonstrates those times when Thomas the *magister* is also Thomas the preacher or priest, who presents instruction in morals when the text warrants.

This moral training was characteristic of Hugh of St. Victor and others of the school of St. Victor. As was discussed earlier in this dissertation, "reading" Scripture had as its goal the restoration of the divine image within fallen humanity.<sup>47</sup> The reading of God's saving deeds at the historical level was to produce comprehension at the allegorical level, followed by application at the tropological level, resulting in action and transformation;<sup>48</sup> for, as Hugh explains, reading "is when we are formed by principles

---

<sup>47</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, II.1, 96, trans. Franklin T. Harkins, in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, Victorine Texts in Translation, vol. 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, "General Introduction," in *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, eds. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, Victorine Texts in Translation, vol. 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 36.

and precepts from various writings”<sup>49</sup>; and it is “by contemplating what God has done” that “we realize what we ourselves ought to do.”<sup>50</sup> The tropological sense is a *disciplina vivendi*, a form of moral training that one is to live out.<sup>51</sup>

To Hugh of St. Victor and the canons who followed him, and to three notable secular masters—Peter Comestor, Peter the Chanter, and Stephen Langton—may be credited the “biblical-moral school” of exegesis, in which the two primary emphases were the Scripture’s historical sense and its moral application.<sup>52</sup> Although Thomas did not share their disinterest in the dialectical approach to teaching the Bible, he did share their tropological and transformative concerns and their commitment to the literal or historical sense of Scripture. As a young *magister* delivering one of his inaugural sermons, Thomas had referred to the necessity of preaching Scripture in order “to teach, to delight and to change” from Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*. In this sermon he had maintained that “the speech of Sacred Scripture does these three things in the fullest manner,” as “it firmly teaches with its eternal truth,” “sweetly delights with its pleasantness,” and “efficaciously changes with its authority,”<sup>53</sup> in order to lead us to eternal life.<sup>54</sup> Even his most famous and systematic work, the *Summa Theologiae*, has a strong moral component; both Torrell and Jordan find the moral teaching in the *Secunda*

---

<sup>49</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Harkins, III.7, 124.

<sup>50</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Harkins, VI.5, 172.

<sup>51</sup> Franklin T. Harkins, *Reading and the Work of Restoration: History and Scripture in the Theology of Hugh of St Victor* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 276.

<sup>52</sup> Mulchahey, “*First the Bow is Bent in Study...*”, 480.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), IV.12, 117. Thomas Aquinas, “Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerney (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 5.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture,” 7.

*Pars* one of the truly striking features of Thomas' *Summa*.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of the *Summa* was to provide an ideal curriculum and a guide to moral teaching at Dominican schools,<sup>56</sup> and it was written at a time when Thomas himself "was responsible for forming the *fraters communes* to preach and hear confessions."<sup>57</sup> It is clear that while students at Dominican schools received a thorough grounding in the historical sense of the Bible in such a way that both its literal meaning and narrative structure were made manifest, they also received training in the moral or tropological sense of Scripture and the Christian life.<sup>58</sup>

While the provenance of the Hebrews commentary is far from certain, it seems safe to say that, whether he was lecturing in a Dominican *studium generale* or at the University of Paris, both as a teacher and as a priest Thomas would have incorporated his concern for his students' spiritual formation into what he taught. The transformative element has been noted in Thomas' commentary on the Psalms, in which Ryan sees the teaching of theology for the purpose of transformation as the work's primary purpose.<sup>59</sup> Although the epistle to the Hebrews may not contain "all of theology" in the way that the book of Psalms does,<sup>60</sup> it is only fitting that Thomas' commentary on this letter would

---

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 2: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 382; Mark D. Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 120.

<sup>56</sup> Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers*, 120.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 2: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 382.

<sup>58</sup> Mulchahey, "First the Bow is Bent in Study," 139-140.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>60</sup> Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*, 14, 145, citing the Prologue to the *Expositio in Psalmos David. Opera Omnia*, vol. 14 (New York: Musurgia, 1949), 148.

contain some hortatory comments of his own fashioning, given the strong hortatory element in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Thomas' hortatory remarks are not frequent, for the systematic exposition of Hebrews according to the literal sense, coupled with doctrinal statements and dialectical argumentation, dominates his treatment of the epistle. Some twenty-five or thirty such remarks occur in the fifty-five lectures that comprise the Hebrews commentary, so that their presence is subtle, at best, and at times, scanty.<sup>61</sup> But the remarks are there—those moments when Thomas includes his audience in his exposition and applies the text to the Christian life. And a few of them are so rich and so compelling that they merit our attention.

Some of Thomas' hortatory comments arise from the application of the literal sense of the text to the Christian life or to the situation of his students. These comments are brief and to the point, and owe little, if anything to standard interpretations found in Chrysostom's homilies on Hebrews or the *Gloss*. In connection with the failure of the readers of Hebrews to master the basic truths to which Heb 5:12 alludes, Thomas opines, "If someone had studied theology a long time and failed to learn the basics, time would be running against him."<sup>62</sup> In another example, Thomas is teaching Heb 10:38-39 regarding the just man who lives by faith without shrinking back. In applying this just man's example, he declares "For the will of God ought to be the rule of our actions," and

---

<sup>61</sup> In the section of the commentary from Heb 6:9 to 10:21 (concerned with the Old Testament priests and priesthood), I found only one comment relating to the living of the Christian life.

<sup>62</sup> "Exordia ergo sermonum Dei et prima principia et elementa, sunt articuli fidei et praecepta Decalogi. Qui ergo diu studuisset in theologia et illa nesciret, tempus curreret contra ipsum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.2 [266], 118-119. The *Gloss* refers to boys being given the first elements of literature to read, but Thomas makes this Hebrews reference far more specific and personal. "*ut vos doceamini, sicut pueri quibus prima elementa litterarum dantur ad legendum.*" Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 438D.

“Therefore let us not fall away from the faith”—with the latter being the final statement of the lecture.<sup>63</sup> Near the end of another lecture, in regard to Heb 4:16 and going to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid, Thomas points out that both the grace of Christ and this “seasonable aid” assist us in doing good. The last two sentences of the lecture are the citation of Eccl 8:6, “There is a time and opportunity for every business,” followed by Thomas’ closing statement, “This is the present time, which is the time of showing mercy”<sup>64</sup>—a statement that could refer to the grace of Christ, but which, from the Ecclesiastes citation, could also apply to the “wise heart” (Eccl 8:5) that, having received mercy, is about the business of showing mercy. While these latter examples may not be profound, they are arresting, particularly given their rhetorical situation as the final words of a lecture. And it is by something as simple as using first-person plural pronouns, or commenting on the lagging efforts of students, that Thomas gives his literal reading of the text an immediate application.

More fruitful statements of moral direction occur on those rare occasions when Thomas makes the transition to a spiritual reading of the text. In teaching Heb 6:7-8, and the herb-producing earth blessed by God in contrast to reprobate and thorn-producing soil, he provides two readings. The first reading relates to Heb 6:6 and those who cannot be renewed to repentance one they have turned back from following Christ; Thomas grants that the earth here functions as a simile, but he then uses it to generate a literal and doctrinally unimpeachable statement. In the second reading, Thomas allows the simile to

---

<sup>63</sup> “*Non placebit ergo animae meae, id est, voluntati meae. Voluntas enim Dei debet esse regula actionum nostrarum.*” “*Sed filii Dei, id est, renati in Christo per fidem, in acquisitionem, id est in salutem, animae. Qui enim mandata Dei custodit, salvat animam suam . . . Ergo non deficiamus a fide.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.4 [549], [550], 235.

<sup>64</sup> “*Omni enim negotio tempus et opportunitas.* Eccle. c. VIII, 6. Hoc est tempus praesens, quod est tempus miserendi.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 4.3 [238], 108.

stand, and to guide the exposition. He states that the earth is the human heart and the rain is God's grace, conveyed through hearing the words of preachers and teachers as they present the doctrine of faith; the herbs are the good works that a man performs as a result of the doctrine thus received.<sup>65</sup> The counter-example of the thorns and briars produced by reprobate ground Thomas likens to minor sins and graver sins, especially sins against one's neighbor.<sup>66</sup>

This example serves to motivate Thomas' students in their future work as preachers and teachers; two other examples, in which Thomas relies on a spiritual reading to make his point, also speak to the experience of his students. The first has to do with Christ learning obedience, in Heb 5:8; Thomas states that Christ learned how difficult obedience is, since he had to obey in the most difficult endeavor possible—death on the cross. Then, drawing on Christ's example, Thomas tells his students that

. . . this shows how difficult is the good of obedience. Because those who have not experienced obedience, and learned it in difficult things, believe that to obey is very easy. But so that you may know what obedience is, it is necessary that you learn to obey in difficult things, and one who has not learned to be subject by obeying, never knows well how to be in charge of teaching.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> “*Terra ista est cor humanum . . . . Quod dicitur terra, quia sicut terra indiget pluviis, ita homo indiget gratia Dei . . . . Sed beneficium, quod percipit, et doctrina fidei, est quasi imber superveniens, quam pluit in cordibus auditorum, mediantibus praedicatoribus et doctoribus.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 6.2 [297], 131.

“*Fructus est, quia generat herbam opportunam cultoribus. Ista sunt bona opera, quae facit homo per doctrinam susceptam.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 6.2 [298], 131.

<sup>66</sup> “*Fructus ergo sunt spinarum, id est, minora peccata, et tribuli, id est, maiora, quae pungunt conscientiam propriam, quandoque etiam alienam, illa scilicet quae sunt contra proximos.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 6.2 [300], 132.

The *Gloss* has many similarities to Thomas' reading of these metaphor-laden verses of Hebrews; but the comments about the earth being the human heart and briars being sins against one's neighbor seem to Thomas' own. Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 443D-444B.

<sup>67</sup> “*Et hic ostendit, quam difficile sit bonum obedientiae. Quia qui non sunt experti obedientiam, et non didicerunt eam in rebus difficilibus, credunt quod obedire sit valde facile. Sed ad hoc quod scias quid sit obedientia, oportet quod discas obedire in rebus difficilibus, et qui non didicit obediendo subesse, numquam novit bene praecipiendo praeesse.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 5.2 [259], 117. Translation mine. Larcher translates *praecipiendo praeesse* as “ruling others,” and Baer translates it as “commanding.” Neither of their translations takes account of *praecipiendo*. *Praecipio* can mean “to receive



These comments seem to be peculiar to Thomas; again, they do not rely on the *Gloss* or on Chrysostom. And note the direct address to his students: “so that you may know . . . it is necessary that you learn.” Note as well the word play: in order “to be in charge (*praeesse*) of teaching,” his students must first “learn to be subject (*subesse*) to obeying.”

This example of learning obedience relates to the present experience of Thomas’ students. The next example relates to their future careers as preachers in the Dominican order. The setting is Heb 11:30-31—the fall of Jericho and the preservation of Rahab. Thomas states that morally, Jericho represents something defective and thus signifies the world. The walls of Jericho are the impediments in the world that hold people back, the trumpets represent preaching, and the seven days of circling the city indicate the present age. Thomas summarizes this teaching by concluding that “through these things we are given to understand that all the world’s impediments fall at the continuing voice of preaching.”<sup>68</sup> Rahab represents those saved by this preaching; Thomas declares that Rahab was freed because of receiving the spies, and the event of her liberation indicates that those who receive the preachers of the gospel are likewise liberated, from eternal death.<sup>69</sup> Thus Thomas ably uses the last two specific examples of faith in Heb 11 to teach

---

in advance” or “to anticipate,” but it can also mean “to teach” or “to instruct,” and I have chosen that rendering because of the symmetry of teaching and learning thus produced in Thomas’ statement.

<sup>68</sup> “Moraliter Iericho interpretatur luna, sive defectus, et significat mundum istum. Muri eius sunt impedimenta quibus aliquis detinetur in mundo. Per buccinas quibus Levitae et sacerdotes intonabant, vox praedicatorum significatur. Per circuitum septem dierum totus designatur decursus praesentis temporis, qui per septem dies completur. Per quae datur intelligi, quod omnia impedimenta mundi cadunt ad continuam vocem praedicationis.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 11.6 [625], 270.

<sup>69</sup> “In hoc autem quod ex ipsa receptione ipsorum liberata est designatur quod recipientes praedicatores Evangelii liberantur a morte aeterna.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 11.6 [626], 270. Thomas’ interpretation of these two verses owes much to the *Gloss*; but the closing statement that those who receive preachers of the gospel are liberated from eternal death is his own. See Peter Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 192, 496D-497A.

his students the goal or end of their education: that by learning to obey, and learning to teach and preach the gospel, they will bring life to others.

The finest instance of Thomas following a Victorine trajectory in the course of his exegesis appears in his words on the cross in his lecture on Heb 12:2-3. Hugh of St. Victor had taught that reading the historical sense was to lead to understanding of the allegorical sense, which in turn pointed to action taken according to the tropological sense, so that reading produced to a moral response. But in the Victorine scheme, the final end of reading is not action, but meditation or contemplation. Hugh states, “The beginning of learning, therefore is in reading, but its completion is in meditation.”<sup>70</sup> This meditation “fixes its keen and unrestrained vision on the contemplation of truth,”<sup>71</sup> and Thomas’ comments on Heb 12:2-3 could be rightly termed just such a meditation.

Thomas’ starting point is the Apostle’s injunction to “look on Jesus” and “think diligently upon him.” The reason Thomas gives for this exhortation to consider Jesus is that, in any tribulation, the remedy for that tribulation is to be found in the cross. In the cross we find obedience to God, just as Christ obeyed God to the point of death; affection and loyalty to parents, in the way Christ took care of his mother; love of one’s neighbors, in Christ’s prayer for his crucifiers and giving of himself for us; patience in adversity, evidenced by Christ’s silent submission to his arrest and sentence; and finally, perseverance in all things, just as Christ persevered unto death.<sup>72</sup> Thomas uses this catena

---

<sup>70</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Harkins, III.10, 125.

<sup>71</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Harkins, III.10, 125.

<sup>72</sup> “Et huius ratio est, quia in quacumque tribulatione invenitur eius remedium in cruce. Ibi enim est obedientia ad Deum. Phil. II, 8: *humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens*. Item pietatis affectus ad parentes; unde ibi gessit curam de matre sua. Item caritas ad proximum; unde ibi pro transgressoribus oravit. Lc. XXIII, 34: *Pater, dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt*. Eph. V, 2: *ambulate in dilectione, sicut Christus dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis*. Item fuit ibi patientia in adversis. Ps.: *obmutui*

to demonstrate that, in the cross, we can find examples of every virtue—an observation supported by Augustine’s statement that “the cross was not only the gibbet on which Christ suffered, but also the chair from which he taught.”<sup>73</sup> And Thomas uses this teaching on the cross to encourage his listeners to persevere, and to reject the temptation to weary of the race and fall away from the faith. He turns to another favorite source, Gregory, in order to exhort us that “if we call to mind Christ’s passion, nothing is so hard, that cannot be tolerated with equanimity.”

### *Conclusion*

Reading Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews in terms of how he taught his students is a valuable exercise. He gives to his students, first of all, the text of Hebrews; then he teaches it word by word and phrase by phrase, using the *divisio textus* to divide the text into short, yet meaningful, sub-sections. We see Thomas occasionally discussing the etymology of a word, often considering the grammatical arrangement of a phrase, and always giving the clear sense of the words. Then, Thomas moves to address the meaning of the text. This stage is the most complex, as it may lead Thomas to teach on the two natures of Christ or the Trinity, or draw attention to the contrast between the Old and New Testaments as presented by the Apostle. It is at this stage that Thomas will bring in the voices of authorities and heretics to draw out the issues conveyed by the text; and he will refer to other biblical passages to clarify and support the meaning of the text.

---

*et humiliatus sum, et silui a bonis, et dolor meus renovatus est. Is. LIII, 7: sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur, et quasi agnus coram tondente se obmutescet, et non aperiet os suum. Item in omnibus finalis perseverantia; unde usque ad mortem perseveravit. Lc. XXIII, v. 46: Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 12.1 [667], 286.*

<sup>73</sup> “Unde in cruce invenitur exemplum omnis virtutis, Augustinus: *crux non solum fuit patibulum patientis; sed etiam cathedra docentis.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 12.1 [667], 286-287.

Throughout this process, Thomas is following Hugh of St. Victor's dictum that in reading a text, its exposition

takes place at three levels: the letter (*litteram*), the sense (*sensum*), and the meaning (*sententiam*). The letter is the suitable arrangement of words, which we also call grammatical construction. The sense is the simple and clear signification that the letter displays on the surface. The meaning is the deeper understanding that is discovered only through exposition and interpretation.<sup>74</sup>

By consistently applying this methodology, Thomas gives his students not only the interpretation of Hebrews, but also a demonstration of how to do the work of interpreting Hebrews.

Also, by adducing the opinions of the Fathers of the Church, as well as those of heretics, Thomas accomplishes two important goals. First, he shows his students why these texts matter—that they convey truths on which our salvation depends, truths which heretics have, in one way or another, either foolishly misread or intentionally distorted. And second, he demonstrates to his students how a dialectical approach, one that relies on logical argumentation, can assist them in arriving at the truth. As followers of Christ, and as preachers and teachers of the gospel, the pursuit of truth will govern the lives of Thomas' students; and he does his best to equip them for that work by giving them the necessary tools and knowledge.

Finally, as their teacher and priest, Thomas Aquinas knows that as followers of Christ and as members of the Dominican order, it is not enough to know; one must love and do, as well. And so he is not content merely to equip them for their work; he wants to be used to transform who they are, and he indicates that desire by his incorporation of a range of teaching moments in his commentary. There are multiple concise exhortations that arise from the literal sense of a phrase or brief section of text. And there are the

---

<sup>74</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Harkins, III.8, 124-125.

occasional more-developed applications of the spiritual sense of a passage, when Thomas speaks of the importance of doing good works or learning obedience; or when he expounds on the privilege of being a preacher, sounding a trumpet to call people out of eternal death and into eternal life. Finally, there are the times when Thomas considers Christ, when his own personal commitment becomes evident, and he teaches his students not only through what he says but also through who he is. Through his gift for teaching Scripture systematically and clearly, through the dialectical training he provides, and through both his words of exhortation and his personal example, Thomas Aquinas reveals himself to be an excellent teacher of Hebrews.

### *Thomas Aquinas as Exegete of Hebrews*

That Thomas is adept at interpreting and systematizing Scripture at the verbal level, and imparting the literal sense of a biblical text, is clear. But what may be less obvious is the fact that he has in play some larger structures that guide and assist his exegesis of Hebrews. With that in mind, a brief look at two issues related to the senses of Scripture is in view, as well as a consideration of the function of the commentary prologue and an examination of the comparative argument that drives Hebrews and Thomas' exegesis of Hebrews. These three topics will comprise the discussion in this section.

#### *The Literal Sense*

The exegetical method of Thomas has been discussed in the first section of this chapter, as we have seen how he moves from words, to their sense, and then to their meaning; how he uses the *divisio textus* to divide and then reunify the text, drawing out

and explicating the doctrinal principle or scriptural issue that provides that unity; and how he constructs categories by which he may compare Christ to other personages—categories such origin, dignity, power, and dominion, in addition to the work done in creation, illumination, and justification. These interpretive strategies are associated with his commitment to the literal sense of Scripture as the sense that presents the truths of the Christian faith and that fosters argumentation and persuasion.<sup>75</sup> But two issues regarding Thomas and the senses of Scripture remain to be addressed: his use of the spiritual sense, and his allowance for the multiple literal sense.

Thomas' reliance on the literal sense in order to teach his students Scripture and doctrine has been documented in this dissertation; and that his use of the literal sense can produce a forceful and persuasive exposition seems evident. His preference for the literal, historical sense of Scripture should not be interpreted as indicating a lack of imagination, or an emphasis of the systematic over the spiritual. Rather, Thomas privileges the literal sense because he views Scripture as having a Christological center: everything in Scripture is related to Christ—so much so that he is “its sole object” and “its whole exegesis,”<sup>76</sup> in that the coming of Christ clarified God's purposes as inaugurated in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New.<sup>77</sup> The events that have taken place in history, as narrated in the Old and New Testaments, are necessary theological and salvific truths.

---

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*. 1.1.8, ad. 1 and 2; *ST* 1.1.10, ad. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 237.

<sup>77</sup> John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 38.

These events have been articulated through the literal-historical sense of Scripture, and it is through that sense that they must first be read and understood.<sup>78</sup>

Because of his commitment to the literal sense, Thomas does not often move to the spiritual sense; and when he does, it is generally with a moral application in mind. Thus, for example, he expands on the meaning of “rest” in Heb 3:11 in a display of multiple spiritual senses. Thomas states that “rest” here has a threefold meaning, in terms of the rest of the promised land, the rest of a clear conscience, and the rest of eternal glory and happiness.<sup>79</sup> The first meaning is an allegorical interpretation sanctioned by Scripture, in which the happiness produced by entering the promised land is compared tacitly to daily rest or the rest of the Sabbath; the second is tropological, having to do with the moral life; and the third is anagogical, as it points to the future life in heaven. The first and third meanings are found in Chrysostom’s homily on this passage<sup>80</sup>; but the second one, the rest of conscience, is Thomas’ personal contribution. The example cited in the previous section of the fall of the walls of Jericho and Rahab’s liberation from eternal death—all through the trumpets of the preaching of the gospel—is another instance in which Thomas, to great effect, teaches a spiritual reading.

Departures from the literal sense in order to draw out a spiritual meaning or a moral application may be uncommon in Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews, but they do occur. And they appear to be more the result of Thomas’ own insight, and less the result

---

<sup>78</sup> Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, 45-46.

<sup>79</sup> “Est autem triplex requies. Una est temporalis . . . Secunda est requies conscientiae . . . Tertia est requies gloriae aeternae . . . Potest ergo exponi illud, quod dicitur hic de qualibet istarum, ut dicatur: ipsi vero nec in requiem terrae promissionis, nec in requiem conscientiae, nec in requiem fruitionis aeternae introierunt.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.2 [184], 85.

<sup>80</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6.2. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 394.

of him borrowing a spiritual interpretation from someone else, than one would expect. Chenu comments that “it is probably never of his own that Saint Thomas proposes a mystical sense,” and suggests that such readings probably reflect Thomas’ reliance on Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory, or on florilegia, glosses, and repertories of allegories. But in the examples studied in this dissertation, Thomas’ spiritual interpretations have had a degree of freshness to them, and a depth of psychological insight not found in Chrysostom or in the *Glosses*. If Thomas borrows, he also improves.<sup>81</sup>

The other issue to be addressed is Thomas’ practice of allowing multiple literal readings of one text. An early example in the Hebrews commentary has Thomas interpreting Heb 1:10, “And: ‘Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth: and the works of Thy hands are the heavens,’” which is a citation of Ps 102:25. Thomas says that verse may be read in two ways—either as a word directed to the Father, or as a word directed to the Son.<sup>82</sup> He provides explanations, complete with supporting Scripture quotations, for both options, and makes no attempt to resolve them. This situation is not like that in which Thomas is explaining how Christ does something first according to his divine nature and then according to his human nature; nor do we have an example of Thomas playing one opinion off another in a display of dialectical engagement; nor is

---

<sup>81</sup> Smalley has noted the surprising modernity of Thomas’ commentaries, when read from the perspective of his time; she also observes that Thomas will sometimes “put fresh life into old conventions, and sometimes ignore them.” Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 301.

<sup>82</sup> “Sciendum est autem circa primum, quod hoc potest dupliciter legi: uno modo, ut sit sermo prophetae directus ad Patrem, ut sit sensus *tu, Domine*, scilicet Deus Pater, *fundasti terram in principio*, id est in Filio tuo, qui est principium . . . . Alio modo, quod sit sermo directus ad Filium, sic: *et tu, Domine*, scilicet Fili, *fundasti terram in principio*, scilicet temporis . . . .” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.5 [68], 34.



Thomas attempting to justify the divergent opinions of the Fathers of the Church.<sup>83</sup>

Rather, this example illustrates his conviction that, because the author of Scripture is God, multiple literal senses are in view here: “Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says, if even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses.”<sup>84</sup> Hence it seems that Thomas does not simply allow multiple literal readings—he expects them. If two interpretations of the same text meet Thomas’ criteria of being in accord with the letter of the text and not being contrary to the truth, he will allow them both to stand.<sup>85</sup>

#### *Thomas’ Prologue to the Hebrews Commentary*

Having surveyed Thomas’ treatment of much of Heb 1-10 in his commentary, it is now possible to evaluate how effectively his prologue serves to communicate his chief exegetical concerns. The prologue touches on two significant topics: the grace of Christ, and the excellence of Christ. To a closing examination of those topics we now turn.

In his prologue to the letter to the Romans, Thomas Aquinas had placed all fourteen of Paul’s writings under the heading of the grace of Christ, which he considers

---

<sup>83</sup> Jordan offers this scenario—the need to explain divergent patristic opinions—as one reason for Thomas’ commitment to the multiple literal sense, in addition to Thomas’ recognition that both the Holy Spirit and human authors, as the primary and instrumental causes of Scripture, may have more than one interpretation in mind for a text. See Mark F. Jordan, “Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense,” in *Medieval Philosophy & Theology: Volume 2*, ed. N. Kretzmann (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 140-141.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.10.

<sup>85</sup> John F. Boyle, “Authorial Intention and the *Divisio textus*,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 5. See also Scott W. Hahn and John Kincaid, “The Multiple Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas’s Commentary on Romans and Pauline Hermeneutics,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 163-182.

to be the entire teaching or *doctrina tota* of these letters.<sup>86</sup> Thomas' scheme arranges the letters in three groups: those that relate to the grace of Christ as found in the Church; those that relate to the grace of Christ as found in the Church's chief members; and the one letter, Hebrews, that relates to Christ as the head of the Church. The Hebrews commentary prologue reiterates this scheme, so that Thomas makes it clear at the outset that this letter serves to commend grace as it pertains to the head of the mystical body.<sup>87</sup>

But once the commentary begins, the presentation of the topic of grace is rather subdued. The word "grace" occurs only eight times in the letter itself<sup>88</sup>; and, having surveyed Thomas' discussion of those occurrences, he does nothing exceptional with them, but handles them in a straight-forward manner according to the literal sense. There are two instances in which Thomas makes a larger statement regarding grace in the Hebrews commentary, and they take the form of the structural comments found at the start of each lecture. The first sentence of the first lecture alludes to the grace of Christ, as Thomas states that the Apostle wrote Hebrews to those who wanted to retain the law's practices, as well as the gospel, "as if the grace of Christ did not suffice for salvation."<sup>89</sup> And in beginning his lecture on Heb 10:19-25, after completing the exegesis of the vast stretch of text that details Christ's comparative excellence and his efficacy at remitting

---

<sup>86</sup> "Est enim haec doctrina tota de gratia Christi, quae quidem potest tripliciter considerari." Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P., ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, Biblical Commentaries, Volume 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Prologue [11], 4.

<sup>87</sup> "In ista vero commendat ipsam gratiam quantum ad caput, scilicet Christum." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4].

<sup>88</sup> Hebrews 2:9, 4:16 (twice), 10:29, 12:15, 12:28, 13:9, and 13:25.

<sup>89</sup> "Scripsit autem epistolam istam contra errores quorundam, qui ex Iudaismo ad fidem Christi conversi, volebant servare legalia cum Evangelio, quasi non sufficeret gratia Christi ad salutem." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [6], 5.

sin, Thomas notes the Apostle's strategy of pairing a statement of Christ's excellence with an admonition to adhere to him. He then summarizes this section of Hebrews and its import by declaring that the Apostle has herein "undertaken to commend the grace of Christ, so that he might incline them to obeying Christ, and to turning back from the ceremonies of the law."<sup>90</sup> Thomas thereby uses these two mentions of the grace of Christ as an *inclusio*, to frame the larger discussion of who Christ is and what he does to save us in Heb 1:1-10:18.

Keating has noted Thomas' understated handling of the theme of grace: while grace is mentioned in the prologue, and at the beginning of the commentary, "it does not directly insert itself into his exegesis at any point," but "hovers over his exegesis as a constant guide."<sup>91</sup> And it does seem that, in the Hebrews commentary, Thomas' approach to the subject of grace is that of demonstrating how grace functions in procuring our justification, rather than telling us what grace is.

Such an approach is consistent with his discussion of grace in the *Summa Theologiae*, in which, of all the effects of grace, the justification of the ungodly is deemed to be God's greatest work,<sup>92</sup> so that an action, not a description, best summarizes the nature of grace. This approach is also consistent with Augustine's conviction that God speaks by events as well as words, evidenced by the figural function of the Exodus<sup>93</sup>;

---

<sup>90</sup> "... quia ad hoc suscepit commendare gratiam Christi, ut alliciat eos ad obediendum Christo, et recedendum a caeremonialibus legis." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.2 [501], 218.

<sup>91</sup> Daniel Keating, "Thomas Aquinas and the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'The Excellence of Christ,' in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London: T & T Clark International, 2012), 85.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.113.9.

<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Book II, XL.61, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65-66.

hence, if Christ is the exegesis of Scripture, as de Lubac states, then it is an exegesis that “does not consist of words first and foremost,” but one that is “actual.”<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Thomas’ decision to show us what the grace of Christ does, rather than invoking his authority to tell us what this grace does, indicates his preference for persuasion, and is consistent with the dialectical method used throughout the Hebrews commentary. Thomas would rather convince his hearers than compel them.

If the grace of Christ functions as an underlying theme for Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews, it is the excellence of Christ that is this work’s premier thematic feature. And in regard to this theme, Thomas Aquinas has shown that in his hands, a prologue is more than a token introduction. Thomas uses Ps 85:8 to propose the theme of the excellence of Christ in regard to his person and works; the first part of the prologue is a sermon on that verse, proving Christ’s excellence when compared to angels, prophets, and priests. While they may be called gods because they shine with divine splendor, hear the word of God, and serve as God’s ministers, Christ is far greater because he is God’s glory, he is the Word of God, and He is no mere minister but the Son. Hence Christ is preeminent in terms of his person; he is also preeminent in terms of his works. He is the creator, whereas angels are creatures; he is the source of illumination, whereas prophets must be illuminated themselves; and he is the one who justifies, whereas even priests are sinners who need to be justified. That all of these statements regarding Christ’s excellence, and the comparisons that reinforce that excellence, are the subject matter of

---

<sup>94</sup> De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1, 238.

Hebrews is evident, says Thomas; and it is this subject matter that distinguishes Hebrews from the remainder of the Pauline corpus.<sup>95</sup>

Consequently, it seems that this prologue to the Hebrews commentary is not merely introductory; it is programmatic, functioning as an overture in which all the principal themes are sounded before the symphony begins. The prologue articulates the purpose or end of Hebrews and of Thomas' commentary: proving the excellence of Christ, so that the Jewish converts mentioned in the first lecture will have no reason to cling to their legal observances, and every reason to cling to Christ. Thomas' chosen *accessus* verse provides the primary theme of Hebrews—the excellence of Christ in terms of both his person and his works. And then in a manner that is both descriptive and discursive, Thomas' prologue anticipates not only Hebrews' comparisons of Christ and Old Testament personages, but also the arguments that will be supported by those comparisons, enabling him to prove *in nuce* the excellence of Christ.

Thomas' Hebrews prologue also presents an outline for the first ten chapters of Hebrews—the excellent person and works of Christ, our high priest; and the *raison d'être* of the final three chapters—adhering to this excellent high priest as our head, and living by faith in him. Thus, in terms of providing a recapitulation of both the message and the structure of Hebrews, Thomas' prologue is unexcelled. It furnishes the lens by which Thomas' students and readers will be able to read and understand, to their eternal profit, his commentary on this most important letter.

---

<sup>95</sup> “Ergo manifeste in verbis istis demonstratur Christi excellentia, et haec est materia huius epistolae ad Hebraeos, quae ab aliis distinguitur.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher, Prologue [4], 2.

### *Thomas' Comparative Strategy*

Thomas uses his commentary prologue to set forth his comparative strategy for understanding Hebrews in terms of the essential and comparative excellence of Christ. Christ's excellence in terms of both his person and his work is in view. Thomas first compares Christ, who is essentially divine, to those who are gods only by participation. Within this latter category fall angels, prophets such as Moses, and priests; and all three groups point to the excellence of Christ in their similarity to him, as well as in their dissimilarity. They relate to Christ in terms of their participation in the divine and in their service to God, as angels reflect the divine glory, prophets have the word of God made known to them, and priests are ministers of God; but they differ from Christ in terms of their creaturely status and finitude. Hence, angels are creatures, prophets require illumination, and priests cannot justify, whereas Christ is supreme in the works of creation, illumination, and justification.

This twofold exposition of the excellence of Christ's person and work shapes Thomas' exegesis of Heb 1-10. Keeping in view the categories of person and work is essential, given that who Christ is determines the work that he does in order to save us. He compares Christ to the angels in Heb 1-2, using the categories of origin, dominion, power, and dignity; he does the same for the prophets and their representative, Moses, in Heb 3-4, applying the same four categories. Then the exegesis of Heb 5-10 allows for an extended comparison of Christ to Old Testament priests and the Old Testament priesthood. Here Thomas adapts his categories, due to the fact that the person and work of a priest are integrally related, and he cannot address the person of Christ without considering the work of Christ in this most important matter. Therefore, in discussing the

person of Christ as high priest, Thomas addresses his origin and dignity; and in examining the high priestly work of Christ, Thomas applies the category of dominion, and he transmutes the category of power into that of saving efficacy.

Implicit in this comparison of Christ to angels, prophets, and priests is another comparison, that of the Old Law or Old Testament to the New Law or New Testament. Thomas declares in his first lecture, on Hebrews 1:1-2, that the Apostle intends to use the letter to the Hebrews to prove Christ's superiority to angels, Moses, and priests, in order to demonstrate the New Testament's superiority to the Old. All three Old Testament personages are intimately associated with the Old Law, since it was by the angels that the Law was handed down, it was through Moses that the Law was given, and it was by the priests that the Law was administered.<sup>96</sup> But with the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Christ there is now available a New Law, placed in the minds and written on the hearts of his people, as Thomas' discussion of Heb 8:10a makes clear. This thought appears in the *Summa*, as well, as Thomas states that the New Law is instilled in man as a gift of grace, helping him not only to know what to do but also to accomplish it.<sup>97</sup> He further avers that the New Law is like the Old Law, in that both are ordained to the same end, which is man's subjection to God.<sup>98</sup> But the New Law is also distinct from the Old Law, because it is more closely connected with that end, and indeed, "the New

---

<sup>96</sup> "Intendit autem ostendere excellentiam Novi ad Vetus Testamentum per excellentiam Christi, quantum ad tres personas solemnes in ipso Veteri Testamento contentas, scilicet angelos, per quos lex tradita est . . . Quantum ad Moysen, a quo, vel per quem data est . . . Quantum ad sacerdotium per quod ministrabatur . . ." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.1 [6], 5.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.106.1, ad. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.107.1.

Law fulfils the Old by supplying that which was lacking in the Old Law.”<sup>99</sup> The Old Law was given through externals, the New Law through inward instruction, says Thomas. Christ has brought in this New Law, which is given through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit instructs inwardly, enlightening the intellect to understand and moving the will and heart to act, in a way that the Old Law could not.<sup>100</sup> Hence it seems that a comparison of Christ with angels, prophets, and priests in terms of not only their persons and works, but also in terms of their effects, is a feature of Thomas’ thought in both the *Summa Theologiae* and the Hebrews commentary.

Here a word of caution is in order, however. While Thomas states his commitment to the literal sense in the opening articles of his *Summa*, it may be observed that in his commentaries “symbolic interpretations are regularly interposed, thus doubling up the rational analysis of the text. This is done in varying degrees, to be sure, yet enough to be noticed, not only as regarding the texts of the Old Testament, which, by definition, are figure-laden . . . .”<sup>101</sup> In regard to this practice, Thomas is consistent with the patristic mode of interpreting Scripture, which was heavily reliant on the spiritual sense. This practice is indicative of the reading of Scripture according to the economy of Judeo-Christian revelation, as it unfolds from the old alliance, to the new alliance, and

---

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1-2.107.2.

<sup>100</sup> “Modus autem tradendi duplex est. Unus per exteriora, sicut proponendo verba ad cognitionem alicuius. Et hoc potest homo facere, et sic traditum fuit Vetus Testamentum. Alio modo interius operando. Et hoc proprium est Dei. Iob XXXII, 8: *inspiratio omnipotentis dat intelligentiam*. Et hoc modo datum est Novum Testamentum, quia consistit in infusione Spiritus Sancti, qui interius instruit. Non autem sufficit tantum cognoscere, sed requiritur operari. Et ideo primo illuminat intellectum ad cognoscendum . . . . Item ad bene operandum inclinatur affectum, unde imprimitur cordi.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 8.2 [404], 175. See also Coolman’s comments on Thomas, the Old and New Laws, and the situation of the Jews. Holly Taylor Coolman, “Romans 9-11: Rereading Aquinas on the Jews,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 101-112.

<sup>101</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 254.



ultimately to its final consummation. It is also indicative of a medieval tendency to reduce every historical event and personage to a sign or symbol, in order to find typological significance in texts unsuited for such treatment. As Chenu observes, “Saint Thomas did practice on his own, in his running interpretation of the texts, that classical type of interpretation wherein utilization of the Bible for spiritual purposes oversteps the explanation of the word of God.”<sup>102</sup>

But on a more positive note, one must credit Thomas with using his comparative strategy to make his Hebrews commentary persuasive and pertinent in regard to his readers, as angels, prophets, and priests are not the only personages drawn into these extended comparisons with Christ. The readers of the letter to the Hebrews, and by implication, the hearers of Thomas’ lectures, are included, as well. Each comparison of Christ, whether to angels, Moses, or priests, concludes with an exhortation to obey Christ. First, “having shown in many ways the eminence of Christ over the angels, the Apostle from this concludes that the teaching of Christ is more worthy of obedience.”<sup>103</sup> Then, having proved “that Christ is more excellent than Moses, the Apostle concludes that Christ is more worthy of obedience.”<sup>104</sup> And finally, having shown

the far greater eminence of the priesthood of Christ with respect to the priesthood of the Law, the Apostle concludes this in his habitual way, with an instruction to adhere more faithfully to this priest. For this he always did previously in the epistle, that after commending Christ he set down an admonition, because he

---

<sup>102</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 257.

<sup>103</sup> “Supra ostendit Apostolus multipliciter eminentiam Christi ad angelos, hic ex hoc concludit, quod magis obediendum est doctrinae Christi, scilicet Novo Testamento, quam Veteri Testamento.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 2.1 [89], 45. Translation mine.

<sup>104</sup> “Supra probavit Apostolus, quod Christus est maioris excellentiae quam Moyses, hic concludit quod magis est obediendum Christo.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.2 [170], 80. Translation mine.

undertook to commend the grace of Christ for this purpose—that he might entice them to obey Christ, and to withdraw from the ceremonies of the law.<sup>105</sup>

Because of who Christ is and because of what he does, and because of his essential and comparative supremacy over any Old Testament figure, merits our obedience and trust, as Thomas has shown through his meticulous exposition of the primary comparative argument of Heb 1-10.

Therefore, the comparisons that have been made in Heb 1-10 provide ample reasons for choosing Christ over the Old Testament. The aim of Thomas Aquinas and the Apostle in this extended comparison is patent: the creaturely and subordinate status of angels, prophets, and priests must be recognized; and the excellence of Christ, and faith in him and his work alone, must be allowed to prevail. And thus we come full circle to the first declaration made by Thomas in his commentary on the letter to the Hebrews: “There is none among the gods like unto Thee, O Lord: and there is none according to Thy works” (Ps 85:8).

### *Conclusion*

Striving to be a faithful reader of Thomas’ commentary on Hebrews has been the goal of this dissertation, in terms of the issues he presents in the prologue and that he expounds in the text commentary. To that end, an intensive study of the prologue, with its *accessus* verse, has revealed its theological depth, as well as its programmatic function in signaling both the purpose and structure of the commentary. Thomas’ study of the excellence of Christ in and of himself in the opening verses of Heb 1 has been

---

<sup>105</sup> “Postquam ostendit Apostolus multiplicem eminentiam sacerdotii Christi respectu sacerdotii legalis, hic iuxta consuetudinem suam concludit, monendo quod isti sacerdotio fideliter inhaerendum est. Hoc enim semper supra fecit, quod post commendationem ponit admonitionem, quia ad hoc suscepit commendare gratiam Christi, ut alliciat eos ad obediendum Christo, et recedendum a caeremonialibus legis.” Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.2 [501], 218. Translation mine.

theologically fruitful, setting forth not only the categories Thomas uses to distinguish the excellence of Christ's person from all others, but also his Trinitarian understanding of the Father-Son relationship and his two-nature Christology. The theme of the excellence of Christ's person in relation to angels, Moses, and priests has been covered in great depth; Thomas leaves his readers with no reason to prefer anyone else to Christ. And the threefold excellence of Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification has been addressed as those three works occur together in the commentary. Thomas' decision to separate Heb 8:10a from 8:10b is theologically justifiable in the context of an *exitus-reditus* scheme, whereby Heb 8:10a highlights Christ's function in providing the illumination we require in order to begin our return to God. And Thomas' exposition of Heb 8:10b demonstrates the apotheosis of Christ's threefold work and the culmination of our return to God, as we anticipate our re-creation in the image of God, the fullest possible knowledge of God, and the removal of sin and its disordering effects.

Additionally, we have had the opportunity to witness the work of Thomas as both a teacher and an exegete. His reliance on the *divisio textus* and on the literal sense, and his custom of treating individual words and phrases in terms of their grammatical function and their verbal signification, stand him in good stead in both endeavors. His ability to divide and organize the text, to bring in the views of authorities and anti-authorities, and then to deliver interpretations that are reliant on the literal sense and congruent with the Christian faith is remarkable. The commentary on Hebrews has also disclosed those moments when the priestly concern of Thomas surfaces—times when he addresses his students as to what form their personal obedience to the text at hand should take. In this he is Augustine's successor, as he seeks not only to teach and delight his

hearers, but also to move them in their commitment to follow Christ. Thomas' reputation as a theologian is unimpeachable; but his ability as a teacher and exegete of Hebrews must be recognized, as well.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### Thomas Aquinas and the Use of Syncrisis in Hebrews

Much has been written regarding the rhetorical structure of Hebrews, with its admixture of exposition, exhortation, and frequent use of both positive and negative examples drawn from Scripture.<sup>1</sup> It is evident that Thomas Aquinas was aware of at least some of the letter's rhetorical features, for after expounding the great theological expanse of Heb 1:1-10:18, he summarizes its import as he makes the transition to the next part of Hebrews:

After the Apostle showed the manifold eminence of the priesthood of Christ with respect to the priesthood of the law, here he concludes according to his custom, warning that they must adhere faithfully to this priesthood. For above [in the preceding discussions of Christ's superiority] he always did this, that he presented commendation after admonition, because in this he undertook to commend the grace of Christ, in order to incline them to obey Christ and withdraw from the ceremonies of the law.<sup>2</sup>

In this statement we see Thomas alluding to two rhetorical categories, exposition and exhortation: exposition in the Apostle's instruction on the manifold eminence of the priesthood of Christ, and exhortation, with the alternation of praise and warning in order to persuade the Hebrews to be faithful to Christ and his priesthood. We also see a reference to the comparisons that drive both the epistle and Thomas' commentary, for the

---

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent work on this subject, see George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> "Postquam ostendit Apostolus multiplicem eminentiam sacerdotii Christi respectu sacerdotii legalis, hic iuxta consuetudinem suam concludit, monendo quod isti sacerdotio fideliter inhaerendum est. Hoc enim semper supra fecit, quod post commentationem ponit admonitionem, quia ad hoc suscepit commendare gratiam Christi, ut alliciat eos ad obediendum Christo, et recedendum a caeremonialibus legis." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 10.2 [501], 218.

Apostle has presented the excellence of Christ's priesthood with respect to the Old Testament priesthood.

Such a comparative strategy is called syncrisis, which is a comparison made for the purpose of evaluation. These comparisons may develop along three lines—good compared with good, good compared with bad, or bad compared with bad.<sup>3</sup> Syncrisis in Hebrews lends itself to epideictic rhetoric, which focuses on praise of the subject of the comparison in order to fortify the beliefs of the hearers regarding that subject. Syncrisis in this letter is also an example of deliberative rhetoric, as time and time again, the readers of Hebrews are urged to consider the eternal outcome of their religious commitment and make a decision to adhere to Christ and his priesthood.<sup>4</sup>

The question arises as to whether Thomas made conscious use of this rhetorical approach in his commentary, although, given the abundant evidence of syncrisis in Hebrews itself, that question may be somewhat peripheral. The comparisons dominate Heb 1-10, and Thomas structures this part of his commentary, and his prologue, accordingly. But there are three avenues through which Thomas could have known of this aspect of classical rhetoric. The first would be the study of the liberal arts on which Thomas embarked at the University of Naples. This program included instruction in the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry,

---

<sup>3</sup> James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 13. I am grateful to Dr. Mikeal C. Parsons for suggesting this line of inquiry.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, Whitlark, and Thompson find ample evidence for both epideictic and deliberative syncrisis in Hebrews. Michael W. Martin and Jason A. Whitlark, "Choosing What Is Advantageous: The Relationship between Epideictic and Deliberative Syncrisis in Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 3 (July 2012), 381. Thompson, *Hebrews*, 12.

astronomy, and music, and one biographer notes that Thomas' studies in grammar and rhetoric were particularly emphasized.<sup>5</sup>

The second avenue would be through Chrysostom's homilies on Hebrews. Translated into Latin in the mid-sixth century, excerpts of these homilies appear in the *Gloss* and in Thomas' commentary on Hebrews.<sup>6</sup> Chrysostom used syncrisis in many works, such as the *Homilies against the Jews* and sermons on Matthew, John, and I Corinthians.<sup>7</sup> Running through Chrysostom's homilies on Hebrews are multiple identifications of comparisons as examples of syncrisis—comparisons that in turn contribute to the large-scale comparison in Hebrews of the old and new covenants.<sup>8</sup> Hence Chrysostom is aware of, and uses to the full, the effect of syncrisis as it pertains to the pericopes of Hebrews and to the letter as a whole.

The third avenue through which Thomas Aquinas might have encountered syncrisis is through his study of Aristotle. Written in the fourth century BC, Aristotle's *Rhetorica* is one of the oldest rhetorical handbooks extant.<sup>9</sup> Thomas was first exposed to the natural philosophy of Aristotle while a student at the University of Naples between

---

<sup>5</sup> James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1974), 15-19.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Thomas quotes from Chrysostom's first homily at the end of his lecture on Heb 1:3. See Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 1.2 [44], 21; Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1.3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 367. Cassiodorus mentions the translation of this work by Chrysostom in his *Institutiones* 1.8.3; Alcuin used the translated homilies in his own work on Hebrews. See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Michael W. Martin, *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 89-90. Martin cites as his source Daniel Sheerin, "Rhetorical and Hermeneutic Synkrisis in Patristic Typology," in *Nova and Vetera*, ed. John Petruccione (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Michael W. Martin and Jason A. Whitlark, "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis as the Key to the Structure and Argument of Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 3 (July 2011), 426. Within the homilies on Hebrews, they locate Chrysostom's use of syncrisis in 1.2; 5.1-3; 8.1; 12.1; 13.1, 5; and 32.1.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Hebrews*, 12.



1239 and 1244.<sup>10</sup> A translated version of Aristotle's *Rhetorica* began circulating in Italy around 1260-1265, and a case has been made for substantial influence on the *Prima Secundae* by Moerbeke's translation of this rhetorical handbook.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the comparative argument provided by syncrisis is supported by another principle that Thomas Aquinas had gleaned from Aristotle. In the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas cites Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as he provides the fourth way for proving the existence of God—a way that “is taken from the gradation to be found in things.” Thomas states

There is then, something which is truest, something best, something noblest, and, consequently something which is most being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in the *Metaphysics*. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum of heat, is the cause of all hot things as is said in the same book. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection. And this we call God.<sup>12</sup>

Thomas alludes to this principle in other Christological contexts. For example, Thomas holds that Christ took on human nature from Adam; but he assumed that nature without sin, because it was necessary for the one coming to cleanse the human race should not himself need cleansing, since “in any kind of change the active principle cannot be the one undergoing that change, e.g. the first cause of changes in quality does not undergo qualitative change.”<sup>13</sup> In a more positive application of this principle, this time to Christ's resurrection, Thomas declares that, ““Whatever is first in a given genus is

---

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 7; Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino*, 13, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, 102, 146.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1.2.3. Thomas is citing Aristotle's *Metaphysics* II, I, 993b25, 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.4.6, ad. 2.

the cause of all that come after it.’ Christ’s resurrection, as shown earlier, is first in the order of our resurrection. It must, therefore, be the cause of our resurrection.”<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the grace of Christ, his soul “received grace so that it could be passed on, as it were, from him to others. Hence he required the maximum grace; just as fire, which is what makes things hot, is itself the hottest thing of all.”<sup>15</sup> And our anticipation of the beatific vision relies on Christ’s fullest possession of that happiness; as Thomas notes, “beatific knowledge, which consists in the vision of God, must be found in its supreme degree in Christ, since the cause must always be superior to what it causes.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, Thomas contends that the incarnation of Christ is the most marvelous divine work; therefore, “toward faith in this particular marvel all other miracles are ordered, since ‘that which is greatest in any genus seems to be the cause of the other.’”<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, it is evident that Thomas understood and applied the principle of comparison to the nature, life, and ministry of Christ in such a way that, in any category under consideration, Christ is the supreme example to whom all members of that category owe their being and are ordered. This approach to understanding Christ applies to the letter to the Hebrews in a very important way, in that Christ in this letter is shown to be the source of all priesthood and therefore the only source of salvation—a point that

Thomas also makes in the *Tertia Pars*. Here he explains that

A priest, as has already been said, is constituted an intermediary between God and his people. Now the only person who stands in need of an intermediary with God is one who is unable to approach God for himself. Such a person must submit to a

---

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.56.1.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.7.9.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.9.2.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*, 27.1, trans. Charles J. O’Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 147.

priesthood and must share in the benefits a priesthood procures . . . . For in any given order the first agent influences others, while it is itself subject to no influence within the limits of that order. For example, the sun gives light; it is not illuminated by anything else; and fire heats it but is not heated by anything else. Now Christ is the source of all priesthood. For the priest of the Old Law was the type of Christ while the New-Law priest acts in his person, ‘For what I have given, if I have given anything, for your sakes have I done it in the person of Christ’ [II Cor 2:10].<sup>18</sup>

Thomas insists that Christ is the only intermediary between us and God; priests before Christ pointed to him, and priests after Christ serve in him.

Hence, Thomas in the *Tertia Pars* proves that Christ is the first in his class, and the source of all others in his class—just as he does in his commentary on Hebrews. A consideration of the comparisons Thomas draws regarding Christ’s person and work, as seen through the strategy of syncrisis, will crystallize the line of argument that both he and the Apostle pursue throughout the letter to the Hebrews.

Small cites Theon as advocating a topical approach to syncrisis in his *Progymnasmata*, 60-61. The comparison should begin with “external and bodily goods,” such as birth, education, offices, and reputation, before moving to a comparison of deeds—which bears some similarity to Thomas’ topics of person and works.<sup>19</sup> In classical rhetoric, the topics to be compared constituted “the essential components of a life,”<sup>20</sup> so that the subjects of the comparison could be evaluated from beginning to end and then justly compared. But not only may human lives be compared; so may the

---

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 3.22.4.

<sup>19</sup> Brian C. Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 135.

<sup>20</sup> Martin, *Judas in Comparison*, 44.

beginning, end, and qualities of cities and nations,<sup>21</sup> and, in the case of Hebrews, covenants and ministries. It is in this sense that the works of Christ, as Thomas depicts them in his Hebrews commentary, may be understood.

For in his presentation of Christ's works, those works do seem to fall into something of a narrative sequence. Christ's threefold work as the Word and as Lord define who he is; his works as they pertain to sin explain the necessity of the incarnation and passion of Christ; his declaration of the Father to his brothers, and continuing existence as the support, light, and life of the Church point to the on-going effectiveness of Christ's threefold work; and Thomas' sermon on Heb 8:10b-13 describes the culmination of Christ's work in creation, illumination, and justification, with the divine purposes that the Old Testament can only anticipate finding their culmination in the New Testament that Christ has made possible. Syncrisis has been called the organizing principle of Hebrews, in which there is, throughout the argument of the epistle, "a narrative progression through covenant life, from ultimate origins to ultimate eschatological ends."<sup>22</sup> And it is this kind of progression—from Christ as the Word, to Christ the provider of re-creation, full illumination, lasting justification, and a union of God and his people—that we see in Thomas' presentation of the excellence of Christ's works.

An argument based on a syncritical analysis of Christ's works is, perhaps,

---

<sup>21</sup> Martin and Whitlark, "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis," 423. As examples of things that may be compared in a manner analogous to the comparison of persons, they mention the founders or the good children of a commonwealth, education in a city, the nature of plants, and the deeds of armies. The point is that it is permissible to find 'analogies of topics' "by considering a corresponding element from the inanimate thing's 'lifespan.'"

<sup>22</sup> Martin and Whitlark, "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis, 417. They note that Koester has also sees the imagery in Hebrews moving in a linear fashion toward a goal—although in three movements, and not necessarily in a unitary fashion. Koester, *Hebrews*, 83.

somewhat tenuous. But an argument based on a syncretical analysis of Christ's person is not. Such a comparison is at the heart of Thomas' prologue and his exposition of Heb 1-10, as he compares Christ to angels, prophets such as Moses, and priests. The Apostle's comparative strategy is clear enough; but Thomas makes the comparisons more concrete and more comprehensible by developing the four categories of origin, dominion, power, and dignity to aid him in comparing Christ and his counterparts. Such an approach is consistent with syncrisis, in which comparison by parts is more effective than comparison of the whole; in this context, Aphthonius, who authored a handbook on rhetoric in the fourth century AD,<sup>23</sup> states that "it is not necessary in making comparisons to contrast a whole with a whole, for that is flat and not argumentative, but compare a heading to a heading; this at least is argumentative."<sup>24</sup>

Providing a lucid and compelling argument for the superiority of Christ is exactly what Thomas has done through the identification and exposition of these four categories. No angel or prophet can rival Christ in unique origin, dominion, power, or dignity; and any comparison only serves to emphasize their lesser status as creatures and servants. Similarly, the priests of the Old Testament cannot compare to Christ as our high priest, for he is the only priest to represent his people before God in a heavenly tabernacle, for which the earthly tabernacle was only a figure; he is the only priest whose sacrifice can remove sins, and remove them completely; and he is the only priest granted the dignity of being the Son of God and the one to sit at God's right hand. In terms of his origin as God's Son, dominion from his throne, saving power and efficacy, and dignity at God's

---

<sup>23</sup> Small, *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*, 117.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by Martin and Jason A. Whitlark, "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis," 419. From *Rhetores Graeci*, ed. L. Spengel (3 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1854-1856).

right hand, no human priest can compare with Christ. Thus, when Christ is likened with any Old Testament personage—angel, prophet, or priest—it is Christ whose salvific supremacy is manifested.

In classical rhetoric, syncrisis allows for three possible modes of comparison: good with good, good with bad, or bad with bad. In the letter to the Hebrews, Christ, who clearly is good, is compared with angels, prophets, and priests, who, within the setting of their roles regarding the Old Testament, are also good. Thomas makes a particular point of praising Moses, and recalling God's praise of Moses in Num 12:7 as one who was faithful in all God's house. Thomas observes that here we find Moses commended more highly than anywhere else in the Bible—a commendation that the Apostle seconds in Heb 3:2.<sup>25</sup> Thus it is evident that Moses is good; angels, as heavenly beings deputed by God to be ministering spirits, are good; and priests, who serve as intermediaries between God and man, are good.

But may I suggest that to read the extended comparison that comprises Heb 1-10 as a simple comparison of good with good, in which the relative virtues of Christ are displayed, is overly simplistic. Christ's goodness is unequivocal. The question remains as to whether, for the readers of Hebrews and Thomas' commentary, the angels, prophets, and priests are good; and their relative status depends on what choice the readers make. If the readers of Hebrews choose to fall away from Christ and rely on lesser personages, then those personages will devolve into simulacra—pale and ineffective imitations of

---

<sup>25</sup> "Ibi enim dicitur sic: *at non talis servus meus Moyses, qui in omni domo mea fidelissimus est.* Ubi, si bene attendimus, magis commendatur Moyses, quam in aliquo loco Bibliae. Et ideo Apostolus tamquam excellentissimum ad commendationem Moysi hoc accipit." Thomas Aquinas, *Hebrews*, Larcher 3.1 [159], 75.

Christ who have subverted the faith and salvation of the Hebrews. If that is the outcome, then those personages will no longer be good, but bad. But if the readers choose Christ, and choose to move forward through faith in him, then the Old Testament personages will be seen to have been forerunners of Christ—servants who point to and prepare the way for the unique incarnate one who alone provides life, light, and union with God. Thus it must be seen that the syncritical argument in Hebrews is a fluid one, in which we will be able to evaluate the nature of the comparison (good with good, or good with bad), and the eternal ramifications of our decision, only after our decision has been made.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### *Works by Thomas Aquinas*

- Thomas Aquinas. "Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture." In *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, edited by Ralph McInerny, 5-12. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- . *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996.
- . *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. Translated by Matthew L. Lamb. Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966.
- . *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Translated by Chrysostom Baer. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2006.
- . *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-5*. Translated by Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- . *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Part I: Chapters 1-7*. Translated by James A. Weisheipl. Albany, NY: Magi Books, no date.  
<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm> [accessed May 26, 2014].
- . *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Part II: Chapters 8-21*. Translated by Fabian R. Larcher. Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1998.  
<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm> [accessed May 26, 2014].
- . *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*. Translated by F. R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating. Edited by J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón. Biblical Commentaries, Volume 38, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.
- . *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Translated by F. R. Larcher and M. L. Lamb. Edited by J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón. Biblical Commentaries, Volume 39, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.



- . *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*. Translated by F. R. Larcher. Edited by J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón. Biblical Commentaries, Volume 41, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.
- . *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*. Translated by F. R. Larcher. Edited by J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón. Biblical Commentaries, Volume 37, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.
- . *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Translated by F. R. Larcher. Edited by J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón. Biblical Commentaries, Volume 40, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.
- . *Introduction to his Exposition of the Psalms*. Translated by Hugh McDonald. The Aquinas Translation Project.  
<http://www4.desales.edu/~philtheo/loughlin/ATP/index.html>
- . *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*. Translated by Anthony Damico. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.
- . *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*. Edited by Raymundi Spiazzi. Rome: Marietti, 1949.
- . *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*. Translated by Anton C. Pegis. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.
- . *Summa Contra Gentiles, III*. In *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Edited by Anton C. Pegis, 429-477. New York: Modern Library, 1948.
- . *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*. Translated by Charles J. O'Neill. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 7. *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Ia. 33-43)*. Translated by T. C. O'Brien. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1976.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 30. *The Gospel of Grace (1a2ae. 106-114)*. Translated by Cornelius Ernst. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1972.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 39. *Religion and Worship (2a2ae. 80-91)*. Translated by Kevin D. O'Rourke. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1964.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 48. *The Incarnate Word (3a. 1-6)*. Translated by R. J. Hennessey. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1976.

- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 49. *The Grace of Christ (3a. 7-15)*. Translated by Liam G. Walsh. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1974.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 50. *The One Mediator (3a. 16-26)*. Translated by Colman E. O'Neill. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1965.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 53. *The Life of Christ (3a. 38-45)*. Translated by Samuel Parsons and Albert Pinheiro. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1971.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 54. *The Passion of Christ (3a. 46-52)*. Translated by Richard T. A. Murphy. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1965.
- . *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 55. *The Resurrection of the Lord (3a. 53-59)*. Translated by C. Thomas Moore. New York: Blackfriars/McGraw Hill, 1976.
- . *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Vols. I and II. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952.
- . *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura*. In *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*. Vol. II. Edited by Raphael Cai. Turin: Marietti, 1952.

#### *Other Primary Sources*

- Alexander of Hales. *Glossa in quattuor libros Sententiarum* I. Edited by PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae. Quaracchi: Bibliotheca Franciscanum Scholastica, 1951.
- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy, Volume III: Paradise*. Translated by Mark Musa. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- . *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*. Vol. IV. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1850.
- . *De Fide et Symbolo*. In *Augustine: Earlier Writings*. Edited by J. H. S. Burleigh. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.
- . *On Christian Teaching*. Translated by R. P. H. Green. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- . *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. In *On Genesis*. Translated by Edmund Hill. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002.
- . *Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10*. Translated by John W. Rettig. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988.

- . *The Trinity*. Translated by Stephen McKenna. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963.
- Bonaventure. *Breviloquium*. Translated by Dominic V. Monti. Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005.
- . *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*. Translated by Zachary Hayes. Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1996.
- . *Saint Bonaventure's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapters 1-8*. Translated by Robert J. Karris. Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001.
- Busa, Roberto. *Index thomisticus*. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974.
- Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms: Volume II, Psalms 51-100*. Translated by P. G. Walsh. Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, No. 52. New York, NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991.
- Chrysostom. *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, vol. 14. Edited by Philip Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.
- Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by J. E. L. Oulton. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Froehlich, K., and M.T. Gibson. *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*. Volume 2. Turnhout: Brepols, 1992.
- Froehlich, K., and M.T. Gibson. *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480-81*. Volume 4. Turnhout: Brepols, 1992.
- Gregory the Great. *Moralia in Job*. Edited by Marci Adriaen. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Vol. 143, 143A, 143B. Turnholt: Brepols, 1979.
- Hugh of St. Victor. *Didascalicon*. Translated by Franklin T. Harkins. In *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*. Edited by Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere. Victorine Texts in Translation, Vol. 3. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012.
- . *Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*. Translated by Jerome Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

———. *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors*. In *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*. Edited by Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere. Victorine Texts in Translation, Vol. 3. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012.

Irenaeus. *Against Heresies, Books 1-5 and Fragments*. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, vol 2. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.

Origen. *Periarchon*. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, vol. 4. Fathers of the Third Century. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.

Peter the Chanter. *Verbum abbreviatum*. *Patrologia Latina* 205.

Peter Lombard. *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*. *Patrologia Latina* 192.

———. *Psalmos Davidicos Commentarii*. *Patrologia Latina* 191.

Tertullian. *Against Praxeas*. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, vol. 3. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.

#### Secondary Sources

Armitage, J. Mark. "Certain Rectitude of Order: Jesus and Justification According to Aquinas." *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 45-66.

Attridge, Harold W. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

Baglow, Christopher T. "Modus et Forma": A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the *Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios*. *Analecta Biblica Investigationes Scientifcae in Res Biblicas* 149. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Institute Biblico, 2002.

Bataillon, L.-J. "Early Scholastic and Mendicant Preaching as Exegesis of Scripture." In *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, edited by Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr., 165-198. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992.

Bauer, W. F., W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Bingham, D. Jeffrey. "Irenaeus and Hebrews." In *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, edited by Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier, 48-73. London: T & T Clark International, 2012.

- Black, C. Clifton. "St. Thomas' Commentary on the Johannine Prologue: Some Reflections on Its Character and Implications." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 681-698.
- Blanco, A. "Word and Truth in Divine Revelation: A Study of the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on John 14,6." In *La Doctrine de la révélation divine de saint Thomas d'Aquin. Acts du Symposium sur la pensée de saint Thomas d'Aquin tenu à Rolduc, les 4 et 5 Novembre 1989*, edited by Leo Elders, 27-48. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990.
- Boersma, Hans, and Matthew Levering. "Spiritual Interpretation and Realigned Temporality." *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 587-596.
- Bourke, Vernon J. *Thomistic Bibliography, 1920-1940*. St. Louis, MO: The Modern Schoolman, 1981.
- Bougerol, J. Guy. *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*. Translated by J. de Vinck. Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964.
- Boyle, John F. "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio Textus*." In *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, edited by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, 3-8. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005.
- . "The Theological Character of the Scholastic 'Division of the Text' with Particular Reference to the Commentaries of Saint Thomas Aquinas." In *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Christian Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish and Joseph W. Goering, 276-283. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- . "The Twofold Division of St Thomas's Christology in the *Tertia Pars*." *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 439-447.
- Brown, Stephen F. "The Theological Role of the Fathers in Aquinas's *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*." In *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, edited by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, 9-20. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005.
- Burrell, David B. "Creation in St. Thomas Aquinas's *Super Evangelium S. Joannis Lectura*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, edited by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, 115-126. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005.
- Cessario, Romanus. *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought from St Anselm to Aquinas*. Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1990.

- Chase, Steven. *Angelic Wisdom: The Cherubim and the Grace of Contemplation in Richard of St. Victor*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- Chenu, Marie-Dominique. "Le plan de la Somme théologique de S. Thomas." *Revue Thomiste* 45 (1939): 93-207
- . *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*. Translated by A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965.
- Clark, William W. "The Twelfth-Century Church of St. Victor in Paris: A New Proposal." In *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, edited by E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith, 68-85. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.
- Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.
- Coolman, Holly Taylor. "Romans 9-11: Rereading Aquinas on the Jews." In *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, 101-112. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012.
- Cuddeback, Matthew. "Thomas Aquinas on Divine Illumination and the Authority of the First Truth." *Nova et Vetera* 7, no. 3 (2009): 579-602.
- Daley, Brian E. "'In Many and Various Ways': Towards a Theology of Theological Exegesis," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 597-615
- Dauphinais, Michael, and Matthew Levering, *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).
- De Hamel, Christopher. *The Book: A History of the Bible*. London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2001.
- Delano-Smith, Catherine. "Maps and Plans in Medieval Exegesis: Richard of St. Victor's *In visionem Ezechielis*." In *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, edited by E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith, 1-45. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.
- De Lubac, Henri. *Medieval Exegesis. Volume 1. The Four Senses of Scripture*. Translated by Mark Sebanc. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.
- . *Medieval Exegesis. Volume 2. The Four Senses of Scripture*. Translated by E. M. Macierowski. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

- . *Medieval Exegesis. Volume 3. The Four Senses of Scripture*. Translated by E. M. Macierowski. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.
- Dodds, Michael J. “The Teaching of Thomas Aquinas on the Mysteries of the Life of Christ.” In *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 91-116. London: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- Edwards, Mark. “Aquinas on Ephesians and Colossians.” In *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 149-166. London: T&T Clark International, 2005.
- Emery, Gilles. “The Doctrine of the Trinity in St Thomas Aquinas.” In *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 45-66. London: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- Evans, G. R. “Exegesis and Authority in the Thirteenth Century.” In *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, edited by Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr., 93-112. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.
- . *Fifty Key Medieval Thinkers*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- . *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Farrar, Frederick. *History of Interpretation*. London: Macmillan, 1886.
- Fidora, Alexander. “Augustine to Aquinas: Latin-Christian Authors.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, 45-54. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Froelich, Karlfried. “Thomas Aquinas.” In *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, edited by D. K. McKim. 85-90. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Gatiss, Lee. “Grace Tasted for All: Thomas Aquinas on Hebrews 2:9. *Tyndale Bulletin* 63.2 (2012): 217-236.
- Gibson, Margaret T. “The *De doctrina christiana* in the School of St. Victor.” In *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, edited by Edward D. English, 41-47. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- . “The Place of the *Glossa ordinaria* in Medieval Exegesis.” In *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, edited by Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr., 5-28. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

- Glorieux, Palemon. "Essai sur les Commentaires Scripturaires de Saint Thomas et Leur Chronologie." *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 17 (1950): 237-266.
- . "L'Enseignement au Moyen Âge: Techniques et Méthodes en usage à la Faculté de Théologie de Paris, au XIII siècle." *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 43 (1968): 65-186.
- . *Répertoire des Maîtres en Théologie de Paris au XIII siècle*. Paris: Vrin, 1933.
- Guggenheim, Antoine. *Jésus-Christ, Grand Prêtre de l'Ancienne et de la Nouvelle Alliance: Étude du commentaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin sur l'Épître aux Hébreux*. Langres: Parole et Silence, 2004.
- Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970.
- Guthrie, George H. *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.
- . *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994.
- Hahn, Scott W., and John Kincaid. "The Multiple Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas's Commentary on Romans and Pauline Hermeneutics." In *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, 163-182. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012.
- Hanson, R. P. C. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1988.
- Häring, Nikolaus M. "Commentary and Hermeneutics." In *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable, and Carol D. Lanham, 173-200. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Harkins, Franklin T. "Docuit Excellentissimae Divinitatis Mysteria: St. Paul in Thomas Aquinas." In *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages*, edited by Steven R. Cartwright, 235-264. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- . "Lectio exhortatio debet esse: Reading as a Way of Life at the Twelfth-Century Abbey of St. Victor." In *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, edited by E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith, 103-130. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.
- . *Reading and the Work of Restoration: History and Scripture in the Theology of Hugh of St Victor*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009.



- Harkins, Franklin T., and Frans van Liere. "General Introduction." In *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, edited by Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, 31-60. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012.
- Healy, Mary. "Aquinas's Use of the Old Testament in His Commentary on Romans." In *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, 183-195. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012.
- Healy, Nicholas M. "Introduction." In *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 1-20. London: T & T Clark International, 2005.
- . *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003.
- Heen, Erik M., and Philip D. W. Krey. *Hebrews. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 10. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Hibbs, Thomas S. *Dialectic and Narrative in Aquinas: An Interpretation of the Summa contra gentiles*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- Hunt, Richard William. "The Introductions of the 'Artes' in the Twelfth Century." In *Studia mediaevalia in honorem R. J. Martin*, 85-98. Bruges: Apud Societatem Editricem 'De Tempel,' 1948.
- Ingardia, Richard. *Thomas Aquinas: International Bibliography, 1977-1990*. Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University, 1993.
- Jeffrey, David Lyle. *Houses of the Interpreter: Reading Scripture, Reading Culture*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003.
- Johnson, Mark F. "Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense." In *Medieval Philosophy & Theology: Volume 2*, edited by N. Kretzmann, 117-141. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2006.
- Jordan, Mark D. "Aquinas Reading Aristotle's *Ethics*." In *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, edited by Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr., 229-250. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

- . *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Keating, Daniel A. “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas.” In *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 139-158. London: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- . “Thomas Aquinas and the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘The Excellence of Christ.’” In *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, edited by Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier, 84-99. London: T&T Clark International, 2012.
- Keating, Daniel, and Matthew Levering. “Introduction.” In *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Gospel of John*, translated by Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl, ix-xxx. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Kennedy, Robert G. “Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Sacred Scripture.” Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985.
- Koester, Craig R. *Hebrews*. Anchor Bible Commentary 36. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Laporte, Jean Marc. “Christ in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*: Peripheral or Pervasive?” *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 221-247
- Leclercq, Jean. “The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture: From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard.” In *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, edited by G. W. H. Lampe, 183-197. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Leget, Carlo. “The Concept of ‘Life’ in the *Commentary on St. John*.” In *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, edited by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, 153-172. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005.
- Light, Laura. “French Bibles c.1200-30: A New Look at the Origin of the Paris Bible.” In *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*, edited by Richard Gameson, 155-176. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Loewe, Raphael. “The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate.” In *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, edited by G. W. H. Lampe, 102-154. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

- Mandonnet, Pierre. "La Chronologie des écrits scriptuaires de St. Thomas d'Aquin." *Revue Thomiste*, N.S. xi (1928): 42-50.
- Martin, Michael W. *Judas and the Rhetoric of Comparison in the Fourth Gospel*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.
- Martin, Michael W., and Jason A. Whitlark. "Choosing What Is Advantageous: The Relationship between Epideictic and Deliberative Syncrisis in Hebrews." *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 3 (July 2012): 379-400.
- . "The Encomiastic Topics of Syncrisis as the Key to the Structure and Argument of Hebrews." *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 3 (July 2011): 415-439.
- McInerny, Ralph. "Introduction." *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, edited and translated by Ralph McInerny, ix-xxxiv. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- McNally, Robert E. *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.
- Miethe, Terry L., and Vernon J. Bourke. *Thomistic Bibliography, 1940-1978*. Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Minnis, A. J. "The *Accessus* Extended: Henry of Ghent on the Transmission and Reception of Theology." In *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, edited by Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr., 275-326. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.
- . *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Minnis, A. J., and A. B. Scott. *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary-Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Monti, Dominic V. "Introduction." Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, edited by Dominic V. Monti, xii-l. Saint Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005.
- Mulchahey, M. Michèle. "First the Bow is Bent in Study....": *Dominican Education before 1350*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010.
- Ocker, Christopher. *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

- O'Keefe, John J., and R. R. Reno. *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- O'Neill, Colman E. "Appendix 5: The Priesthood of Christ." In Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Volume 50: The One Mediator (3a. 16-26), translated and edited by Colman E. O'Neill, 245. London: Blackfriars/Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965.
- Paretsky, A. "The Influence of Thomas the Exegete on Thomas the Theologian: The Tract on Law (Ia-IIae, qq. 98-108) as a Test Case." *Angelicum* 71 (1994): 549-577.
- Principe, Walter. "Thomas Aquinas' Principles for Interpretation of Patristic Texts." In *Studies in Medieval Culture*, VIII and IX. Edited by John R. Sommerfeldt and E. Rozanne Elder, 111-121. Kalamazoo, MI: The Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1976.
- Thomas Prügl. "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture." In *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, 386-415. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
- Quain, Edwin A. "The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*." *Traditio* 3 (1945): 215-264.
- Rouse, Mary A., and Richard H. Rouse, "The Development of Research Tools in the Thirteenth Century," in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, 221-255. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.
- . "Statim invenire: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page," in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, 191-219. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.
- Rouse, Richard H., and Mary A. Rouse, "Statim invenire: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page." In *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, 201-225. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Runciman, Steven. *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- Ryan, Thomas F. *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.
- Schumacher, Lydia. *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

- Sigmund, Paul E. "Law and Politics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, 217-231. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Small, Brian C. *The Characterization of Jesus in the Book of Hebrews*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Smalley, Beryl. "The Bible in the Medieval Schools." In *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, edited by G. W. H. Lampe, 197-220. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- . *The Gospels in the Schools*. London: Hambledon Press, 1985.
- . *Medieval Exegesis of Wisdom Literature: Essays by Beryl Smalley*. Edited by Roland E. Murphy. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986.
- . "Peter Comestor on the Gospels and His Sources." *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 46 (1979): 84-129.
- . *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978.
- Smith, Lesley. *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009.
- Spicq, C. *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, I.- Introduction. Paris: J. Gabalda, 1952.
- . "Saint Thomas d'Aquin exegete." *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 15/1, 694-738. Paris: Letouzey, 1946.
- Stump, Eleonore. "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, 252-268. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Synan, Edward. "The Four 'Senses' and Four Exegetes." In *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, 225-236. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Thompson, James W. *Hebrews*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Thouzellier, Christine. *Rituel Cathare*. Sources Chrétiennes 236. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1977.

- Torrell, Jean-Pierre. "Le Christ dans la 'spiritualité' de saint Thomas." In *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, edited by Kent Emery, Jr. and Joseph Wawrykow, 202-219. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.
- . "Life and Works." In *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, 15-32. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume I: The Person and His Work*. Translated by Robert Royal. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996.
- . *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2: Spiritual Master*. Translated by Robert Royal. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996.
- Valkenberg, Wilhelmus G.B.M. *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht New Series, 6. Leuven: Peeters, 2000.
- Van der Ploeg, J. "The Place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St Thomas." *The Thomist* 10, (1947): 398-422.
- Van Liere, Frans. "Andrew of Saint-Victor and His Franciscan Critics." In *The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Christian and Medieval Culture*, edited by Ineke van't Spijker, 291-310. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009.
- . "Christ or Antichrist? The Jewish Messiah in Twelfth-Century Christian Eschatology." In *From Knowledge to Beatitude: St. Victor, Twelfth-Century Scholars, and Beyond*, edited by E. Ann Matter and Lesley Smith, 342-357. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.
- . "Introduction to Hugh of St Victor's *On Sacred Scripture and Its Authors* and *The Diligent Examiner*." In *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory; A Selection of Works of Hugh, Andrew, Richard and Godfrey of St Victor, and of Robert of Melun*, edited by Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere, 205-211. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012.
- Van't Spijker, Ineke. "The Literal and the Spiritual: Richard of Saint-Victor and the Multiple Meaning of Scripture." In *The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Christian and Medieval Culture*, edited by Ineke van't Spijker, 225-248. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009.
- Verger, Jacques. "L'exégèse de l'université." In *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, edited by P. Riché and G. Lobrichon, 199-232. Paris: Beauchesne, 1984.

- Wawrykow, Joseph. "Reflections on the Place of the *De doctrina christiana* in High Scholastic Discussions of Theology." In *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, edited by Edward D. English, 99-125. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- . "Wisdom in the Christology of Thomas Aquinas." In *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers*, edited by Kent Emery, Jr. and Joseph Wawrykow, 175-201. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.
- Weinandy, Thomas G. "Aquinas: God *IS* Man: The Marvel of the Incarnation." In *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 67-90. London: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- . "The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas' Commentary on Hebrews." In *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum, 223-244. London: T & T Clark International, 2005.
- Weisheipl, James A. *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974.
- . "Thomas D'Aquino and Albert His Teacher." In *The Gilson Lectures on Thomas Aquinas*, Etienne Gilson Series 30, edited by James P. Reilly, 1-18. Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008.
- Williams, A. N. "Argument to Bliss: The Epistemology of the *Summa Theologiae*." *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (October 2004): 505-526.
- . "Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*." *Modern Theology* 13, no. 1 (January 1997): 53-74.
- Williams, C. S. C. "The History of the Text and Canon of the New Testament to Jerome." In *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, edited by G. W. H. Lampe, 27-53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Wilson, R. McL. *Hebrews*. New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.
- Wippel, John F. "Metaphysics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, 85-127. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

William M. Wright, *Rhetoric and Theology: Figural Reading of John 9*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

Young, Frances M. "Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews." In *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, edited by Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier, 33-47. London: T & T Clark International, 2012.

Zinn, Jr., Grover A. "Hugh of St. Victor's "*De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* as an "Accessus" Treatise for the Study of the Bible." *Traditio*, no. 52 (1997): 111-134.

———. ed. *Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of The Trinity*, The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1979.