

imical to both high culture and a true popular culture. Only with a recovery of the meaning of art as *recta ratio factibilium*, with all that is implied by that, can we have either a healthy artistic life or a healthy social order.

## A Thomistic Preface to Theology - "The Science of God and of the Blessed"

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It has been said that a good teacher is one who can take the loftiest subject and make it accessible to the lowliest beginner. There is no discipline whose object is loftier than that of theology, namely, God Himself, in His infinite mystery; and whose student, the human being, is lowlier with regard to it. We are dealing with an *excess* of knowledge, not a *deficiency*—there is *too much* to know, and it is too far above us. Aristotle compared man's situation vis-à-vis God to the eye of an owl blinded by the light of the sun; the owl is comfortable flying in the dark because its eye was made for that environment. Images of God though we are, we humans have *individual material things* as the first and natural object of our mind. This means we are equipped rather well to understand and speak about and make use of the material things among which we find ourselves on this planet, but are equipped rather poorly to rise beyond them to pure spiritual realities. St. Thomas Aquinas insists that God, as He really is in Himself, is beyond all our language, beyond reach of our reasoning, so that our thoughts and words fall perpetually short; we walk towards Him in the bright darkness of faith, guided by His hand, instructed by *His* words, above all by His *Word*, Jesus Christ.

I will have more to say later about the essential link between theology, Christ, and conversion. Suffice it to say for now that if God had not, in His mercy, "humbled himself to share in our humanity" and mingle with us sinners, if He did not stoop to conquer, we would have no purchase whatsoever on the world of the divine, the "interior life" of God. We would be alien to Him—and ultimately, to ourselves.

There are countless ways of introducing theology—some better, some worse, some completely wrong. The Church founded by Jesus Christ on the Rock of Peter knows better than to leave us floundering helplessly when it comes to the discipline most arduous and most worthy. She has told us, through dozens of popes over a period of almost 700 years, and with growing urgency: "*Ite ad Thomam*, Go to St. Thomas."

Take him as your master and guide. With confidence in the Church's sound judgment, this is what we, as budding theologians, must also do. The main text I will draw upon in this lecture is the opening question of the *Summa theologiae*. St. Thomas introduces the question as follows: "That our undertaking be kept within some definite limits, it is necessary first of all to track down what sort of thing 'holy teaching' is, and to what things it extends itself." Notice how Thomas speaks of what we are now accustomed to call "theology": while he does use this word, he more often uses the phrase *sacra doctrina*, which may be translated a number of ways: "holy teaching" or "sacred instruction" or "sacred doctrine."

First, he calls it *doctrina*. This term suggests someone *teaching* (which implies authority to teach), someone *receiving instruction* (which implies docility and zeal), and something *being taught*, or handed down. It is a relationship of instructor and pupil, a bearer of wisdom and a disciple, a giver and a recipient, built upon a truth that precedes both the teacher and the pupil, is greater than they are, and measures them both. The term *doctrina* immediately highlights that we are not dealing with an abstract impersonal sum of information, but a living truth that is possessed within a tradition, given as a gift, and received with trust.

Second, St. Thomas calls it *sacra*. The truth, the teaching to be imparted, is not an earthly science of earthly things; it is not even the slender, sublime knowledge had by the best of the pagan metaphysicians, who achieved profound insights into creation and its uncreated source. It is a knowledge that bears *directly upon God*, who is in Himself essentially holy and divine; it is a knowledge of God's *inner life* and how He freely and generously pours out this life to His rational creatures when they turn to Him in love; as St. Thomas will say, it is a knowledge that *comes* from God to us, and helps us to *return* to God, to become holy as He is holy. *God* is the First Teacher who imparts this *sacra doctrina* to mankind, in and through His Church. The function of a human teacher is to clear the way for *this* Teacher to do His superior work in the soul. In the vision of Thomas Aquinas—who is not called a saint for nothing—*sacra doctrina* is no mere intellectual project; it is a transformative exercise, demanding the continual purification of thought and desire. And it always takes place within the context of *lectio divina* and sacramental rites. In St. Thomas's view, if you were to take away the meditative reading of Scripture and fervent participation in Mass, there would be nothing left for you to work on, or to be worked on by.

Taking my inspiration from St. Thomas, I will divide my topic into its different aspects, addressing four questions:

1. Why do we need theology?
2. What is the object (or subject-matter) of theology?
3. What is the goal of studying or "doing" theology?
4. Who is a theologian?

### 1. The necessity of theology

Let us begin with an objection. It might seem that there is no need at all for a "holy instruction" or sacred theology. One might think that everything we could know or need to know we get from other sciences; and if one wanted to know about God, one could look to the philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, who spoke eloquently about the First Cause of all being.<sup>1</sup>

The best refutation of this kind of reasoning is *God's own word*, given to us in the sacred writings (or "scriptures") whose authors are divinely inspired to communicate exactly the truths about God and His creation that He wishes to reveal, without the slightest error. God would not have done such a thing had it not been useful, or rather, vitally necessary, to us. As to *why* we need it, we can do no better than to quote St. Thomas:

It was necessary for human salvation that there should be some teaching from divine revelation besides the philosophical disciplines that are discovered by human reason.

First, because man is ordered to God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of reason, according to Isaiah 66:4: "The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, the things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee." But an end must first be *known* by men who are to direct their intentions and actions towards that end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation.

Even as regards those truths about God that human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine

<sup>1</sup> I presuppose an affirmative answer to the question: Can we know with certainty the existence and attributes of God by reasoning well about the created world? The question is rather this: *Granting* the existence of a God, is there a need for—or even the possibility of—a higher kind of knowledge than what we can gain from our own reasoning about reality?

revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. *Whereas man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth.* Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical disciplines discovered by reason, there should be a sacred teaching learned through revelation.<sup>2</sup>

We see here the classic distinction between two kinds of theology, a "natural" theology, also known as metaphysics or first philosophy, and a "revealed" or "sacred" theology. Natural theology has to do with truths about the First Cause of natural beings, inasmuch as it causes certain effects known to us by experience and investigated by reason. Aristotle, for example, demonstrated that there must be a single first principle, pure intellect altogether without body, unmoved and immutable, perfect in its activity; that it must be the end desired, in varying ways, by all other beings; and that human happiness has something to do with contemplating this God. Yet Aristotle was among the few thinkers of any age who got even as far as this; and still we find in his writings no notion of the Fall of man or the blight of sin, of man's need for a Savior, of a heavenly destiny shared with angels. Plato, for his part, pictured an afterlife of bliss for the just and punishment for the wicked; he glimpsed, as did Aristotle, that a kind of *divine or divinized life* was man's fulfillment; he even had a faint idea of man's plight (as we see in the well-known allegory of the cave) and the kind of wise man or savior who might rescue him (the philosopher-king who must endure rejection and even death). Nevertheless in Plato these truths are mingled with fables and fancies, some admirable, some (like reincarnation) foolish. If the two greatest philosophers of the human race could barely catch a glimpse of the highest and best reality on which all things depend, the rest of us might as well admit defeat, and get on with our worldly business.

But the God who is "rich in mercy," in His sovereign freedom, has come down to *our* level, in order to raise us up to *His*. In a sermon on the Apostle's Creed, St. Thomas explains how beautiful is the virtue of faith,

<sup>2</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 1, a. 1, corp.

which brings us directly into God's own truth, and in that way supplies for the weakness of our fallen nature and our fallible reasoning:

The first thing that is necessary for every Christian is faith, without which no one is truly called a faithful Christian. Faith brings about [several] good effects. The first is that through faith the soul is united to God, and by it there is between the soul and God a union akin to marriage. "I will espouse thee in faith" (Hos. 2:20). ...

The second effect of faith is that eternal life is already begun in us; for eternal life is nothing else than knowing God. This the Lord announced when He said: "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (Jn. 17:3). This knowledge of God begins here through faith, but it is perfected in the future life when we shall know God as He is. Therefore, St. Paul says: "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for" (Heb. 11:1). ...

The third good that comes from faith is that right direction which it gives to our present life. Now, in order that one live a good life, he has to know what is necessary to live rightly; and if he depends for all this required knowledge on his own efforts alone, either he will never attain such knowledge, or if so, only after a long time. But faith teaches us all that is necessary to live a good life. It teaches us that there is one God who is the rewarder of good and the punisher of evil; that there is a life after this one, and other like truths whereby we are attracted to live rightly and to avoid what is evil. "The just man liveth by faith" (Hab. 2:4). This is evident in that none of the philosophers before the coming of Christ could, through his own powers, know God and the means necessary for salvation as well as any old woman since Christ's coming knows Him through faith. And, therefore, it is said in Isaiah [by way of prophecy] that "the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord" (Is. 11:9).

Another of St. Thomas's sermons, this one preached on the feast of Pentecost sometime between 1268 and 1272, elaborates on the same points:

What, then, is the reason for the sending of the Holy Spirit [to us]? *Our* neediness; and the necessity of this neediness of ours comes partly from human nature's dignity, and partly from its deficiency. For the rational creature excels other creatures because it can actually reach the enjoyment of God, which no other earthly creature can do. "The Lord is my portion, said my soul" (Lam. 3:24). Some seek their portion in this

world, such as those who seek worldly honor or dignity. But the Psalmist says: "It is good for me to cling to God" (Ps. 72:28).

You should consider that all things that are moved to some end must have something moving them toward that end. Those that are moved to a natural end have a mover in nature; but those that are moved to a supernatural end, namely to the enjoyment of God, must have a supernatural mover.

Now, nothing can lead us to our end unless two things are presupposed, for someone is led to an end by two things—knowledge and love. The kind of knowledge in question is supernatural: "No eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it arisen in the heart of man, what God hath prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). ...Now, whatever a man knows, he knows either by discovering it himself or by learning from another. Vision serves discovery and hearing serves learning, and for this reason it is said that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," showing that the ultimate end altogether transcends human knowledge. It exceeds human desire, too, and that is why Scripture says: "nor hath it arisen in the heart of man."

How, then, is man led to know it? It was necessary for heavenly secrets to be *made known* to men; it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to be invisibly sent, in order to *move man's affections* so that he may tend toward that end. ... How, then, *do* we know? "God hath revealed it to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit examineth all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). "Who would be able to know Thy thought, unless Thou gavest wisdom and sent the Holy Spirit from the Most High?" (Wis. 9:17).<sup>3</sup>

The First Vatican Council summed up St. Thomas's views (themselves the unblemished mirror of Catholic tradition) in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*.<sup>4</sup>

Now we move on to the second question, which, in a way, we have already begun to explore: What is the *object* of theology?

<sup>3</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sermon Emitte Spiritum*. See "Aquinas's Sermon for the Feast of Pentecost: A Rare Glimpse of Thomas the Preaching Friar," introduced by P. A. Kwasniewski, translated from the Latin with Jeremy Holmes, in *Faith & Reason* 30:1–2 (2005): 99–139.

<sup>4</sup> See VATICAN COUNCIL I, *Dei Filius*, chapter 2.

## 2. The object of theology

The "object" (or, in modern terms, subject-matter) of a science refers to the target of one's knowledge, the thing one wishes to gain knowledge of; by extension, "object" comes to mean the *aspect* under which one studies something. For example, the object of vision, as such, is not an apple or a tree, but color—the color red, the color green. Similarly, the object of hearing, as such, is not a symphony or a birdsong, but pitches, timbres, loud and soft. In like manner, while theology's object is God, it also considers created things because of the necessary relationship they have to their Creator; it considers creatures as originating from Him, as governed by Him, as attaining to Him. So the object of theology is—to put it in one phrase—"the truth about God in Himself, and God as Creator and Lord of His creatures, that God divinely reveals to us." For this reason, *anything* about which God reveals the truth to us belongs to this holy teaching or science of theology. That is why there can be a theological anthropology; a theology of marriage and the family; a theology of morals; a theology of the body; and so on. The particular subject matter may well be something created, natural, bodily, perishable, even unspiritual (as when we speak of the creation of plants and brute animals), but the *vantage* according to which we speak of them will be *as pertaining to or included within God's revelation of Himself*. In the words of Aquinas:

Things which are the treated in different philosophical sciences may yet be considered by one single sacred teaching under one aspect, [namely] insofar as they are among divinely revealables, so that in this way, sacred doctrine bears, as it were, the stamp of God's own knowledge [*scientia*] which is one and simple, yet extends to everything.<sup>5</sup>

If the *object* of theology is *God's own knowledge*, the eternal Truth that He is and the truth about all other things that He knows, the only way *we* could be theologians is to share directly in this divine knowledge, or put differently, to become sharers in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). This sharing or participation is precisely the effect of sanctifying grace, the grace that renders our souls pleasing to God. As St. Thomas writes: Man, through grace, becomes as it were a citizen and a sharer in this blessed society which is called the heavenly Jerusalem (Ephes. 2:19),

<sup>5</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST I*, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2.

"You are fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God." And in this way, man is admitted to participating in celestial beatitude which consists in the vision and enjoyment of God.<sup>6</sup>

For this is what happens when a person is baptized: he becomes a child of God whose new likeness to the only-begotten Son of God makes him beautiful in the Father's sight, worthy of His greatest gift, eternal life, and all the other gifts that make it possible for man to attain an end so far beyond his fallen nature. This takes place above all by the virtues whose centrality and importance earned for them the title of "theological virtues": faith, hope, and love. We enter into theology, the divine science, just as we enter into God's life and happiness—by these virtues and only by these virtues.

When St. Thomas is defending theology's status as a true and proper science (in the ancient sense of the word "science" [*episteme, scientia*], that is, true knowledge with demonstrable certainty—this is not the meaning we are used to in the modern age), he writes:

We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of optics proceeds from principles known through geometry, and music from principles known through arithmetic. And it is in this manner that sacred doctrine is a science, because it proceeds from principles known by the light of a higher science, namely the science of God and the blessed [*scientia Dei et beatorum*]. Hence, just as music accepts on authority the principles handed to it by mathematics, so sacred teaching relies upon [*credit*] principles revealed to it by God.<sup>7</sup>

The reason we can do theology "scientifically," the reason we can attain stable and definite truth about God, is that God knows Himself perfectly and has shared this knowledge with the saints and angels in heaven by the gift of vision, and with men on earth by the gift of faith.

<sup>6</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De caritate*, art. 2, corp.

<sup>7</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST I*, q. 1, a. 2, corp. Compare the remarks in a. 6: "[S]acred doctrine essentially treats of God viewed as the highest cause—not only so far as He can be known through creatures just as philosophers knew Him ("That which is known of God is manifest in them," Rom. 1:19)—but also so far as He is known to Himself alone and revealed to others."

God is this knowledge, this wisdom, whereas the blessed participate in it *immediately*: they are deiform, perfectly "divinized." We participate in this knowledge *through faith*, which is also a divinizing force, albeit not apart from charity. We are given a share in the very same knowledge that makes the saints and God Himself blessed, though in our case, the knowledge is enveloped in a cloud of obscurity.

According to the Catholic understanding, the theologian's task is not to attempt a kind of *demonstration* or *proof* of the doctrines of the faith, much less to adapt them to the spirit of a given age and render them plausible to skeptics or rationalists (this was the error of Modernism), but, with humble fidelity, to receive the faith as it has been handed down, to illuminate each mystery's content by analogy with other truths both natural and supernatural,<sup>8</sup> to find various and at times more adequate ways of formulating these truths, to assimilate new secular knowledge and place it in the service of saving Truth, and to respond to legitimate difficulties brought forward by proud unbelievers or perplexed believers.

Here I think it is extremely important to say what we mean when we talk about "mystery," since one cannot speak of sacred theology without sooner or later coming to this term. Responding to the arid rationalism and stifling materialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—itsself the product of a so-called Enlightenment that produced books such as Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, Jefferson's redaction of the New Testament (with all the miracles stripped from it), and Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*—the German theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben fo-

<sup>8</sup> This is the *nexus mysteriorum* or interconnected tissue of divine secrets. Having noted how the Nestorians denied first the supernaturalness of grace, then as a logical consequence original sin, then the Incarnation, then the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, SCHEEBEN observes: "So true is it that the mysteries involve one another, and that one supernatural mystery can keep its meaning, and hence vindicate its nature and reality, only as a link in a chain, as a member in an organism of related mysteries. Wrested from this chain, deprived of their position in the supernatural organism, the mysteries ... turn into obscurities, and can scarcely be detected by blind faith, despite the most earnest searchings of reason. But when strung on this chain, when integrated in an organism, the dead members spring to life, the darkness turns to light, and ... brilliance and life stream from them" (*The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, SJ [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1946], 481).

cused his attention on the essential, irreducible mysteriousness of Christian revelation as such. I want to read a couple of paragraphs from Scheeben's great work *The Mysteries of Christianity [Die Mysterien des Christentums]*, first published in 1865:

Christianity entered the world as a religion replete with mysteries. It was proclaimed as the mystery of Christ (Rom. 16:25-27, Col. 1:25-27), as the "mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10). Its ideas and doctrines were unknown, unprecedented; and they were to remain inscrutable and unfathomable. The mysterious character of Christianity, which was sufficiently intelligible in its simplest fundamentals, was foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews ... If its teaching is worthy of the only-begotten Son of God, if the Son of God had to descend from the bosom of His Father to initiate us into this teaching, could we expect anything else than the revelation of the deepest mysteries locked up in God's heart? Could we expect anything else than disclosures concerning a higher, invisible world, about divine and heavenly things, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," and which could not enter into the heart of any man (1 Cor. 2:9)? ...

Mysteries must in themselves be lucid, glorious truths. The darkness can be only on our side, so far as our eyes are turned away from the mysteries, or at any rate are not keen enough to confront them and see through them. There must be truths that baffle our scrutiny not because of their intrinsic darkness and confusion, but because of their excessive brilliance, sublimity, and beauty, which not even the sturdiest human eye can encounter without going blind. ... Only God's cognition excludes all mysteries, because it springs from an infinite Light which with infinite power penetrates and illuminates the innermost depths of everything that exists. ...

Mysteries become luminous and appear in their true nature, their entire grandeur and beauty, only when we definitely recognize that they are mysteries, and clearly perceive how high they stand above our own orbit, how completely they are distinct from all objects within our natural ken. And when, supported by the all-powerful word of divine revelation, we soar upon the wings of faith over the chasm dividing us from them and mount up to them, they temper themselves to our eyes in the light of faith which is supernatural, as they themselves are; then they display themselves to us in their true form, in their heavenly, divine nature. The moment we perceive the depth of the darkness with which heaven veils its mysteries from our minds, they will shine over us in the

light of faith like brilliant stars mutually illuminating, supporting, and emphasizing one another; like stars that form themselves into a marvelous system and that can be known in their full power and magnificence only in this system.<sup>9</sup>

In a word, Scheeben is saying that Christianity is a religion *whose essence is mystery*, and not the kind of mystery that can be "solved" but the kind that only grows deeper with experience and knowledge. No one is more aware of the infinite mystery of God and Jesus Christ than the Virgin Mary and the saints and angels in heaven.

What are the mysteries that theology receives, ponders, and passes on to its pupils? The answer is to be found in the great creeds and confessions of the Christian faith—in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed. These Creeds emerged from the early centuries of prayerful reflection on the Gospels and other New Testament writings, and from the public debates that led up to the great Ecumenical Councils. From the very beginning, therefore, we see an indissoluble connection between revelation and magisterium—between the truths revealed by God, and their divinely authorized guardian and interpreter—between the inspired message, and the apostolic body to which it was entrusted for all time.

The actual study of theology is chiefly and almost exclusively the careful and prayerful study of three kinds of sources, each at a different level. First and foremost, we study divine revelation, which is comprised of Sacred Scripture ("the very soul of theology," as Vatican II calls it<sup>10</sup>) and Apostolic Tradition.<sup>11</sup> Second, we study the Church's authoritative interpretation of this revelation (in other words, her dogma<sup>12</sup>), as expressed in conciliar canons and decrees, papal and other

<sup>9</sup> MATTHIAS SCHEEBEN, *Mysteries* 3-4, 6, 19 (see previous note for full citation).

<sup>10</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Dei Verbum* 24; cf. LEO XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* 16.

<sup>11</sup> See *Dei Verbum* 9-10 on the intimate and inseparable relationship of Scripture, Tradition, and magisterium.

<sup>12</sup> As Ratzinger says in *Principles of Theology*: "Dogma is by definition nothing other than an interpretation of Scripture." So the only relevant question is: Who is authorized to interpret Scripture, since, in any case, the very act of reading and speaking about Scripture is necessarily an interpretation of the text? One of the unintended benefits of the transition from modernism to postmodernism has been to bring into sharp clarity the impossibility of approaching a text with a supposed neutral objectivity and reading off its "meaning" as if one were

magisterial documents. Third, to augment our understanding of divinely revealed mysteries, we study the commentaries and treatises of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the testimony of her mystics—above all, the writings of Aquinas. These three kinds of sources constitute a triunity whose elements are inseparable if we are to receive, in all its breadth and depth, the divine Truth embodied in Jesus Christ and offered to us in His Body, the Church.

Hence, the study of theology *for us* means, practically speaking, the study of the *great sources* of theology, with proper reverence and submission, guided by the Church's magisterium and by the example and wisdom of the Saints who are our best models, since they conform most closely to the perfect Image of the Father, Christ Jesus the Lord. Theology is the only science in which authority, as such, takes precedence over reasoning. In any merely human science, the argument from authority is the weakest, whereas in theology it is the strongest; nay, it is the basis of the science. Apart from the authority of Christ and the Church, the science of *sacra doctrina* simply does not exist. The symphony of the Church Fathers and the thirty-three Doctors, with St. Thomas at their head, are the divinely-appointed instruments for learning theology, since in them profound sanctity is united with exceptional learning (whether the learning be acquired as well as infused, or simply infused).

Granting that it is possible to learn a truly *catholic* theology "at the heart of the Church" from any number of her Fathers, Doctors, popes, and other holy men and women, one might nevertheless wonder what is unique, indeed irreplaceable, in the mission entrusted by God to St. Thomas Aquinas, the service he was called upon to undertake within the Mystical Body of Christ. This Dominican friar was not asked to surrender himself to heroic penances or lead a life of absolute silence in the cloister; he was not asked to make episcopal visitations of parishes, nor even to attack this or that relatively narrow theological problem. As

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reading off an electric meter (a Cartesian mathematicization of understanding). Texts only "live" within interpretive traditions; their meaning is brought to birth in the living interaction between text and interpreter. Now, postmodernism thinks that this "subjectivity" of a text necessitates a universal relativism, but nothing could be further from the truth. It merely forces one to ask more carefully about the criteria of interpretation and who possesses authority to apply them.

Leo XIII showed in *Aeterni Patris*, God entrusted the Angelic Doctor with the mission of gathering together, in a mighty sweep of intelligence, the disparate and clashing elements of human life and thought, of sacred and profane history, and to purify, illuminate, and unify them in the light of divine revelation, laying bare, so far as human language permits, the superabundant source and blessed goal of our restless and partial strivings. An amazing and truly singular vocation, the fruits of which will last until the end of time! I doubt anyone could say it better than Jacques Maritain did when he wrote, apropos *genuine* humanism: Proclaiming both that grace perfects, without destroying, nature and that the specifically divine life, which graces implants in us, can alone heal the wounds of nature and must take hold of nature absolutely, his [St. Thomas's] peculiar achievement was to bring all the virtues of the mind into the service of Jesus Christ. The whole problem of culture and humanism presented itself in him and his answer was: *sanctity*. Man becomes perfect only supernaturally: he develops only on the cross. A humanism is possible, but on condition that its ultimate end is union with God through the humanity of the Mediator and that it proportions its means to that essentially supernatural end, a humanism of the Incarnation: on condition that it orders itself entirely to love and contemplation; that it entirely subordinates, like the holy soul of Thomas Aquinas itself, mere knowledge to wisdom and theological wisdom to the wisdom of the saints; that it realizes that the form of reason can subject the world only if it is itself subject to the supra-rational and supra-human order of the Holy Ghost and His gifts. Otherwise humanism, even Christian humanism, will inevitably tend to the destruction of man and a universal ruin.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere Maritain says, more pointedly:

The peculiar task of St. Thomas, the undertaking to which he was appointed by the Lord, was to bring the proudest and most intractable (because the most spiritual) of powers—I mean the mind, in all its apparel of riches and majesty, armed with all its speculative energies, all its logic and science and art, all the harness of its fierce virtues which are rooted in being itself—to bring the mind (by compelling it to sobriety but never to abdication) whole and entire into the holy light of

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<sup>13</sup> JACQUES MARITAIN, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Angel of the Schools*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (London: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 43.

Christ, to the service of the Child-God lying in the manger between the ox and the ass. He has all the Magi behind him for the rest of time.<sup>14</sup> His duty was to serve the mind, but as the priest serves the creature of God. His duty was to teach it, to baptize it, to nourish it with the Body of the Lord, to preside at the nuptials of the Mind and the Lamb.<sup>15</sup> Such observations on the Common or Universal Doctor and Patron of Catholic Schools leads us naturally to the threshold of finality: What is the *goal* of theology—what is the *purpose* or *point* of our theological studies?

### 3. The goal of theology

The ultimate goal of this journey of truth-seeking is happiness or beatitude. As we know from divine revelation, this means the face-to-face vision of God in heaven. What will heaven be like? St. Thomas spells it out in a memorable phrase: "Perfect vision, full embracing, and the clinging of consummated love."<sup>16</sup> The true theologian longs to see God face to face, longs to be united with Him forever.

God delights in Himself eternally, He rejoices in His own infinite goodness. He *is* His beatitude, God and bliss are one and the same; and our beatitude is nothing other than to be raised up into this blessed life of His, this life that He *is*. That is why theology is the only discipline that is fully practical as well as fully speculative: to be a successful theologian *means* to be converted, humbled, in order to be *divinized*.<sup>17</sup> Listen to the words of St. John Damascene with which, near the end of his life, St. Thomas chose to describe the effects of eating the Eucharist in a soul well-disposed for it: "The fire of that desire which is in us, taking ignition from the burning coal (that is, from this sacrament) will burn up our sins and light up our hearts, so that by participation of the divine fire we may be set on fire and deified."<sup>18</sup> United to Jesus "through faith and love," the communicant "is transformed into Him and becomes His member: for this food is not changed into the one who eats it, but turns into itself the one who takes it ... This is a food capable of making man

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 99–100.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>16</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 1, a. 1, obj. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST I*, q. 1, a. 4.

<sup>18</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS quoting Damascene in the *sed contra* of *ST III*, q. 79, a. 8.

divine and inebriating him with divinity."<sup>19</sup> "The proper effect of this sacrament is the conversion of man into Christ, that it might be said with the Apostle, 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:20)."<sup>20</sup> And Thomas again: "Through this sacrament's power the soul gains spiritual nourishment, for the soul is gladdened and, in a way, inebriated with the sweetness of divine goodness, as we read in the Song (5:1): 'Eat, friends, and drink, and be drunk, my dearly beloved.'"<sup>21</sup>

In the Dominican tradition, as we see it for example in St. Albert the Great, St. Catherine of Siena, or Bd. Henry Suso, there is a strong emphasis on *eating and drinking* the Word of God, on feasting and even—in a spiritual sense—getting drunk on heavenly wine.<sup>22</sup> Even sober St. Thomas speaks this way: the culmination of Christian theology is mystical drunkenness, which the Angelic Doctor tasted superabundantly in the life-changing vision that took place while he was offering Mass on December 6, 1273. Towards the end of his life, Friar Thomas was known to weep copiously during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice.

It was Jesus who, at the Last Supper, drawing nearer to us in His loving friendship than any earthly lovers could ever draw close to each other,<sup>23</sup> changed bread and wine into His Body and Blood, in fulfillment of the promise He had made: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life ... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn. 6:54, 56-57).

<sup>19</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ioannem* 6, lec. 7, §969. The full passage: "Sic ergo spiritualiter manducat carnem et bibit sanguinem per comparationem ad Christum contentum et signatum, qui coniungitur ei per fidem et caritatem, ita quod transformatur in ipsum, et efficitur eius membrum: non enim cibus iste convertitur in eum qui sumit, sed manducantem convertit in se, secundum Augustinum, cum dicit: «cibus sum grandium: cresce, et manducabis me; nec tu me mutabis in te, sed tu mutaberis in me». Et ideo est cibus hominem divinum facere valens, et divinitate inebrians." Cf. *ST III*, q. 73, a. 3, ad 2; *Sent. IV*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1.

<sup>20</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sent. IV*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1.

<sup>21</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST III*, q. 79, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>22</sup> See PAUL MURRAY, OP, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness* (London: Burns & Oates, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. St. Thomas's argument from fittingness: friends most of all want to live and dwell together, remaining in each other's company (*ST III*, q. 75, a. 1).

What our Lord is talking about is a total, if gradual, change of heart, mind, soul, and strength—a transformation into Him.<sup>24</sup> This path of Eucharistic conversion is the path for *all* Christians. For the theologian it is true in a special and distinctive way, however, for he must submit his intellect utterly and completely to Jesus Christ if he wishes to break through to the only adequate level of understanding, the one St. Thomas refers to as “affective knowledge” or “knowledge by connaturality” (*cognitio affectiva, cognitio per connaturalitatem*), meaning an affectionate intimacy, a closeknit sympathy produced by living and suffering, dying and rising together. This dying and rising begins in the innermost sanctuary of the soul: as we read in St. Paul, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2); “We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). It goes without saying that for the Tradition, only a person who is feeding upon sacred mysteries and gaining nourishment from them is entitled to study and speak about them as well. In this sense the study of God is not at all democratic; no one is “entitled to” or “has a right to” his or her own opinion.

Colossians 2:3 speaks of Jesus as the one “in whom are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In his commentary on this verse, St. Thomas first quotes 1 Corinthians 2:2, “I did not judge myself to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” and goes on to say: “Just as if one were to have a book in which all knowledge could be found, he would not seek to know anything else except that single book, so, too, there is no need for us to seek anything beyond Christ.”<sup>25</sup> St. John of the Cross has similar advice:

In giving us his Son, his only Word (for He possesses no other), he [the Father] spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word—and he has no

<sup>24</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sent. IV*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1, ad 3: “Charity’s work is transforming the lover into the beloved, for as Dionysius says, charity makes for ecstasy. And since the growth of virtue in this sacrament takes place by the conversion of the one eating into the spiritual food, therefore growth in charity is more [specially] attributed to this sacrament than growth in other virtues.”

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super ad Colossenses 2*, lec. 1, n. 82 (Marietti ed.).

more to say ... because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son.<sup>26</sup> Now it is for us to sit at His feet and listen continually to Him, soaking up His words and holding fast to His Heart. When Newman chose for his Cardinal’s motto *Cor ad cor loquitur*, “heart speaks to heart,” he was capturing in a phrase the most essential reality and medium of true religion: it is, before all else, a personal relationship in which everything is at stake; it is a total gift of oneself to the beloved Lover; it is a question of friendship, not of propositions, rules, customs, and so on. The one who loves accepts everything else—the propositions, rules, customs, or what have you—without complaint, indeed with an infectious joy. I think that the crisis of theology today (and, more broadly, the crisis in the Church) is due not so much to this or that regional heresy, as to the prevailing absence of the spirit of the “holy fools,” the “fools for Christ,” who are ready to throw everything else away if only they can cling to the Lord. You see this spirit, sometimes a rushing torrent like white river rapids, sometimes as silent and peaceful as snow, in orthodox religious like Carmelite contemplatives, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Père Philippe’s Community of St. John, or the Missionaries of Charity; you can see it, too, in faithful Catholic families who are living out the demands of the Beatitudes as well as they can, and are winning the Lord’s blessings for it. In such communities or families, the poisonous atmosphere of an egoistic rationalism has been driven away, replaced by the fresh air of living for the divine Lover who loved us and gave Himself for us (cf. Gal. 2:20).

Theology pursued apart from sacramental incorporation into the bridegroom Christ, apart from communion with the bridal Church who lives by His Spirit, is, or all too quickly becomes, “the letter that kills”; pursued *within* Holy Mother Church, sustained by the Blood of her Spouse, it is, and becomes more and more, “the spirit that gives life.” In this respect it is fundamentally different from philosophy or any of the lower disciplines, all of which can be mastered, in principle, by the diligent application of natural reason alone, and without a total existential commitment and surrender to the ineffable. Theology culminates in sacramental mysticism and ultimately the beatific vision. Theology is

<sup>26</sup> JOHN OF THE CROSS, a comment on Heb. 1:1-2 cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* at n. 65.

the business of the saints—or those who wish to become saints. To be really and truly itself, theology has to follow the way of the imitation of Christ and discipleship to Him, as expressed in a life of continual conversion of morals, *lectio divina*, and active charity towards one's neighbor. This is the very program put into classic form in the Rule of St. Benedict and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, but it is also the way of life shown to us by each and every saint who has ever walked the face of the earth.

#### 4. Who is a theologian?

In this final part I would like to sum up my thoughts by posing a question: *Who is a theologian?* Who best satisfies all the descriptions given earlier?

The first, invincible and measurelessly perfect Theologian who measures all others is Jesus Christ Himself—He who is the *way* to the Father, the *truth* incarnate, and eternal *life* (cf. Jn. 14:6). We read in the opening verse of St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word [*ho Logos*], and the Word was with God [*pros ton Theon*], and the Word was God." In the second phrase John speaks of the Son of God as "the Word towards God." Our word "theology" comes from the words *Theos* and *Logos*: it means the expression, or summation, or formula, or intellectual account, of or about God. The Son of God is, in His very essence, the Word of, / about, / towards God the Father, and in having (or rather, being) this relation, He utters and manifests *all* the truth that is God's very being and life. He is the Father's absolutely single and inexhaustible self-understanding and self-expression; He is, so to speak, Theology Itself. He fully *is*, and fully *embodies*, the truth we stammer to express, the truth to which we abandon ourselves. He is the total revelation of the Father and His Love.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, a theologian is a man of God, a man of transformed mind and heart, who can speak authoritatively about divine things. Thus the

<sup>27</sup> This is the burden of the argument in John Paul II's Trinitarian triptych: *Redemptor Hominis*, *Dives in Misericordia*, and *Dominum et Vivificantem*. As we read in 1 John 4:9-12: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Greek tradition calls the apostle and author of the Fourth Gospel "St. John the Theologian" or "St. John the Divine,"<sup>28</sup> meaning a man who is imbued with his subject; and for the entire Catholic tradition, it is first and foremost the *inspired authors of Scripture* who are the theologians (as Ratzinger has said: "The normative theologians are the authors of Holy Scripture"). Everyone else is a theologian only in a relative sense, because all the rest of us are learning from and deriving conclusions from the only infallible authorities God has given us: the inspired authors of Scripture and their Spirit-led interpreters, the Popes and the bishops in union with the Pope when teaching on matters of faith and morals.<sup>29</sup> We are always learners because we are, in relation to God, always creatures, dependents, children; and we will find joy in the spiritual life and in meditating on divine things only if we *know* that we are children, and *want* to be children, and make an effort to turn and become like little children, for only those who become like little children can enter this kingdom of mysteries.

Thirdly, and *only* conventionally, the theologian is anyone who devotes intellectual effort to God and other things as they stand in relation to God. In this sense, anyone who goes to a Barnes & Noble and picks up a book called *The Problem of God* or *The Question of God* is "doing theology," but this stands in somewhat the same relationship to *being* a theologian as reading *about* soccer to actually *playing* the game, or taking courses in law to *being* a judge and delivering judgments in court, or *talking* about marriage, when everything sounds Edenic, to *being* married, where there are heavy crosses to bear and, for that very reason, a weight of glory to win.

This is why, in the final analysis, theology is to be pursued on one's knees. As Hans Urs von Balthasar used to say, what we need most is not a "sitting theology" but a "kneeling theology." And that is my plea to myself and to all who love or will come to love theology: If you want your work, your quest, to bear fruit, *pray first*, and do all the rest—read the books, ask the questions, hold the conversations, write the essays—afterwards. And while you're working, practice the presence of God. And when you're done, go and pray again. For a theologian, this is

<sup>28</sup> We also speak of "divines," meaning men who claim knowledge of the divine.

<sup>29</sup> The bishops are not infallible in and of themselves; but all together, and in union with the Pope, they have a kind of infallibility (see Journet's *Theology of the Church*).

more important than anything else, and is the measure of everything else.

#### A PRAYER FOR THEOLOGIANS

Almighty God,  
You gave me intellect;  
You gave me faith;  
then You opened to me the truth that is Your very essence.

You made me long for happiness;  
you gave me the hope of being happy in You;  
then You handed over Your beloved Son  
to show me how much You want me to attain this joy.

You gave me a heart to love with;  
You gave me love;  
then, to surpass all, You gave me Jesus as my Beloved.

Grant me the grace to love you in return  
with all my heart,  
with all my mind,  
with all my soul,  
and with all my strength.

I ask this through Your well-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

## Die *conversio substantialis* in der *Summa theologiae* des Thomas von Aquin vor dem Hintergrund seines Theologieverständnisses (Teil II)

ROBERT RAUHUT

### 3 DIE TRANSSUBSTANTIATION IN DER SUMMA THEOLOGIAE (STH III Q. 75)

#### 3.1 EINLEITUNG

Thomas von Aquin behandelt die Transsubstantiation in der *Tertia pars* der *Summa theologiae* im Traktat über die Eucharistie (*qq.* 73-83) im Zusammenhang der Untersuchung der Materie der Eucharistie (vgl. *q.* 74 *prooemium*) in der *q.* 75 in 8 Artikeln.<sup>1</sup> Die *quaestio* 75 bildet das Zentrum der thomanischen Lehre von der Transsubstantiation, da die sich an diese anlehrenden beiden folgenden *quaestiones* 76-77 über die Gegen-

<sup>1</sup> Der Eucharistietraktat steht im Anschluss an die Traktate der Christologie (*Sth III qq.* 1-59), der Sakramente im Allgemeinen (*Sth III qq.* 60-65) und der Taufe und Firmung (*Sth III qq.* 66-72). Thomas verankert die Sakramente bereits zu Beginn des Sakramentstraktats in Christus und der Kirche: „Post considerationem eorum quae pertinent ad mysteria Verbi incarnati, considerandum est de Ecclesiae sacramentis, quae ab ipso Verbo incarnato efficaciam habent.“ *Sth III q.* 60 *prooem.* Vgl. hierzu BERGER, *Sakrament*, S. 26-29. Das Voranstellen einer allgemeinen Sakramentenlehre (*Sth III qq.* 60-65) vor den Traktaten der Einzelsakramente ist wiederum kennzeichnend für die thomanische Methode, in der im Sinne der *venatio definitionis* vom Allgemeineren zum spezifisch Unterscheidenden vorangeschritten wird. Vgl. BERGER, *Sakrament*, S. 9-10 und die Ausführungen in 2.4.1. Der Traktat über die Eucharistie lässt sich folgendermaßen untergliedern: das Sakrament der Eucharistie in sich (*qq.* 73-78, wobei die Transsubstantiation in *q.* 75, die Realpräsenz Christi in der Eucharistie in *q.* 76 und die zurückbleibenden Eigenschaften des Brotes und des Weines in der Eucharistie in *q.* 77 behandelt werden), die Wirkungen des Sakraments (*q.* 79), die Empfänger des Sakraments (*qq.* 80-81), der Diener des Sakraments (*q.* 82), der liturgische Vollzug des Sakraments (*q.* 83).