

Aquinas on Eucharistic Ecstasy: From Self-Alienation to Gift of Self

PETER A. KWASNIEWSKI
Wyoming Catholic College
Lander, Wyoming

O God . . . hear me as I tremble in this darkness and reach out your right hand to me. Hold your light before me and call me back from my wandering, so that, with you guiding me, I may return again to myself and to you.

—*St. Augustine*¹

AFTER A PERIOD of relative neglect, our day is witnessing a revival of scholarly interest in St. Thomas's theology of the sacraments, particularly of the Eucharist, and his views on the liturgy of the Mass and its

The present article was researched and written in connection with the commissioning of a paper titled "St Thomas on Eucharistic Ecstasy," which will appear in *The Liturgical Subject: Subject, Subjectivity, and the Human Person in Contemporary Liturgical Discussion and Critique*, ed. Dom James Leachman, O.S.B. (London: SCM-Canterbury Press, 2008). I am grateful to SCM-Canterbury Press and to Dom Leachman for permission to include herein the content of that paper, which constitutes the substance of part III. I would also like to thank Mario Coccia, Edward Hadas, Jeremy Holmes, Timothy Kelly, Matthew Levering, and Gintautas Vaitoska for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

Unless otherwise noted, translations from St. Thomas or other authors are my own, and quotations of Scripture are drawn from the RSV. If no further indication is given, citations of articles in the *Summa theologiae* or the *Commentary on the Sentences* (*Sent.*) refer to the body or main response. Section numbers refer to the Marietti edition of the work in question.

¹ *Soliloquiorum*, bk. II, ch. 6, §9: "Deus . . . exaudi me palpitantem in his tenebris, et mihi dexteram porrige. Praetende mihi lumen tuum, revoca me ab erroribus; te duce in me redeam et in te" (PL 32:889).

ceremonies and symbols.² Instead of duplicating work already done, this essay will turn to related but less explored themes in Aquinas's theology, themes that have tremendous implications for a liturgiology wishing to take full account of the real situation of the human subject in his or her problematic subjectivity. It is my conviction that Thomas's robustly scriptural and patristic theology of the sacraments, anchored in the depths of the mystery of Christ, offers precious insight into what both Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger name "the spirit of the liturgy," as well as into the ambiguous and indigent subjectivity or selfhood with which the liturgy has to reckon as it makes haste slowly to feed fallen men with the bread of angels. We will ponder the dissolution and re-creation of the "I" as this process is shown forth in sacramental signs through which the Eternal High Priest touches bodies and souls with his power, effecting in the well-disposed recipient a direct share in the mysteries of his life, death, and resurrection. It is in this way that the Mass typifies and prepares for a mystical incarnation of the Word of God in the womb of the Christian whose ego is humbled like the Virgin's. Attention will be paid to some of the ways in which Thomas's sacramental theology does justice to the complexity of our actual human experience, and advocates as the cure an unreservedly zealous Eucharistic worship, rooted in humble faith and tending, of itself, toward the ecstasy of love. But we shall return to these matters in due course. We must follow a different path first, if we wish to derive full benefit from Aquinas's insights.

² Notable postconciliar studies include Liam G. Walsh, O.P., "Liturgy in the Theology of St. Thomas," *The Thomist* 38 (1974): 557–83; idem, "The Divine and the Human in St. Thomas's Theology of Sacraments," in *Ordo Sapientiae et Amoris*, ed. Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira, O.P. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1993), 321–52; idem, "Sacraments," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 326–64; James T. O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); David Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy*, trans. Christopher Grosz (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2004); John P. Yocum, "Sacraments in Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 159–81; Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). Outstanding recent work in this area has been done by French Dominican theologians, such as Gilles Emery, Martin Morard, Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, and Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole. Among preconciliar works, special mention must be made of *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (1924) by Dom Anscar Vonier, O.S.B., which has been reprinted many times.

Self-Alienation

Nathan Rotenstreich traces out the evolution in the meaning of the term *alienatio* (1) from its origin in courts of law, where it describes the formal act of transference by which something is removed from one man's ownership and given into the hands of another; (2) to its Platonic, Augustinian, and medieval meaning of what happens in *excessus mentis* or *extasis* when God seizes possession of one's soul and becomes principal actor in her; (3) to its function in Hegel's dialectical system, where union of subject and object is achieved through mutual diremption; (4) to the psychological critique given by Feuerbach and Karl Marx, for whom *alienatio* takes on the derogatory meaning of man's abandonment of his rightful liberty and autonomy in favor of subjection to an illusory Other, be it human or divine; and thus Marx, in a distorted return to the term's origins, speaks of man's being converted into property alienated from its rightful owner, the self.³ In this way, what was for the medievals the active summit of *theosis* becomes for Marx the primary objection against theism.⁴

³ Nathan Rotenstreich, "On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of 'Alienation,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 16 (1961): 550–55; the same author later published a full-length study, *Alienation: The Concept and Its Reception* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989). In these pages I will be speaking, as does the older tradition, of alienation *from* something (from *oneself*, even as one's property can be legally "alienated" from one), and not, as popular psychology tends to do, of an alienation *by* something. People commonly speak of being "alienated by others": A person considers himself a good that has been rejected by others, marginalized, isolated, left out. The others do not think of me or consider my needs, my feelings; they do not consider me a friend, "another self," but simply *other*. In this perspective the notion of being victimized plays a large role; the emphasis is put on who a person is in other people's minds, on whether they like/love me or not. In this way of speaking, I am alienated *by* others, I am the *object* of alienation. In the traditional way of speaking, something is alienated *from* me, or I am alienated *from* God, my neighbor, myself; I am the *subject* of the alienation. John Paul II defines alienation, in a negative sense, as inhibition of human transcendence, obstruction of the gift of self, and argues that finally speaking it is only to God, on account of his very transcendence, that man can fully give himself (*Centesimus Annus*, §41). See the chapter "Religious Alienation," in Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 419–55.

⁴ Thus, what was blessing in the medieval period turns to curse in the modern period. As Rotenstreich writes ("Ecstatic Sources," 555): "This concept [*alienatio*] connoted in the first place an act of elevation, when an elevated realm has been taken as metaphysically or theologically existent. With the abandonment of the transcendent realm the concept of alienation came to connote either an improper transcendence (Hegel) or a fictitious one (Feuerbach) or else a terrifying one (Marx)." Against the modern caricature of the "God of the attributes" as an "ego-agent" who is "alien and alienating" for finite men, see Janet Martin Soskice, "The Gift of the Name: Moses and the Burning Bush," in *Silence and the Word: Negative*

Speaking of *alienatio mentis* in Augustine and Richard of St. Victor, Rotenstreich says:

Being an act of elevation it reaches the divine realm, and ceases to be a negative act of estrangement, thus becoming a positive act leading to the achievement of union with God. . . . The alienation is due not only to the transfiguration of the mind as transcending its own boundaries, but also to the fact that this transfiguration cannot be brought about by human effort, but only by divine grace. It is, to put it freely, that the contemplated object engenders the act of contemplation on behalf of the contemplating subject. In the ecstatic rendering of the term *alienatio*, we find clearly that alienation in terms of the human mind amounts to its elevation, and thus, also, to the state of being at home in the divine realm. Yet this being at home is achieved precisely by going outside the position of the mind as an independent subject.⁵

Behind this description of *alienatio*, we can hear echoes of an equally ancient notion, prominent already for Plato and destined to pass into the Christian tradition: *ekstasis*, standing outside oneself—by implication, standing in or toward another.⁶ Against the sophists of his day, Plato taught that human perfection demands self-surrender in the face of divine reality, self-transcendence in the presence of the gods who are the source of all good things, love (*eros*) being the greatest of their gifts.⁷ Man cannot find completion or rest in himself, but only in one who is other than himself. His entire life, from infancy to adulthood to old age, is marked

Theology and Incarnation, ed. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61–75. Robert Barron shows how Aquinas's principles render impossible the conceptual conflict that shapes much of modern thought: the contrary tyrannies of a "supreme being" (God over against me, limiting my freedom) and of a "supreme ego" (I over against all, limited by nothing). See his "Thomas Aquinas: Postmodern," in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Lambert Leijssen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 265–78.

⁵ Rotenstreich, "Ecstatic Sources," 552.

⁶ See Kevin Corrigan, "Ecstasy and Ectasy in Some Early Pagan and Christian Mystical Writings," in *Greek and Medieval Studies in Honor of Leo Sweeney, S.J.*, ed. William J. Carroll and John J. Furlong (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 27–38; on Plato and parallels with Aquinas, see *ibid.*, 27.

⁷ Josef Pieper develops this thesis in his two commentaries on the *Phaedrus*. See *Divine Madness: Plato's Case Against Secular Humanism*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995); *idem, Enthusiasm and Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue "Phaedrus,"* trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2000). One might consider the following representative texts: *Phaedo* 80c–82c; *Symposium* 210a–212a; *Phaedrus* 246a–250c; *Republic* 500c–d, 508d–509b, 517b–d, 611b–612a.

with need of others, and within this exigency there abides a desire for the Other who will complete him and bring him rest. He is capable of discovering through reflection that in this world he is always in some way estranged not only from this other, whoever it be, but even from himself; what is more, he can see that the former is the *cause* of the latter: I am not myself *because* I am not yet perfectly united to the other.⁸ “A full personality only when united in love to God, man’s being—because it is open—is structurally relational,” maintains Frederick Wilhelmsen. “Since every relation involves both that which is related and that to which it is related, the personality of man in its total existentiality is not an ‘I’: it is a ‘we.’”⁹ From their long experience of conversion and love, the saints know this truth better than anyone else; they know the definitive, self-giving Thou. That is how William of St. Thierry prays to the Lord: “As long as I am with you, I am also with myself, but I am not with myself as long as I am not with you.”¹⁰ His friend St. Bernard agrees: “He who

⁸ The theme of the self or “I” as constituted through relationship with the “other” (or “thou”) is, needless to say, a major theme in contemporary psychology, philosophy, and theology; it is not part of my intention to enter directly into this larger discussion. Here it will suffice to note some of the more perceptive studies on the question of who or what the self is, and how it is constituted through relation to others, above all to God: Gabriel Marcel, “The Ego and Its Relation to Others,” in *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd (Chicago: Regnery, 1951), 13–28; Robert O. Johann, S.J., *The Meaning of Love: An Essay Towards the Metaphysics of Intersubjectivity* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959); Martin C. D’Arcy, S.J., *No Absent God: The Relations Between God and the Self* (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1962); Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Metaphysics of Love* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1962); Anthony Kenny, *The Self* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1988); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Ricoeur speaks of “oneself as another” in order to mediate between “a centered, self-positing subject, and a decentered, shattered subject,” or what Ford later styles “monotheistic and polytheistic idolatries of self” (*Self and Salvation*, 8; 86). At root, this pair of descriptions correspond to the contrary tendencies of Cartesian idealism wherein the conscious “I” takes on a larger-than-life reality, and Humean empiricism, according to which a self does not really exist at all. See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. I, *Reflection and Mystery*, trans. G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), 59–61.

⁹ Wilhelmsen, *Metaphysics of Love*, 49.

¹⁰ William of St. Thierry, *Meditativae orationes*, II.208: “Quamdiu sum tecum, sum etiam mecum; non sum autem mecum, quamdiu non sum tecum,” cited in Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 133.

gave me himself, gave me back to myself.”¹¹ They are good disciples of St. Augustine, who said: “Unless my being remains in him, it cannot remain in me.”¹²

Many modern thinkers are fascinated, one might say haunted, with questions of alienation, alterity, ecstasy. Does the self transcend itself in a true encounter with the other? How can it? Why must it?—granting that we already somehow understand the meaning of the questions and the urgency of answering them. “Is not man truly the being who is capable of ex-isting, in the sense that he can surpass or transcend himself?” asks Henri Gratton, continuing: “And is this not already a certain kind of *ek-stasis*, a going out from oneself?”¹³ Emmanuel Levinas speaks of a “metaphysical desire” for otherness, a desire to reach out “toward an alien outside-of-onself, toward a yonder.”¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer analyses the player who yields himself to the game, or even the spectator who can “give himself in self-forgetfulness to what he is watching,” for in either case one is bent on “being wholly with something else”—an *Ekstasik des Aussersichsseins*.¹⁵ Merold Westphal notes the presence of the theme of *ekstasis* in Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Paul Ricoeur. Looking back over all these thinkers, he concludes: “Perhaps the current preoccupation with alterity among some philosophers is more the expression of hunger than of curiosity.”¹⁶ Westphal’s tentative conclusion is given wings by a remark of Henri-Louis Bergson’s: “Nothing prevents the philosopher from pushing to its limit the idea, suggested to him by mysticism, of a universe which would be nothing but the visible and tangible aspect of love and of the need for loving.”¹⁷ Nothing prevents the hypo-

¹¹ St. Bernard, *De diligendo Deo*, 5: “Ubi se dedit, me mihi reddidit,” in *Bernardi opera*, vol. III, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), 132.

¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), bk. 7, ch. 10, p. 147. The Middle Ages inherited from Augustine a highly nuanced concept of *alienatio*. See R. A. Markus, “*Alienatio*: Philosophy and Eschatology in the Development of an Augustinian Idea,” *Studia Patristica* 9 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966); John P. Anton, “Plotinus and Augustine on Cosmic Alienation: *Proodos and Epistrophe*,” *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 4.2 (1996): 3–28.

¹³ Henri Gratton, s.v. ‘extase,’ *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932–95), vol. IV, 2171.

¹⁴ Cited in Merold Westphal, “Religious Experience as Self-Transcendence and Self-Deception,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Westphal, “Religious Experience,” 188.

¹⁷ Quoted in Gérard Gillemann, S.J., *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, trans. William F. Ryan, S.J., and André Vachon, S.J. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961), 139.

thetical “pure philosopher,” and in fact nothing prevented the friar Thomas or the monk Dionysius. As Fran O’Rourke says:

Under the inspiration of Dionysius, Aquinas presents within his philosophy a parallel to the sublime revelation *Deus caritas est*. According to both Dionysius and Aquinas, the ultimate key to the wonder of the world is the very mystery of the abounding love of God. The most fundamental and universal love of all is that with which God loves his own goodness. Of necessity God loves his goodness but communicates it freely to beings through creation. Divine love is the principle of the universe in its origin, its internal order and immanent dynamism, and its ultimate finality. In God alone is there fully perfect love; given, as it were, on loan by God and reflected throughout creation in the love which beings have for each other, it is returned through the native desire which all things have for total fulfillment.¹⁸

Has liturgy anything to do with this cosmic metaphysical vision? And has it anything to do with the experience of alienation? Implicit in the theology of Aquinas is an affirmative answer to both questions, and for similar reasons. Liturgy, or more accurately the Christian sacramental life as solemnly enacted in liturgical ceremonies and their devotional echoes, is the school of a welcome alienation that opens one’s eyes more and more to the presence and absence of God—to his majesty and beauty, and to all the misery and darkness of fallen man.¹⁹ The public, cultic worship of God aids in divesting man of himself (the *old* self, his own property) and clothing him with Christ, or better, changing him into Christ from deep within, thus realizing the soul’s innate potential to be what God has created it to be, *imago Dei*, in truth and to the full.²⁰ The Eucharistic liturgy is the defining act of the new man, the paradigm of what it is to be divinely human. This metamorphosis does not destroy the person but re-creates him as a distinctly radiant reflection of the Father’s unique Image, whose plenitude allows for inexhaustibly differentiated imitation.²¹

¹⁸ Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 225.

¹⁹ See Peter A. Kwasniewski, “Solitude, Communion, and Ecstasy,” *Communio* 26 (1999): 371–92, at 388–92.

²⁰ See Alexander Schmemmann’s eloquent essay on the Eucharist in *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 23–46, esp. 34–36. For a similar perspective from the Western tradition, see *The Sacred Liturgy*, by an anonymous Benedictine monk (London: Saint Austin Press, 1999); and *Four Benefits of the Liturgy*, by an anonymous Benedictine monk (London: Saint Austin Press, 1999).

²¹ On the Son of God as *imago Patris*, see *ST I*, q. 35; on Christ as natural son in contrast to adopted sons, see *ST III*, q. 23. As St. Thomas establishes in *ST I*, q. 93,

As Jean Borella remarks: “Far from effacing the creature, deification alone makes it possible for it to exist in its integral truth.”²² In the limpid words of Étienne Gilson:

Grant that a being is an image, and then the more it resembles its Original the more faithful it is to itself. But what is God? He is Love. . . . [T]o love God as He loves Himself, that truly is to be one with Him in will, to reproduce the divine life in the human soul, to live like God, to become like God, in a word, to be deified. The marvel is that in thus becoming God man also becomes or re-becomes himself, he realizes his very essence as man in realizing its end, plucks up by the roots the miserable dissimilitude that divided the soul from its own true nature. Losing that whereby it is but partially itself, it finds once more the fullness of its own being, as it was when it came from the hands of God.²³

The connatural Thomist G. K. Chesterton makes the same point in his own delightful way:

the goal of the production of man by God is the *imago Dei* written into human nature. This is what man most fundamentally *is*, namely *factum ad imaginem Dei*, and his perfection is measured by the degree to which the potency contained in this image is brought into act, not merely by his having a mind (aa. 1–6), but by his active *use* of it (a. 7), and not by any use but by the highest: attaining union with God in loving contemplation (a. 8), of which the ecstatic union of creature and creator in the beatific vision is the pinnacle—a mystical union already ontologically realized and exemplified in the Word made flesh. For commentary, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. II, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 125–52; see also J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P., “Imago Dei—Imago Christi: The Theological Foundations of Christian Humanism,” *Nova et Vetera* 2 (2004): 267–78, with its ample bibliography on p. 275, to which the following item should be added: Wieslaw Dabrowski, “La dottrina de la *imago Dei* nei commenti di san Tommaso d’Aquino alle lettere di san Paolo,” *Angelicum* 80 (2003): 779–828.

²² Jean Borella, *The Sense of the Supernatural*, trans. G. John Champoux (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 140. On the mystery of deification, see Charles Journet, *Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szczurek, O. Praem. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 84–89; John Seward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love: The Theology of the Christmas Mystery* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 265–81; and the florilegium of Thomistic texts collected and commented on by Luc-Thomas Somme, O.P., *La Divinisation dans le Christ* (Genève: Editions Ad Solem, 1998).

²³ Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Scribners, 1936), 297–99. On 299–300, Gilson specifies the exact meaning of “annihilation” as advocated by the Cistercian mystics. What is “annihilated in God” is “the separative will that made the man at once different from God and from himself.” What is recovered, then, is both God and oneself: “Charity begins the work of restoration; ecstasy realizes it as far as it can be realized in this life; it is consummated in the beatific vision.”

To the question, “What are you?” I could only answer, “God knows.” And to the question, “What is meant by the Fall?” I could answer with complete sincerity, “That whatever I am, I am not myself.” This is the prime paradox of our religion; something that we have never in any full sense known, is not only better than ourselves, but even more natural to us than ourselves.²⁴

Awakening to the human self in the divine Other where it most perfectly exists, where it wells up from all eternity and where, in the end, it must come to rest if happiness is to be gained, requires treading the rugged, at times agonizing path of alienation.²⁵ I will indeed “find myself” in the end, but only by being purified from “miserable dissimilitude,” only after yielding to the dominion of another, the beloved, who reshapes my life according to his will. “It is not the perfecting of one’s own self that makes one holy,” writes Cardinal Ratzinger, “but the purification of the self through its fusion into the all-embracing love of Christ: it is the holiness of the triune God himself.”²⁶ It is a process of action and reaction, power and passion, more violent and revolutionary than Hegelian dialectics, yet unlike the latter’s Marxist mutation, it is community-building, consoling, and peaceful.²⁷ In its symbols the liturgy proclaims the new heavens and the new earth, and in the nascent holiness of Christians fed at the altar, begins already to anticipate the kingdom of God—a kingdom fully established only after the fiery destruction of the old heavens and the old earth. The Lord’s “risen body is the nucleus of the new world”;²⁸ and as the Head had to drain the cup of suffering before entering into his glory, so too must his members.

There is thus an *intrinsic* relationship between Eucharistic worship and self-alienation. In modern times it is Hegel, above all, who perceives this

²⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. I, ed. David Dooley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 363.

²⁵ For a clear account of this Thomistic teaching as developed by Meister Eckhart, see Richard Woods, O.P., *Eckhart’s Way* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd), 87–148.

²⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 95. See, too, Ratzinger’s comments in the same book (142, 153) on man’s constant need for *ablatio*, the “negative theology” of being divested of unlikeness to God.

²⁷ As regards the effect of the Eucharist, Thomas writes: “Its principal figure was the manna, which had in itself every sweetness of flavor, as is said in Wisdom 16:20, as also the grace of this sacrament refreshes the mind in all respects” (*ST* III, q. 73, a. 6). Cf. *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1, ad 2.

²⁸ Pierre Benoit, O.P., *Jesus and the Gospel*, vol. 1, trans. Benet Weatherhead (New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), 107.

link, albeit in a distorted manner. For this Lutheran idealist aspiring to absolute and universal spirit, the Catholic veneration of a particular host as the particular flesh and blood of Christ is an abasement of mind before matter, and the ultimate vehicle of self-alienation.²⁹ Hegel is right to think that a human life totally focused on the Eucharist, wholly surrendered to it, causes alienation. He is wrong to think it a *bad* alienation, when—“if you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me [yourself as] a drink’” (Jn 4:10), for “I am thirsty” (Jn 19:28)—it is the separation from sinfulness, profanity, and finitude that accompanies conversion into Christ, the unblemished Lamb, the Holy One of Israel. It represents the gradual triumph of incarnation over illusion, of fleshly substance over empty conceptuality. Mirroring the Lord’s total gift of himself, it demands an exodus from oneself, *excessus a seipso*, which here and now takes the form of passion and death, before it can acquire the form of life and glory.

Only one of the evangelists, Luke, tells us that it was this very mystery of humiliation and glorification that occupied Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the mountain of the transfiguration. The lawgiver and the prophet were speaking to Jesus “of his departure [*exodos*], which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Lk 9:31). In the Vulgate, *exodos* is rendered *excessum*. Throughout his life but especially in his passion and death, Christ models the *excessus*,³⁰ the exodus, that each Christian must reproduce in his own life by achieving ever-deeper union with Christ.³¹ On more than one occasion, Ratzinger has stressed that “exodus . . . with its death and regrowth” is a “basic pattern in Christianity.”³² He has spoken also of the ongoing temptation for carnal man to “reverse the exodus,” to go back to “Egypt” and all that it symbolizes.³³ Christ rejected this temptation in the garden of Gethsemane when he prayed: “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22:42); he rejected at its root Luciferian self-assertion, the exercise of autonomous will. He made himself, as it were,

²⁹ See, for example, G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1965), 377–78, 389–90, 393, 408, 440; idem, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 53–55, 149–50. In the latter work Hegel describes the medieval Church as “the Holy of Holies degraded into finitude” (103).

³⁰ See St. Thomas’s comments on Psalms 30:23 [31:22], §§1 and 19.

³¹ See Joseph Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 55.

³² Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 212–17.

bread and wine to be shared out endlessly, so that all who come to him can receive all from him, soberly drunk with his love.

The Self, Possessed and Dispossessed

Is not “self-image” something we hear about all the time? Is it not what modern man or woman seems to want most—a new self-image, a better one, handsomer, richer, or whatever quality is most prized? But can there really *be* a self-image? Of course, one can form an “image of oneself,” in the sense of a conception of who or what one sees oneself to be, or of what one wishes to become. The rational creature cannot have itself as an exemplar, but it can represent itself to itself—if not fully adequately, then at least in reference to aspects that catch the attention. What deserves to be denied is that there is, at rock bottom, a “self-image” in the sense of a complete idea of oneself *within* oneself that suffices as the map of one’s journey, the pattern of one’s destiny. The better acquainted a man is with himself, the more he stands humbly before an unknown abyss, looking up toward God who alone defines me.³⁴ He says, with Socrates, “I know that I do not know”; he says, with St. Paul, “I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), “I am not conscious to myself of anything” (1 Cor 4:4). To try to make or remake oneself according to an image projected by oneself is to enter a house of distorting mirrors with no hope of finding an exit. In reality, man is made to the image of God. I exist as the image of another, who is therefore more myself than I am. If I wish to be *myself* I must become increasingly like *him*; the image is only as real as its active imaging. Consider a further passage from Gilson, where he wrestles with the logic of imagehood:

If man is an image of God, the more like God he makes himself the more he fulfils his own essence. Now God is the perfection of being, Who knows Himself integrally, and loves Himself totally. If man is fully to realize his virtualities and become integrally himself he must become this perfect image of God: a love of God for God’s sake. . . . Whatever of *amour propre* he retains, makes him so far forth different from that love of God which is God; and all love of self for the sake of self that he abandons, makes him, on the contrary, like to God. But thereby also it makes himself like himself. As image, the less he resembles the less he is himself; the more he resembles the more he is himself; wherefore *to be* is, for him, to distinguish himself as little as possible, to love himself is to forget himself as much as possible. And he attains his last perfection when,

³⁴ See John Saward, “Towards an Apophatic Anthropology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 41 (1974): 222–34.

remaining substantially distinct from his original, he has become no more than a subject carrying God's image.³⁵

Because this *is* the case, growth in spiritual being (*esse spiritualis*, as Aquinas calls it) presupposes and entails alienation from or disintegration of the "self" we, or our world, have created. This, in simplified terms, is the thesis advanced by Denys Turner in his highly suggestive study of the role of negativity in Christian mysticism.³⁶

Great masters of the spiritual life—Turner focuses his attention on Dionysius the Areopagite, Augustine, Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Denys the Carthusian, and John of the Cross—understand the total transcendence and intimate immanence of God to entail a surprising result in one's own identity: the more God is allowed to take over, the more one starts to lose (track of, hold of) oneself. The old self disintegrates and a new self is forged in a crucible of mental emptiness and suffering, in which one can only mutter: "Who am I? What am I?" As Augustine cries out, "O Lord, I am working hard in this field, and the field of my labors is my own self. I have become a problem to myself, like land which a farmer works only with difficulty and at the cost of much sweat."³⁷ The eventual result, if

³⁵ Gilson, *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 288. It needs to be said that people today are often taken aback by talk of man as "created in the image and likeness of God." What can this mean, if God is held to be immaterial and invisible, all-perfect and all-good, infinite and ubiquitous, unchanging, eternal, omnipotent, and so forth—in a word, everything we are simply not and, it seems, could never be? The difficulty indicates a serious misunderstanding of the claim; the lucid treatment at *ST I*, q. 93, has never been more timely (see note 21 above).

³⁶ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Turner explores similar themes in *Faith Seeking* (London: SCM Press, 2002); see especially 3–47 and 93–115. It is not difficult to see how the great themes Turner finds in the doctrine of the "mystics" are to be found in Aquinas's own work. Of the literature on this topic, suffice it to mention four studies that complement one another: Torrell's *Spiritual Master* (see note 21); Walter H. Principe, C.S.B., *Thomas Aquinas' Spirituality* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984); Joseph Wawrykow, "Luther and the Spirituality of Thomas Aquinas," *Consensus: A Canadian Lutheran Journal of Theology* 19.1 (1993): 77–107; Heather McAdam Erb, "'Pati Divina': Mystical Union in Aquinas," in *Faith, Scholarship, and Culture in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Alice Ramos and Marie I. George (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 73–96.

³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 10, ch. 16 (trans. Pine-Coffin, 222). Here the doctor of grace is addressing the problem of memory. Since for him memory is the root faculty out of which a self is "constructed" in its relations with itself and the world around, this passage is an outcry of confusion about self-identity.

one does not reject God's grace, is the beginning of permanent self-transcendence, the foretaste of unconditional ecstasy. God wants the self as we understand it to disintegrate; this is why he allows us trials and sufferings, constant opportunities to lose our grip on "reality" in order to gain a deeper grip on the one reality that decisively matters. We have to be decentered in order to be recentered on Jesus; and this Jesus, whom St. Catherine of Siena did not hesitate to call drunk and mad,³⁸ is altogether "eccentric": as God, he receives all that he is from the Father; as man, he looks only to the Father's will.³⁹ He is never folded back upon himself, to unearth his identity from within his own essence; he is constituted as person by relation-to-another, he is anointed savior by his submission and triumphs through self-surrender. The Christian's progressive decentering is inescapably painful; many who start on the path give up before they attain the hidden center⁴⁰ where joy and peace are to be found, or settle for a self-induced "peace of mind" that is not the gift Jesus came to give us.⁴¹ Moreover, it is never as if the disciple definitively attains this new center—not in this life, for the disciple is not yet grown to his Master's full stature (Jn 13:16; Eph 4:13). Rather, we are forever centering and decentering, drawn downward (or outward, as Augustine would say)⁴² with the gravity of fallen nature, drawn upward (and inward) by the levity of divine grace. This very disorientation, this unpredictable and, at some level, unavoidable swirl of setback and progress, is part of the process of disintegration, blessed loss and gain.

I say *blessed* loss and gain because it must not be thought that either the proper starting point or the desired goal of this process is an attitude of self-contempt. Self-contempt already involves having constructed an ego that is then pitilessly battered, a kind of scapegoat. It is well known that

³⁸ See, for example, St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), ch. 30, p. 72; ch. 153, p. 325. Catherine generally applies words of that sort to God the Father, but in the latter text she begins with the Father and comes around, almost imperceptibly, to the Son.

³⁹ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 13–46.

⁴⁰ I borrow the phrase from Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

⁴¹ See Thomas Dubay, S.M., *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel—On Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 114–15, 230–31; Turner, *Faith Seeking*, 97.

⁴² A representative remark along these lines, from *Confessions*, bk. 10, ch. 27 (trans. Pine-Coffin, 231–32): "You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself; and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you."

self-contempt is frequently allied with pride, for both are heightened forms of self-indulgence, a wallowing in one's accumulated wealth of accomplishments or failures. Christian repentance (which is never unaccompanied by *its* ally, Christian confidence, *parresia*) is much different: It is the awareness that I—in my fragmentary, imperfect, struggling self—am not fully what God in his love has called me to be, and therefore that the appropriate act before him is humility, contrition, sorrow for sins. In order to understand the nature of contrition, St. Thomas goes to the etymology of *contritio cordis*, a breaking of the heart in sorrow for sin. The heart's hardness or capacity for resistance meets with a contrary resistance that wears it down, just as pulverizing a hard stone turns it eventually into a soft powder.⁴³ Sin is associated with inflation of self-will, but contrition with the contrary movement: “annihilation, shattering, detestation” of self-will.⁴⁴ Self-humiliation is the path to regaining oneself *in Christ*: “He who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39); “whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt 23:12); “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:32). Augustine learns in his pilgrimage that throwing oneself down exhausted before the cross of Christ is not a reckless last resort when safer options fail. It is *the* way, because we *do* suffer from a mortal disease (in Gabriel Marcel's words, “the wound I bear within me, which is my *ego*”).⁴⁵ There is only one cure:

From the clay of which we are made he [the Son of God] built for himself a lowly house in this world below, so that by this means he might cause those who were to be made subject to him to abandon themselves and come over to his side. He would cure them of the pride that swelled up in their hearts and would nurture love in its place, so that they should no longer stride ahead confident in themselves, but might realize their own weakness when at their feet they saw God

⁴³ *In IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 2, ad 3.

⁴⁴ *In IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 2. The clarification in note 23 above also holds good for St. Thomas: the annihilation spoken of is not absolute but relative; its purpose is plenitude and fruition.

⁴⁵ Marcel, “The Ego and Its Relation to Others,” 16. Marcel continues: “What then is this anguish, this wound? The answer is that it is above all the experience of being torn by a contradiction between the all which I aspire to possess, to annex, or, still more absurd, to monopolize, and the obscure consciousness that after all I am nothing but an empty void; for, still, I can affirm nothing about myself which would be really myself; nothing, either, which would be permanent; nothing which would be secure against criticism and the passage of time. Hence the craving to be confirmed from outside, by another; this paradox, by virtue of which even the most self-centered among us looks to others and only to others for his final investiture.”

himself, enfeebled by sharing this garment of our mortality. And at last, from weariness, they would cast themselves down upon his humanity, and when it rose they too would rise.⁴⁶

The moment of breakdown is the moment of breakthrough.⁴⁷ All of us, therefore, must have an identity crisis before we can attain the stability of clinging to another—not just any other, but the One who alone can give us what we truly are, can give us the power and humility to begin to be a self instead of a scattered and confused mass of phenomena. Most people who have reached a certain age and have lived through pain, disappointment, loneliness, *ennui*, know what it is like to feel oneself somehow “missing.” I do not know who I am, and I do not expect to find an easy answer. In fact, I have to renounce the futile quest for “inner certainty” and begin doing, or loving, something else in earnest, since there is a cavernous gap in the place where I once thought I found myself the bedrock or benchmark of reality. To the psyche-in-process can be applied Hegel’s description of the “faculties, inclinations, and passions” catalogued by “observational psychology,” which finds itself “astonished that such a contingent medley of heterogeneous beings can be together in the mind like things in a bag, more especially since they show themselves to be not dead, inert things but restless movements.”⁴⁸ Expanding on a point in Hegel, Jean Hyppolite writes: “Self-consciousness is subjectivity constituted as truth, and this subjectivity must discover its own inadequacy and experience the pain of the self that fails to reach unity with itself.”⁴⁹ But is it really *this* failure that causes the human subject pain? One should rather say: the failure to reach unity *with God*, who is Truth and Love—*this* is my inadequacy and my anguish, the wounded condition of my being.⁵⁰ Man’s distinctive trait is his openness to, and

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 7, ch. 18 (trans. Pine-Coffin, 152).

⁴⁷ See Paul Murray, O.P., *A Journey with Jonah: The Spirituality of Bewilderment* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002), 43 et passim.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), §303, p. 182. For Hegel, “consciousness . . . has really become a riddle to itself” (§365, p. 220) just for a time, at a certain stage in the dialectical ascent. There is greater humility in saying that this is true not just for a time, but *simply speaking*. We are riddled with contradictions that will only be overcome in the vision of God, the supreme gift of his eternal life.

⁴⁹ Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 190.

⁵⁰ It must be clarified that we are dealing here not with a psychological problem per se but with an essentially spiritual problem. The vanquished and vanishing “I” of the Christian making progress into Christ is far different from the crippled,

hunger for, the infinite;⁵¹ if the infinite does not invade and pervade him, he cannot attain self-unity. “My thoughts, the intimate life of my soul, are torn this way and that in the havoc of change,” prays Augustine, “and so it will be until I am purified and melted by the fire of your love and fused into one with you.”⁵² The *Confessions* as a whole show how Augustine comes to be a coherent person, intelligible to himself, beatifiable by God, to the extent that the fragments of selfhood by which he tried unsuccessfully to define himself now coalesce in prayer around the singular reality of the ever-present God.⁵³ If *he* does not give myself to me (that is to say, if I am not looking to him for identity), *I* do not exist.

A basic law of life is shadowed forth: Identity comes to me in proportion to my surrender to something outside myself. And I learn, sooner or later, if I am fortunate, that the crisis is not resolved but exasperated by turning to find in a creature the answer to the question my very self is posing to me, even should I turn to another man or woman deeply (perhaps desperately) loved, who is similarly ill-equipped to be a center of gravity around which the crumbling elements of my mind can gather and solidify. For sure, one must have acquired a certain degree of self-knowledge to realize that clinging to a creature, however exciting or enriching in finite terms—be it a lover, riches and an elegant life, a healthy body, fine art, natural beauty, or something more subtle like dedication to scholarship, social work, or political affairs—is not going to make one happy, and cannot do so. One has to make an *effort* to close one’s eyes to the parti-colored world without, in order to become aware

dysfunctional “I” of chronic depression or mental insanity. The former, unlike the latter, is quite compatible with external stability, cheerfulness, and sense of purpose: see Dubay’s discussion of how dark nights differ from depression (*Fire Within*, 163–64; 295). Helpful on these matters are Thomas V. Moore, *Heroic Sanctity and Insanity* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1959); Raphael Simon, O.C.S.O., *Hammer and Fire: Way to Contemplative Happiness, Fruitful Ministry and Mental Health in Accordance With the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Colorado Springs: Zaccheus Press, 2006); Richard F. Berg and Christine McCartney, *Depression and the Integrated Life: A Christian Understanding of Sadness and Inner Suffering* (New York: Alba House, 1981).

⁵¹ See Aristotle, *De anima*, bk. 3, ch. 8 (431b20–21).

⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 11, ch. 29 (trans. Pine-Coffin, 279).

⁵³ See Turner, *Darkness of God*, 50–73. As Murray Littlejohn observes, the *Confessions* traces out a path that originates in “the restless heart’s longing for beatitude,” moves through disorientation (i.e., “the human bondage to sin”), into orientation or “awakening to the love of wisdom,” and finally the reorientation that consists of “conversion to Christ,” the very embodiment of divine wisdom—at once true God and the way to God. “Augustinian Wisdom and the Law of the Heart,” *Études maritainiennes/Maritain Studies* (1996): 77–97.

of a darksome world within, much vaster, and thirsty for light. Dom Pius de Hemptienne brings this out: "The more determinedly I close my eyes to the thousand nothings that surround me, the more I feel that Jesus Christ, the divine Light, supersedes the light-in-darkness of mere creatures, which no longer can illuminate the depths of my interior."⁵⁴

Inevitably, the question will arise: is the introspection that gives rise to such a judgment healthy or morbid? There is a kind of inward sensitivity that is as necessary for the possibility of a fully human life as food is for the possibility of ongoing animal life. If a person never becomes sharply aware of a longing for totality, of a profound need for love on the basis of truth, and of a frustration with fragmentation and finitude, he is blind to what is most basic in the human condition. It is true that one who does become aware of these things might, at that point, opt for a nihilistic exit, a skeptical shrug of the shoulders, or a psychologistic salve, but he would at least have attained the beginnings of self-knowledge, and thus the raw materials of prayer and unselfish love. Lack of such primal insight into oneself would be no less morbid—on the contrary, probably more so—than excessive preoccupation with the same self; the one would be a defect, the other an excess.

No, in spite of moments of rallying, the sickness I discover in (and *as*) myself only gets worse, unless I am able to turn to one whose presence restrains death's hand, rescues me from its grip. Geoffrey Preston says of this malaise and its cure:

The gospel offers a diagnosis of the human condition in terms of a universal and pervasive sickness unto death, one man alienated from another and each man a stranger to himself. . . . Probably no one has ever described this phenomenon better than Paul himself [in Rom 7:18–23]. He defines for us the distance between a man's true self, what he would want to be, what is called here "the law of his mind," and the man's embodiment. This distance or rivalry, as Paul calls it, is one of the ways in which we experience the fundamental sickness that afflicts us in being human: split personality, sick personality, man at war with himself. Healing must involve integration, the abolition of the distance between a man's best self, the law of his mind, and the embodiment of himself, the contrary law in his members. Holiness entails wholeness, which in turn implies healing. This is a healing prior to the individual sin. It is a restoration of the image of God in man in accordance with the Genesis myth of man as he was meant to be, at peace with himself, with the animals, and with God. Healing has to do with the restoration

⁵⁴ Dom Pius de Hemptienne, O.S.B., *A Disciple of Dom Marmion, Dom Pius de Hemptienne: Letters and Spiritual Writings*, trans. Benedictines of Teignmouth (London: Sands, 1935), 215.

of Adam, the taking up of the first Adam into the second Adam, Christ, who is God's way of being Adam, that is, Man.⁵⁵

It would be little consolation if the presence to whom I turn were altogether unlike me; but it would be no consolation at all if he were altogether like me as I now am (or am not). What I search for, explicitly if I know myself to be a nothing that could be everything, and implicitly if I think myself to be someone whom I am not, is one who is like me in all ways of being alive and energetic, unlike me in all ways of being diseased or dead. It is a God whom I seek, but not simply a God, for deity is a "boundless ocean of substance,"⁵⁶ serenity, and freedom, while I am a slave at war. I seek a man who is divine, a creature who is infinitely more than created, a master who lets himself be shattered, torn apart, dissolved like me, not as punishment, not from weakness, but solely to meet me where I am, and take me where I could not go—into an indestructible life, communion with all, substantiality of self, surrender to One. Robert Barron draws out the implications:

Nothing less than everything, than Being itself, than the divine energy will fill up the emptiness of the human heart. Nothing other than a concrete and complete imitation of Christ, the ecstatic lover of God, will bring us to life. . . . Enfleshed, built for ecstasy, destined for a deifying beatific vision, we are all [called to be] in the image of Jesus Christ. Thomas's "theological anthropology" can be summed up in Paul's phrase, "to live in Christ Jesus." To live in the self-forgetting and self-transcending love of God, to allow the divine and human to meet and mingle in one's very flesh, to open the eyes of the soul to the vision of God is to live *in Christo*.⁵⁷

The Eucharistic Gift of Self

What has all this to do with St. Thomas's theology of the sacraments or his understanding of liturgy? We do not find in Thomas a formal discussion of the "ego" as found in Cartesian or post-Cartesian sources, nor the sharp edge of doubt; yet there is a highly developed analysis of interior-

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Preston, O.P., *God's Way to Be Man: Meditations on Following Christ through Scripture and Sacrament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 57.

⁵⁶ A phrase of Damascene's cited several times by Aquinas: *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4; *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 5; *De potentia*, q. 10, a. 1, ad 9; *ST I*, q. 13, a. 11.

⁵⁷ Robert Barron, *Thomas Aquinas, Spiritual Master* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 172; 175. See also two remarkable sermons preached by Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Flesh Becomes Word" and "By Water, Blood and Spirit," in *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 146–55.

ity, of self-knowledge and self-love, of the different aspects or elements of oneself (usually in reference to the soul's powers), deriving from rich resources—among them, Aristotle's penetrating study of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Augustine's pilgrimage inward and upward in the *Confessions*, and, most of all, the Johannine and Pauline writings.⁵⁸ We can therefore expect to find, and upon looking do find, his liturgical, sacramental, and Eucharistic doctrine shot through with motifs of self and other, of transformation, indwelling, and ecstasy (*extasis*).

The teaching on *extasis* is particularly important for our purposes. Thomas understands *extasis* as a standing-outside-oneself, a going beyond oneself or *exitus a se* that involves *alienatio* from what one has been in order to become different, literally "altered."⁵⁹ *Extasis* can be debasing or perfective—debasing when a man is driven downward by worldly passion, perfective when he is taken out of himself and caught up in the virtuous love of a friend.⁶⁰ For Aquinas, a friend is "another oneself," *alter ipse*, not in the

⁵⁸ A good example of an analysis of "self" is found in *ST* II–II, q. 25, a. 7, where Thomas explains the difference between good self-love and bad self-love on the basis of how one construes what is "most oneself": the rational nature or "inward man," or the sensitive, bodily nature or "outward man." This can be put as a question: "Who, or what, am I most of all?" Some indication of the subtlety of the Thomistic analysis of self can be gleaned from two articles by Klaus Hedwig: "Alter ipse. Über die Rezeption eines Aristotelischen Begriffes bei Thomas von Aquin," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 72 (1990): 253–74; idem, "Solitudo circa subiectum. Über den Begriff der Einsamkeit bei Thomas von Aquin," in *Indubitanter ad veritatem: Studies Offered to Leo J. Elders, S.V.D.*, ed. Jürgen Vijgen (Budel: Damon, 2003), 219–34.

⁵⁹ Thomas defines or comments on the term *extasis* in a variety of ways. There is not space to go into all of them here, but one could cite the following as examples. *ST* I–II, q. 28, a. 3: "Someone is said to suffer *extasis* when he is placed outside himself," *extra se ponitur*; later in the same response he speaks of *exiens quodammodo extra seipsum* and *exit extra se*. In the commentary on the *De divinis nominibus* he uses not only the phrases *ponit extra se/seipsum* (ch. 4, lec. 10, §§430 and 433), but also the phrase *a se alienatum* (ch. 7, lec. 5, §739): estranged from himself, dispossessed of himself. This language of *alienatio* is present in the first objection of *ST* I–II, q. 28, a. 3, where it means losing one's mind. At *In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1 ad 4, he explains *extasis* as a placement outside oneself, *extra se positio*, and links it to *fevor*, "since that which burns rises beyond itself and vanishes into smoke." In other texts, he takes *excessus* or *excessus mentis* as synonymous with *extasis* (e.g., *ST* II–II, q. 175, a. 2, obj. 3; *Super Ps.* 30, no. 1). Perhaps the most helpful definition is found at *ST* II–II, q. 175, a. 2, ad 1: "Extasis importat simpliciter excessum a seipso, secundum quem scilicet aliquis extra suam ordinationem ponitur."

⁶⁰ On the place of "ecstasy" in Aquinas's teaching on *amor/caritas*, see Peter A. Kwasniewski, "St. Thomas, *Extasis*, and Union with the Beloved," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 587–603; idem, "The Ecstasy of Love in Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences*," *Angelicum* 83 (2006): 51–93; David M. Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude

sense of a duplication of an already-existent *ego* as if the “I” were mirrored, but an expansion and extension of the “I” in reference to a fundamentally different existence that causes my own to be redefined, at times from the roots up.⁶¹ Once again, it is God’s friendship, freely offered in Christ, that most radically redefines the “I” by transplanting the lover’s ground from himself to the Lord in whom he abides and who abides in him, whose face he seeks, whose footsteps he follows. Christian *alienatio a se* is the negative supposition, one could say, of positive transformation in Christ, of which the motto is the Apostle’s cry of scorching intensity: “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:19–20).⁶² Paul asserts that he is living *Christ’s own life*, no longer a merely natural life he can call his own; he abandons himself in faith to the One who loves him to the utmost, who therefore attracts and unifies his whole love. And so the world is crucified to him and he to the world (Gal 6:14).⁶³ As we will see, Aquinas finds these verses emblematic of the Christian life in its Eucharistic font.

For Aquinas the most basic function of the sacraments is to place man in vital contact with the crucified and risen Lord;⁶⁴ they are, in the words of Romanus Cessario, “graced instruments for restoring the image of God”⁶⁵ through assimilation to God’s Son, who is the Father’s perfect image and man’s formative exemplar. By virtue of the God-man’s sacrifice, each sacra-

and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas,” *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996): 20–27; Juan Cruz Cruz, *El éxtasis de la intimidad: Ontología del amor humano en Tomás de Aquino* (Navarre: Ediciones Rialp, 1999).

⁶¹ For lucid accounts of this doctrine, see David M. Gallagher, “Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis for Love of Others,” *Acta Philosophica* 8 (1999): 23–44; idem, “Desire for Beatitude,” 20–39; James McEvoy, “The Other as Oneself: Friendship and Love in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Approaches to Truth*, ed. J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 16–37.

⁶² Adapted from the text of the KJV.

⁶³ Other Pauline texts emphasize the remainder: that with Christ, the Christian has *risen* to new life, and *will rise* at the end of time (cf. Rom 6:1–11). On the theology expressed in Galatians 2:20, see François Amiot, *The Key Concepts of St. Paul*, trans. John Dingle (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), 142–49, cf. 133–41, 195–202; Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 88–89.

⁶⁴ See Joseph J. Sikora, S.J., “Sacraments and Encounter,” in *Theological Reflections of a Christian Philosopher* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 213–33.

⁶⁵ From his essay “Aquinas on Christian Salvation,” in Weinandy, Keating, and Yocum, *Aquinas on Doctrine*, 129. See also the same author’s “The Sacramental Mediation of Divine Friendship and Communion,” *Faith & Reason* 27 (2002): 7–41.

ment has power to originate, deepen, or repair a direct relationship between man and God, a communion of like-minded friends having a shared beatitude for its goal. The mediation of the Son as head of mankind and head of the Church prepares for and establishes in souls an immediacy of divine indwelling for all who belong to him as his members. What is more, each of the sacraments configures one to Christ in a specific way by communicating the grace associated with the saving deeds and sufferings of the Lord. For each sacrament Aquinas identifies (1) the past reality it stems from and evokes; (2) the present sacramental encounter in its threefold aspect—mere sign, a reality that is also sign, and a pure reality; and (3) the future reality this encounter promises and accomplishes. The first of these, the past reality of the sacraments, is most worthy of attention here. The Eucharist brings us into contact with “Christ in the state of bloody immolation,” though the *mode* is unbloody;⁶⁶ baptism unites us with “Christ dying and rising”; confirmation, with “Christ as descended upon by the Holy Spirit.” Holy Orders fuses the candidate with “Christ offering sacrifice”; marriage conjoins spouses to Christ in the act of “uniting to himself mankind and the Church.” When the sick are anointed, it is “Christ strengthening those who are struggling”; he is the angel who visits them in their Gethsemane. The penitent sinner is made one with “Christ efficaciously making satisfaction for us”—the sinner is nailed to an invisible cross where the Savior meets him, and breathes out peace upon him.⁶⁷ In every case, it is Christ himself, in his sacred humanity, in his eternal divinity, who acts directly upon the recipient; it is he who bestows the healing and elevating effects of grace *through* the sacramental signs administered by others.⁶⁸ “The man who baptizes provides only exterior ministry,” writes Thomas, “but it is Christ who baptizes interiorly, who is able to use all men for whatever he wills.”⁶⁹ In another text the point is made quite forcefully:

⁶⁶ Cf. Berger, *Aquinas and the Liturgy*, 27–41. It must be emphasized, and we shall have occasion to point this out, that for St. Thomas the Eucharist occupies so unique a place and enjoys such a primacy among the seven sacraments of the New Law that even the term “sacrament” has to be regarded as analogous, with the Eucharist being the very locus of divinization and communion with the Savior, and the other sacraments streaming out from it and leading back to it.

⁶⁷ The phrases quoted are taken from the faithfully Thomistic commentary of André-Charles Gigon, O.P., *De Sacramentis in communi* (Fribourg: Typographia Canisiana, 1945).

⁶⁸ On Aquinas’s general sacramental theology, see Yocum, “Sacraments in Aquinas,” in Weinandy, Keating, and Yocum, *Aquinas on Doctrine*, 159–81; Liam G. Walsh O.P., “Sacraments,” in Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow, *Theology of Aquinas*, 326–64; Journet, *Theology of the Church*, 175–84.

⁶⁹ *ST* III, q. 67, a. 5, ad 1.

It is evident that Christ himself accomplishes all the Church's sacraments: he it is who baptizes; he it is who forgives sins; he is the true priest, who offered himself on the altar of the cross, and by whose power his own body is consecrated daily on the altar. And yet, because he was not to remain bodily present to all the faithful, he chose ministers, that through them he might give that same body to the faithful.⁷⁰

Thus, in and through the seven sacraments, Christians re-live mystically the life Christ lived when he dwelt among us full of grace and truth, and the risen life he is now living forever: we enter into his earthly ministry, his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension.⁷¹ One can see these connections by attending to the relevant prologues in the *Summa theologiae*. Before *Summa theologiae* I, question 2, Thomas says he will expound the science of sacred doctrine by treating of God, of the rational creature's advance toward God, and finally of Christ, who *as man* is our way to God. Having arrived at III, question 1, he then says it remains to consider the Savior Jesus Christ who showed in his very person the way of truth whereby we may attain to eternal bliss by rising again, a consideration to be unfolded in three stages: the Savior himself; the sacraments whereby we attain our salvation; the goal of immortal life. At the start of the second stage (q. 60), he announces that the sacraments follow next in order *because they derive their efficacy from the very Word made flesh*. This truth is the key principle for the remaining questions (qq. 60–90) that Thomas completed before the mystical breakdown of December 1273.⁷² Each sacrament has its power and operation *immediately from Jesus Christ*, whose glorified humanity is the inseparable instrument, the predestined channel, through which the divine Word pours out grace into souls. When a human being, properly disposed, receives one of the seven sacraments, he is at that moment in mystical contact with the person of the Savior, who pours out as much grace as the soul is ready to receive.⁷³ This mystical contact attains

⁷⁰ SCG IV, ch. 76. *Super ad Eph.* 4, lec. 2, §200: "No matter who performs the rites they possess an unvaried power because he who baptizes interiorly is one, namely, Christ" (then follows the proof text Jn 1:33).

⁷¹ A superb exposition of this ancient Christian teaching and its development by Aquinas is given in Saward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love*, 47–120. See also Torrell, *Spiritual Master*, 125–52.

⁷² On the significance of the saint's breakdown (and breakthrough) occurring in connection with celebrating the holy sacrifice of the Mass, see Peter A. Kwasniewski, "Golden Straw: St. Thomas and the Ecstatic Practice of Theology," *Nova et Vetera* 2 (2004): 61–89.

⁷³ Thus, in regard to baptism, Aquinas teaches not only that we receive certain benefits from Christ's passion, but that it is Christ who baptizes us (cf. *ST* III, q. 66, a. 5, obj. 1 and ad 1), and Christ into whom we are baptized. Moreover, all

an incomparable fullness and immediacy in the Eucharist, which both symbolizes and accomplishes the intimate communion of the Savior with the members of his body.⁷⁴ Here the sacramental encounter is no mere contact, but the context for an unreserved, mutual gift of self that can attain a unity and fecundity only distantly hinted at in human marriage.⁷⁵

Thomas's uncompromising sacramental *realism* is in many ways astonishing. Without denying that they are social, symbolic celebrations for calling to mind important truths, Aquinas holds the sacraments to be, first and foremost, a real participation in Christ's own actions, sufferings, and glory, for the sake of receiving into one's being the effect of those actions, the fruit of those sufferings, the vision of that glory. As Gilles Emery phrases it: "They bear the historical event of the passion of Jesus, whence they procure the fruit of grace in the present moment, while announcing the fulfillment whose seed they possess."⁷⁶ For example, when asking whether a man is freed from *all* guilt through baptism, Aquinas responds:

Through baptism one is incorporated into Christ's passion and death, according to Romans 6:8, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live together with Christ." From which it is clear that Christ's passion is communicated to every baptized person as a remedy, as though

the world's water acquires baptismal potency subsequent to the descent of the holy body of Jesus into the Jordan River (cf. *ST* III, q. 39, a. 1; q. 66, a. 3, ad 4).

⁷⁴ Cf. *ST* III, q. 73, a. 1, ad 3; a. 5, ad 2. At *ST* III, q. 66, a. 9, ad 5, Aquinas makes a very important comparison between baptism and Eucharist: "Both sacraments . . . are representative of the Lord's death and passion, but not in the same way. For in baptism Christ's death is commemorated insofar as man dies with Christ, that he may be born again into a new life. But in the sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ's death is commemorated *insofar as the suffering Christ himself is offered to us as the paschal banquet*, according to 1 Corinthians 5:7–8, 'Christ our pasch is sacrificed; therefore let us feast.' And since man is only born once, whereas he eats many times, so is baptism given only once, but the Eucharist many times" (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ For a synthetic presentation of all these points, see two works in particular: Matthias J. Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis: Herder, 1946), 469–610; Emile Mersch, S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis: Herder, 1951), 546–93.

⁷⁶ Gilles Emery, O.P., "The Ecclesial Fruit of the Eucharist," *Nova et Vetera* 2 (2004): 43–60. See Berger, *Aquinas and the Liturgy*, 61–87, for discussion of the sacramental realism according to which sacraments are not merely symbolic occasions of grace but physical causes emanating from the risen Christ and bringing men into contact with his personal saving work. This theme is central to two valuable studies by Colman E. O'Neill, O.P., who bases himself on the teaching of Aquinas: *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments* (1964; New York: Alba House, 1991); idem, *Sacramental Realism: A General Theory of the Sacraments* (1983; Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 1998).

he himself had suffered and had died. Now Christ's passion . . . is sufficient satisfaction for all the sins of all men. And so the one who is baptized is freed from the debt of all the punishment due to him for sins, as though he himself had sufficiently satisfied for his own sins.⁷⁷

In baptism the death and resurrection of Christ becomes *ours*; they become *our* paschal mystery, the origin of a new life with him. Thomas approvingly cites Origen: "As we died with the dying Christ and rose up again with the rising Christ, so through Christ we are circumcised with a spiritual circumcision; and so we do not stand in need of a carnal one."⁷⁸ The effect is the same as if *we*, having become unblemished victims, had hung on the cross; as if *we* had suffered and died, guiltless of all crime; as if *we* had risen again, forever beyond the reach of death and decay.⁷⁹ The Apostle never tires of declaring this gospel: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3–4).⁸⁰ "You have

⁷⁷ *ST III*, q. 69, a. 2. Cf. the same article, ad 1: "The punishment of Christ's passion is communicated to the one baptized, inasmuch as he becomes a member of Christ, as though he himself had endured that punishment," and *ST III*, q. 68, a. 5: "Through baptism a man is incorporated into the very death of Christ."

⁷⁸ *ST III*, q. 37, a. 1, ad 2.

⁷⁹ So much is this the case, believes Thomas, that it even dissolves the obligation of rendering the marriage debt in a certain case: "Now he who goes over to the religious life dies only a spiritual death, not a bodily death; and so, if the marriage be consummated, the husband cannot go over to religious life without his wife's consent (whereas he can do so prior to there being a carnal joining, when there is only a spiritual joining). But the one who undergoes baptism is even *corporeally* buried with Christ in death; and therefore he is freed from paying the marriage debt even after the marriage has been consummated" (*In IV Sent.* d. 39, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2, reproduced at *Supplement*, q. 59, a. 4, ad 2). This "as if" is not the *als ob* of Kantian philosophy—we must behave *as if* there is a God; we must view nature *as if* there is teleology; we must approach the beautiful *as if* beauty is an objective trait. It is the mystical "as if" that means we have really done and suffered these things because we have been spiritually joined, even identified, with the one who really did and suffered them. Being true man, Christ could act and undergo as a creature acts and undergoes; being true God, he can, in the power of the Spirit, make *his* accomplishments *ours*. The "as if" merely preserves the reverent distance of participant to source.

⁸⁰ Romans 6:3 is a text Thomas routinely cites (Galatians 3:27 is another) when he wishes to underline the quasi-organic bond between Savior and sacrament, between the *work* Christ accomplishes on the cross and the *gift* of our justification. Cf. *ST III*, q. 61, a. 1, ad 3, emphasis added: "Christ's passion is, so to say, *applied to man* through the sacraments."

died, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). “He died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15). “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:7–9). As Cardinal Ratzinger explains:

What Paul is describing is an event of birth and death. I am wrested from my isolation and incorporated into the communion of a new subject; my “I” is inserted into the “I” of Christ and consequently joined to the “I” of all my brothers. Only from such deep renewal of the individual does Church come into being as a communion that binds us together and sustains us in life and death.⁸¹

This “incorporation,” begun at baptism, is perfected by a man’s being united in the power of the Spirit to the body of Christ—engrafted into his mystical body by way of his glorified body shared in the Eucharist, that we may no longer live for ourselves, but for him.⁸² The Eucharist is thus “the consummation of spiritual life, and the goal of all the sacraments.”⁸³ It contains substantially the common spiritual good of the whole Church.⁸⁴ It is “the sacrament of Christ’s passion in so far as a man is perfected in union with the Christ who suffered.”⁸⁵ It is called *synaxis* or *communio* “because we

⁸¹ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 153. Cf. the forceful words of H. Ball: “It is characteristic of Gnosticism . . . that at the heart of the redemptive process lies, not the suffering and death of Christ, not the crucifixion, but the ‘message concerning the holy path,’ the teaching. Illumination comes, not through pain, but through the communication of knowledge. . . . [In Paul’s writings] the wise and wonder-working, highly communicative Jesus of the Gnostics disappeared behind the obedient, the tormented Christ, the Christ who was done to death and had therefore risen again. Baptism is no longer a conjuring-up of fire and light. It is being immersed in the death of Christ” (cited in Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 89, note 3).

⁸² For Aquinas’s teaching on our sacramental incorporation into Christ, see Emery, “Ecclesial Fruit.” At a broader level, the studies of Emile Mersch remain classics: *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, already mentioned; and *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition*, trans. John R. Kelly, S.J. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938). Cf. *ST III*, q. 68, aa. 1–2; q. 73, a. 3.

⁸³ *ST III*, q. 73, a. 3. The next sentence: “And so the reception of baptism is necessary for beginning spiritual life, while the reception of the Eucharist is necessary for consummating it.” At q. 63, a. 6, Thomas cites Dionysius, who calls the Eucharist “the end and consummation of all the sacraments.”

⁸⁴ *ST III*, q. 65, a. 3, ad 1.

⁸⁵ *ST III*, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3: “Eucharistia est sacramentum passionis Christi prout homo perficitur in unione ad Christum passum.” But it is the *risen* Lord, too. At

communicate with Christ himself through it—both because we partake of his flesh and Godhead, and because we communicate with and are united to one another through it.”⁸⁶ Feeding on this spiritual food, man is changed into Christ,⁸⁷ and so the Greeks also call it *metalepsis* or assumption, because in this sacrament “we assume the deity of the Son.”⁸⁸

The sacraments, in fact, simply *Christianize* us. The soul is not, of its nature, naturally or anonymously Christ.⁸⁹ We must be transformed in consciousness and conscience; we need to be given the gift of connaturality with Christ. This means, of necessity, being alienated from our “own” life—the *propria vita* we regard as ours and *not* another’s—in order to live *in and for* Christ, or rather, to become, more and more, Christ himself. According to Thomas, that is exactly what love does, and why the Eucharist is “the sacrament expressive of Christ’s charity, and productive of the same in us.”⁹⁰ Love conforms the lover to the beloved, shifting his center from self to other: “Charity makes a man give up his very self in a way and adhere to the beloved, since, as Dionysius says, ‘love places a man outside himself and places him in the one loved.’”⁹¹ Charity brings about “a spiritual union whereby the will is, in a way, transformed into that [divine] end.”⁹²

When the affection or appetite is wholly imbued by the form of a good that is an object for it, it finds the good suitable and adheres to it as

q. 80, a. 10, ad 1, Thomas recalls Augustine (though it is really Ambrose) saying to the daily recipient of communion: “Daily Christ rises for you.”

⁸⁶ *ST III*, q. 73, a. 4, citing Damascene.

⁸⁷ *ST III*, q. 73, a. 3, ad 2.

⁸⁸ *ST III*, q. 73, a. 4, citing Damascene.

⁸⁹ As Berger says: “The supernatural mystery is not an explication of man’s innerness, as the old and new Modernism wish to have us believe. It rather approaches man from outside; man may receive it as a gift from a higher darkness. . . . Once man has recognized this, he will come to appreciate the extent of the chasm that separates creator and creature. He will react to this recognition with the act of submissive worship so profoundly characteristic of the liturgy” (Berger, *Aquinas and the Liturgy*, 49). See, along the same lines, Ratzinger’s remarks on the “breaking in from the outside” character of Christianity (and of its Jewish root) that distinguishes it entirely from immanentistic religion or the “mysticism” of illumination: Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 32–44, 85–89, et passim. This is a familiar theme in many of Ratzinger’s works: Christianity is an event, not an idea; it confronts us first of all with a person, not a theory or an ethic.

⁹⁰ *In IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 3, ad 5: “Eucharistia dicitur sacramentum caritatis Christi expressivum, et nostrae factivum”; cf. *ST III*, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3.

⁹¹ *In III Sent.*, d. 29, a. 5, obj. 1, citing Dionysius, *On the Divine Names IV*, §13 (PG 3:711).

⁹² *ST I–II*, q. 62, a. 3.

though fixed upon it; and then it is said to love it. Whence love is nothing other than a certain transformation of affection into the thing loved. And since anything that is made the form of something is made one with it, through love the lover becomes one with what is loved, which becomes the lover's form. And therefore the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 9 that "a friend is another self"; and we read in 1 Corinthians 6:17: "Whoever adheres to God is one spirit [with him]."⁹³

The sacraments find us more or less pagan, more or less self-centered, and they evangelize and convert us to be centered on Christ, to have our center in him—entailing the dissolution of self earlier spoken of, and leading the trustful disciple into a gradual rediscovery of his own paths and purposes *in relation to* the beloved. This means that a sacramental life, so far as the recipient's *experience* is concerned, will not consist of satisfying (one might say, flattering) encounters between a well-defined self or subject and a securely apprehended object.⁹⁴ It will be a mirror, at times bright, at times blurry, in which I can glimpse the meaning of my life and the face of the one who seeks me out in love. "Sacraments are proportionate to faith, through which the truth is seen in a mirror and in an enigma."⁹⁵ For Thomas, one may thus say about the sacraments what Ratzinger says about the Christian faith as such:

It never comes out of what we have ourselves. It breaks in from outside. That is still always the way. Nobody is born a Christian, not even in a Christian world and of Christian parents. Being Christian can only ever happen as a new birth. Being a Christian begins with baptism, which is death and resurrection (Rom 6), not with biological birth.⁹⁶

The Catholic custom of baptizing infants is seen to be all the more fitting in that there is not even the possibility of a conscious interpersonal relationship; the infant, a silent preacher of the doctrine of St. Paul, cannot even appear to be performing a work of righteousness, it only "suffers the

⁹³ *In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1. On the doctrine of love contained in this and related texts from the *Scriptum*, see Kwasniewski, "Ecstasy in Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences*."

⁹⁴ The experience, as such, may be empty and dry, or overfull and beyond words—like bodily intimacy, like evanescent recollection. But this is not the crux of the matter. The desire to equate faith or love with a subjective "experience" of God, and the consequent tendency to spurn a God who eludes experience, is one of the chief temptations a Christian has to overcome if he is to get beyond "self-cultivationism" into the maturity of spiritual marriage. On this point, see Turner's *Darkness of God*.

⁹⁵ *ST III*, q. 80, a. 2, ad 2.

⁹⁶ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 87.

divine love.” The child of nature’s womb has first of all to be re-formed in the Church’s womb, elevated to the point of being *able* to have a relationship of love with Christ and through him with the whole human family. This is a dramatically anti-Pelagian gesture in which individual helplessness is met and mended in solidarity with others.⁹⁷

It is almost invariably Galatians 2:20 that Thomas quotes when he wants to illustrate scripturally the reality of *extasis*, the paradox of the “I” whose life, without ceasing to be a life that is his (for the person is not annihilated), has been handed over and transformed by love into another’s life, so much so that he lives *out of* himself, *in* another. “Divine love makes a man, so far as possible, live not his own life, but God’s life.”⁹⁸ “Some are alive, but have not life in themselves, such as Paul. . . . He was living, yet not in himself but in another by whom he was living, even as a body is alive, yet has not life in itself but rather has life in the soul by which it lives.”⁹⁹ To find out how Aquinas envisions the communion effected by charity, we would do well to look at his commentary on Galatians 2, verses 19–20:

The Apostle therefore says *With Christ I am nailed to the cross*, that is, concupiscence or the kindling of sin, and everything of the sort, has been put to death in me through the cross of Christ: “Our old man is crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed” (Rom 6:6). Also from the fact that I am nailed to the cross with Christ and have died to sin, and because Christ rose again, I, too, have risen with him rising, “who was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Thus, therefore, does Christ renew in us a new life, the oldness of sin being destroyed. Hence he says *And I live*, that is, because I am nailed to the cross of Christ, I have the strength to

⁹⁷ Cf. *ST III*, q. 68, a. 9; q. 73, a. 3: “By baptism a man is ordered to the Eucharist, and therefore from the fact of children being baptized, they are destined by the Church to the Eucharist; and just as they believe through the Church’s faith, so they desire the Eucharist through the Church’s intention, and, as a result, receive its reality.” In fact, a good case can be made that infant baptism is the litmus test, so to speak, for whether or not a Christian confession takes seriously the objective efficacy of the sacraments. For further discussion, see Peter A. Kwasniewski, “King Herod and the Martyr-Children,” in *Abortion and Martyrdom: The Papers of the Solesmes Consultation and an Appeal to the Catholic Church*, ed. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 2002), 32–50.

⁹⁸ *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3, ad 1.

⁹⁹ *Super Ioannem* 5, lec. 5. In both this passage and the former, Thomas cites Galatians 2:20 to support his point. Passages in which Galatians 2:20 plays a significant role include *In IV Sent.* d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1 (quoted below); *ST II–II*, q. 175, a. 2, ad 2; *De perfectione spiritualis uitae*, 11; *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus*, 4, lec. 10; *Super Ps.* 21, §26; and *Ps.* 30, §1; *Super Ioan.* 1, lec. 12; *Super II ad Cor.* 5, lec. 3; *Super ad Gal.* 2, lec. 6 (quoted below); and *Super ad Gal.* 6, lec. 4.

act well, *now not I* according to the flesh, because I no longer have the oldness which I once had, *but Christ liveth in me*, that is, the newness which has been given us through Christ.

Or, in another way: a man is said to live according to that in which he chiefly establishes his affection, and in which he most of all takes delight. Hence men who take their greatest delight in study or in hunting say that this is their life. Now, each and every man has his own private affection by which he seeks that which is his own. When therefore someone lives seeking only what is his own, he lives only unto himself; but when he seeks the good of others, he is said to live for them. Accordingly, because the Apostle had set aside his self-directed affection through the cross of Christ, he said that he was dead so far as self-directed affection was concerned, saying that “with Christ I am nailed to the cross” (2:19), that is, through the cross of Christ my own self-directed or private affection has been removed from me. Hence he says below (6:14): “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ [by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world]”; and 2 Corinthians 5:14: “If one died for all, then all were dead. And Christ died for all, that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them.” *And I live, now not I*, as if having in my affection my own good, *but Christ liveth in me*, that is, I have Christ alone in my affection, and Christ himself is my life. “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).

Then when he says, *and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God*, he answers a twofold difficulty. . . . First of all, the first one, namely: how he lives and yet it is not he who lives. He answers this when he says: *And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God*. Here it should be noted that, strictly speaking, those things are said to live which are moved by an inner principle. Now the soul of Paul was set between his body and God; the body, indeed, was made to be alive and was moved by the soul of Paul, but his soul by Christ. . . . Therefore he says, *I live by faith in the Son of God* through which he dwells in me and moves me: “But the just shall live in his faith” (Hab 2:4). And note that he says *in the flesh*, not “by the flesh,” because [to live like] this is evil. Second, he shows that he is nailed to the cross, saying: [I live by faith in the Son of God] because the love of Christ, which he showed to me in dying on the cross for me, brings it about that I am always nailed with him. And this is what he says, *who loved me*: “he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:10). And he loved me to the extent of *giving himself* and not some other sacrifice for me: “he loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5); “As Christ loved the Church and delivered himself up for it, that he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life” (Eph 5:25).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ *Super ad Gal.* 2, lec. 6, §§106 and 107. The translation is adapted from that of F.R. Larcher, O.P., *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians by St. Thomas Aquinas* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), 62–63.

This passage from the Galatians commentary is directly relevant to our theme, for it is an important aspect of Thomas's Eucharistic theology that the Lord of glory present under the consecrated species is the Christ-who-suffered, *Christus passus*. In the *Commentary on John*, he writes:

Since this sacrament is of the Lord's passion, it contains within itself Christ who suffered. Hence whatever is an effect of the Lord's passion is wholly contained in this sacrament, for it is nothing else than the application of the Lord's passion to us. . . . Hence it is clear that the destruction of death, which Christ accomplished by his death, and the restoration of life, which he accomplished by his resurrection, are effects of this sacrament.¹⁰¹

This is significant for many reasons. One reason that might be overlooked is psychological. In being made to confront symbols of the death we inflicted on Christ—the crucifix, the host, the chalice—we are brought face to face with the reality of our own malice or even simply our moral weariness, and our failure to “solve” the problems of human existence. Christianity does not automatically rid people of all sin and every stain of sin; sincere Christians are not necessarily better behaved than their unbelieving neighbors, and they can at times be worse.¹⁰² But they are nevertheless *aware* of two things, if they are truly practicing their faith: how bad they are in turning away from the Lord, “every one to his own way” (Is 53:6); how good they are in being his creatures, sprinkled in the Lamb's

¹⁰¹ *Super Ioan.* 6, lec. 6, §964. See, e.g., *In IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 2; *ST III*, q. 66, a. 9, ad 5; and q. 73, a. 5, ad 2.

¹⁰² Edward Schillebeeckx discusses this issue in *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 217–21; cf. Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 61–65, 148–56. Taking up a theme of many ascetical-mystical treatises, Preston speaks of the providential persistence of defects: *God's Way to Be Man*, 53–60. All the same, the truth and effectiveness of the Christian faith must, in fairness, be judged not by its lukewarm half-practitioners or its apostates (should one blame a medicine that was never taken for a sickness that was not thereby ameliorated?), but by its vast company of saints who have washed their robes white in the Blood of the Lamb. Moreover, it is all too easy to take for granted how Christianized our assumptions, mores, and institutions have become due to centuries of ecclesial presence. What is routinely attributed to secular reason, to an ethic of fairness or a noble humanism, is often enough the last sputter of gospel influence. The popes of modern times, from Leo XIII onward, have warned that if the gospel is not welcomed as the animating principle of individuals and societies, the West will degenerate ever more rapidly into a kind of high-tech barbarism at the service of pride, greed, and lust, contemptuous of human dignity and rights. The papal prognosis has been correct, above all for the Western Europe of today—spiritually bankrupt, culturally exhausted, demographically dried up.

blood. They seek forgiveness and healing, ultimately resurrection, from the very one they have killed, who has already died *for them* and only awaits their turning around to him (one might say, they need to “turn themselves in”). It is this preventive offering of the sinless for the sinner and its counterpart, the surrendering of assailant to victim, that the cross symbolizes and the Mass makes present in a mirror and in an enigma.¹⁰³

We can understand these connections better by turning for a moment to Dom Sebastian Moore’s probing of the “psychology of the cross.” For Moore, the mystery of evil can be described as the “will not to be,” the effort to *deny* that “man is called to an ever-greater intensity of selfhood”: “The most passionately protected thing in us is our mediocrity, our fundamental indecision in respect of life. Its protection will require, and will not stop at, murder.”¹⁰⁴ We experience the love that overpowers evil, and the acceptance of ourselves as failures, only when we first realize that *we* have crucified Jesus; in the crucifixion, all man’s frustration with and flight from himself are focused vindictively on one innocent victim. Here, with open eyes, we see explicitly what we really want—but we also see that God knows this and is ready to forgive us, that he wants to heal and convert our desire. Writes Moore: “It is only by a total surrender that we come into our identity, a surrender whose dimensions embrace the deep mystery of our refusal and has required, for its being made, the full experience of that refusal.”¹⁰⁵ Thus in Pilate’s cry “Ecce homo” is the unintended confession that here, and here alone, is Man encountered, and our latent humanity awoken: “I come before the crucified *as a non-person*, seeking to be awoken to the person I am.”¹⁰⁶ And why? “‘I am’ equals ‘I love.’ ‘I love’ is the only way to say ‘I am.’”¹⁰⁷ For that very reason, taking up again St. Thomas’s language, the sacrament of love *must be* the sacrament of the cross, commemorating the Lord’s sacrificial death.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Cf. *ST* III, q. 83, a. 1: The celebration of the Eucharist is called the “immolation” of Christ because, first, it is “a certain *image* representative of Christ’s passion,” and second, “through this sacrament we are made partakers of the fruit of the Lord’s passion.”

¹⁰⁴ Sebastian Moore, O.S.B., *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 13. It should not be necessary to add that I differ with Moore as I do with Schillebeeckx concerning matters on which they dissent from the Magisterium. Each has valuable insights that deserve to be retained, like gold extracted from ore.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 96. See also Sebastian Moore, O.S.B., “Our Love Is Crucified,” *Downside Review* 116 (1998): 27–44; cf. Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, “The Wounds of Christ,” *Journal of Literature & Theology* 5 (1991): 83–100.

¹⁰⁸ A point emphasized by Wawrykow (“Luther and the Spirituality of Aquinas”), who rightly sees how Thomas, throughout the *ST* treatise on the Eucharist, is at pains

But the process of reform does not stop with acknowledging one's guilt, or even with detachment from sin; the former is an obstacle to be overcome, the latter a precondition for growth. Christians pursue detachment only for the sake of deeper attachment. Borrowing the Apostle's words, Thomas describes the highest of the three degrees of charity as a "longing to be dissolved and to be with Christ."¹⁰⁹ What the Lord seeks is the total gift of oneself, the passionate clinging of lover to beloved, of wife to husband, forming one flesh, sharing one breath.¹¹⁰ If nothing less will do for human lovers in their frenzied possessiveness, will Christ settle for a lukewarm exchange of goods and services? "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!" (Lk 12:49); "I have ardently longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk 22:15).¹¹¹ Unlike earthly spouses, Christ is able to effect a union of pure, total, permanent possession, in no way limited in its fullness, going to the abyss of one's being, there where "the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10) are darkly known and sweetly loved, are touched and savored. "I shudder to feel how different I am from it," says Augustine of God's Word, "yet in so far as I am like it, I am aglow with its fire."¹¹²

Since the matter of the Eucharist is bread and wine, which are food and drink for man, its proper effect can be discerned from the effects of food and drink in the one who consumes them—namely, the restoration of lost

to link it with charity, real presence, and the passion. The cumulative message is this: The love of God is made manifest and communicated in the broken body of Jesus, who gave his life on the cross in order to give it ever anew in the sacrament of his love. For all ages, this sacrament—whether anticipated in pre-Christian cults or realized in the Mass—is the pulsing heart of the world, the center of gravity toward which everybody is attracted. Cf. Journet, *Theology of the Church*, 181–84.

¹⁰⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 24, a. 9. In context, it is the beginners, says Thomas, who are occupied with getting away from sin and fighting against fleshly desires; their aim is primarily negative, viz., to keep charity from being corrupted. Those advancing, for their part, are concerned with the growth of charity—they want to run ahead, doing good. The perfect, however, aim above all at "union with, and enjoyment of, God." Then follows the citation of Philippians 1:23.

¹¹⁰ See Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 33–40, esp. 38–39. On the intimate union of *persons* brought about in Eucharistic communion, see François Charmot, S.J., *The Mass, Source of Sanctity*, trans. M. Angeline Bouchard (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1964), 167–228; but above all, a poignant little book by Marie-Vincent Berdanot, O.P., originally published in France early in the twentieth century: *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, trans. Francis Izard, O.S.B. (1925; London: Sands, 1951).

¹¹¹ Following the NJB. The opening phrase is particularly strong in the original, where the language doubles itself, mirrored in the Vulgate's *desiderio desideravi*.

¹¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 11, ch. 9 (trans. Pine-Coffin, 260).

matter and, should there be surplus, an increase of bodily substance.¹¹³ But, Thomas goes on to say, there is a crucial difference between bodily food and spiritual food. Bodily food has its effect, to restore lost flesh and increase its quantity, by being converted into the one fed. Spiritual food, on the contrary, is not converted into the one eating; the one eating is rather converted into *it*, for it acts upon *him*, so as to turn him into itself.¹¹⁴ The notion of being changed into the food one eats might seem odd, since that would be the contrary of what happens with all other food and drink. Were the food in question mere food, it would be impossible to speak this way, as Jesus recognizes when he says: “the flesh profits nothing” (Jn 6:64), that is, as the Church Fathers interpret the saying, mere flesh is lifeless, it cannot bring life to the spirit.¹¹⁵ But if the food is the life-giving flesh of the living Son of God, a believer’s contact with it leads to life, renewal, deification—a truth central to the theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria,¹¹⁶ who is the first patristic *auctoritas* Thomas cites in the important question on the effects of the Eucharist:

The life-giving Word of God, uniting himself to his own flesh, made it life-giving. It was becoming, therefore, that he be in a certain way united to our bodies through his sacred flesh and precious blood, which we receive in a life-giving blessing in bread and wine.¹¹⁷

As Mersch explains:

Union with food is effected in a mysterious exchange of life, in an assimilation by which one becomes the other. But in the Eucharist, the more vital of the two is the bread we receive, the “bread of life.” This bread consumes and changes into itself the one who eats it.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ *In IV Sent.* d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1. To these physical effects, Thomas likens the sacramental effects of an increase in “spiritual quantity” (where “quantity” means the extent of active power) by the strengthening of the virtues, and a restoration of wholeness through the forgiveness of venial sin or the repairing of any sort of defect.

¹¹⁴ Aquinas says this many times; in the *Sentences* commentary alone, at *In IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1; *In IV Sent.*, d. 9, a. 2, qa. 4; *In IV Sent.*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1. Cf. Emery, “Ecclesial Fruit,” 47–48.

¹¹⁵ Typical of the patristic exegesis of John 6:64 is the interpretation of Augustine’s that Thomas quotes in *ST III*, q. 75, a. 1, ad 1.

¹¹⁶ See Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 337–58.

¹¹⁷ *ST III*, q. 79, a. 1; Cyril is commenting on Luke 22:19.

¹¹⁸ Mersch, *Theology of the Mystical Body*, 590–91.

This it can do because it is none other than the Lord in person, under the appearances of bread and wine.¹¹⁹ United to Jesus through faith and love, the communicant “is transformed into him and becomes his member,” says Aquinas, “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 divine and inebriating him with divinity.”¹²⁰ In the *Sentences*, Thomas simply states that “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.’”¹²¹ He later adds:

It belongs to charity to transform the lover into the beloved, because charity is such that it brings about ecstasy, as Dionysius says. And since the increase of virtues caused by this sacrament comes about through the changing of the one eating into the spiritual food eaten, therefore to this sacrament is specially attributed the increase of charity rather than an increase of other virtues.¹²²

L. Gregory Jones summarizes it thus: “For Thomas, to feed on Christ is gradually to lose the old, sinful self in order to be changed into a new self, a Christlike friend of God.”¹²³ Such a change has communal, cosmic implications, as Ratzinger brings out:

¹¹⁹ The end (*finis*) of the eating is well stated by Cardinal Ratzinger: “Communion means the fusion of existences; just as in the taking of nourishment the body assimilates foreign matter to itself, and is thereby enabled to live, in the same way my ‘I’ is ‘assimilated’ to that of Jesus, it is made similar to him in an exchange that increasingly breaks through the lines of division. This same event takes place in the case of all who communicate; they are all assimilated to this ‘bread’ and thus are made one among themselves—one body.” Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 37.

¹²⁰ *Super Ioan.* 6, lec. 7, §969; cf. *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 2. In these places Thomas goes on to cite a passage from the *Confessions* in which Augustine describes how he heard Christ saying to him: “You will not be changing me into you, as food becomes your flesh; it is rather you who will be changed into me” (*Confessions*, bk. 7, ch. 10; cf. trans. Pine-Coffin, 147). Commenting on Psalm 22:5, Aquinas writes: “This [goodly] cup is the gift of divine love which inebriates, since one who is drunk is not in himself. . . . for he is made to be in ecstasy”; “the cup means the blood of Christ, which ought to make us drunk.” *Super Ps.* 22, no. 2.

¹²¹ *In IV Sent.*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1.

¹²² *In IV Sent.*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 1, ad 3. In the same question, cf. a. 2, qa. 1: “by the power of this sacrament there is a certain transformation of man into Christ through love . . . , and this is its proper effect.”

¹²³ L. Gregory Jones, “The Theological Transformation of Aristotelian Friendship in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *New Scholasticism* 61 (1987): 373–99, at 389.

Normal food is less strong than man, it serves him, is taken into man's body to be assimilated and to build it up. But this special food, the Eucharist, is above man and stronger than man. Consequently the whole process involved is reversed: the man who eats this bread is assimilated *by it*, taken into it; he is fused into this bread and becomes bread, like Christ himself. "Though many, we are one body, for we are one bread." The result of this insight is quite clear: Eucharist is never merely an event *à deux*, a dialogue between Christ and me. The goal of Eucharistic communion is a total recasting of a person's life, breaking up a man's whole "I" and creating a new "We." Communion with Christ is of necessity a communication with all those who are his: it means that I myself become part of this new "bread" which he creates by transubstantiating all earthly reality.¹²⁴

That the Eucharist effects a transformation of the eater into the eaten, an ongoing conversion into Christ that parallels the increase of charity, is a view fairly common among scholastic authors. What is striking is how Thomas links up this idea with *ektasis*, a link reminiscent of the Eucharistic doctrine of an author whom Thomas never explicitly cites on the matter, St. Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory teaches that the progress of the soul into God and at the same time into its own true nature is "a transmutation toward the divine (*ektasis pros to theioteron*) accomplished by the Holy Eucharist," and that "through the divine food and drink, change and ecstasy from worse things to better things enter together into the soul (*metaboles kai ekstaseos . . . suneisiouses*)."¹²⁵ I have not been successful in finding a source in which Thomas might have encountered Gregory's views—but there does not need to be a source. We are likely dealing with a coincidence proceeding from a heart similarly moved, a mind similarly disposed. This suggests that we are getting near the center of Thomas's own heart and mind. Faithful reception of the Eucharist pushes forward an ecstatic self-transformation into the soul's beloved, Jesus Christ. It causes accelerating alienation from a pseudo-self, to bring the healing of reintegration and divinization in the Lord. Among the patristic quotations in the *Summa's* treatise on the Eucharist, we find the following, from St. John Damascene: "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 illuminate our hearts, so that by partaking of the divine fire we may be set on fire and deified."¹²⁶ Thomas himself had noted earlier that Christ superabundantly fulfilled on the cross what was prefigured by the

¹²⁴ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 89, original emphasis.

¹²⁵ Cited in Corrigan, "Ecstasy and Ecstasy," 33.

¹²⁶ *ST III*, q. 79, a. 8, s.c.

burning up of animals: “In Christ’s holocaust, instead of material fire [being present], there was the spiritual fire of charity.”¹²⁷ When we receive the Eucharist in a state of grace, we are feasting upon this fire of love, letting it permeate and burn into all the powers and passivities of soul and body. Hence, too, so far as ritual is concerned, “the exterior sacrifice that is offered is a sign of the interior sacrifice by which one offers himself to God, as Augustine says in *On the City of God*.”¹²⁸ Here Thomas is utterly at one with the monastic tradition, with Bernard’s homilies on the Song of Songs, with the Victorines who speak of *extasis* in prayer. Here we catch a glimpse of that stout and often silent Dominican friar whose contemporaries testified far more often about his tears at Mass, his vigilant prayer and virginal purity, than about his disputations and publications.¹²⁹ As one of his early biographers, William of Tocco, writes:

He was especially devoted to the most holy Sacrament of the Altar; since it had been granted him to write so profoundly of this, he was likewise given grace to celebrate it all the more devoutly. . . . During Mass he often would be seized by such strong feelings of devotion that he dissolved in tears, because he was absorbed in the holy mysteries of the great sacrament and invigorated by its offerings.¹³⁰

Aquinas gave himself body and soul to the holy mysteries because in them he found his beloved Lord, and through them feasted upon his love. He was convinced that of all the good things Jesus wants for us, foremost is an intimate friendship between him and each person who believes in him (cf. Jn 15:13–5). Giving reasons in support of the real presence of the Lord in the Sacrament, Aquinas says:

Such a thing befits Christ’s love, out of which he took up a true body of our nature, for the sake of our salvation. And since “to live together

¹²⁷ *ST III*, q. 46, a. 4, ad 1.

¹²⁸ *ST III*, q. 82, a. 4, referring to bk. 10, ch. 5. For a luminous exposition of this Augustinian (and Thomistic) understanding of sacrifice, see Joseph Ratzinger, “The Theology of the Liturgy,” in *Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger*, ed. Alcuin Reid, O.S.B. (Farnborough: Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, 2003), 18–31, esp. 25–29.

¹²⁹ All this can be easily found in the medieval biographical accounts: see *Thomae Aquinatis vitae fontes praecipue*, ed. Angelico Ferrua, O.P. (Alba: Edizioni Domenicane, 1968); for a partial translation, Kenelm Foster, O.P., *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1959). See also Jean-Pierre Torrell’s “portrait” of Friar Thomas in *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. I, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), esp. 278–89; and Kwasniewski, “Golden Straw,” 79–85.

¹³⁰ Ferrua, *Fontes praecipue*, §30, p. 73.

is most of all proper to friends,” as the Philosopher says, he promises his own bodily presence to us as a reward. . . . Yet meanwhile, his bodily presence has not abandoned us in this sojourning; rather, he joins us to himself in this sacrament through the truth of his body and blood. Hence he himself says in John 6:57: “he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” Hence this sacrament is a sign of the greatest love, and the support of our hope, from so close a joining [*ex familiari coniunctione*] of Christ to us.¹³¹

Asking whether Jesus fittingly instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, Thomas lingers over the same theme. It was fitting, yes,

because the things said last, and most of all by departing friends, are more committed to memory—especially because one’s affection is then more inflamed toward the friends, while those things toward which we have more affection are imprinted more deeply on the soul.¹³²

Charity, as Thomas teaches, is divinely given friendship with God.¹³³ The Eucharist is the divinely given sign and agent of charity.¹³⁴ Therefore this sacrament is the sacrament of friendship *par excellence*, the supreme embodiment of God’s love for each soul. Since ecstasy, too, is one of the chief effects of love,¹³⁵ and above all, of friendship-love (*amor amicitiae*) for another person, we can see once again why the Eucharist brings to the soul that which it commemorates and signifies: the Lord’s gift of himself on the cross, where he sealed an eternal covenant with his bride, the Church.

All of this takes place in the dark, the darkness of faith; it is with good reason that Aquinas insists on the cloudy, enigmatic nature of the sacramental event.¹³⁶ God gives himself in limitless intimacy, but we comprehend

¹³¹ *ST III*, q. 75, a. 1. Thomas had similarly argued in q. 46, a. 3, that the first of five reasons why Christ willed to suffer the passion on our behalf is that “now man realizes how much God loves man, and so is roused to love him in return, in which loving the perfection of human salvation consists.”

¹³² *ST III*, q. 73, a. 5.

¹³³ *ST I-II*, q. 65, a. 5; *II-II*, q. 23, a. 1.

¹³⁴ *ST III*, q. 78, a. 3, ad 6: “sacramentum caritatis quasi figurativum et effectivum.”

¹³⁵ Cf. *ST I-II*, q. 28, a. 3; this and related texts are gathered in Kwasniewski, “St. Thomas, *Extasis*, and Union with the Beloved.”

¹³⁶ As Charles De Koninck writes: “It is, then, by a truly unparalleled mercy that God has deigned to meet us in perfect night and that, in order to elevate us to his own heights, he has satisfied for all our insufficiencies, and has asked of us, in our act of faith, an abnegation analogous to that of his Son. *This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?* . . . Simon Peter answered him: *Master, to whom shall we go?* Is it not a mercy admirable above all that, abandoned by all, we can go nowhere else except to him, in surrender to this mystery of Faith where hides, in a

neither him nor his gifts, for we can hardly come to grips with a love so unlike ours in its generosity and humility, yet so longed-for by us in our solitude and poverty. Can it be true? The mind baulks; the response is often bewilderment. It is not possible that God should be “mine” as if he ceased to be immense and purely unreachable, unfathomable. Yet he is indeed mine, for, as creator and sustainer, he enters into my being far more profoundly than I can enter into my own thoughts or volitions; he is more within, and more “mine,” than my own thinking and willing, my own actions and sufferings.¹³⁷ And that is not all. He delivers himself to death for me, hands over his very life to me, plants within me the seed of everlasting life: his true flesh, his inebriating blood, his glorious humanity, “the divine, holy, most pure, immortal, heavenly, life-creating, and awesome mysteries of Christ,” as the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom chants.

No wonder we are bewildered. We are torn apart by a love that defies our logic, that multiplies our longings and frustrates our desires, which are always too few and too small. God would have it this way, for unless he renews us and remakes us, we cannot enter into his rest, be one with him, be the temple of his glory, bear him in our bodies, become his sons in our souls. This is the merciful cruelty of God, the blessed wounding spoken of by the mystics, and like its exemplar, the wise folly of the cross, it belongs to the heart of the Christian experience. In essence, to be a mystic is to believe in the mystery Paul announces in Galatians 2:20, and to strive to live it day after day with the help of God’s grace—that and nothing else.¹³⁸ This is why Aquinas wept so often when celebrating Mass, and why he is a master and model for all of us.¹³⁹

“Behold, the Dwelling of God Is with Men” (Revelation 21:3)

My principal goal has been to sketch a Thomistic understanding of sacramental self-transformation in Christ. But connected to this goal is a subordinate one. If ecstasy is the hallmark of Eucharistic communion, the

perfectly adapted silence, the one whose name is Word?” De Koninck, “This Is a Hard Saying,” *The Aquinas Review* 1 (1994): 111.

¹³⁷ See *ST I*, q. 8, esp. a. 1 and a. 2, ad 3.

¹³⁸ As Louis Bouyer unfolds in his beautiful work *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, trans. Iltyd Trethowan, O.S.B. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990). Over the last century many authors have emphasized the sacramental-ecclesial-devotional “mysticism” that Thomas understands as intrinsic to the Catholic faith and accessible to all believers; a valuable summary is furnished by Erb in “‘Pati Divina’” (see note 36 above).

¹³⁹ Cf. Martin Grabmann, *The Interior Life of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Nicholas Ashenbrenner, O.P. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1951).

Eucharist in turn must be housed in a “tabernacle” suited to its inherent dynamism. This tabernacle is the sacred liturgy, which is worthily celebrated when celebrated in a manner that accords with the great mystery it contains and diffuses.¹⁴⁰

Among the seven sacraments the Eucharist holds pride of place. To it all the others are ordered; in it, or in him whom it mystically signifies and really contains, are the source and summit of the Christian life, the soil and fruit of the Church’s life. “Because the whole mystery of our salvation is contained in this sacrament,” remarks St. Thomas, “it is performed with a greater solemnity than the other sacraments.”¹⁴¹ In the magnificent question 83 of the third part of the *Summa*, St. Thomas presents a detailed exegesis of the Mass in all its aspects: word, song, and silence, rubric and ritual, exterior architecture, interior mysticism.¹⁴² What is it

¹⁴⁰ An argument central to most high-level critiques of the postconciliar liturgical reform is that its outcome failed to accord with the meaning and spirit of cultic worship as understood by our forebears from antiquity to the eve of the Council. See, among others (I list the following in chronological order): Klaus Gamber, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background*, trans. Klaus D. Grimm (San Juan Capistrano, CA: Una Voce Press, 1993); Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Looking at the Liturgy: A Critical View of Its Contemporary Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996); Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., and James Monti, *In the Presence of Our Lord: The History, Theology, and Psychology of Eucharistic Devotion* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997), 59–102; Borella, *Sense of the Supernatural*, 59–65; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Stratford Caldecott, ed., *Beyond the Prosaic: Renewing the Liturgical Movement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000); idem, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, The Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001); Klaus Gamber, *The Modern Rite: Collected Essays on the Reform of the Liturgy*, trans. Henry Taylor (Farnborough: Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, 2002); Reid, *Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy*; Alcuin Reid, O.S.B., *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (Farnborough: Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, 2004); U. M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004); Jonathan Robinson, *The Mass and Modernity: Walking to Heaven Backwards* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005); Martin Mosebach, *The Heresy of Formlessness: The Roman Liturgy and Its Enemy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006). We can be sure there will be many more such books in years to come. It scarcely needs mentioning that the tradition and Magisterium of the Roman Church have always favored solemnity, dignity, contemplativity, and symbolic richness in liturgical praxis. In some ages and places this ensemble of qualities has translated into the idiom of courtly pomp and lavish display, but it has not always done so, nor need it do so.

¹⁴¹ *ST III*, q. 83, a. 4.

¹⁴² A number of recent authors have drawn attention to the riches of this liturgical exegesis and its continuing relevance: Berger, *Aquinas and the Liturgy*, 27–41;

that *underlies* the pronounced attitude of reverence, the humble welcoming of tradition, the evident love of cultic form, so characteristic of Aquinas's approach? A passage in Borella seems to offer an appropriate answer. Having spoken of a true liturgical rite as an ensemble of sensible symbols that are, in combination, fixed, timeless, visibly extraordinary, unusual for the profane world, hieratic, mysterious, bearers of a secret order, and signposts to the transcendent, Borella then places an imaginary speech on the lips of "every true rite":

Ever in me is your present; in me your ephemeral life can rediscover its surest meaning, because ever in me is the fidelity and the patience of Divine Love and its promise. You who are worn out by the whirl of time and things, you who have been torn to pieces, divided further and lost; come and see, I will gather you together again, unify you, calm you, for I am always the same; I am the language with which your fathers and mothers prayed. . . . I am the long and still fresh memory of people when they remember God.¹⁴³

The solemnity draws attention to, and keeps attention on, the symbolic representation of our being *loved* as no one else loves us, our being taken hold of and carried into something totally beyond our ken, yet offered to us through ordinary things which in turn provoke us to reconsider how we relate to the world itself. Preston and McCabe emphasize how the mysteries enacted with bread and wine at Mass, far from being anomalous rituals disconnected from daily life, ought to be opening our eyes to the potential sacredness of every table and every meal.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, however, the avoidance of merely "common" modes of speaking and acting in the liturgy is *by design*, to help us break free from a profane mindset, to awaken us to the Presence that surrounds and penetrates the entire world. Hence, making the liturgy *more* common, more everyday, casual, horizontal, is self-defeating; it obliterates the liturgical as such,

Levering, *Sacrifice and Community*, ch. 5; John Saward, "The Cosmic Liturgy and the Way of the Lamb," *Antiphon* 7 (2002): 18–28; Peter M. Candler Jr., "Liturgically Trained Memory: A Reading of *Summa Theologiae* III.83," *Modern Theology* 20 (2004): 423–45.

¹⁴³ Borella, *Sense of the Sacred*, 62.

¹⁴⁴ See Preston, *God's Way to Be Man*, 89; Herbert McCabe, O.P., *The New Creation: Studies on Living in the Church* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 72–78; Albert Bagood, O.P., "Intersubjectivity—Friendship, Diner and Holy Eucharistic Meal," *Angelicum* 82 (2005): 755–81; Thomas Merton too has enlightening things to say along these lines in *The Living Bread* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1956), 125–32. All four authors, of course, also speak of the differences between this meal and every other.

exactly where it cultivates the holy, the divine, the Other who is more myself than I. Ironically, too, a liturgy stripped of its mysterious *alteritas* would be reduced to the place of last among worldly equals, for it cannot compete against the secular on the latter's terms. And so, it would be effectively sterilized in its power to fecundate outlying culture, prevented from casting an otherworldly light on the potential sacredness of the ordinary elements of this-worldly life. As Ratzinger writes:

Worship, that is, the right kind of cult, of relationship with God, is essential for the right kind of human existence in the world. It is so precisely because it reaches beyond everyday life. Worship gives us a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from that divine world into ours. . . . It lays hold in advance of a more perfect life and, in so doing, gives our present life its proper measure. A life without such anticipation, a life no longer opened up to heaven, would be empty, a leaden life.¹⁴⁵

Liturgical worship offers us an opening or clearing in which to practice, and thus to make our own, a sacred mode of thinking, feeling, acting, receiving—a mode that challenges our profane assumptions, the worldliness in which we tend to lose ourselves if we are not careful to cling to Christ. We are called upon to receive into the darkness of our lives an Other who will dispossess us of the fictitious identity we hide behind, and substitute for it a share in his all-embracing light. If we understand what we are doing, insists Preston, we will realize that approaching the altar means asking for both strength and the testing of strength, finding uncertainty no less than consolation:

What we are saying “Amen” to is bread that has been broken (even if we sometimes disguise this by having individual hosts). The mystery of the Church is the mystery of Christ's brokenness, his broken body and outpoured blood, his brokenness and his sacrifice. In saying “Amen” to that we are saying “Yes” to the call to become ourselves his broken body. We are committing ourselves to being prepared to be held in the hands of Jesus and to be broken by him, snapped out of what we think we are.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 21. Again: “If worship, rightly understood, is the soul of the covenant, then it not only saves mankind but is also meant to draw the whole of reality into communion with God” (ibid., 27). The assertion that a life not straining toward heaven, filled by anticipation with its fragrance, is a life doomed to pointlessness, boredom, and disarray, is the main thesis of A. J. Conyers's *Eclipse of Heaven: The Loss of Transcendence and Its Effect on Modern Life* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁶ Preston, *God's Way to Be Man*, 85–86.

Later in the same discourse, Preston adds: “The time and place set apart for the holy as we have them now are there lest we fail to be unsettled and settle for the present order of things. The Eucharist is meant to unsettle us, and that in our whole lives.”¹⁴⁷ The same is true of all the “foreign” ritual and exalted artistry that belong to the liturgy as religious cult.¹⁴⁸ If the liturgy ever became fully domesticated, if it ever struck us as perfectly clear and distinct, it would ipso facto cease to be a provocation to the shattered, alienated mentality of fallen “enlightened” man that pretends to be sweet reasonableness.¹⁴⁹

Yet what we do and undergo at Mass is not a breaking only, as it is for the species of bread divided into many hosts, masticated in many mouths. For those who enter into the mystery of unity that the one bread symbolizes, the event promises a remaking of ourselves in the image of Christ, perfect Image of the Father. We are broken in order to be reshaped, re-created, *not* according to our own conceptions of appropriate form and suitable matter, but according to the Lord’s, which we cannot fathom and in relation to which we are as clay to the potter. In its alpha of adoration and omega of communion, Eucharistic worship is nothing less than a total, radical surrender of one’s being into the hands of Christ, the Word made flesh who inscribes his Word into our flesh. Making this surrender depends upon a humble faith that is able to bend the knee before material manifestations, sanctified sensibles.¹⁵⁰ Man’s highest dignity consists in worship, the giving of thanks and praise; his most dynamic activity consists in receiving divine gifts—or, as Dionysius and Aquinas say, *suffering* them.¹⁵¹ It is thus of paramount importance to Aquinas that baptism brings with it the mystery of a sacramental character by which the soul is imprinted or inscribed with an ineradicable conformity to Christ the High Priest.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴⁸ See Aquinas’s intriguing remarks along these lines at *ST* I–II, q. 102, a. 4.

¹⁴⁹ For a defense of ritual formalism against the Enlightenment rationalism widespread in contemporary liturgiology, see Nichols’s *Looking at the Liturgy* and other works mentioned in note 140 above. See also the wide-ranging presentation “Towards a New Liturgical Movement” by Dom Charbel Pazat de Lys, O.S.B., in Reid, *Looking Again at the Question of the Liturgy*, 98–114, esp. 105–11, on the “irruption of transcendence.”

¹⁵⁰ See *ST* III, qq. 60–1; Sikora, “Liturgy and the Spirit of Man,” *Theological Reflections*, 208–12; Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 197–216 et passim.

¹⁵¹ *ST* II–II, q. 45, a. 2; *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus* 2, lec. 4, §191.

¹⁵² Cf. *ST* III, q. 63. For discussion, see Conrad Pepler, O.P., *Sacramental Prayer* (London: Bloomsbury, 1959), 61–75; Charles Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (London: Sheed & Ward, 1954), 68–77. On pages 50–67, Journet explains why the Christian religion is, in essence, the divine cultus emanating from and returning to Christ. See also Gilles Emery, O.P., “Le

Concretely, this does not mean the Christian is empowered to offer the atoning sacrifice of Calvary (a conformity produced specifically by the sacrament of Order), but more simply and more fundamentally, that he is enabled to *receive* divine gifts and use them fruitfully.

This is the first, greatest, and eternal identity of the Christian: the one who receives divine gifts poured out from the Heart of Christ, and so bears lasting fruit. For this reason worship's highest dignity consists in its being at once a transparent communicator of divine initiative and a delicate modeling of human receptivity. "Classical liturgy," writes David Berger, "calls for and shapes such a person, devoted to contemplation, capable of receiving, humble, not Pelagian, who can above all look wholly away from himself and open himself to one who is greater and other."¹⁵³ It belongs to the inherent nature and purpose of sacred liturgy to represent in word, sign, and silence the *mystery* of Jesus Christ, true God and true man; to lead us contemplatively into that mystery; to nurture a more perfect union between us and the victim on the cross, risen in glory to confirm our hope of eternal life; to cleanse our psychic powers, especially the memory, from profane contamination, and to consecrate them in the truth, preconsciously as well as consciously; and in all these ways, to bring the Word of the Father to birth in virginal souls. All this requires something totally different from experimental or domesticated liturgy. The true "unsettling" of which Preston speaks is accomplished primarily by a confrontation with the purest ritual manifestation of both the divine otherness and the divine condescension, a paradox that is vividly communicated in traditional liturgical rites—in their prayers, gestures, trappings, and overall complexion.¹⁵⁴

sacerdoce spirituel des fidèles chez saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Thomiste* 99 (1999): 211–43.

¹⁵³ Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy*, 13. See Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, *Liturgy and Contemplation*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1960); Peter A. Kwasniewski, "Traditional Liturgy as a Liberation from Egoism," *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* 99.4 (January 1999): 19–28; idem, "The Symbolism of Silence and Emptiness," *The Latin Mass* 15.5 (Advent/Christmas 2006): 6–11; Nicholas Postgate, "A Rite Histrionic and Disoriented," *The Latin Mass* 16.1 (Winter 2007): 34–39.

¹⁵⁴ I recognize that good liturgy does not, in and of itself, set people in the right direction. My argument is not about a magical recipe for success, but rather about an instrument (viz., traditional liturgy) that we neglect at our peril, at the risk of deadening our sensitivity to the sacred and the transcendent. It is more a matter of assuring a congenial context for representing and assimilating the richness of the Christian mystery than a guarantee of internalizing that richness. Nothing advocated here would necessitate a *complex* liturgy, but only one whose ministers grasp the sublimity and awesomeness, the fearful wonder, of what they

The paradox is clear: Borella is right, and Preston is right, and Aquinas would agree with both. The liturgy does gather us together again, we who are worn out, torn to pieces, and lost. The fidelity and patience of God's love are truly in it, unifying and calming us. But because God's holiness is a consuming fire and his love seeks *everything*, a liturgical life lived to the full breaks apart the complacent ego fed on a diet of flattery and platitudes. We are not allowed to remain asleep, but, in different ways, are made awake to the reality of God, which is at once overwhelming and freeing. We are broken in order to be healed; we are evicted, stripped, unsettled, that we may be housed, clothed, and resettled on the land of promise, "transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13). The Mass is where our belonging to another and not to ourselves is ritually acted out and really enacted in this land of exile.¹⁵⁵ "You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19). The Eucharist is the sacrament of friendship, in which I gain myself only in communion with Jesus and, for his sake, with all the others who are, or are called to be, his brethren.

Walter Hoeres laments that many liturgists today

understand the Mass not so much as cult, as sacrifice, but much more as God's deed for man; just as if, contrary to all great theologians and all councils, we were concerned not so much with worshipping and glorifying the Almighty and accordingly with an atoning sacrifice, but above all with human well-being.¹⁵⁶

are about, and then act accordingly—which is quite compatible with simplicity and poverty. In a sense, the key criterion for good liturgy is a seriousness of purpose manifested in a spirit of adoration, earnest pleading, and signs of sacred dignity. See John F. Baldwin, S.J., "‘Lo, the Full Final Sacrifice’: On the Seriousness of Christian Liturgy," *Antiphon* 7 (2002): 10–17.

¹⁵⁵ This acting and enacting permeate all forms of prayer inasmuch as they are rooted in communion with Christ and seek to further it. Thus, Thomas maintains that the Mass—as he knew it in the Roman rite, though his analysis is sufficiently general to apply to any Eucharistic rite, Western or Eastern—exemplifies all aspects of prayer in their most perfect balance (see *In IV Sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 3; *ST* II–II, q. 83, a. 17). At the same time, Aquinas knew that liturgical worship and the sacramental system, through which we touch God in the darkness and see him through a veil, are a temporal dispensation destined to be superseded in the kingdom of heaven (see, e.g., *ST* I–II, q. 103, a. 3; *ST* III, q. 61, a. 4, ad 1 and q. 63, a. 5, obj. 3). Another Thomas forcefully teaches the same: Thomas à Kempis, *Imitatio Christi*, IV.11.

¹⁵⁶ Cited in Berger, *Aquinas and the Liturgy*, 50. An admirable summary of the tradition in this regard is Nicholas Gehr's 1902 classic *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass Dogmatically, Liturgically, and Ascetically Explained*, trans. anon. (St. Louis: Herder, 1949), which first treats the virtue of religion and its principal act, sacrifice (3–29) and proceeds to speak at length and in detail of the sacrificial death of Jesus and its mystical perpetuation through the Mass (30–194).

This essay has spoken much of the healing of the self, but in a way that rather supports than deflects from Hoeres's judgment. It has been the core of my argument that the only way for man to be healed, elevated, saved, is through the selfless worship and glorification of the Almighty; that the *only* path to wholeness, to the acquisition of a self worthy of the name, is the atoning sacrifice that makes of a sinner someone capable of being united to God in friendship. Writes David Ford: "The 'I' has God intrinsic to its identity through worship: the one before whom it worships is the main clue to its selfhood. This God is a refuge, righteous, a guide, faithful, steadfastly loving, gracious, good, blessed, and active in multifarious ways."¹⁵⁷ We are called to become like him in all those ways, to be *re-created* in him, "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). Without a mystagogical focus, liturgy will do little more than validate a community's collective conceit, when it does not drive away the congregation from sheer boredom.¹⁵⁸

Provided we give him the chance to speak aloud his prayer-born thoughts, St. Thomas in this area as in many others proves himself to be an inspiring teacher, a deft critic, and, perhaps unexpectedly, a mystic of Christ Crucified.¹⁵⁹ On Easter morning Mary Magdalene stooped to peer into the tomb. Aquinas sees a good reason for her behavior: she

give[s] us the example to look continually on the death of Christ with the eyes of our mind, for one glance is not enough for the one who loves, in whom the force of love multiplies the desire for seeking: "Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2).¹⁶⁰

In his person no less than in his pages, the Angelic Doctor brings into sharp relief the primacy of contemplation, receptivity, timeless truth, over activism, performance, timely relevance. He demonstrates that no activity

¹⁵⁷ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 128.

¹⁵⁸ What I mean by mystagogical focus is best illustrated by the awe-inspiring liturgical theology of the Eastern Christian tradition—one thinks of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Dionysius, Nicholas Cabasilas. The Western tradition has its counterparts: St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, and indeed, as we have seen, St. Thomas, whose gracefully articulated account of sacramental life in Christ is shot through with flashes of fire. All this certainly deserves much more attention than it currently receives.

¹⁵⁹ For further reflections along these lines, see Kwasniewski, "Golden Straw," 76–89; idem, "'Divine Drunkenness': The Secret Life of Thomistic Reason," *The Modern Schoolman* 82 (2004): 1–31, at 18–19.

¹⁶⁰ *Super Ioan.* 20, lec. 2, §2494.

is more perfect than waiting on God, listening to him, seeking his face; that no doing of mine is better than dying to my will, clinging to the cross; that nothing can be more pertinent to man here and now, nothing more liberating for the world, than yielding in silent faith to the hidden God, the righteous God. To the cynical children of Adam, all this is completely counterintuitive and totally unappealing, if not downright absurd.¹⁶¹ And yet, for all that, it is right; it *has* to look that way to fallen man (cf. 1 Cor 1:18–31), for his eye is bleary, his ear blocked, his desire narrow. “He who would search into the mysteries of Christ must go out, in a way, from himself and from fleshly ways,” states Thomas soberly.¹⁶² Jesus knew what was in the heart of man, and he came not only preaching, but healing infirmities; not only healing bodies, but divinizing souls. It was to make us his intimates that he instituted the sacraments of the new law, chief among them the sacrament of his own flesh-and-blood love, the feast of the New Covenant, which is simply, and incomprehensibly, the gift of himself.

The only response worthy of him is the total gift of myself, remade in the beauty of his grace. If I do this, I will no longer suffer estrangement from myself or from anything real, because I shall be one with him who is supremely real, the source of all identity and difference. I can only fall on my knees and say: *Domine, non sum dignus . . . sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea*. In one of his writings, Meister Eckhart, urging frequent communion, imagines a Christian raising a heartfelt objection, and then gives a response that transmits with perfect fidelity Aquinas’s mystical doctrine:

Now you might say: sir, I find that I am so empty and cold and worn out that I dare not go to our Lord.

And I shall say: then all the greater is your need to go to your God, for it is in him that you will be warmed and kindled, and in him you will be made holy, to him alone will you be joined and with him alone made one, for you will find that the sacrament possesses, as does nothing else, the grace by which your bodily strength will be united and

¹⁶¹ Recall Rotenstreich’s summary (in “On the Ecstatic Sources”) of the opposition to Christian theism and theosis evident in Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx—a list to which many modern philosophers could be added. This cannot be surprising if we take at face value the Apostle’s declaration in the First Letter to the Corinthians that “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing” (1:18), folly to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews (1:23), those who in their search for wisdom trust in reason alone and those who so cling to the letter that they grieve the spirit, demanding always more signs. This antagonism is permanently inscribed in the wood of the cross as the inherent presupposition of the peace Christ came to bring, a peace purchased at the cost of blood.

¹⁶² *Super Ioan.* 20, lec. 1, §2477. Cf. 1 Cor 2:14.

collected through the wonderful power of our Lord's bodily presence, so that all man's distracted thoughts and intentions are here united and gathered together, and what was dispersed and debased is here raised up again and its due order restored as it is offered to God. . . . For we shall be transformed into him and wholly united with him so that what is his becomes ours, and all that is ours becomes his—our heart and his, one heart; our body and his, one Body.¹⁶³

N-V

¹⁶³ From Meister Eckhart, *Rede der unterscheidung*, ch. 20; translation adapted from that of Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and Bernard McGinn, in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 271; and that of Oliver Davies, in *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 34.