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Thomas Instituut te Utrecht
(Tilburg University)

Director

Dr. H.J.M. Schoot

Administration Office

Thomas Instituut te Utrecht (Tilburg University)
Nieuwe Gracht 65
NL-3512 LG Utrecht
tel.+31-13-4663832
email: thomasinstituut@tilburguniversity.edu
<http://www.thomasinstituut.org>

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, in 2015, our Thomas Instituut celebrated its 25th anniversary. The Institute was established in 1990, succeeding the Working Group Thomas Aquinas (est. 1979), both of them founded by the late prof. dr. Ferdinand de Grijs. This yearbook exists since 1981, and so this year we present our 35th volume.

The anniversary of our Institute was celebrated in two important ways. First, we worked hard on translating Aquinas's academic sermons in Dutch. Mark-Robin Hoogland c.p., in cooperation with Harm Goris and the undersigned, presented this translation in December 2015. The Bishop of Rotterdam, mgr. dr. H. van den Hende, who is also member of the board of the Thomas Foundation, graciously received the first copy of this remarkable book: *Thomas van Aquino. De Academische Preken* (Almere: Parthenon, 2015, pp. 398).

Secondly, we organized yet another international conference on Aquinas, our fifth since the first which was organized in 1995. Some 60 scholars from all over the world gathered together in Utrecht, 16-19 December 2015, to discuss the relationship between acquired and infused moral virtues in Aquinas: *The Virtuous Life. Thomas Aquinas on the Theological Nature of Moral Virtues*. We had four days of intense study, celebrated the Eucharist together and with the auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese Utrecht, mgr. Th.C. Hoogenboom, enjoyed a conference dinner, and walked through downtown Utrecht under the guidance of an inspiring guide. An important number of the lectures and papers that were presented during this conference, will shortly be published under the title of the conference, by Harm Goris and the undersigned, as Volume XVII of our Publication Series with Peeters Publishers in Louvain.

Not all contributions to the conference could be included in the conference volume, for various reasons. We are quite thankful that we are able, in this yearbook, to present four of these studies, that do very much merit to be published and read by a larger public.

Rik van Nieuwenhove, lecturer in theology at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland, is at present working on a book on Contemplation in Aquinas. A first written fruit is presented here. Van Nieuwenhove considers the intellectual virtue of contemplation from the angle of acquired and infused virtues, nature and grace: “Aquinas on Contemplation: A Neglected Topic”.

Lambert Hendriks, rector of the Major Seminary of Rolduc, Diocese of Roermond, the Netherlands, considers the characteristics of *agere facilliter* in relation to the infused moral virtues. He poses the question “Can God make acting easy? A Reflection on the Characteristics of Acting *facilliter* in relation to infused moral virtues.”

Kevin Grove is at present fellow of the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study. Grove studies Aquinas on the evangelical counsels, proposing the relevance of Aquinas’s incarnational Christology, i.e. his treatment of the teaching of Christ’s life as well as his temptations, for their proper interpretation: “Desires, Counsels, and Christ: The Christology of Aquinas’ treatment of the Evangelical Counsels.”

Anton ten Klooster, Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, works at our Institute on a dissertation on Aquinas’s commentary on Matthew, especially the beatitudes. In this commentary the concept of heroic, infused virtue is especially interesting and important. Ten Klooster gives his first interpretation of this aspect of Aquinas’s commentary: “The Beatitudes as Acts of the Virtues in Aquinas’s *Lectura* on Matthew.”

The fifth and last contribution was sent in by Michael Estler, at present parish priest in St. Georg, Germany (Diocese

Rottenburg/Stuttgart), who recently defended his doctoral thesis on Aquinas's *Rigans montes* (Inaugural lectures, 1256). Estler considers the relevance of Aquinas's theology of divine mercy for the present pastoral concerns regarding divorced and remarried catholics: "Thomas von Aquin: Konsequenter Lehrer der Barmherzigkeit. Konkrete Aspekte einer diakonisch-missionarischen Pastoral."

Concluding this introduction, let me express once more our gratitude for all those who keep sustaining us in the work that we do, here at the Thomas Instituut in Utrecht. This last academic year has been remarkable and memorable in many respects; we hope that our work will keep being fruitful. And please, if you want us to consider any manuscripts that you would want us to consider publishing, do not hesitate to send them to us. We will welcome them.

July 26, 2016.

Henk J.M. Schoot,
Editor-in-Chief.

AQUINAS ON CONTEMPLATION: A NEGLECTED TOPIC¹

Rik van Nieuwenhove

Introduction

While important scholarship has considered in detail Aquinas's views on the beatific vision and his indebtedness to Islamic and early-Latin sources,² the topic of contemplation remains rather neglected.³ It is hard to account for this neglect. After all, Aquinas

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented in Utrecht during the Conference *On the Virtuous Life* organised by the Thomas Instituut in December 2015, and at the invitation of the Irish Dominican Province, on the occasion of the Aquinas Lecture (28 January, 2016) which celebrated the 800th anniversary of the Dominican Order. I am grateful to all present for their constructive comments, and especially to Professor Harm Goris, Utrecht, for his detailed feedback.

² For an outstanding recent contribution on Aquinas's Latin sources, with helpful references to literature, see Katja Krause, "Remodelling Ultimate Human Happiness: Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on the Sentences and his Sources" *Divus Thomas* 118 (2015), 15-56.

³ Thomas Hibbs, "Interpretation of Aquinas's Ethics Since Vatican II" from Stephen Pope (ed.), *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 412: "Given Thomas's emphasis upon the crucial role of contemplation in the good life, it is surprising how little attention has been devoted to the topic or to the role of intellectual virtues. I might list the topic of contemplation and intellectual virtue among those features of Aquinas's moral thought that remain neglected in the literature." Only Josef Pieper [*Happiness and Contemplation* (IN: St Augustine Press, 1996)], writing in the 1940s and '50s, considered it of sufficient importance to dedicate a number of short books to it. There is a helpful contribution by Mary Catherine Sommers "Contemplation and Action in Aristotle and Aquinas" in G. Emery and M. Levering (eds.), *Aristotle in Aquinas's Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 167-85. Apart from a rather brief (and somewhat abrasive) discussion of Aquinas's notion of contemplation

sees contemplation as the purpose and goal of our entire life (*STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4: *contemplatio est finis totius humanae vitae*) and as an inchoative sharing in the beatific vision (*STh* II-II, q.180, a. 4: *inchoatio beatitudinis*), which, therefore, shapes almost every aspect of his theological outlook, and his view on the human person and her ultimate fulfilment in particular.

The following questions remain largely unexplored in recent scholarship: What exactly is contemplation according to Aquinas? To what extent does Aquinas transform the Aristotelian notion of contemplation by importing elements from Christian and Neoplatonic authors (e.g. Augustine, Gregory the Great, Boethius, Ps-Dionysius, Richard of St Victor)? How do philosophical and theological contemplation relate to each other? Does Aquinas treat of “infused contemplation” (as some scholars such as Garrigou-Lagrange and Torrell claim, see note 26), or is this a later category, originating with the Carmelite mystics of the sixteenth century? What is the role of the cognitive gifts of the Holy Spirit in relation to contemplation, and how did Aquinas’s views on this matter change from his *Scriptum* to (and throughout) the *Summa Theologiae*? What is the role of charity in contemplation? How does Aquinas conceive of the relation between the active and the contemplative lives? Is he quietly abandoning the traditional notion

by Simon Tugwell in his book *Albert and Thomas. Selected Writings. Classics of Western Spirituality* (NY: Paulist Press, 1988), 279-86, a helpful discussion in Bernard McGinn’s *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*. Vol. IV of *The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (NY: Herder & Herder, 2005), 27-38 and a recent study by Edyta Imai (dealing with contemplation and emotions), entitled *Thomas Aquinas on Contemplation and the Human Animal* (Scholars’ Press, 2013) relatively little has been published in the English-speaking world on the subject in the last forty years. In the francophone world Jean-Pierre Torrell has engaged with the subject, and there is a probing article by Adriano Oliva in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 96 (2012): 585-662, entitled “La Contemplation des Philosophes selon Thomas d’Aquin.”

that the contemplative life is superior to the active life, and is he, in light of the Dominican charism, espousing a kind of mixed life?

In this contribution I will not be in a position to tackle all of these questions, but I would like to consider the nature of contemplation. I will argue that Aquinas operates with a broad and integrative notion of contemplation, which includes philosophical contemplation, theological contemplation, and the contemplation of the ordinary Christian. This implies that I will take issue with those scholars who put forward the view that Aquinas considers philosophical contemplation to be radically different in kind from “supernatural” theological contemplation (informed by charity).⁴

In part one of this contribution I will examine in some detail the nature of contemplation, and uncover its intellective dimension. In doing so, I will make a subsidiary claim, namely that a central aspect of Aquinas’s notion of contemplation, namely the characterisation of contemplation as *intuitus simplex*, is actually Neoplatonic rather than Aristotelian in inspiration. This claim is bound to strike some as provocative; after all, Aquinas’s indebtedness to Aristotle’s views on contemplation are well-documented.⁵ In a second part I will examine the relation between philosophical and theological contemplation, while in part three I will consider how the intuitive or simple nature of contemplation can accommodate the contemplation of the ordinary faithful.

⁴ Some scholars (e.g. Jordan Aumann in the Blackfriars Edition, Vol. 46, *Action and Contemplation*, 105-106) include the theological activity of the theologian with dead faith (as well as philosophical contemplation) in ‘acquired contemplation’, which they contrast with ‘acquired supernatural contemplation’ (such as that of theologian who enjoys charity) and ‘mystical contemplation.’

⁵ An illustration: a cursory glance at *STh* II-II, q. 182, a. 1 (where Aquinas argues for the superiority of the contemplative over the active life), for instance, reveals that all eight arguments are drawn from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, on which Aquinas had written an extensive commentary.

1. The intellectual nature of contemplation, and its Neoplatonic roots

In order to explain the intellectual nature of contemplation I need to discuss first the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*. Aquinas contrasts *ratio* and *intellectus* throughout his works. In *STh* I, q. 59, a. 1 *ad* 1, for instance, we read: “the intellect knows by simple intuition, while reason knows by a process of discursion from one thing to another.” Of course, as he points out in *STh* I, q. 79, a. 8 *intellectus* and *ratio* are not different faculties. However, the one faculty of human cognition has two distinct operations, a rational-discursive and an intellectual one:

Reason and intellect in humans cannot be distinct powers. We shall understand this clearly if we consider their respective actions. For to understand is simply to apprehend intelligible truth: and to reason is to advance from one thing understood to another, so as to know an intelligible truth. And therefore angels, who according to their nature, possess perfect knowledge of intelligible truth, have no need to advance from one thing to another; but they apprehend the truth simply and without mental discursion (*simpliciter et absque discursu veritatem rerum apprehendunt*), as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* VII). But we arrive at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore we are called rational. Reasoning, therefore, is compared to understanding, as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession; of which one belongs to the perfect, the other to the imperfect.⁶

⁶ The quotation continues: “And since movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest; hence it is that human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery (*secundum viam inquisitionis vel inventionis*), advances from certain things simply understood – namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment (*in via iudicii*) returns by analysis (*resolvendo*) to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found. Now it is clear that rest and movement are not to be referred to different powers, but to one and the same, even in natural things: since by the same nature a thing is moved towards a certain place.” From first

A number of points are worthy of note in this context: first, while human cognition is mainly rational-discursive, it is also intellective: discursive reasoning culminates in a moment of intellective understanding or insight. As Aquinas suggests elsewhere, human cognition is therefore dialectical (in the Hegelian, not in the Aristotelian sense) or, to use Aquinas's phrase: 'circular'⁷, i.e., our discursive reasoning processes cannot *begin* without assenting in an intellective manner to a number of principles or truths which we simply grasp without discursive reasoning (such as the principle of non-contradiction), and our reasoning process *culminates* and comes to rest in intellective understanding.⁸

Secondly, our rationality is a kind of shadow⁹ of the pure intellectivity of angels, which it mirrors, and in which it

principles we arrive at new truths which we had not known earlier, and this is called *via inquisitionis* or *inventionis*. It is also possible that an 'analytic' move occurs, when by way of resolution (*via iudicii*) we return to first principles. (See: *In De Div Nom* no. 711). For our purposes it is important to note that in both cases, whether by *via inquisitionis* or *via iudicii*, we begin and end with an intellective moment of understanding, or with something that is self-evident (which can also be an experimental datum).

⁷ *De Ver* q. 10, a. 8 ad 10: "the circularity is observed in this, that reason reaches conclusions from principles by way of discovery, and by way of judgement examines the conclusions which have been found, analysing them back to the principles."

⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 3 ad 2: "The discourse of reason always begins from an understanding and ends at an understanding; because we reason by proceeding from certain understood principles, and the discourse of reason is perfected when we come to understand what previously did not know."

⁹ The metaphor of shadow, which Aquinas repeatedly uses, is derived from Isaac Israeli: "Ratio oritur in umbra intelligentiae" (II *Sent* d. 3 q. 1, a. 6; see also: I *Sent* d. 3 q. 4, a. 1 ad 4; d. 25, q. 1, a. 1 ad 4; III *Sent* d. 14 q. 1, a. 3 sol. 2 ad 3; *Expos De Trin* q. 1, a. 1 ad 4; *De Ver* q. 5, a. 8; q. 8, a. 3 ad 3; and q. 24, a. 3.

participates,¹⁰ no matter how imperfectly. There are, of course, important differences between human and angelic cognition: Whereas angels have an immediate grasp of truth beyond temporal succession (*sine continuo et tempore*)¹¹ through the intermediary of innate intelligible species, we know in a ratiocinative manner through the intermediary of sensible species acquired through abstraction. The natural manner of knowing for an angelic nature is to know truth “without investigation or movement of reason” whereas we know mostly through inquiry and by moving from one thing to another.¹² Nonetheless, we too share in intellectivity:

The human soul, according to what is highest in it, attains to that which is proper to angelic nature, so that it knows some things at once and without investigation (*anima humana, quantum ad id quod in ipsa supremum est, aliquid attingit de eo quod proprium est angelicae naturae; scilicet ut aliquorum cognitionem habeat subito et sine inquisitione*) although it is lower than angels in this, that it can know the truth in these things only by receiving something from sense.¹³

Thirdly, the distinction between the rational and intellective nature of cognition, as well as the notion of contemplation in terms of *simplex intuitus*, appear more indebted to Neoplatonic sources

¹⁰ We are intellective *per participationem* (*STh* I, q. 108, a. 5). For the notion of participation, see Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

¹¹ *III Sent* d. 14 q. 1, a. 3 sol. 2.

¹² *De Ver* q. 16, a. 1.

¹³ *De Ver* q. 16, a. 1; cf. also *De Malo* q. 16, a. 5; *De Ver* q. 8, a. 15. Again, in *De Ver* q. 16, a. 1 Aquinas affirms that “human nature, insofar as it comes in contact with the angelic nature, must both in speculative and practical matters know truth without investigation. And this knowledge must be the principle of all the knowledge which follows, whether speculative or practical, since principles must be more stable and certain.” Two aspects deserve attention: first, Aquinas alludes to the Neoplatonic notion of participation in a hierarchy (“in contact with...”); secondly, *synderesis* also involves a kind of intuition or insight. This I will not develop in this contribution.

than to Aristotle.¹⁴ While Aquinas's philosophy of mind is undoubtedly deeply Aristotelian, his views on contemplation incorporate an important Neoplatonic element, and it is this Neoplatonic element which, perhaps surprisingly, allows for an inclusive and integrative notion of contemplation, which covers both Christian and philosophical contemplation, as I hope to show.

It is revealing to survey the most important texts which emphasise the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*, and the references Aquinas quotes: I *Sent* d. 3 q. 4, a. 1 *ad* 4 (with a reference to Ps-Dionysius); II *Sent* d. 9 q. 1, a. 8 *ad* 1 (Ps-Dionysius); *De Ver* q. 5, a. 1 *ad* 5 (with a reference to Boethius); q. 8, a. 15 (Ps-Dionysius); q. 15, a. 1 (Boethius and Ps-Dionysius); q. 24, a. 3 (no reference); *Expos De Trin* q. 2, a. 2 (no reference) and q. 6, art. 1 (Boethius); *STh* I, q. 58, a. 3 (no reference) and a. 4 (Ps.-Dionysius); I, q. 59, a.1 *ad* 1 (no reference); I, q. 79, a. 8 (Ps-Dionysius); *STh* I, q. 79, a. 8 *ad* 2 (Boethius); II-II, q. 8, a. 1 obj. 2 (Ps-Dionysius); I, q. 83, a. 4 (no reference); II-II, q. 9, a.1 *ad* 1 (no reference); II-II, q. 180, a. 3 (Ps-Dionysius). In *STh* II-II. q. 8, a. 1 obj. 2 (a text I will discuss below) the objection reveals the source from *The Divine Names*: "the mode of human nature is to know the truth, not simply (which is a sign of understanding) but discursively (which is a sign of

¹⁴ Aquinas, when distinguishing between *discernere*, *cogitare* and *intelligere*, associates the notion of *intelligere* as *simplex intuitus* with the writings of Augustine (cf. I *Sent* d. 3 q. 4, a.5) but scholars have been unable to find its source in Augustine. Augustine discusses *cogitatio* in *De Trin* XIV.7, quoted in *STh* II-II, q. 180, a.3 *ad* 1. Perhaps a remote inspiration here was the Pseudo-Augustinian *De Spiritu et Anima*, chs 1 and 23, which Aquinas quotes in *De Ver* q. 15, a. 1: "the sight of the soul by which it looks at the true." A more immediate source is Boethius's *De Consol Phil* Bk V (especially in relation to the contrast between the 'rest' of intellect, and the 'movement' of reason), and, of course, Pseudo-Dionysius, who is quoted (from *In De Div Nom* IV, 8) for instance, in *De Ver* q. 8, a. 15. In *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1 obj. 2 he also refers to *In De Div Nom* VII for the distinction between discursive and multiple reasoning and a knowledge in a simple manner (*simpliciter*) through *intellectus*.

reason), as Dionysius explains (*Div. Nom.* VII).” As this sample suggests: whenever Aquinas is contrasting *intellectus* and *ratio* he invariably appeals to Ps-Dionysius or Boethius, if he refers to his sources at all, and never to Aristotle.

This distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* is of immediate significance in relation to contemplation. While in general terms Aquinas describes contemplation as “the consideration of truth” he characterises it in more specific terms as “a simple gaze upon the truth” (*STh* II-II, q. 180, a.3 ad 1: *contemplatio pertinet ad ipsum simplicem intuitum veritatis*) and, as I mentioned, Aquinas always draws on Christian-Neoplatonic sources to describe this simple, intellectual or non-discursive grasp of things, not Aristotle.

This observation raises the question: why would Aquinas have drawn on Ps-Dionysius and Boethius to develop the intellectual notion of contemplation rather than on Aristotle? Aristotle was, after all, also familiar with the distinction between *noein* and *dianoesthai* (e.g., *De An.* 429a 23-24; 408b 18-31) and he repeatedly acknowledges the non-discursive nature of *nous*, which simply accepts certain principles without argument or deduction. An in-depth answer to this question would require an exhaustive comparison of Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s views on contemplation, *scientia*, *intellectus* and *sapientia* – an enterprise I cannot undertake within the confines of this paper. Still, we can hint at a possible answer.

Aristotle uses *nous* both in a general sense to include all operations of reason (e.g. 429a23), or to refer to a non-discursive apprehension of first principles, in which instance it is clearly distinct from *dianoia* (discursive reasoning). When he uses it in this more restricted sense, such as in *Posterior Analytics*, *nous* (*intellectus*) refers to grasping first principles, which are necessary to generate the reasoning process in the first place, and avoid an infinite regress. Specifically in the context of contemplation a characteristic (and well-known) passage from *Nicomachean Ethics* Bk VI.6 (1140b31-1141a8) may prove instructive in relation to the question we raised. Here Aristotle discusses the intellectual virtues of *nous*

(*intellectus*), *episteme* (*scientia*), and *sophia* (*sapientia*); the latter is the most excellent and characteristic virtue of the contemplative person. He explains that because *episteme* involves reason (*meta logou*) the insight into first principles is not a matter of *episteme* but of *nous*: “what is scientifically known is demonstrable” while first principles are not. Thus, the end-result of demonstrative reasoning is called *episteme* (*scientia*), and it always presupposes reasoning (*meta logou*): *scientia* is from conclusions, *intellectus* relates to principles. After having reiterated that “understanding and not reasoning deals with first principles,” he adds: “nor is wisdom [exclusively] about origins; for it is proper to the wise person to have a demonstration of some things” (*apodeixis*).¹⁵ He then goes on to describe wisdom as the combination of understanding and *episteme*: “the wise person must not only know what is derived from the origins of a science, but also grasp the truth about the origins. Therefore wisdom is understanding plus scientific knowledge.”

These passages indicate that not just *episteme*, but *sophia* as well (as the combination of intellective apprehension of principles and demonstrative reasoning) remains intrinsically linked with *apodeixis*, and is therefore non-simple or composite. Aristotle generally associates the outcome of the demonstrative reasoning process with *episteme*, rather than with *nous*: *nous* is primarily concerned with principles¹⁶ while *episteme/science* is the outcome of demonstrative reasoning.¹⁷ In short, it seems doubtful that, for Aristotle, *episteme* (which is essentially a grasp of demonstration, cf. *Post. An.* I.2) can be simple. The same applies, I suspect, to Aristotle’s *sophia* (as the combination of *nous* and *episteme*), which remains apodeictic. Aquinas, at least in his own theological

¹⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141a 1-3. I have made use of the translation by Terence Irwin, *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics* (IN: Indianapolis, 1985), 156-7.

¹⁶ *Post An.*, 100b5.

¹⁷ In Aquinas’s words –when commenting on Aristotle’s *De Anima* 428a 16-18, III, lect. 5 (no. 648): “simple understanding bears upon first principles, and science upon demonstrated conclusions.”

syntheses (as distinct from the Commentaries on Aristotle) explicitly allows for the possibility that the outcome of our reasoning process can be simple or non-composite, and he draws on Neoplatonic sources –especially the Pseudo-Dionysius– to make this point. For Aquinas, there are instances in which both science and wisdom can be simple or non-composite, as I will show. I will suggest later that Aquinas had good reasons (albeit theological ones) to identify contemplation with a simple understanding of truth rather than with Aristotelian *scientia* or *sapientia*, which remain composite: as I will try to show in part three, if contemplation is effectively characterised as a simple, non-discursive understanding of truth, Aquinas can incorporate the contemplation of the ordinary faithful within his overall notion of contemplation. With an apodeictic notion of contemplation, such as Aristotle’s, this is not possible.

For now, let’s examine in some more detail contemplation as simple intuition of truth and how it relates to other acts of human cognition. As indicated earlier, in contemplation we have to abandon discursive reasoning, and direct all the operations of the soul toward the simple contemplation of the intelligible truth (*omnes operationes animae reductuntur ad simplicem contemplationem veritatis intelligibilis*).¹⁸ The gaze of the soul must then be fixed in an intellective manner on the contemplation of the one simple truth (*cessante discursu, figatur eius intuitus in contemplatione unius simplicis veritatis*).¹⁹ *STh* II-II, q.180, a.3, then, considers the relation of this act of contemplation with other acts. More specifically, Aquinas asks “Whether there are various actions pertaining to the contemplative life?” He basically argues that there is only one basic act in contemplation, namely the grasping of truth, in which contemplation comes to fruition, although this one final act presupposes a number of other cognitive acts, such as inductive inquiry and ‘analytic’ judgement (i.e., *via inventionis* and *via iudicii*).²⁰ In his *Response* he first refers, again,

¹⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 180, a. 6 ad 2; *In De Div Nom* no. 906.

¹⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 180, a. 6 ad 2.

²⁰ See footnote 6 of this contribution.

to angelic intelligence, pointing out that despite the differences between angelic and human cognition, we too arrive at the one act of beholding the truth:

According to Dionysius (*Div. Nom.* VII) between humans and angel there is this difference, that an angel perceives the truth by simple apprehension, whereas we arrive at the perception of a simple truth by a process from multiplicity (*ex multis pertingit ad intuitum simplicis veritatis*). Accordingly, then, the contemplative life has one act wherein it is finally completed, namely the contemplation of truth, and from this act it derives its unity.

We share in a hierarchy, midpoint between angels and the rest of the animal kingdom. In the apex of our cognition, we share to some degree in an intellective understanding which is connatural to angels. Aquinas now argues for the unity of the contemplative life on the basis of the one act of contemplating truth, which he characterises in terms of *intuitus simplicis veritatis*, as he puts it in the first Reply.²¹ In summary, for Aquinas, contemplation is the terminus of human reasoning; it is the high-point of human understanding; it is this which mirrors the intellective operation of angels; and it is this climax of understanding that pertains especially to contemplation, and bestows unity on the contemplative life.

The significance of what Aquinas is saying here in relation to the unity of the contemplation should not be overlooked. For instance, prayer, reading, study, meditation are traditionally considered to be contemplative activities. Does this mean, then, that the contemplative life loses its unity, as it covers rather divergent activities? This does not appear to be Aquinas's view. The *Sed contra* puts it in a summary fashion: "Life signifies here the operation on which a man is chiefly intent. Wherefore if there are several operations of the contemplative life, there will be, not one but several contemplative lives." For Aquinas contemplation is that which gives ultimate meaning to human existence; on earth it is a foretaste of the vision of God. This ideal at the heart of his moral theology cannot be splintered into many ideals. Thus, while there are many acts that precede the crowning act of contemplation, "the

²¹ *Sth* II-II, q. 180, a. 3 ad 1, with reference to a text from Richard of Saint Victor.

contemplative life has one act wherein it is finally completed, namely the contemplation of truth, and from this act it derives its unity." This final act is an intellective apprehension or vision of truth.

This observation has implications for the topic I now hope to discuss. For Aquinas, truth is one. There is not one truth for philosophers, and another one for theologians. Hence, it makes no sense to treat philosophical and theological contemplation as specifically different. To do so, would undermine the very integrity of theology as a science which integrates the findings of other sciences, including philosophy. It is now time to substantiate this claim.

2. Theological and philosophical contemplation

In *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4 Aquinas raises the question "Whether the contemplative life consists in the mere contemplation of God, or also in the consideration of any truth whatsoever?" The full response runs as follows:

I answer that, as stated above (II-II, q. 180, a.2), a thing may belong to the contemplative life in two ways: principally, and secondarily, or dispositively. That which belongs principally to the contemplative life is the contemplation of the divine truth, because this contemplation is the end of the whole human life. Hence Augustine says (*De Trin.* I, 8) that "the contemplation of God is promised us as being the goal of all our actions and the everlasting perfection of our joys." This contemplation will be perfect in the life to come, when we shall see God face to face, wherefore it will make us perfectly happy: whereas now the contemplation of the divine truth is competent to us imperfectly, namely "through a glass" and "in a dark manner" (1 Cor. 13:12). Hence it bestows on us a certain inchoate beatitude, which begins now and will be continued in the life to come; wherefore the Philosopher (*Ethic.* x, 7) places our ultimate happiness in the contemplation of the supreme intelligible good.

Since, however, God's effects show us the way to the contemplation of God himself, according to Rm. 1:20, "The invisible things of God . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," it follows that the contemplation of the divine effects also belongs to the contemplative life, inasmuch we are guided thereby to the knowledge of God. Hence Augustine says (*De Vera Relig* xxix) that "in the study of creatures we must not exercise an empty and futile curiosity, but should make them the stepping-stone to things unperishable and everlasting."

Accordingly it is clear from what has been said (II-II, q. 180, aa. 2-3) that four things pertain, in a certain order, to the contemplative life; first, the moral virtues; secondly, other acts exclusive of contemplation; thirdly, contemplation of the divine effects; the fourth contemplative factor is the contemplation of the divine truth itself.²²

This response rewards close reading.²³ Aquinas had already explained how the moral life can assist us in obtaining serenity, which is a prerequisite for contemplation (art. 2). He had also already mentioned different cognitive acts which contemplation crowns (art.3). In the first paragraph of article 4, then, Aquinas refers to Christian contemplation, including the contemplation at the heart of the endeavours of the Christian theologian. Christian theology takes God as its immediate object of study (cf. *ST I*, q. 1, a. 7), and it does so from the perspective of assent to key Christian beliefs. The quotation from 1 Cor. 13:12 further confirms this. In the second paragraph Aquinas has in mind philosophical contemplation, as the reference to Romans 1:19-20 suggests. Indeed, the passage from Romans 1:19-20 is a stock phrase which Aquinas generally uses to argue for the legitimacy of philosophical pursuits. In *STh I*, q. 7, a. 6, for instance, he had already written, quoting the same passage from Romans: "sacred doctrine essentially treats of God viewed as the highest cause – not only so

²² Following the Leonine edition, which has: *quartum vero contemplativum*, instead of *quartum vero et completivum*.

²³ Compare Oliva, "La Contemplation...", 590-92.

far as he can be known through creatures just as philosophers knew him – *That which is known of God is manifest in them* (Rom 1:19) – but also so far as he is known to himself and revealed in others.” In both instances the reference to Rom 1:19-20 backs up the validity of a philosophical consideration of creation as a manifestation of God. The reference to Augustine’s *De Vera Rel* further reinforces the point that such a philosophical consideration of creation, although legitimate, should not lose this theocentric focus lest it become mere curiosity.

In the final paragraph Aquinas summarises his broad notion of the contemplative life, which he had been developing in previous articles: while contemplation involves several acts which precede the contemplation of divine truth, it is the intellective contemplation of truth which bestows on the contemplative life its unity. Thus, it comprises the moral virtues, as well as other acts, which include inquiry and judgement. It further involves the (philosophical) contemplation of the creation, but ultimately it comes to fruition in *contemplatio divinae veritatis*. Thus, while Aquinas admits there is a certain hierarchy or order (*ordine quodam*) to contemplation there is no hint that he sharply differentiates philosophical from theological contemplation, or considers them to be “specifically different.” As Simon Tugwell rightly pointed out, in the *STh* Aquinas is not interested in making a distinction between the intellectual life of the philosopher and that of Christians: “on the contrary, he is eager to show the continuity between the saint and the philosopher (...). The contemplative life is much more simply and straightforwardly the intellectual life, whoever is leading it. A Christian intellectual life must, of course, be motivated by charity, like any other Christian activity; but that does not mean that it becomes something quite different from anyone else’s intellectual life.”²⁴

The way we conceive of contemplation will have repercussions for how we interpret how Aquinas conceives of the relation between theology and philosophy, and vice versa.

²⁴ S. Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas*, 285.

Anyone who subscribes to the view that Christian and philosophical contemplation are different in kind, will find it difficult to account for the harmonious way in which Aquinas conceives of the relation between theology and philosophy. Or again, those scholars (such as Eugene Rogers, John Milbank, and others) who are of the view that Aquinas has no place for philosophical considerations in his theological outlook, will probably be wedded to the position that Christian and philosophical contemplation are inherently different acts – a position that Aquinas, in my reading, does not support. Aquinas’s general notion of contemplation – “the consideration of truth” – covers both Christian and philosophical contemplation, and nowhere in the *Summa* does Aquinas state that these are ‘specifically’ different, as some commentators have asserted.²⁵ Nor does Aquinas use the phrase “infused contemplation” anywhere in his writings, as some twentieth century scholars (e.g., from Garrigou-Lagrange to Jean-Pierre Torrell) appear to claim.²⁶ At the heart of contemplation is an intellective understanding that Aquinas considers to be the culmination of our reasoning processes, and this intellective

²⁵ For the claim of a “specific difference”, see for instance the comments by the Editors of the Blackfriars Edition, *Summa Theologiae* Volume 46 *Action and contemplation (2a2ae 179 - 182)* Latin Text, English Translation, Introduction, notes appendices & glossary by Jordan Aumann (NY: Blackfriars and McGraw-Hill, 1966), Appendix 3 “Contemplation”: “Acquired supernatural contemplation [which includes theological contemplation under the impetus of charity] issues from the infused virtues of faith and charity. (...) It is (...) specifically different from purely natural acquired recollection [which includes philosophical contemplation].” (106).

²⁶ For attributing “infused contemplation” to Aquinas, see for instance R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 2003), 221-35 and Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality...* 15, with a reference (unconvincing, in my view) to *In Ioannem* I, lect. 11, no. 211.

understanding extends to both philosophical and theological contemplation.²⁷

In a helpful contribution Rudi te Velde has reminded us that the widespread view of the relationship between reason and revelation as constituting two separate sources of knowledge about God is really “a distortion belonging to later times. Revelation, as distinguished from reason, pertains to the formality under which God is known as object of faith.”²⁸ Thus, *Sacra Doctrina* is not a science about a different reality; it is about the same reality as metaphysics but seen under a different formality, namely “the aspect of the intelligibility which things have when seen in the light of God’s revelation.”²⁹

Te Velde’s views will resound with all those who have read the first question of the *STh*. The very first article addresses the question “Whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required?” The answer is a resounding “Yes”: given our limitations (in terms of intelligence and time) it was necessary, for our

²⁷ A stronger case –yet still unconvincing, in my opinion– could be made that the speculative sciences, namely natural science, mathematics, and divine science involve different kinds of cognition (through their respective approaches: *rationabiliter*, *disciplinabiliter*, and *intellectualiter*) rather than that philosophy (“theology pursued by philosophers”) and theology (“theology taught in Sacred Doctrine”) involve a different *intellectus*. Cf. *Expos De Trin* q. 5 art. 4 and q. 6. All our philosophical pursuits can be described as an intellectual glimpse (*quasi intuitu*) which prepares us for Christian theology (cf. *ScG* IV 1.4). Metaphysics is especially intellective, while natural philosophy relies primarily on *ratio* or discursive reasoning. (*Expos De Trin* q. 6 a.1). This suggests that metaphysics, being especially intellective, is particularly apt at preparing us for the Christian contemplation of God.

²⁸ See Rudi A. te Velde, “Understanding the *Scientia* of Faith” in Fergus Kerr (ed.), *Contemplating Aquinas. On the Varieties of Interpretation* (IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 55-74. For this quotation, see 61

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 68

salvation, that we should be taught divine truths by revelation. But this does not imply that theology considers an entirely different area of study: “there is no reason why those things which may be learned from philosophical science, so far as they can be known by natural reason, may not also be taught us by another science so far as they fall within revelation.” (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 1 ad 2) Theology considers things “under the formality of being divinely revealed” (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 3) and is based on principles revealed by God (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 2). Metaphysics also treats of God as the highest cause but it does so from another angle (to use a spatial metaphor). To refer to a text quoted earlier: “Sacred doctrine essentially treats of God viewed as the highest cause –not only so far as he can be known through creatures just as philosophers know him –*That which is known of God is manifest in them* (Rom 1:19)– but also so far as he is known to himself alone and revealed to others.” (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 6) Note that Aquinas writes “*not only* so far as he can be known through creatures” –which implies that theological science also includes knowledge of God through creatures. In *STh* I, q. 1, a. 3 ad 2 he drives home the point:

Objects which are the subject-matter of different philosophical sciences can yet be treated of by this one single sacred science under one aspect precisely so far as they can be included in revelation. So that in this way, sacred doctrine bears, as it were, the stamp of divine science, which is one and simple, yet extends to everything.

In short, theology is an all-encompassing or architectonic discipline for Aquinas: it also includes knowledge which we usually associate with philosophy. It is this inclusivity of theology as the overarching science which sanctions the use of philosophical rationality within the domain of theology.³⁰ Of course, such a broad and inclusive approach does not weaken the claim that God remains the primary object of the science of theology (as is argued in *STh* I, q. 1, a. 7). Peter Lombard, for instance, had stated that other things (such as “things and signs”) are also included a topics of theology. Aquinas does not disagree but he makes the point that God remains the primary subject of theology, and things are only treated as

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 68.

subject of theology if “they have a reference to God” as their origin or end (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 7). This focus on God is essential for theology to remain a unified science.

While the philosophical and the theological paths are both legitimate ways of pursuing truth, Aquinas is, of course, in no doubt about the superiority of the latter, as the first article in the *Summa Theologiae* makes clear. Still, for Aquinas, philosophy and theology are not in competition with one another; nor is it necessary somehow to insulate theology from the intrusions of philosophy. His perspective is more serene than our modern one: for him, our philosophical pursuits point the way and open up a theological vista, just as nature craves grace. This is perhaps one of the reasons why by the end of the *Secunda Secundae* Aquinas operates with an integrative view of contemplation. In defining contemplation in broad terms as “nothing else than the consideration of truth”³¹ he can cover both theological and philosophical truth. If we fail to acknowledge Aquinas’s inclusive and integrative understanding of contemplation, the status of theology as the science which integrates the findings of other disciplines, while respecting their integrity, will become eroded.

There is little doubt that Aquinas considered philosophy and theology specifically different disciplines, as *STh* I, q. 1, a. 1 ad 2 states (*differt secundum genus*). But from this it does not follow that they imply specifically different acts of understanding. One may raise the legitimate question: is our act of understanding while reading the five ways (a preamble to faith) or when pondering philosophical arguments for the immortality of the soul (in *Disputed Questions On the Soul*) specifically different from the act of understanding a theological argument, such as that there must be two wills in Christ, and not one (cf. *STh* III, q. 18, a. 1)? Or is there any merit in the suggestion that a theologian on whom the virtue of charity and the gift of wisdom have been bestowed, understands the data of faith in a *specifically different* manner from one who does not enjoy these gifts? (This is not to deny that the theologian who has a living faith may understand them *better* or have a more intimate understanding than a theologian who has a dead faith; but

³¹ *STh* I-II, q. 35, a. 5 ad 3: “nihil aliud sit quam consideratio veri.”

that is a different claim). I am not aware that Aquinas suggests this to be the case, and I suspect he would resist such a claim, for it would splinter the contemplative life into a multiple acts: “if there are several operations of the contemplative life, there will be, not one but several contemplative lives.” Given the unity of contemplation as the goal of human life, this seems an unacceptable suggestion. I will now argue that this integrative notion of contemplation does not merely include theological and philosophical contemplation, but also the contemplation of the ordinary Christian.

3. Contemplation of the ordinary Christian

Earlier, I have attempted to show that Aquinas invariably refers to Neoplatonic sources to argue for the intellective nature of human cognition, which, as we have seen, is central to his notion of contemplation. I also suggested why he could not appeal to Aristotle, given the apodeictic character attached to Aristotelian contemplation. This raises a further question: why exactly does *intuitus simplex* occupy such a pivotal role in Aquinas’s understanding of contemplation? I will conclude this contribution by hinting at a number of possible (theological) reasons.

Emphasising the intellective, non-discursive nature of human cognition has a number of advantages. First, as indicated earlier, it makes clear that to the degree that we, too, are intellective, we share in a hierarchy which puts us within touching distance of angels, who are entirely intellective. This matters to Aquinas for whom hierarchy adds to the beauty of the created world.³²

More importantly, it further supports his view that there is continuity between our ways of knowing on earth, and the beatific vision. The intellective dimension of contemplation on earth prefigures our non-discursive ways of knowing God in the after-life. This kind of continuity mattered to Aquinas the theologian, for whom grace perfects nature but does not abolish it. Thus, the intellective nature of contemplation enables Aquinas to argue more

³² *ScG* III, 97.3.

cogently that contemplation on earth is an inchoative sharing in heavenly beatitude.³³

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, there is the issue of inclusivity of contemplation. For Aristotle, as mentioned earlier, the final acme of our reasoning processes appears to remain linked with demonstration and knowledge of causes. For Aquinas the culmination of contemplation is clearly intuitive or non-discursive.³⁴ In my view it is here that the notions of simplicity and *intuitus simplex* are of particular significance. Aquinas is willing to defend notions of *scientia*, *intellectus* and *sapientia* that are utterly non-composite and non-discursive, especially when he discusses the theoretical gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Given the fact that an exhaustive discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is beyond the confines of this paper, I will focus for present purposes exclusively on Aquinas's treatment of the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit in the latter parts of the *Summa Theologiae*. As is well-known, Aquinas altered his views on the gifts of the Holy Spirit throughout his career. It was only towards the end of his career that he appended the gifts to their relevant theological and cardinal virtues. The cognitive gifts of *intellectus* (II-II, q. 8) and *scientia* (II-II, q. 9) are appended to the theological

³³ See *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4: "inchoatio beatitudinis, quae hic incipit ut in futuro terminetur."

³⁴ See also this early text: III *Sent* d. 35 q. 1, a. 2 qc. 2: "The contemplative life consists in the activity that one assumes (*acceptat*) above all others. (...) Now, the inquiry of reason (*inquisitio rationis*) proceeds from a simple regard of the intellect (*a simplici intuitu intellectus progreditur*) – for one proceeds by starting out from principles which the intellect holds; so too the intellect attains certainty when the conclusions it draws can revert back to the principles through which the intellect attained certainty. This is why the contemplative life consists primarily in the operation of the intellect (*Et ideo vita contemplativa principaliter in operatione intellectus consistit*): the very word 'contemplation' suggests this as it denotes 'vision.' The contemplative person, however, uses rational inquiry (*inquisitione rationis*) so as to attain the vision of contemplation, which is his main goal."

virtue of faith, while *sapientia* (II-II, q. 45) is discussed in the context of charity, and *concilium* (II-II, q. 52) is associated with prudence.

Aquinas usually distinguishes between two key operations of the intellect, namely grasping the indivisible and judgement.³⁵ In order to clarify the distinction between the gifts of understanding and knowledge he refers to these two basic operations. The gift of knowledge involves judgement; the gift of understanding is an instance of the first operation (the apprehension of quiddity): it involves a certain perception of the truth,³⁶ “an excellence of cognition that penetrates into the heart of things” (*excellentia cognitionis penetrantis ad intima*).³⁷

The first objection of *STh* II-II, q. 8, a.1 is particularly relevant for our purposes: given the fact that humans know truth mainly discursively (*discursive*), which we associate with *ratio* rather than knowing simply (*simpliciter*), which we usually connect with *intellectus*, we should speak of ‘the gift of reason’ (*donum rationis*) rather than ‘the gift of understanding’ (*intellectus*). In his reply, Aquinas reiterates that our reasoning proceeds from, and ends in, understanding. We speak therefore of ‘the gift of understanding’ (rather than of ‘the gift of reason’) because the gift of understanding is in comparison with what we know supernaturally, what the natural light is in regards to the things we know intuitively and primordially. Thus, the gift of understanding assists us in immediately perceiving the truth (*perceptio veritatis*), and piercing with the mind (*mente penetrare*) into the principles of faith.³⁸

³⁵ *In Meta* Bk VI lect. 4 (no. 1232): “The intellect has two operations. One of these is called the understanding of indivisibles, and this is the operation by which the intellect forms simple concepts of things by understanding the whatness of each one of them. The other operation is that by which the intellect combines and separates.” See also *In Meta* IV (no. 605); *In De An* III, nos 760-62; *De Ver* q. 14, a. 1. I *Sent* d. 19, q. 5, a. 1 ad 7; *Expos De Trin* q. 5, a. 3.

³⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 5 ad 3.

³⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1 ad 3.

³⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 6 ad 2.

It should not strike us as particularly surprising that the gift of understanding is non-discursive. After all, the same can be said about the intellectual virtue of understanding. More significant is how Aquinas characterises the gifts of knowledge and wisdom. The first objection in article 1 of question 9 of the *Secunda Secundae* – the article raises the question whether *scientia* is a gift– cites *An. Post.* I, 2 (71 b18), where Aristotle writes that demonstration is a syllogism producing *scientia*. Whereas science is the result (*effectum*) of our natural reasoning efforts, the gift of knowledge surpasses our natural ability. In his reply, Aquinas, while acknowledging that human science is acquired by means of demonstration, argues that the gift of the Holy Spirit is a participated likeness in the divine way of knowing, which is non-discursive and simple:

In God there is a sure judgement of truth without any discursive process, by simple intuition (*absque omni discursu per simplicem intuitum*). Therefore, God's knowledge is not discursive, or ratiocinative, but absolute and simple (*non est discursiva vel ratiocinativa, sed absoluta et simplex*), to which that knowledge is likened which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, since it is a participated likeness thereof (*participata similitudo ipsius*).³⁹ In short, the non-discursive or intuitive nature of the gift of knowledge is one of the key features that distinguishes it from the intellectual virtue of *scientia*.

Following Augustine, Aquinas distinguishes between the gifts of knowledge and wisdom by linking the former with the cognition of things created, and the latter of things divine.⁴⁰ Whereas the gift of knowledge pertains to judgements of created things, the gifts of understanding and wisdom, then, are particularly

³⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 9, a. 1 ad 1.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIII,24. In *De Trin* XII, 21-25 Augustine had also associated wisdom with contemplation and knowledge with action, making an interesting distinction between intellective cognition of eternal things (wisdom), and rational cognition of temporal things (knowledge). For Aquinas's comments, see for instance his *In Col.* 2:3, no. 81.

relevant for our contemplation of divine truth.⁴¹ I have already outlined the non-discursive nature of the gift of *intellectus*. It is now time to examine the gift of *sapientia*.

The virtue of wisdom and the gift of wisdom both involve judgement according to divine norms. The gift of wisdom, however, is characterised by an intuitive judgement, which distinguishes it from the intellectual virtue of wisdom: "It belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgement about divine things after reason has made its inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them."⁴² Aquinas quotes Ps-Dionysius's remark from *The Divine Names* ch.2 about Hierotheus who "suffered divine things" through a connaturality or sympathy, which results from the unity with God that charity effects.⁴³ By way of illustration, Aquinas draws a well-known contrast with right judgement in matters of chastity after a reasoning process, and an instinctive or intuitive awareness how to judge when one has the habit of chastity. This theme of connaturality has been frequently commented upon in scholarship.⁴⁴ For our purposes it suffices to state that the gift of wisdom, as connatural, is intuitive and non-discursive.

Now, this non-discursive gift of wisdom is of central importance in the contemplation of God. Through charity we are intimately united with God. Through it and the gift of wisdom that flows from charity, we are directed towards contemplation of God (as well as proper action).⁴⁵

Aquinas's notion of contemplation incorporates central insights from Aristotle. It is, however, overall far more inclusive and less elitist. It can accommodate the contemplation of both the

⁴¹ *STh* II-II, q. 9, a. 4 ad 3.

⁴² *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

⁴³ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

⁴⁴ See for instance Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol. 2. Spiritual Master* (Washington DC, The Catholic University of America, 2003), 206-24.

⁴⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 45, a. 3 ad 1 and ad 3 (*ad sapientiam pertinet contemplatio divinorum, quae est visio principii*); II-II, q. 45, a. 5.

philosopher who pursues knowledge and wisdom through discursive reasoning, the theologian, and the illiterate *vetula* who grasps and subscribes to central articles of the Christian faith—even though she may not be able to reason about them, or refute arguments against them; if she enjoys the gifts of the Holy Spirit she just *sees* their truthfulness. In III *Sent* d. 36 q. 1, a. 3 ad 5 (no. 12831) Aquinas explicitly states that all Christians—most of whom do not have the philosophical or theological skills to engage in reasoning and demonstrative argumentation about what they believe—are called to participate in contemplation: “Although all those who are in the active life do not attain to a perfect state of contemplation, every Christian who is in a state of salvation must participate somehow in contemplation, for the commandment is given to all: ‘Be still, and see that I am God.’” (Ps. 45:11). As the quotation suggests, Aquinas interprets the third commandment (keeping the Sabbath) in terms of a universal call to contemplation.⁴⁶ Similarly, in *Summa contra Gentiles* I.6 he rejoices in the fact that “inspiration [is] given to human minds, so that simple and untutored persons, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, come to possess instantaneously the highest wisdom...” (*ut idiotae et simplices, dono spiritus sancti repleti, summam sapientiam et facundiam in instanti consequerentur*). It further explains why Aquinas considered the Virgin Mary as excelling in contemplation—a view that Aristotle undoubtedly would have found rather puzzling.⁴⁷

Contemplation is the goal of our entire life (*finis totius vitae*). It is a foretaste of heavenly beatitude.⁴⁸ All Christians are called to contemplation but not all Christians have the intellectual skills to

⁴⁶ III *Sent*, d. 36 q. 1, a. 3 ad 5 *Ad quintum dicendum, quod quamvis ad perfectum statum contemplationis non perveniat omnis qui in vita activa est; tamen omnis Christianus qui in statu salutis est, oportet quod aliquid de contemplatione participet, cum praeceptum sit omnibus: vacate, et videte quoniam ego sum Deus, Psal. 45, 2; ad quod etiam est tertium praeceptum legis.*

⁴⁷ *Sermon Puer Iesus*. See also *STh* III, q. 27, a. 5 ad 3.

⁴⁸ See *STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 5 c. and *STh* II-II, q. 180, a. 4: “inchoatio beatitudinis.”

argue in a reasoned manner about their faith. Hence, Aquinas must make allowances for a kind of contemplative act which is non-discursive and which is available to all Christians through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This explains why the non-discursive notion of intuitive understanding he encountered in the writings of his Neoplatonic sources would have appealed to him. The broad understanding of contemplation as *intuitus simplex* can incorporate the acts of contemplation of the Greek sage or the academic theologian, as well as those of the *vetula* who enjoys the benefit of her Christian faith, enabling her to know truths which the philosopher comes to know, if at all, with great difficulty and after laborious reasoning processes.⁴⁹

[Rik Van Nieuwenhove, Department of Theology, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland; Rik.VanNieuwenhove@mic.ul.ie]

⁴⁹ See *Sermo Attendite a falsis*, pars 2: “Plus scit modo una vetula de his quae ad fidem pertinent, quam quondam omnes philosophi.” See also *Sermo Beati qui habitant*, where Aquinas contrasts the labours of the philosopher with the short-cut offered by our Lord: “Veritatem cognoscere nisi sunt per exercitium studii. Sed Deus brevioram viam docet, scilicet per cordis mundiciam dicens: beati mundo corde et cetera.”

CAN GOD MAKE ACTING EASY? A REFLECTION ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTING *FACILITER* IN RELATION TO INFUSED MORAL VIRTUES

Lambert Hendriks

In recent times, unfortunately, martyrdom is brought again to the centre of our attention because of numerous massacres. Actuality can remind us sometimes of the old Christian persecutions, where the martyrs gloriously represented the courageous choice to remain faithful and to abstain even in extreme situations from evil actions. When we read the ancient acts of the trials of these martyrs and the description of their execution, we can be struck by the easiness and the joy that accompanies their martyrdom. This may bring us to the question: is becoming a martyr easy? Are the acts of the martyrs right when they describe a joyful and easy way towards death? We might be tempted to attribute such a description to a writer's pious memory of great saints. But still, we may consider the act of undergoing martyrdom as the ultimate example of virtuous acting, as Christian tradition holds¹. In this context, martyrdom becomes an example of considering the effects of virtue in relation to God's aid in human acting. Is God's grace, undoubtedly present in a courageous martyr, able to provide easy acting by a human person? Among the characteristics of virtue, an essential aspect is that it makes the human action immediate, joyful and also easy². However, when we reflect on these well-known characteristics of virtue in relation to martyrdom, it immediately becomes clear that some problems emerge.

Particularly the example of martyrdom shows us that doing good is about much more than mere human standards. After all, voluntarily

¹ This is mentioned often in John Paul II's encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (e.g. nrs. 90-94). See also: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2473.

² These three characteristics are discussed e.g. in: R. Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, Notre Dame 2009², 47. They are derived from Thomas's description of the virtue's habitus in: *De virt* q. 1, a. 1.

undergoing death is not at all prudent according to inner-worldly values. It is only in the light of God and by His grace that martyrdom can become virtuous and exemplary³. For Thomas Aquinas, the fact that good acting always includes the perspective of the ultimate end and the necessity of God's grace, brings him to consider virtue not only in the Aristotelian sense of acquiring a good habit, but also – and perhaps foremost – in the Augustinian sense of an infused good habit of the soul as a grace: this is the problem of the infused moral virtues, as we are discussing it in this volume.

While acquiring a virtue, the habit brings about immediateness, joy and easiness in the virtuous act. Since this acquiring by repetitive acts is not typical in the case of infused virtue, the specific consequence of repetitive exercise, viz. easiness in acting, is not present in the same way as it is in acquired virtue. Martyrdom is a case in point. It is not difficult to imagine how the infused virtues, by God's grace, can cause an immediate and maybe even joyful human act, as the great stories of the martyrs show. But the example of martyrdom makes us wonder if this grace brings about also the characteristic of easy acting. No one, after all, would blame martyrs for finding it difficult to give up their own life, or for experiencing their heroic deed as something difficult. Indeed, this may show that the fact that virtuous acting is done 'faciliter' cannot in the same way be applied in the case of infused virtues. Such an infused virtue is not the result of a repetitive exercise of a specific action, making it easy to perform the latter⁴. But there is more to it. Specifically the martyrs do show us some kind of easiness in their martyrdom, which takes place on a different level. This is what this article will be about.

In what follows I would like to address this problem of acting 'faciliter' through infused moral virtues in three steps. Firstly, I will describe the convergence of the two definitions of virtue in

³ Lee H. Yearley makes this point in "The Nature-Grace Question in the Context of Fortitude", in: *The Thomist* 35(1971), 577-578.

⁴ This becomes even clearer in relation to actions that are contrary to prior habits: *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3 ad 2.

Aquinas: the Aristotelian and the Augustinian one. Secondly, I will elaborate on the necessity of infused moral virtues and finally, with help of the prior elements, I will try to answer if God does indeed make virtuous acting easy.

1. The convergence of the two definitions of virtue in Aquinas

Looking at Aquinas's definition of virtue, it seems quite logical that this problem regarding the easy virtuous acting emerges. Aquinas has two different approaches when it comes to virtue: the Aristotelian one, where he defines virtue as an operative good habit⁵ and the definition that is composed with texts of Augustine, who defines virtue as a "good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us"⁶. Particularly this last remark brings Aquinas to an explicit distinction between infused and acquired virtues. Comparing the two definitions, the first one relies heavily on the fact that the acting person has a good disposition, acquired by performing repetitively good acts, whereas the second definition attributes the possession of the virtue to God alone⁷. Evidently, the disposition to act good resulting from repeated free and reasonable action, causes also an easiness in acting. It has become a stable habit of the soul, caused by the acting person herself⁸. However, if virtues are possessed by infusion, they aren't preceded by actions that gently form the virtuous disposition in the person. This means that there is no ground on which the virtuous acts, based on infused moral virtues, would be performed easily.

⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 3: "Unde virtus humana, quae est habitus operativus, est bonus habitus, et boni operativus."

⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 4.

⁷ Cf. *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 4; I-II, q. 63 and *De virt* q. 1, aa. 1-2. See also: L. Elders, *De ethiek van Thomas van Aquino*, Oegstgeest 2000, 161-163.

⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 2: "Virtus igitur hominis ordinata ad bonum quod modificatur secundum regulam rationis humanae, potest ex actibus humanis causari, in quantum huiusmodi actus procedunt a ratione, sub cuius potestate et regula tale bonum consistit."

Although Aquinas is explicit about the existence of both acquired and infused moral virtues (*STh* I-II, 55,4), still this difference has often been neglected or not always been accepted by everyone⁹. The reason for this hesitant approach is plausible, since the concept of “virtue” is in its common understanding usually related to the Aristotelian idea of repeated human action. In other words, if there exists a form of divine grace that is infused in persons in order to act good, why should this grace be related to virtue?¹⁰ The answer to this question appears only in the situation where one abstains from a separation between the two types of virtue, just as Thomas Aquinas treats the two definitions harmoniously together. Both the Aristotelian and the Augustinian perspective shouldn't be separated¹¹.

There is a convergence between both definitions of virtue, which allows for both approaches to be genuine human action, as well as to be the result of grace. Nowadays it is obvious that both grace and nature should not be considered as separated levels, and it is in calling the infused principle in relation to human action truly a “virtue”, that this unity becomes conceivable. In other words, precisely the fact that also the infused moral virtues are just as much authentic elements in the human act of an acting person itself, makes them genuine virtues.

It is also because of the convergence between the two approaches of virtue, that infused moral virtues do not imply that the acting

⁹ See also: S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Edinburgh 1995, 180; A. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics. Virtues and Gifts*, New York 2012, 66; R. Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, 102.

¹⁰ See also: A. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 18, where he refers to the opinion of J. Porter, and 64.

¹¹ As David Decosimo puts it: “Thomas ... structures the corpus to show that Augustine's definition clearly fits the Aristotelian conception of virtue”, in: *Ethics as a Work of Charity. Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue*, California 2014, 118. See also: G. Bullet, *Virtus morales infuses et virtus morales acquies selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Fribourg 1958, 104.

person loses her autonomy or her responsibility for her own acts¹². The human act remains fully of the acting person herself. It is for this reason, that often the relationship is stressed between the human acts from infused moral virtues and those that stem from one's own natural disposition, or from acquired virtues. Aquinas clarifies that the part of (infused) virtue's definition, where it says that "God works in us, without us", does not mean that God takes over our actions. "God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part"¹³. Thomas clearly sees the action of God and the human action together: not only in the aforementioned sense that we have to consent to God's working in us, but also in the sense that our actions cause the right disposition, so that God is able to give the infused virtues¹⁴.

Looking at the way in which both acquired and infused virtues have their role in human action, it seems that infused virtue causes the disposition, the power for good conduct, whereas acquired virtue causes the action to be easy. For Gabriel Bullet these are two sorts of 'facilities': one essential, from the infused virtues, and one accidental, from the acquired virtues¹⁵, both present in the virtuous acting person. As he points out, these two types of facility remind of Aquinas's own distinction regarding the two ways of making action easy: one by prior exercise and one by a strong adherence to the object of virtue¹⁶.

¹² See also: D. Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity*, 134.

¹³ *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 4 ad 6: "Quae vero per nos aguntur, Deus in nobis causat non sine nobis agentibus".

¹⁴ *De virt* q. 1, a. 11: "Actus autem nostri comparantur ad augmentum caritatis et virtutum infusarum, ut disponentes, sicut ad caritatem a principio obtinendam; homo enim faciens quod in se est, praeparat se, ut a Deo recipiat caritatem".

¹⁵ G. Bullet, *Vertus morales infuses*, 115.

¹⁶ *In IV Sent* d. 14, q. 2, a. 2 ad 5: "facilitas operandi opera virtutum potest esse ex duobus; scilicet ex consuetudine praecedente; et hanc facilitatem non tribuit virtus infusa statim in sui principio: et iterum ex forti inhaesione ad objectum virtutis; et hanc est invenire in virtute infusa statim in sui principio".

Bullet's way of describing the role of both types of virtues already hints to a solution for our problem regarding the acting 'facilitator'. That is to say that this characteristic is present not only in acquired virtues, but also in infused virtues, albeit in an unexpected way. In all the characteristics of virtue, grace and nature are working together. It is only plausible that this goes also for infusion and acquiring of virtues. In the complexity of a human act, both have their genuine place. In a classical way, this convergence is described with the words 'gratia supponit naturam', stressing that grace does not destroy the natural disposition. Particularly where it comes to human action, always the free human act should be preserved. In his article on nature and grace, Lee Yearley convincingly states that one should not overstress this aspect of nature being presupposed, in the sense that God is not bound to work in any particular way. However, in any normal situation God works in a continuity with natural human action, without radical interventions¹⁷. This continuity appears, hence, in a human act that is accomplished with all the normal human capacities, yet penetrated by God's grace.

Turning back to the question how infused moral virtues can make acting easy in the context of nature and grace, we have seen how there is a mutual dependency, or maybe better 'expectancy' of human nature and God's grace. This relationship is important in the discussion, although it has to be said that Aquinas himself does not say anything specific on the relationship between infused and acquired moral virtues¹⁸. In the whole of Aquinas's virtue ethics, however, the unity of human action and the unity of the acting person bestowed with grace, is always underlined, and from this follows for our initial question also the answer of an organic unity

¹⁷ L. Yearley, "The Nature-Grace Question", 574-575.

¹⁸ See also: M. Sherwin, "Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: a Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of Infused Cardinal Virtues", in: *The Thomist*, 73(2009), 49.

between acquired and infused virtues¹⁹. As concepts they can be separated, but in reality they coexist together.

Within this unity, both grace and nature act according to their specific essence. To say that they act in harmony is not quite sufficient, as there is a real penetration of human action by the supernatural grace. This is shown by Pinckaers in a clear way, when he explains how human action becomes able to have supernatural happiness as its end. It is the one human act, that gains a new perspective and becomes able to be an expression of Christian morality²⁰.

2. The necessity of infused moral virtues

One of the problems in identifying the role of the infused moral virtues becomes clear when one analyses the acting of persons that don't have a corresponding acquired habitus in any way. Classical examples in this respect are young children who are baptised and thus receive grace, but also people with a vicious contrary habit who come to conversion and repent. Although it is clear that they do receive infused virtues²¹, it is clear at the same time that the corresponding act can never be easy to them, at least not in an evident way. The answer to this problem can be found in the fact that the infused moral virtues provide the disposition to act, and not the actual acting itself. This is what becomes even clearer when Aquinas reflects on infused virtue in young children and those

¹⁹ See also: R. Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, 109; L. Melina, *The Epiphany of Love. Toward a Theological Understanding of Christian Action*, Cambridge 2010, 38. In this context also the connection of the virtues has its place.

²⁰ See: S. Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 180: "These qualities penetrate the interior of the natural virtues, enabling them to act in view of supernatural happiness [...] Thus the infused moral virtues contribute to trace specific lines of Christian morality even at the level of the natural virtues".

²¹ See M. Sherwin, "Infused Virtue", 34; G. Bullet, *Vertus morales*, 45, 50 and 136-137. See also the declaration of the Council of Vienna (1312) on the the effect of baptism: *DH* 903.

deprived of the use of reason²². Virtues, after all, are not thus related to actual acting, that only persons who actualise this potentiality can be said to have virtues: virtues are habits of the soul, as is elaborated by David Decosimo in a clear way²³.

In the previous paragraphs it has become clear that the infusion of virtues can coexist with the natural way of acquiring virtues, without posing a threat to the freedom of the acting person, nor to the logic of acquisition by repetitive good action. A further step in the line of reasoning should be, if the infusion of virtues is not only possible, but even necessary beyond the natural acquiring of virtues. Previously it turned out that infused moral virtues are a divine, yet also normal phenomenon in human action: they direct the human act to God. But if it is true that they change the perspective of action towards God and the ultimate end, then they can even be recognised as necessary elements. Acting in view of the ultimate end, after all, is the characteristic of truly good action: an end that the infused virtues have in view while choosing the means to that end. In fact, that the grace of this infusion is necessary to achieve our supernatural destination, is pointed out by Aquinas quite at the beginning of the *Prima Secundae*²⁴.

Where God becomes a factor in human acting, He also provides a new perspective and a new end to every human act. This is precisely what happens when infused moral virtues are given.

²² *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 14 ad 3: “Sed prudentia gratuita causatur ex infusione divina. Unde in pueris baptizatis nondum habentibus usum rationis est prudentia secundum habitum, sed non secundum actum, sicut et in amentibus”. See also: A. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 17 and 72, as well as: D. Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity*, 79.

²³ See: D. Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity*, 72-77 and 84. Here, Decosimo points out why virtue does not always immediately imply actual acting.

²⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 5, a. 5: “Unde nec homo, nec aliqua creatura, potest consequi beatitudinem ultimam per sua naturalia”. See also: J. Wippel, “Natur und Gnade”, in: A. Speer (Hrsg.), *Thomas von Aquin: Die Summa theologiae. Werkinterpretationen*, Berlin 2004, 250-251 and 256.

However, the notion, that grace adds to human action the possibility of a new supernatural end, which motivates that very action, is not the only thing that there is to it. In his book on the Second-Person Perspective, Andrew Pinsent reacts to Sherwin's claim that the infused moral virtues provide the possibility to act rightly, with regard to the means to the ultimate end, which is God²⁵. If I understand Pinsent correctly, he criticises the fact that the infused moral virtues would then be an unnecessary addition to the theory of action, since the direction towards God is already sufficiently given in the theological virtues. However, in Sherwin's position, the infused moral virtues should be considered beyond the mere function of providing a supernatural end to the human act, which is proper to the theological virtues. The infused moral virtues, while having their proper ends, have to do with the means to that ultimate end. With this remark, the contrast between the positions of Sherwin and Pinsent is resolved: the infused moral virtues don't copy the theological virtue's supernatural end, but provide the means to that end.

The virtues, being habits of the soul and present in the core of every human act, provide a connatural inclination towards the virtuous good²⁶. This is also the case with the infused moral virtues. Just as the moral virtues are directed to particular goods, also the infused moral virtues provide for a new connaturality with particular goods that are eventually related to the ultimate end. In normal virtuous acting it is reason that establishes the concrete mean to an end by a virtuous inclination²⁷; in the case of infused moral virtues this mean is still established by reason, but now by reason "enlightened by faith"²⁸. In more recent discussions, e.g.

²⁵ See: A. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 68.

²⁶ See: *STh* I, q. 1, a. 6 ad 3; I-II, q. 58, a. 1 and 4.

²⁷ See also: R. te Velde, "De deugd als eenheid van natuur en rede. Over de *habitus*-leer van Thomas", in: R. te Velde (red.), *De deugden van de mens. Thomas van Aquino: De virtutibus in communi*, Baarn 1995, e.g. 90.

²⁸ See: J. Aumann, "Mystical Experience, the Infused Virtues and the Gifts", in: *Angelicum* 58(1981), 38 and 45; G. Bullet, *Virtus morales infuses*, 106.

between McKay and Osborn, regarding the different possible forms of prudence (perfect and imperfect acquired prudence and infused prudence) it becomes clear that this role of reason is difficult to determine, particularly where it comes to the place of grace in it²⁹.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise the role of grace within the whole of reasonable virtuous acting, because it is the only way in which the human acts can become proportionate to their perfect end, which transcends a person's natural capabilities³⁰. Many have pointed to this paradox of human agency, that a person desires by his natural powers something that only God can give. It is by recognising in the infused virtues a new proportionality that this paradox is overcome³¹. This new proportion means that the good that the acting person ultimately strives for, is not only the good that God provides, but that it has also become connatural to her. It is through the infused moral virtues that this connaturality and proportion can be experienced on the level of concrete human acts.

3. Does God make acting easy by infused moral virtues?

When we want to answer the question if God makes virtuous acting easy by means of the infused moral virtues, then with the aforementioned elements already a preliminary answer can be given: the acting person becomes able to act in a good way, because she can act for the perfect end – this is what Bullet called 'faciliter' as possible (see paragraph 1). Acting easy, after all, is based on a proportion that exists between the end of my actions and my own capabilities. So if God provides the means to act for the perfect end, then acting 'faciliter' has become a real characteristic. Through the

²⁹ See: A. McKay, "Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue", in: *The Thomist* 69(2005), 535-555 and T. Osborne jr., "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues", in: *The Thomist* 71(2007), 39-64.

³⁰ See: J. Wippel, "Natur und Gnade", 246-270; L. Yearley, "The Nature-Grace Question", 564-565.

³¹ E.g. R. Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, 105; M. Sherwin, "Infused Virtue", 39; L. Melina, *The Epiphany of Love*, 78; G. Bullet, *Virtus morales infuses*, 121.

infused virtues, a person's capabilities become in harmony with the end she should strive for and also the imperfection of nature's own limits can be overcome³². For Aquinas, the fact that God provides this proportion in human acts, is quite obvious. With a beautiful phrase, he states: "It is not fitting that God should provide less for those whom he loves with a view to their obtaining a supernatural good than for creatures whom he loves with a view to their obtaining a natural good"³³.

This is the consequence of Thomas's vast affirmation that "acts conducing to an end must be proportionate to that end" and that, consequently, grace is needed to perform meritorious acts, proportionate to everlasting life³⁴. This word "meritorious" that Aquinas adds, is important. When authors describe the reason for the existence of infused moral virtues, they often point to the fact that only because of these, a person can act meritoriously in view of the ultimate end³⁵. Because of this characteristic, Sherwin and McKay point to Aquinas's affirmation that infused virtues only have to do with acts that regard the acting person's salvation (*STh* II-II, 47,14 ad 3)³⁶. This proportion to the ultimate end is the first

³² See also: R. te Velde, "De deugd als eenheid van natuur en rede", 130.

³³ *STh* I-II, q. 110, a. 2: "non est conveniens quod Deus minus provideat his quos diligit ad supernaturale bonum habendum, quam creaturis quas diligit ad bonum naturale habendum". See also: *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3: "Caritate simul infunduntur omnes virtutes morales. Cuius ratio est quia Deus non minus perfecte operatur in operibus gratiae, quam in operibus naturae".

³⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 109, a. 5: "Et ideo homo per sua naturalia non potest producere opera meritoria proportionata vitae aeternae, sed ad hoc exigitur altior virtus, quae est virtus gratiae. Et ideo sine gratia homo non potest mereri vitam aeternam". See also: G. Bullet, *Virtus morales infuses*, 101.

³⁵ We can find this e.g. in: G. Bullet, *Virtus morales infuses*, 45; J. Wippel, "Natur und Gnade", 251; J. Aumann, "Mystical Experience", 37.

³⁶ M. Sherwin, "Infused Virtue", 42 and A. McKay, "Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue", 554.

argument to recognise a form of easiness in acting through infused moral virtues. It is not the ‘faciliter’ in the characterological sense, but the easiness is given through the adherence to the end. This adherence provides a ‘drive’ towards the end, present in the human act.

There is also a second and perhaps even stronger argument to recognise a certain easiness in acting through the infusion of virtues. Until now, we have described infused moral virtues primarily by means of the virtuous and gratuitous ordination towards the ultimate end in human action. We have seen some aspects that could be regarded as referring to a certain easiness in acting. For the second argument, we should recall one of the key features in Aquinas’s theory of action and this has to do with the way in which difficulties can be overcome in acting. For Thomas, the fact that we need God’s grace to achieve the ultimate end of our actions or that we need God to act good at all, does not degrade our own acting. What is more, he expressly states that “what we do by means of our friends, is done, in a sense, by ourselves”³⁷. This theme, of course, fits beautifully within the reflection of “charity” as a friendship with God (*STh* II-II, 23,1).

Through this intrinsic relationship with God, the acting person who receives God’s infused virtues, is now able to act – not merely by his own power – but by the aid of God, to whom acting obviously cannot but be easy. In this argument it is important that for Aquinas also seeking the help of others is a normal feature of one’s own acting; this is the second-person perspective that Pinsent describes as “a way of conceiving how virtue ethics can be reconciled with divine direction without being reduced to an ethics of divine command”³⁸.

In this way, the previous description of Bullet of the two forms of ‘facility’, is placed in a new light and applied to virtue as

³⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 5, a. 5 ad 1. See also: A. Pinsent, “The Second-Person Perspective”, 73 and L. Melina, *The Epiphany of Love*, 21 and 153.

³⁸ A. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 73. See also: *op.cit.*, 18 and A. McKay, “Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue”, 554.

such. We have seen that not only acquiescence gives a “facilitas operandi”, but the strong adherence to the object of virtue does this as well³⁹. In infused moral virtues the latter is present as a principle of action, given by God, whose help is necessary to the acting person. It makes sense that technically, infused virtue does not provide easiness, because of the lacking of a repetition of the virtuous act. But in the order of the redemption of mankind, Christ appears as the friend that comes to the aid of the acting person, providing this “facilitas operandi”, which is present in the infused moral virtues⁴⁰.

Having introduced the role of Jesus Christ in the theory of action, it is evident that He is not a casual bystander in the history of salvation: His role is essential to human action. His incarnation made Him a brother and friend of every human being, and in that quality He is ready to provide the facility in human action, which is needed for acts in view to the ultimate perfection and salvation. The infused virtues are the practical ways of doing just that. Human acts that stem from these virtues, essentially are graced acts. This grace, then, flows from the the redemption that Christ brought about; it makes the acting person capable of participating in the work of salvation and of the imitation of Christ⁴¹. For a Christian, it is in this way that acquired and infused moral virtues are essentially related, and acts that are performed by acquired virtue at the same time stem from the infused virtue as well. Both the Christian and Christ himself can be recognised in the one human act.

4. Conclusion

God grants through the infused moral virtues, a very specific way of easy acting, or a “unique type of facility”, as Sherwin calls it⁴². He gives the ability to act for the true virtuous good, He gives the

³⁹ See the already quoted: *In IV Sent* d. 14, q. 2, a. 2 ad 5.

⁴⁰ See also: R. Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, 119.

⁴¹ See also: D. Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity*, 103; M. Sherwin, “Infused Virtue”, 30-31; R. Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, 108.

⁴² M. Sherwin, “Infused virtue”, 44-45.

proportion and He gives also immediate, joyful and easy acting, even though it is very much possible that acquired contrary habits still have to be overcome. Answering the question if God makes acting easy, this appears to be the case. But the ‘facilitator’ as a characteristic of infused virtues has to be considered also in a broader, but still authentic sense. The infused virtues entail intrinsically the help of God in acting, making thus true good action possible in the first place, suitable to participate in salvation, which is every acting person’s vocation. The easiness in acting is provided by a striving in human action, originating from the adherence to the supernatural end. This drive is given in the infused moral virtues, not by making the human contribution to the act futile, but as an aid to true human acting.

It is important to keep this broader picture, including the ultimate end, in mind, to see the function of the infused moral virtues. When it comes to the theory of action, it is the organic whole that counts, and not the single elements of human agency⁴³. If the acquired virtues would suffice, then our end would not be complete and perfect; if the infused virtues would suffice, then morality becomes unrealistic and inhumane. It is precisely because of this intrinsically joint perspective, that the martyrs in every age of Christianity can make for themselves the genuine human choice to follow the infused virtuous inclination to imitate Christ in a form of courage that they could never have thought of without God’s help. Although in one way it is appropriate not to like becoming a martyr, it is precisely in the situation when we see people undergoing martyrdom in an immediate, joyful and apparently easy way, that we can recognise the infused virtues that lead us to salvation.

[Lambert Hendriks, Major Seminary of Rolduc, Heyendallaan 82, 6464 EP Kerkrade, The Netherlands; l.hendriks@me.com.]

⁴³ A. Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective*, 67, referring to S. Pinckaers.

DESIRES, COUNSELS, AND CHRIST: THE CHRISTOLOGY OF AQUINAS' TREATMENT OF THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

Kevin G. Grove, C.S.C.

1. Introduction

This study treats the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the *Summa Theologiae* in the context of Christology. Specifically, I suggest that Thomas's treatment of the manner of Christ's life and temptations in *STh III*, qq. 40-41 brings together and builds on earlier material about the counsels as well as the desires which the counsels treat. The article accomplishes this as follows: first we look back to the place that Thomas explains the threefold causes of sin originating in the sense appetite and based on 1 John 2:16 (*STh I-II*, q. 77, a. 5). From there, we go to the treatment of the counsels, as part of the content of the New Law (*STh I-II*, q. 108). The counsels prove to be fittingly proposed in the New Law. In a next step, questions on charity and the religious state show that Christ's friendship actually is charity, and that the present life of human beings is oriented to perfect charity (of which the religious life is understood in an explicit way to be a school) (*STh II-II*, q. 186). Although Jesus Christ does not take vows, nor does Aquinas bring up the theme of the "counsels" as such in the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas makes arguments for the fittingness of the poverty, fleshly abstinence, and obedience of Jesus Christ (*STh III*, q. 40). In his temptations, Jesus Christ overcame the human desires which the counsels help to reform (*STh III*, q. 41). This, then, is the great hope that the counsels, understood in light of the Incarnation, offer to humankind. Christ as teacher gave instruction to humans as one having taken up a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Therein, his actions—including the practice of counsels—are instruction on our way to God, fitting the end of his Incarnation, and our end in bliss.

This progression, which structures the paper, is shown in “Figure 1” below.

Figure 1

Causes of Sin	Goods of the World	Human Desire (Triple Lust)	The New Law Counsel	Christian Practice	Religious State	The Incarnation	Christ's Temptations
Desire of the Eyes	Earthly Goods	Desire of the Eyes	Poverty	Alms-deeds	Poverty	Poverty as fitting	Own kingdoms of the earth
Desire of the Flesh	Bodily Goods	Desire of the Flesh	Continenence	Fasting	Continenence	Fleshly abstinence of Christ	Turn stones into bread
Pride of Life	Honors	Pride of Life	Obedience	Prayer	Obedience	Obedience to Law	Throw self off of parapet
<i>STh</i> I-II 77	<i>STh</i> I-II 108	<i>STh</i> I-II 108	<i>STh</i> I-II 108	<i>STh</i> II-II 186	<i>STh</i> II-II 186	<i>STh</i> III 40	<i>STh</i> III 41

The columns from left to right show issues as they appear in the *Summa Theologiae*. Each of the three causes of sin, indicated in the first column, correlates horizontally to the things that follow it. For example: the desire of the eyes as a cause of sin comes from an inordinate desire for earthly goods. The reformation of desire occurs in the New Law counsel of poverty as well as the Christian practice of almsgiving. In addition to showing how these columns relate, this article particularly stresses the importance of the Incarnation and of Christ's temptations (in the case of the desire of the eyes, Christ's temptation to own the kingdoms of the earth).

2. An Incarnational Approach to Counsels: Reclaiming *STh* III

Thomas Aquinas begins the *corpus* of the first article of the question on the manner of Christ's life (*De modo conversationis Christi*): “Christ's manner of life had to be in keeping with the end of his Incarnation, by reason of which he came into the world.”¹

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter *STh*], trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1981), III, q. 40, a. 1 co. Unless otherwise noted, all English citations of the *Summa Theologiae* are from this translation.

This sentence provides an interpretive key to the rest of the article and the following articles concerning Christ's manner of life in the world.² Christ's "*conversatio*" or behaviors and habitual associations with others—including his poverty, his obedience to the Law, and his temptations—are all "fitting" with the end of his Incarnation.³ In the *Tertia Pars*, Thomas sets Christ's manner of life in an incarnational framework.⁴ I argue that this recapitulates Thomas's discussion of Christ's poverty, abstinence, and obedience in his earlier treatment of the same topics as counsels in the content

² One also notes the resonance with *convenientia* as interpretive key to Aquinas' Christology, especially in the *STh* III.

³ *Conversatio*, from the title of question 40, commonly means moving about in a place, but here *conversatio* more precisely means behavior and habitual association. Thomas writes: '*ut conveniret fini incarnationis.*' Although sometimes translated 'in keeping with,' the sense of 'conveniret' is most properly 'fitting.' *STh* III, q. 40, a. 1 co. See J.-P. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mystères: la vie et l'oeuvre de Jesus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 1 (Paris: Desclee, 1999), 211-257.

⁴ The following subcategories show where the relevant articles are situated. Christ's life in this world is a subset of the 'Life and Death of Christ,' which fits within the treatment of the Saviour himself. Thus, although this paper concerns primarily the counsels as they are treated within 'His Life in this World,' the incarnational framework of the whole *Tertia Pars* is assumed.

The Saviour

The Mystery of the Incarnation

Fitness of the Incarnation (1)

The Mode of Union (2-15)

Consequences of the Union (16-26)

The Life and Death of Christ (27-39)

His Coming into the World (27-39)

His Life in the This World (40-45)

Manner of Life (40)

Temptation (41)

Doctrine (42)

Miracles (43-45)

Departure from This World (46-52)

Exaltation (53-59)

of the New Law (*STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 3-4) and the religious state (*STh* II-II, q. 186). In *STh* III, qq. 40-42, the counsels reemerge as part of Thomas's reflection on the life of Christ, whose every action is for human instruction. And, as teacher, Christ's manner of life and temptations call forth the earlier texts concerning the evangelical counsels. Whereas Thomas previously explicated the counsels as fitting content for the New Law, and as fitting for humans generally, not until the *Tertia Pars* does Thomas argue that they were fitting for Christ. The reason for their fittingness, for Thomas, is the end of the Incarnation. And, the measure for Christ's poverty, abstinence, and obedience is also the Incarnation: that his assumption of our flesh might seem credible.⁵

This argument calls for a new scholarly evaluation of Thomas's treatment of Christ's manner of life. The questions in the *Tertia Pars* which treat Christ's life and death (*STh* III, qq. 27-52), perhaps for reasons of historical usage, are sometimes partially or wholly neglected in discussions of the evangelical counsels (especially concerning the religious state).⁶ As Fergus Kerr, O.P.

⁵ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 3.

⁶ Expositions on the counsels most frequently occur in conjunction with secondary literature on the religious life. But even in these cases, scholars do not draw out the framework of the Incarnation for those questions in the *Summa Theologiae*. For instance, in Paul Philippe's *The Ends of the Religious Life According to Thomas Aquinas*, he utilizes *STh* III, q. 40 only to make the points that Christ is the highest example of the 'mixed life' and that all Christ's actions are our instruction. See: Paul Philippe, *The Ends of the Religious Life According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Fraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1962), 62n1-2, 79n1. Others are similar in their treatment of the counsels or religious life, but with little attention to Christ's manner of life in that regard, especially in terms of the Incarnation. For instance: L.M. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, *La Vie Religieuse d'après Saint Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris: Pierre Tequi, 2000); J.G.J. Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994); Antonin Motte, O.P., 'La définition de la vie religieuse selon saint Thomas d'Aquin,' *Revue Thomiste* 87:3 (1987), 442-453; Marie-Vincent Leroy, O.P., 'Theologie de la vie religieuse,' *Revue Thomiste* 92:1 (1992), 324-343.

explains, at various points in history the questions on Christ's human life were printed in vernacular languages for devout readers.⁷ Kerr suggests that since these printings biblical scholarship has made some of Thomas's reflections seem elementary, leaving these questions ignored by even modern Thomists. The very need for a "little life of Jesus" is not the case when direct scriptural contact is readily available; thus, as Kerr states, this "renders Thomas's exposition completely redundant."⁸ The problem here, as it impacts this study, is twofold. First, these questions, when published as *libella* (regardless of pastoral benefits of a little life of Christ) were isolated from Thomas's Christological program in which they belong.⁹ I argue, for instance, that Thomas's exposition of Christ's poverty is presented in terms of the Incarnation and can only fully be understood in relation to the end of the Incarnation. Secondly, the questions on Christ's manner of life are indeed Thomas's reflections on Scripture, but not limitedly so. If understood in light of Aquinas' Christology and his earlier discussions of the counsels, then the scriptural account of the manner of Christ's life provides a rich commentary on a number of things—like virtue—that have preceded it. Thus, at stake is not only the subject matter of the counsels but also the value of *STh* III, qq. 27-52 for Thomistic scholarship.

3. The Causes of Sin from the Part of the Sensitive Appetite

Thomas explains that sin is always inordinate self-love, which includes a desire for some good.¹⁰ Because the passions include a desire for the good, they are in some way ordered also to the avoidance of evil, for in Thomas's system, avoidance of evil is caused by the appetite for the good. The three desires, which Thomas sets forth as the causes of all sin, emerge from scripture itself. They are circumscribed in 1 John 2:16 as the desire of the

⁷ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 175.

⁸ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 175.

⁹ See note 4.

¹⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 77, a. 5 co.

eyes, desire of the flesh, and pride of life. Thomas cites this verse.¹¹ The anthropology which underlies 1 Jn 2:16 is as old as the first man and first woman. When Eve gazes upon the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Genesis account, she says that it is “good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirous for gaining wisdom” (3:6). Thus the desires themselves have a history which antedates the fall in the garden. The desires in themselves are for goods. After the fall, they become inordinate desires for goods, as under conditions of sin they are separated from God as good and end. The counsels of the New Law work directly upon the reformation of these human desires.

4. The Counsels as the Content of the New Law

Aquinas’ exposition of the counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience begins in his treatise on the New Law (in *STh* I-II, q. 108 a. 3-4). He raises the objection that the Lord unfittingly taught humans to shun the glory of human favor only by fasting, alms-deeds, and prayer.¹² The objection is that there are many other good works besides these; and, Aquinas replies, citing 1 John 2:16, reiterating that all worldly temptations and their correlative goods may be reduced to three: the concupiscence of the flesh (pleasures of the flesh), the concupiscence of the eyes (earthly riches), and the pride of life (ambition to renown and honor).¹³ The three actions of fasting, alms-deeds, and prayer reform the three desires, respectively, and aid humans in the attainment of true glory.¹⁴ These actions were taught by the Lord to humans for the purpose of aiding in reforming desires for the goods of the world. These works

¹¹ *STh* I-II, q. 77, a. 5 sc.

¹² *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 3 obj. 4.

¹³ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 3 ad 4.

¹⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 ad 4. ‘Reforming’ desire means less cupidity and the possibility of increased charity, which Thomas takes up more thoroughly in his discussion of the religious state. *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 2 co.

are the specific actions that correspond to three larger principles: the counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience.¹⁵

Aquinas then turns (in article 4) to argue that counsels are fittingly proposed in the New Law. Counsels are different from commandments, which, for Aquinas, are necessary for gaining eternal bliss. Counsels are not necessary, but might be “fitting” (*convenientia*) inasmuch as they make the attainment of eternal bliss more assured and expeditious. One could argue that they are not, as counsels are given as expedient things toward an end. Some things, indeed, are not expedient for everyone; thus, the counsels might not be fitting content of the New Law. Here Aquinas gives his primary argument for the evangelical counsels as fitting content of the New Law:

The counsels of a wise friend are of great use, according to Prov. xxvii. 9: *Ointment and perfumes rejoice the heart: and the good counsels of a friend rejoice the soul.* But Christ is our wisest and greatest friend. Therefore His counsels are supremely useful and becoming.¹⁶

The reason for the fittingness of the counsels as part of the New Law is that Christ is the one who gives the counsels. Christ who is wisdom, and friend to humanity, gives counsels.

Immediately, though, Aquinas distinguishes between a counsel and a commandment (in article 4). Poverty, continence, and obedience are not commandments, or obligations which remove things contrary to charity.¹⁷ The commandments concern matters necessary to attain eternal bliss whereas the counsels “are about matters that render the gaining of this end more assured and expeditious.”¹⁸ Therefore following the commandments is necessary for eternal happiness, but the purpose of the counsels is

¹⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 co.

¹⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 sc. The Latin is ‘*Ergo eius consilia maximam utilitatem continent, et convenientia sunt*’ which indicates most useful and ‘fitting’ although it is sometimes translated as ‘becoming.’

¹⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 co.

¹⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 co.

to “attain more speedily thereto by giving up the goods of this world entirely.”¹⁹

The counsels, firstly, are fittingly proposed in the New Law because they are counsels given by Christ. But for whom are they fitting? Thomas begins with the commandments as those things necessary for all. The goods of the world, and the desires that spring up concerning those goods, are the same for all people. Wealth, carnal pleasures, and honors, the three primary goods of the world as well as the triple temptation of the eyes, flesh, and pride of life are the goods and desires of all people, respectively. To wit, such was the case of the first man and the first woman in the garden concerning the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.²⁰ Because all of humanity experiences these same goods of the world and the correlative desires, the counsels are expedient to all people. Yet some people are “ill-disposed” such that the counsels are inexpedient on account of a disposition not inclined to them.²¹ Thus, when Christ spoke of the counsels, he spoke of, as Thomas says, fittingness. “If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you have” (Mt. 19:21), just like Paul said “This I speak for your profit; not to cast a snare” (1 Cor 7:35).²² Thus, in the section on Law, Thomas explains both that the counsels are fittingly proposed by the New Law, and he explains their fittingness for humans. When the Lord proposes the evangelical counsels, “He always mentions man’s fitness (*idoneitas*) for observing [them].”²³ Some observe them absolutely, others observe them in particular cases, when they give alms to the poor, refrain from carnal pleasure of some sort, or spend time in prayer. The counsels, in the treatise on the New Law, are fitting in two ways: 1. as content of the New Law; and 2. as befitting those who are able to observe them. At this point, however, Thomas

¹⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 co.

²⁰ Thomas explains in his questions on original sin that it is ‘concupiscence, materially, but privation of original justice, formally.’ *STh* I-II, q. 82, a. 3 co. See *STh* I-II, qq. 82-83. The temptations of Adam are found in *STh* II-II, q. 165.

²¹ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 ad 1.

²² *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 ad 1.

²³ *STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 4 ad 1.

has made no mention of the counsels as related to Christ's own life. He details Christ's verbal instruction to humans, but at this point neither Christ's own observance of the counsels, nor their fitness for him are discussed.

5. Means to an End: Counsels and Charity in the Religious State

The counsels, as Thomas presents them in his questions on the New Law, are expeditious means to the end of eternal bliss, given to humans by their wisest and greatest friend. In *STh* II-II, q. 23, however, Thomas further explains how Christ shows his friendship to others. When Jesus spoke to his disciples and called them friends (Jn 15:15), he did so by reason of nothing else than charity. Charity, the most excellent virtue, is friendship between God and man. Friendship is the mutual well-wishing communication between two people.²⁴ Christ's communication of the counsels in the New Law is an act of charity, an act of the friendship between God and man. Thomas makes this implicit connection between charity and the counsels explicit in his treatment of the state of perfection and the religious state (*STh* II-II, q. 184-189).²⁵

Concerning the perfection of life (attaining one's proper human end in God), Thomas explains that the perfection of the Christian life "consists radically in charity."²⁶ And, in earthly human life, the perfection of that charity consists in observing the commandments and the counsels. First, the commandments are

²⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 23, a. 1 co.

²⁵ Thomas has three minor works on the religious life *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum* (1256), *De Perfectione vitae spiritualis* (1269), and *Contra pestiferam doctrinam retrahentium hominum a religione* (1270). But these works, the latter two of which were written in the same period as the *Secunda Pars* (1268-1272), either respond to specific controversies in the religious life or present very little that is theologically different from the *Secunda Pars*. Although there is a great deal in Thomas's treatment of the religious life, the theology of the counsels is most thoroughly explained at the end of the *Secunda Secundae*.

²⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 184, a. 1 co.

primarily and essentially the perfection of charity because the end of each commandment is charity.²⁷ But, secondarily and instrumentally, perfection also consists in the observance of the counsels. Thomas explicates the counsels in the context of the state of perfection very similarly to the way he describes them as the content of the New Law: “counsels are directed to the removal of things that hinder the act of charity, and yet are not contrary to charity, such as marriage, the occupations of worldly business, and so forth.”²⁸ The difference from the discussion of the counsels in the context of the New Law (*STh* I-II, q. 108) is that Thomas articulates the counsels at this point in the *Summa Theologiae* in terms of charity. Thomas presented the counsels as the wisest instructions of a closest friend in the New Law. Charity characterizes God’s friendship with humans and Christ’s instructions to the same.

Aquinas continues his discussion of the counsels in terms of charity through his treatment of the religious state, the last theme discussed in the *Secunda Secundae* before the treatment in the *Tertia Pars* of the Mystery of the Incarnation. The religious state, derived from the virtue of religion, is an exercise or school for attaining to the perfection of charity.²⁹ Those who enter into the religious state are not already perfect, but have the intention to fulfill acts of charity.³⁰ Human beings strive to reach the perfection of charity by various practices, just as a physician might employ different medicines in order to heal an affliction or a wound. With this description of the religious state as a school for the perfection of charity, Thomas discusses each of the counsels individually, asking whether or not poverty, continence, and obedience are necessary for religious perfection.

Thomas argues that poverty, chastity, and obedience are foundations whereby humans are able to foster greater charity (and

²⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 184, a. 3 co.

²⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 184, a. 3 co.

²⁹ For Thomas’s treatment of religion as a virtue, see *STh* II-II, q. 81; *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 3 co.

³⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 2 co.

therein less cupidity).³¹ The first of these is poverty. Poverty is the first “foundation” (*fundamentum*) for the perfection of charity, as taken from the instruction of Christ in Matthew, “Go, sell all thou hast, and give to the poor,...and come follow Me.”³² Riches, as Thomas explains, are in themselves of a nature “to hinder the perfection of charity, especially by enticing and distracting the mind” once they are possessed.³³ Riches in themselves are conducive instrumentally to the active life. But, they pose a danger to all humans. Christ indicated this in his teaching: a camel’s passing through the eye of a needle is easier than a rich man’s entering the kingdom of God.³⁴ The rich man who is blessed is the one who has been placed in the midst of riches, but does not love them. The counsel of poverty, made explicit as a vow of religion, removes the possibility of riches from the life of a man or woman such that he or she is able to pursue the perfection of charity.

Thomas presents continence in much the same manner. Christ introduced the counsel: “There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs, for the kingdom of heaven” and then added: “He that can take, let him take it.”³⁵ The vow of perpetual continence is only meant for those who are able to take it. Thomas also accounts for those who do not profess the vow of continence: “Lest anyone should be deprived of the hope of attaining perfection, he admitted to the state of perfection those even who were married.”³⁶ It would be an injustice for a husband to forsake his wife (whereas one can without injustice renounce riches). Thus, for Thomas, the “use of sexual union” hinders the mind from “giving itself wholly to the service of God,” either on account of “vehement delectation” or the demands of wife, children, and the temporalities

³¹ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 3 co.

³² *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 3 co.

³³ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 3 ad 4.

³⁴ Thomas cites both the Gospel of St. Matthew (19:21; 19:23) and the fathers (John Chrysostom’s ‘Homily 63 on Matthew’ and Gregory’s ‘Homily 15’) concerning poverty.

³⁵ Mt 19:12.

³⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 4 ad 1.

related to their upkeep, and the removal of these things is necessary for the religious state.³⁷

Obedience pertains to the school for the perfection of charity because obedience pertains to instruction. Obedience, first of all, is imitation of Christ. Christ instructs concerning poverty (Mt 19:21) but concludes his directive with the phrase “follow me.” This obedience in Christ, as Thomas states, is to be commended above all else. Christ it was who “became obedient unto death.”³⁸ Obedience extends to one’s whole life, even though it is not given regarding classical examples of morally indifferent acts. For instance obedience might not apply to rubbing one’s beard or lifting a stick from the ground. But the counsel of continence, and for religious the vow, extends to one’s whole life.³⁹ It is the primary instruction in the school of perfection. This makes obedience the primary of the three religious vows because it contains the other two. In the vow of obedience a human offers to God his or her own will, which is greater than offering the goods of the world (poverty) and one’s own body (continence).⁴⁰

At this point in Thomas’s presentation of the counsels in the treatise on the religious state (*STh* II-II, q. 184), he has changed to the language of vows. This language is unique to the religious state. The ends of religion require a certain binding, oblation, and even sacrifice or holocaust.⁴¹ Thus, the vows are obligatory and necessary ways in which vowed religious practice the virtue of religion.⁴² The counsels, however, remain oriented “to the perfection of the Christian life” generally.⁴³ The religious state, ordered specifically as a school in the perfection of charity, is one

³⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 4 co.

³⁸ Philippians 2:8. *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 5 sc.

³⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 5 ad 4.

⁴⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 8 co.

⁴¹ Religious life, for Thomas, is fitting even for penitents. Van den Eijnden treats holocaust and the religious life: *Poverty on the Way to God*, 156-169.

⁴² The virtue of religion is not limited to those who have professed religious vows.

⁴³ *STh* II-II, q. 186, a. 6 co.

explicitly and essentially vowed to the observation of the counsels. Nonetheless, in his treatment of the religious state, Thomas explains in greater detail the way in which charity relates to the counsels. Religious life is a school in the perfection of charity because the vows are a means to the ends of charity in Christ.⁴⁴

6. The Incarnation

Thomas's treatment of the religious state is the last topic of the *Secunda Secundae* before he begins the final section of the *Summa Theologiae* with the Mystery of the Incarnation. This in itself should not be passed over as insignificant.⁴⁵ At the heart of the discussion of the religious life is the state of perfection and how the counsels (through vows) are a school toward the end of perfect charity. Even though the religious life is only expedient for some people, the counsels are for all. After treating various other topics concerning the religious life, Thomas ends his treatise on the religious life explaining that one ought to be ready to enter into that

⁴⁴ Thomas's writings on the religious life treat many more subjects than the counsels, including things competent to religious life, kinds of religious life, and entrance into the religious life. For this study, Question 186 treats the vows sufficiently for the purposes of what is added to his previous discussion of the counsels as content of the New Law.

⁴⁵ Like Marie Dominique Chenu, O.P., I find that the *Tertia Pars* cannot be read as a 'mere postscript in Saint Thomas's scheme' but rather as contributing to the overall work in such a way that the *exitus-reditus* of man to God happens 'through Christ.' I argue that this reading of the *Summa Theologiae* helps to make sense of the placement of the treatise on the religious state as right before the Incarnation. The religious state is concerned, teleologically, with perfection, which can only come through Christ. Thus, the religious life and the content of the state of perfection lead into a necessary discussion of Christ as the second person of the Trinity having assumed human nature to himself in the person of Jesus Christ. See M. D. Chenu, O.P., *The Scope of the Summa of St. Thomas*, trans. Robert Edward Brennan, O.P. and Albert Marie Landry, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1958), 27-29.

state without undo hesitation as the yoke of Christ is sweet and he promises the refreshment of divine fruition and the eternal rest of souls.⁴⁶ After a short doxology to Christ, he begins to speak about the fittingness of the Incarnation.

The treatise on the Incarnation begins with resonances of the treatise on the religious state. In Thomas's distinction concerning the two types of necessity (whether or not it was necessary for the restoration of humanity that God should become incarnate), the Incarnation was, in one sense, "necessary" in that the end (i.e. the restoration of human nature) was achieved more conveniently on account of it.⁴⁷ And, in Thomas's ensuing lists of five, he names three things that directly correspond to the prior material concerning the New Law and the counsels as a school for the perfection of charity. In the furtherances in good, Thomas names increase in charity, example of well-doing in becoming human, and achieving the end of human life (which is full participation in divinity).⁴⁸ At the very least, these three articulate the necessity of the Incarnation in language similar to the explanation of the counsels of the New Law and the religious state.

But why would Christ practice poverty, etc.? Or have a need to practice? Thomas states clearly not only that Christ had virtue, but that "Christ was full of *all* virtue."⁴⁹ Virtues of a soul flow from grace and the grace of Christ was most perfect.⁵⁰ This is evident in Christ's exhibition of virtue. Christ condemned all riches, and in so doing he showed the highest kind of liberality and magnificence. Continence requires a distinction. For Thomas, even though Christ had no evil desires (rendering, as Thomas says, the adjective "continent" un-fitting for Christ) he still practiced temperance, which differs from continence only in that the temperate man does not suffer the evil desires of the continent

⁴⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 189, a. 10, co. and ad 3.

⁴⁷ *STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 co.

⁴⁸ *STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 co.

⁴⁹ *Emphasis added.* *STh* III, q. 7, a. 2 sc.

⁵⁰ *STh* III, q. 7, a. 2 sc.

man.⁵¹ And, Christ practiced these virtues as one having habitual grace, even with regard to his relationship to the human race: that his grace might “overflow upon others.”⁵² If Christ, however, was full of habitual grace and virtue, and he did not have evil desires, one might still ask why it was that Christ would take up voluntary poverty, fast in order to discipline his flesh, and be obedient to the Law? The answers to these questions come in his manner of living. And, the answer is that they fit the end of his Incarnation.

7. Christ’s Manner of Life: the Counsels and the Incarnation

In the first article concerning the manner of Christ’s life, on whether or not he should have associated with others or led a solitary life, Thomas writes: “Christ’s manner of life had to be in keeping with the end of his Incarnation, by reason of which He came into the world.”⁵³ Christ, to be sure, was not vowed to the evangelical counsels, but he became the teacher of these counsels. In order to manifest the truth, in order to free humans from sin, and that through him we might have access to God, Christ associated with humans. Therein, as Thomas replies to one objection, “Christ’s action is our instruction.”⁵⁴ On account of the Incarnation, Christ acted in the world among men; simultaneously his manner of life was instructive. Secondly, if Christ’s actions are those appropriate in terms of the Incarnation, Thomas is also able to use the incarnation as a measure, or rule for the practices of poverty,

⁵¹ Thomas follows Aristotle in his distinction between temperance and continence based on the existence of evil desires. *STh* III, q. 7, a. 2 ad 3.

⁵² *STh* III, q. 7, a. 1 co.

⁵³ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 1 co.

⁵⁴ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 1 ad 3. In different forms, this axiom occurs 17 different times in Thomas’s work. See Richard Shenk, O.P., ‘*Omnis Christi Actio Nostra Est Instructio*: The Deeds and Sayings of Jesus as Revelation in the View of Thomas Aquinas,’ (Vatican City: Pontificia Accademia di S. Tommaso d’Aquino: 1990), 104-131; and Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 118.

chastity, and obedience. The process of Christ's life, his manner of life, temptations, and doctrine, as recounted by Scripture, are "fitting" for Christ on account of the ends of the Incarnation.

Rather than continence, the first counsel (question 40, article 2) that Thomas takes up is the austerity of Christ in the world. As aforementioned, Christ did not practice continence because he did not have the evil desires that other men have. Rather, Christ practiced the virtue of temperance.⁵⁵ And, where one might expect that Christ would lead a most austere life in the world, renouncing bodily pleasures (like John the Baptist), Thomas cites Matthew, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking."⁵⁶ Article 2 first builds an argument for Christ leading a life associated with others. Thomas writes, "Now it is most fitting that he who associates with others should conform to their manner of living."⁵⁷ The evidence for this is scriptural, as Paul writes, "I became all things to all men."⁵⁸ Thus, for Thomas, it was fitting that Christ should conform his manner of eating and drinking to those for whom he came into the world. Christ also fasted and spent time alone in prayer: "He went out into a mountain to pray; and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God."⁵⁹ Although Thomas's presentation of the life of Christ first speaks of him coming into the world and partaking of food and drink.

Much like his treatise on the counsels, in which Thomas argued that fasting, prayer, and alms-deeds are not necessary for salvation but expedient on the way, in these articles concerning the manner of Christ's life, Thomas says again: "Abstinence in eating and drinking does not of itself relate to salvation, according to Rom. xiv. 17: 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink'."⁶⁰ Christ, both in eating and drinking with friends and in fasting, demonstrated the two ways of life. His actions legitimated both. "Both these lives are lawful and praiseworthy—namely that a man withdraw from the

⁵⁵ See reference, note 51.

⁵⁶ Mt 11:19; *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 sc.

⁵⁷ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 co.

⁵⁸ 1 Cor 9:22; *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 co.

⁵⁹ Mark 6:31; *STh* III, q. 40, a. 1 ad 3.

⁶⁰ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 1.

society of other men and observe abstinence; and that he associate with other men and live like them. And therefore our Lord wished to give men an example of either kind of life.”⁶¹

This still leaves the question, why would Christ fast? Aquinas cites Bede on the same issue, “abstinence is meritorious where the nature is weak. But why should our Lord, whose right by nature it is to forgive sins, [avoid those whom by their abstaining he could render freer from defilement]?”⁶² In the next response, Thomas quotes Bede again: “Christ fasted, that thou mightest not disobey the commandment; he ate with sinners, that thou mightest discern his sanctity and acknowledge his power.”⁶³ Both actions are fitting imitations of Christ. Christ did not fast out of some personal need for continence or weakness of nature. Rather, Christ fasted “that thou might learn how great a good is fasting, and how it is a shield against the devil, and that after baptism thou shouldst give thyself up, not to luxury, but to fasting.”⁶⁴ Thomas is clear here, quoting Chrysostom, that Christ did not fast because he needed it, “but as teaching us.”⁶⁵ On account of the ends of his Incarnation, Christ fittingly taught us to fast by pursuing the activity of fasting himself.

Christ did not make fasting a necessity of salvation, but an aid to humans. Indeed, there are limits to its usefulness. Christ only fasted to a certain point: “And for this did he proceed no further than Moses and Elias, lest his assumption of our flesh might seem incredible.”⁶⁶ The Incarnation serves a secondary function here. Christ’s assumption of the flesh serves as a measure of the fittingness of his fasting. All grace and virtue were in Christ. It would have been conceivable that he could fast beyond the limits of Moses and Elias. But he did not. And the reason he did not was that men would believe in his assumption of the flesh. If men were

⁶¹ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 1.

⁶² The translation in brackets is my own. “[Dominus] cur eos declinaret quos abstinentibus poterat reddere puriores.” *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 2.

⁶³ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 3.

⁶⁴ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 3.

⁶⁵ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 3.

⁶⁶ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 2 ad 3.

to believe in his taking up the flesh, they had to believe that his fasting fit within the limits of the flesh.

Concerning poverty, Thomas uses the language of fittingness. Whereas earlier, the counsel of poverty was a fitting part of the New Law and a fitting counsel for humanity, Thomas now writes, “It was fitting *for Christ* to lead a life of poverty in this world.”⁶⁷ Thus, poverty was fitting for Christ. Firstly, poverty was fitting on account of his preaching, for which he came into the world. Secondly, Thomas makes an analogy with the death of Christ’s physical body. Just as Christ took upon himself death of his body in order to bestow spiritual life, so also did he bear bodily poverty to bestow on humans spiritual richness.⁶⁸ This second reason for Christ’s poverty is notably incarnational in its language. Christ took up the physical body, that he might die and bestow life eternal. Christ’s poverty has soteriological implications for the spiritual wealth of all of humanity. Thirdly, if Christ were rich, his teaching would be ascribed to cupidity. And fourthly, “the more lowly he seemed by reason of his poverty, the greater might be the power of his Godhead be shown to be.”⁶⁹ Thomas takes this from the Council of Ephesus, that from the time of Christ’s physical appearance on the earth, he lived a life of poverty:

He chose all that was poor and despicable, all that was of small account and hidden from the majority, that we might recognize his Godhead to have transformed the terrestrial sphere. For this reason did he choose a poor maid for His Mother, a poorer birthplace; for this reason did he live in want. Learn this from the manger.⁷⁰

This passage functions in the opposite manner as the Chrysostom citation in article 2 describing the limits of Christ’s fasting being the credibility of the Incarnation. Here, Christ’s voluntary poverty from the Incarnation forward, in his choice of Mother, manger, and

⁶⁷ *Emphasis added.* *STh* III, q. 40, a. 3 co.

⁶⁸ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 3 co.

⁶⁹ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 3 co.

⁷⁰ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 3 co.

manner of life, reveals not the credibility of his taking up of the flesh, but the power of his Godhead in those actions. The last line of the Ephesus citation, and the end of Thomas's *corpus* for this article is "Learn this from the manger." The poverty of Christ not only gives humans the reasons that were fitting for Christ to renounce the goods of the world in terms of benefit to humans, it also reveals the power of the Godhead whose second person assumed human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Assumption of impoverished flesh by a Godhead who "transform[s] the terrestrial sphere" has consequences for human action. In the answer to the first objection, Thomas is clear about how humans should relate to the goods of the earth. He writes, "Those who wish to live virtuously need to avoid abundance of riches and beggary, in as far as these are occasions of sin."⁷¹ Abundance of riches is an opportunity for pride and beggary is an opportunity for thieving, lying and perjury. Christ chose voluntary poverty. This poverty was fitting for Christ and as one of his actions, is instructive for humans.

Lastly, Christ conformed his conduct in every way to the precepts of the Law. Earlier in the treatise on the Incarnation, Thomas stated Christ's obedience, "Christ had most perfect obedience to God, according to Philippians 2:8: "Becoming obedient unto death." And hence He taught nothing pertaining to merit which he did not fulfill more perfectly in himself."⁷² Christ's actions were in obedience to God, but also to the precepts of the Law. For this reason, Christ wished to be circumcised, the physical signification of man's intent to keep the Law. In each willful act of keeping the Law, Christ showed first his approval of the Old Law, such that "by obeying it he might perfect it and bring it to an end in his own self, so as to show it was ordained to him."⁷³

Furthermore, the acceptable reasons for Christ's seemingly breaking the Old Law are on account of his being the second person of the Godhead having assumed a human nature to his person. For instance, Christ healed a man on the Sabbath, a day on which God

⁷¹ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 3 co.

⁷² *STh* III, q. 7, a. 3 ad 2.

⁷³ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 4 co.

rested and thus commanded humans to do. Thomas replies in three ways, first stating that the precept against working on the Sabbath is not against divine work, but against human.⁷⁴ God ceased from creating on the seventh day but continues to keep and govern at all times. Christ's miracle was divine work. The Incarnation thus explains the legitimacy of Christ's obedience when an objector might find that Christ had broken the law. Thomas, however, continues to explain that the precept against work on the Sabbath takes exception for bodily health (i.e. the miraculous works of Christ concerned both body and soul). And thirdly, the Sabbath is not broken by those working for the worship of God. Understood in this light, what might have been a seeming breaking of the Old Law is Christ's true obedience to the Father, showing again his benefit to humans: health of body and soul as well as enabling men to worship God.

STh III, q. 40 demonstrates that Christ's manner of life was one for which the counsels were fitting. And, in their fittingness for Christ, he made them an example for the rest of humanity. In the case of continence, Thomas considers it more accurate to describe Christ as temperant rather than continent. But Christ did live a life of necessary eating and drinking with men as well as fasting, proving that both his abstinence from fleshly pleasures and his partaking in them were for our instruction. Thus, Christ observed poverty, fleshly abstinence, and obedience throughout his life on account of the ends of his Incarnation. This is further amplified by Christ's temptations.

8. Christ's Temptations: Actions of the Counsels

Thomas's first claim concerning the temptations of Christ is that they were "fitting."⁷⁵ Christ, full of all virtue, had no need to be tempted, but he wished to be.⁷⁶ And, he wished to be tempted in

⁷⁴ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 4 ad 1.

⁷⁵ Again, the Fathers of the English Dominican Province here use 'becoming,' which for the sake of consistency, I translate 'fitting.'

⁷⁶ A question which one might ask of Thomas at this point, yet he himself does not directly address, is whether or not Christ could really

order to show us how to overcome temptation, to strengthen us against them, to warn us that we are not free from them, and to fill us with confidence in his mercy.⁷⁷ Thomas explains that not only was it fitting that Christ should wish to be tempted, but that the temptations took place after a period of fasting, by which one is strengthened.⁷⁸ The reasons for Christ's fasting and for the limits of it are the same for his temptations as they were for his manner of life. Aquinas again quotes Chrysostom: Christ fasted, not as needing it for himself, but as for our instruction. Therefore, Christians ought to give themselves up to fasting after their baptisms, not give themselves up to luxury.⁷⁹ Also, Thomas repeats again the reason that the limit to Christ's fasting was that of Moses and Elias lest his assumption of human flesh might seem incredible. Aquinas adds, however, a new incarnational reason for the fasting of Christ at this point. Citing Hilary, Thomas says, "For the devil was to be conquered not by God, but by the flesh."⁸⁰ Not only does the Incarnation, then, serve as the ends which make Christ's fast fitting, and limit its extent (for credibility); also, the Incarnation allows for the possibility that the devil could be conquered by human flesh, not only by the power of God. And in this sense, Christ's fasting is also most fitting.

Thomas does not present Christ's temptations, which follow his fasting, using the language of "counsels." Rather, he presents the list in terms of the fall of the first man and woman in paradise. In this way, Thomas follows the Scripture and the triple desires of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life. In Scripture, the devil

be tempted given his inability to sin. See Joseph Wawrykow, 'Temptation,' in *The Westminster Handbook to Thomas Aquinas* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 147-149.

⁷⁷ *STh* III, q. 41, a. 1 co.

⁷⁸ Stephen Loughlin, 'Thomas Aquinas and the Importance of Fasting to the Christian Life', *Pro Ecclesia* 17:3 (2008), 343-361. Loughlin treats fasting, beginning with modern aversion to it, according to its benefits and limits for Christ.

⁷⁹ *STh* III, q. 41, a. 3 co.

⁸⁰ *STh* III, q. 41, a. 3 co.

tempted the first man and woman in three ways.⁸¹ Christ's temptations followed the same order. First the devil tempted Christ "to that which men desire, however spiritual they may be—namely, the support of the corporeal nature by food."⁸² This temptation (turning stones into bread) corresponds to the desire of the flesh, temperance for Christ, and the practice of fasting. Secondly, the devil "advance[d] to that matter in which spiritual men are sometimes found wanting, inasmuch as they do certain things for show, which pertains to vainglory."⁸³ Vainglory (throwing oneself off of the parapet) corresponds to pride of life, the counsel of obedience, and the practice of prayer. Thirdly, "he led the temptation on to that in which no spiritual men, but only carnal men, have a part—namely, to desire worldly riches and fame, to the extent of holding God in contempt."⁸⁴ The desire of the eyes (to own the kingdoms of the world) corresponds with the counsel of poverty and the corresponding activity of alms-deeds.⁸⁵ Thus, Christ's willing to be tempted meant that he was able to undergo and overcome the temptations (from the devil, an external, not internal, source of temptation) to which the first man and woman succumbed.

Thomas concludes the text on the temptations of Christ, however, with yet another quotation on vanquishing the enemy through human, not divine, means. "Christ resisted these temptations by quoting the authority of the Law, not by enforcing his own power."⁸⁶ Therein, Christ's obedience to the Law allowed him to overcome each of the temptations of the flesh. The reason for this obedience, however, is from Leo, "so as to give more honor to his human nature and a greater punishment to his adversary, since the foe of the human race was vanquished, not as by God, but as by man." The achievement of Christ's overcoming temptation is

⁸¹ Gen 3:1.

⁸² *STh* III, q. 41, a. 4 co.

⁸³ *STh* III, q. 41, a. 4 co.

⁸⁴ *STh* III, q. 41, a. 4 co.

⁸⁵ For the schematic chart of the counsels, temptations, vows, and corresponding Christian practices, see Figure 1.

⁸⁶ *STh* III, q. 41, a. 4 co.

further augmented by the fact that Christ as human overcame what humans had theretofore not been able to do. And in so doing, Christ left instruction for all those who, as humans, endure the temptations of the eyes, flesh, and pride of life.

9. Christ the Teacher

Thomistic scholarship often refers to Thomas's line that Christ's actions are our instruction.⁸⁷ Jesus Christ emerges in the *Summa Theologiae* as a teacher whose life formed the content of his teaching.⁸⁸ One way of reading Christ as teacher is he whose example is to be imitated. Christ was indeed a moral exemplar, one who contained all grace and virtues, and for whom it was fitting to observe voluntary poverty, fleshly abstinence, and obedience to the Law of the Father. Yet, as Michael Dauphinais points out, imitation of Christ is a rather narrow interpretation of how Christ ought to be understood as teacher. Dauphinais suggests:

It is not simply a good man that offers us example, but it is God who became man that offers us example. God is the one who should be followed. Yet human beings have no way of imitating God, at least not according to their natural capacities....human beings are not merely to imitate the human nature of Christ, but are meant to imitate the Person of Christ, the Word of God. Following Christ's divine example can be called ontological exemplarity. In addition to following Christ's deeds, we are also to imitate Who He is.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See note 54.

⁸⁸ This is the reason, for instance, that Christ did not write his teaching down (*STh* III, q. 42, a. 4 co.). He adopted the most excellent manner of teaching, which was not writing on paper, but writing on the human heart.

⁸⁹ Michael A. Dauphinais, 'Christ the Teacher: Pedagogy of the Incarnation According to St. Thomas Aquinas,' (PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), 261.

Dauphinais explains that imitation of Christ is not a slavish imitation of each word and action of the human Christ. Rather, Christ's actions as our instruction mean that humans are to imitate Christ by "follow[ing] along the way of Christ." And the way, "is Christ Himself."⁹⁰

Dauphinais' argument can be furthered in terms of the manner of Christ's life. Christ did not take up, for instance, an austere life in the world such that no one might legitimately use the goods of the world. Rather, Christ came eating and drinking with humans; but the same Christ also fasted in the desert and took time away from the crowds in order to pray. The teacher Christ was God incarnate such that all might learn the ways of charity, or friendship with him, by means of imitating his life and person. Not all are fit to take vows of poverty, continence, and obedience. But for all human beings, God can be forsaken on account of the goods of the world, the desires of the flesh, and human pride. Thomas's treating the three counsels in the context of the Incarnation adds to his earlier discussions of the counsels. They are still the counsels of a good friend, for the end of charity. But, in light of Christ's living them, and by means of them overcoming temptation for humanity by his human person, they became part of imitating Christ's person. Also in this sense, and perhaps mostly so, they are fitting to the end of the Incarnation.

10. Conclusions

Thomas begins his treatise of Christ's manner of life by stating that Christ's manner of life had to be fitting the ends of the Incarnation.⁹¹ The best reading of the questions which treat the manner of Christ's life, his temptations, and his teaching, is one guided by this initial comment. First, it establishes that these questions cannot be taken separately from the treatise on the Incarnation, and that reading them as *libella* or *glossa* on Scripture is too narrow a reading for Thomas's project.

⁹⁰ Dauphinais, 'Christ the Teacher,' 262.

⁹¹ *STh* III, q. 40, a. 1 co.

Rather, Thomas's treatment of the manner of Christ's life and his temptations brings together earlier material in the *Summa Theologiae* within the Incarnation, the final part of the theological work, as an *exitus-reditus* journey to God through Christ. This is modeled in Thomas's treatment of the counsels. The counsels first appear as the content of the New Law. As fitting content for the New Law and as fitting counsels for humans, they are given as the counsels of a friend Jesus Christ. Questions on charity and the religious state show that Christ's friendship actually consists in charity, and that human life is oriented to perfect charity (of which the religious life is understood in an explicit way to be a school). Although Jesus Christ does not take vows, nor does Aquinas bring up the "counsels" as such in the treatise on the Incarnation, Thomas makes arguments for the fittingness of the poverty, fleshly abstinence, and obedience of Jesus Christ. At last, the counsels are those of humanity's closest friend because by means of the Incarnation the counsels were fitting for this friend. In his actions, the same Incarnation served as a limit for the extent of his activity. And even in temptation, in which Jesus Christ overcame the human desires which the counsels help to reform, he overcame these temptations in such a way that the enemy might be vanquished by a man. This, then, is the great hope that the counsels, understood in light of the Incarnation, offer to humankind. Our teacher—himself the fullness of virtue—gave instruction to humans as one having taken up a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Therein, his actions are instruction on our way to God, fitting the end of his Incarnation.

[Kevin Grove, C.S.C., 436 Malloy Hall, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556, U.S.A.; kgrove1@nd.edu]

THE BEATITUDES AS ACTS OF THE VIRTUES IN AQUINAS' *LECTURA* ON MATTHEW*

Anton ten Klooster

In his groundbreaking work *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Servais Pinckaers OP argued that the beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-10) are a decisive element of Aquinas' moral theology. He lamented what he saw as "a reduction of Christian ethics to natural law or the Decalogue".¹ A lot of researchers have heeded the call to change this situation, and have read Aquinas anew in order to see how the beatitudes form a distinctly Christian way of speaking about morality and the happiness toward which it is directed. Many good contributions have been written, mostly based on the *Summa Theologiae*. However, it is puzzling that very few researchers have turned to the text where Aquinas directly engages with the beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and the questions that the sermon evokes: the commentary on the gospel of Matthew.²

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the relevance of the commentary for understanding Aquinas' theology in general, and that of the beatitudes in particular (1). It does so by discussing the use of the concept 'beatitudo' in the commentary (2), and by studying in detail Aquinas' remarks on merit (3), law (4), and reward (5), in relation to the beatitudes. This leads to the conclusion that the commentary can help us to clarify certain themes, as well

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¹ S. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 3rd edition, 1995, 185.

² Mattison is a notable exception: W.C. Mattison III, 'Beatitudo and the Beatitudes in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas', in *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 17-2 (2010), 233-249.

as to understand the context and development of Aquinas' theology (6). The beatitudes are a central theme in Aquinas' treatment of human happiness, and the commentary on the gospel of Matthew is a highly relevant source for studying Aquinas' thought on this Biblical concept.

1. The Importance of the Commentary

Several authors have argued that Aquinas' Biblical commentaries should be read alongside the systematic works. In the words of J.-P. Torrell: "they are not merely an authority amongst others, but the very source and structure of theological exposition".³ Research done at the Thomas Instituut Utrecht, by W. Valkenberg, has been instrumental in establishing that commenting on the Bible did indeed influence the development of Aquinas' theological expressions.⁴ But what is even more important is that Aquinas himself, in his systematic work, presupposes a certain understanding of Scripture. In the first of eight questions on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he states that in the theological discussion of these gifts "we ought to follow Scripture's own way of speaking".⁵ It is important to know then, what Aquinas believes Scripture is saying.

One of the reasons for researchers to shy away from Aquinas' commentary on Matthew is the fact that it is notorious for its spurious editions, and for the presumably meagre quality of the text. These are indeed serious issues, and I hope to contribute to

³ J.-P. Torrell, 'Life and Works', in: B. Davies, E. Stump (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, 17.

⁴ W.G.B.M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Leuven, Peeters, 2000.

⁵ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 68, a. 1 resp.: "Et ideo ad distinguendum dona a virtutibus, debemus sequi modum loquendi Scripturae".

resolving some of them.⁶ Having said that, we can hardly pass up on an opportunity to sit in Aquinas' class and to listen to what he has to say about the beatitudes, happiness, virtue, merit, and reward. And it is exactly this that the commentary offers us. Through a close reading of the commentary it becomes clear that Aristotle's philosophy may have provided Aquinas with a framework for his discussion of virtue, but that this framework was not sufficient to him. The Aristotelean concept of 'heroic virtue' is employed at the service of a discussion of the beatitudes as meritorious acts. But Aquinas goes beyond this concept by using it to speak of acts of infused virtue. In a modest way, the commentary can thus contribute to clarifying Aquinas' much-discussed statement on the 'mediation' of infused virtue in rendering acquired virtue meritorious.⁷

In regard to the Christian life, this is a highly relevant discussion. The beatitudes are the prelude of the Sermon on the Mount, and "the whole perfection of our life is contained in this sermon of the Lord", according to both Aquinas and Augustine.⁸ Is it possible to live the sort of life that the Sermon on the Mount calls for through acquired virtue, even though it may be imperfect? Or can only Christians, who have received the infused virtues in Baptism, be "men and women of the beatitudes"?⁹

⁶ For an overview of the issues surrounding the text: A.M. ten Klooster, 'The Two Hands of Thomas Aquinas: The Reportationes of the Commentary on Matthew', in *Angelicum* 91-4 (2014), 855-880.

⁷ *De Virt* a. 10 ad 4: "unde actus virtutis acquisitae non potest esse meritorius nisi mediante virtute infusa".

⁸ *In Matt* #403: "in isto sermone Domini tota perfectio vitae nostrae continetur"; Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, lib. I, c. 1, PL 34, 1229-1231. Latin and English quotations of the commentary are from: J. Holmes, B. Mortensen (translation), Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-12*, Lander, The Aquinas Institute, 2013. This edition reproduces the Latin text of the of the Marietti edition from 1951.

⁹ Pope John Paul II, Opening address at World Youth Day, Toronto, 2002, #8. Full text at: <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul->

In order to make the commentary fruitful for this specific discussion, we direct our attention to the beginning of Aquinas' comments on the Sermon on the Mount. There is something unusual about this part of the text. As he is accustomed to, Aquinas presents a *divisio textus* at the beginning of the chapter. Typically, the *divisio* only presents the main themes and refers to key verses. Then, the Biblical text is commented upon verse by verse. But here, Aquinas interrupts the course of the commentary to offer a sort of preface.¹⁰ These introductory remarks, found in #404-413 of the Marietti edition of the commentary, constitute a short treatise on the nature of happiness, merit, and reward. Such an inserted treatise is a rare occurrence in the commentary on Matthew.¹¹ It is used to clarify key notions, and thus provides the student of Aquinas with a framework to understand the discussion of the Biblical text that follows the preface.

2. Beatitude and the Beatitudes

The first thing Aquinas notes about the beatitudes is that “all complete happiness is included in these words”.¹² It is natural for the human person to strive for happiness, but there are different perceptions of happiness. These words lead to a reflection on the nature of happiness. We should note that to Aquinas, who is reading the Bible in Latin, it is obvious to relate the beatitudes (*beatitudines*) to happiness (*beatitudo*). There is also no formal distinction between Christian happiness (*beatitudo*) and the philosophical conception of happiness (*eudaimonia*). Aquinas uses

ii/en/speeches/2002/july/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020725_wyd-address-youth.html

¹⁰ This preface is explicitly concluded in *In Matt* #413: “Unde istis praemissis, accedamus ad litteram”.

¹¹ In the first twelve chapters of the commentary, I have been able to identify only one other treatise. In *In Matt* #170, Aquinas presents an extensive discussion of fate.

¹² *In Matt* #404: “Sciendum tamen quod in istis verbis includitur omnis plena beatitudo”.

the single term ‘beatitudo’ to refer to these three different concepts. This is lost in many translations, where ‘beatitudo’ may be translated as “happiness” in the first part of a sentence, and the ‘futura beatitudo’ in the second part of the same sentence is rendered “the beatitude which is to come”.¹³ In bad English, but true to Aquinas’ interpretation, we can say that, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents several ‘happineses’ in order to instruct his disciples on the nature of true happiness. As he also does in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas presents several opinions about what happiness is.¹⁴ In the commentary he presents four groups of possible candidates for the definition of happiness. Happiness is said to be found in an abundance of temporal possessions, the satisfaction of the human will, the virtues of the active life, or the virtues of the contemplative life. “All these opinions”, he concludes, “are false, although not in the same way”.¹⁵ Working within the four categories he constructed, Aquinas then discusses the beatitudes, following the order of the gospel text.¹⁶ He explains in what respect a given perception does not describe true *beatitudo*. Abundance of material wealth, for example, does not describe true happiness. True happiness consists not in earthly riches, but in heavenly treasures.

After five of the seven beatitudes have been presented as a counterstatement to a human conception of happiness, we arrive at an important distinction. The only possible candidates left for happiness are the active and the contemplative life, and they are discussed in greater detail. In itself, the active life does not constitute happiness in the Christian sense, Aquinas believes. But

¹³ As is the case in the Blackfriars translation of *S.Th.* I-II, q. 69, a 3 resp, to give but one example. The same type of problem occurs several times in the Holmes/Mortensen translation of the commentary on Matthew.

¹⁴ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 2.

¹⁵ *In Matt* #404: “Omnes autem istae opiniones falsae sunt: quamvis non eodem modo”.

¹⁶ This order is slightly different from current editions of the Bible, in the Vulgate verses 5:4 and 5:5 are reversed.

the moral virtues are a way toward happiness, because they order human actions toward a cleanness of heart and toward peace. Therefore, he concludes, “these virtues are ways to happiness, and not happiness in itself”.¹⁷ Having established this, he moves on to the two final beatitudes. These correspond in some way to the virtues of the contemplative life. When he discusses them, Aquinas further specifies these virtues as “the contemplation of divine things”.¹⁸ In this contemplation there are two things: vision and love. It is not possible to achieve this in the current life, and in this way this conception of happiness is also incorrect. But it is correct in its description of happiness. True happiness consists in seeing God, which is promised to “the clean of heart”, and in living in a union of love, which is promised to “the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”.

At first sight, this passage may seem to support a “coexistence theory” of acquired and infused virtue.¹⁹ How else are we to understand the statement that moral virtues are “ways toward happiness”? A possible answer comes from the *Summa Theologiae*. In this systematic discussion of the beatitudes, Aquinas follows the same line of argumentation: the happiness of the life of pleasure is rejected, but “the happiness of the active life *disposes* one for the beatitude which is to come”.²⁰ It is indeed necessary to turn to this type of interpretation, because in what follows it will become clear that for Aquinas only acts of infused virtue lead toward true happiness.

¹⁷ *In Matt* #407: “Et ideo istae virtutes sunt viae in beatitudinem, et non ipsa beatitudo”. The Holmes/Mortensen translation reads “ways to beatitude, and not beatitude itself”.

¹⁸ *In Matt* #408.

¹⁹ A. McKay Knobel, ‘Can Aquinas’s Infused and Acquired Virtues Coexist in the Christian Life?’, in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23-4, (2010), 385-386. Knobel uses this term to describe the position that acquired virtues are ‘taken up’ or ‘transformed’ into infused virtues.

²⁰ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 69, a. 3 resp. “Beatitudo vero activae vitae dispositiva est ad beatitudinem futuram”.

3. Merit, Divine and Infused Virtue

Having clarified several misconceptions about happiness, Aquinas goes on to explain each of the ‘happinesses’, the beatitudes of Christ. Each of the seven beatitudes, he claims, consists of two elements: merit and reward. The first line, “blessed are...”, describes the merit, the second, “for they will...” gives the reward. Aquinas clarifies this by applying it to the first beatitude.²¹

Item notandum quod in istis beatitudinibus quaedam ponuntur ut merita, et quaedam ut praemia: et hoc in singulis. *Beati pauperes spiritu: ecce meritum; quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum: ecce praemium, et sic in aliis.*

Likewise, one should note that in these beatitudes, certain things are set down as merits, and certain things as rewards: and this is clear in each case. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: here is a merit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven: here is the reward; and so on in the others.*

The second part of Aquinas’ preface is devoted to clarifying the concepts ‘merit’ (*meritum*) and ‘reward’ (*praemium*). Since we will closely follow Aquinas’ commentary of the term ‘merit’, it is helpful to quote the text at length.²²

Et notandum est etiam aliquid circa meritum in communi, et aliquid circa praemium in communi. Circa meritum sciendum quod Philosophus distinguit duplex genus virtutis: unum commune, quae perficit hominem humano modo;

And one should note also something about merit in general, and something about reward in general. About merit, one should know that the Philosopher distinguishes two kinds of virtue: one common, which perfects a man in a human

²¹ *In Matt* #409.

²² *In Matt* #410.

aliud specialis, quam vocat heroicam, quae perficit supra humanum modum. Quando enim fortis timet ubi est timendum, istud est virtus; sed si non timeret, esset vitium. Si autem in nullo timeret confisus Dei auxilio, ista virtus esset supra humanum modum: et istae virtutes vocantur divinae. Isti ergo actus sunt perfecti, et virtus etiam, secundum Philosophum, est operatio perfecta. Ergo ista merita vel sunt actus donorum, vel actus virtutum secundum quod perficiuntur a donis.

manner; the other special, which he calls heroic, which perfects above the human manner. For when a brave man fears where there is something to be feared, that is a virtue; but if he did not fear, it would be a vice. But if he feared nothing, trusting in the help of God, that would be a virtue above the human manner; and these virtues are called divine. Therefore, these acts are perfect, and virtue also is a perfect operation, according to the Philosopher. So these merits are either acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues according as they are perfected by the gifts.

Aquinas takes up the Aristotelean distinction between common and heroic virtue to clarify the concept of ‘merit’. One thing we can already conclude, is that he is quick to abandon the discussion of “common virtue”. Aristotle provides a concept of a type of virtue that is ‘special’, ‘above the human manner’, ‘divine’, and a ‘perfect operation’. Unlike the virtue Aristotle is speaking of, Aquinas is thinking of a type of operation that cannot be achieved by human efforts alone. He is looking for a way to explain how the ‘merits’ of the beatitude are perfect actions. This leads him to say that these merits are acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues that are perfected by the gifts.

What is perhaps most important is that this passage underlines the fact that the beatitudes refer to acts. They are not merely a description of a state a person finds himself in, the merits described

in each of the beatitudes are “acts of the virtues”, and here we must read “heroic or divine virtues”.²³ Now, the human person is the agent of these virtuous actions, but he acts under some sort of influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the *Summa* we read that the gifts are described as infused dispositions that make us amenable to be moved by divine inspiration.²⁴ The beatitudes, then, are virtuous acts that are done under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

In this passage, there are a number of things Aquinas does not specify. He departs from an Aristotelean definition, but arrives at a thoroughly Christian statement about a virtue that is perfected by the action of the Holy Spirit. I would argue that Aristotle’s definition of acquired heroic virtue provides Aquinas with a way of speaking about how the Christian acts according to infused virtue. There are four reasons to assume that Aquinas is speaking of infused virtue, rather than acquired virtue. First, the beatitudes describe actions that lead to an inchoate form of happiness, which is had fully *in patria*.²⁵ Infused virtue is the only type of virtue that remains *in patria*, so this would give us reason to presume that the “acts of the virtues” that Aquinas is speaking of are acts of infused virtue.²⁶ The second argument is related: infused virtue directs the human person toward his supernatural end, eternal happiness. That which is directed to eternal happiness must then have some relation to infused virtue. The beatitudes direct the person toward his final happiness, which also is what infused virtue does. Third, Aquinas speaks of acts that are meritorious, and that are “acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues according as they are perfected by the gifts”.²⁷ It

²³ Cf. W.C. Mattison III, ‘Beatitude and the Beatitudes’, 241.

²⁴ Cf. *S.Th.* I-II, q. 68, a. 1 resp: “Oportet igitur inesse homini altiores perfectiones secundum quas sit dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur. Et istae perfectiones vocantur dona: non solum quia infunduntur a Deo; sed quia secundum ea homo disponitur ut efficiatur prompte mobilis ab inspiratione divina”.

²⁵ Cf. *In Matt* #413.

²⁶ *De Virt Card* a. 4 resp.

²⁷ *In Matt* #410: “Ergo ista merita vel sunt actus donorum vel actus virtutum secundum quod perficiuntur a donis”.

is clear that the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the perfection of virtue, through His gifts. Because Aquinas is working with an Aristotelean definition, the assumption that this virtue is perfected by the Holy Spirit would suggest that the gifts of the Spirit are in some way infused even in non-baptized performing virtuous actions. It seems to me that this explanation is in conflict with the text of the commentary, and with the tenets of Aquinas' theology. Fourth, Aquinas' introductory remarks to the commentary make it clear that Christ promises a reward to those "who accept this teaching" and observe it.²⁸ We would be stretching the commentary beyond reasonable limits if we were to apply this to non-Christians.

4. The Beatitudes as a Form of Law

When we assume that Aquinas is thinking of infused virtue, we also find an answer to a pressing question of many interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount: are these precepts not too heavy for a human person? Aquinas would agree that the sermon commands virtue above the human manner. But a successful observance of these words of Jesus does not rely on human efforts alone. It is with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and through the infused virtues that one can observe the teaching of Christ. Or, as Aquinas puts it in another lecture on Matthew: "love makes all heavy and impossible things light. Hence if someone loves Christ well, nothing is heavy for him, and so the new law does not burden him".²⁹

It is in this context that we can understand what follows in the commentary on the beatitudes. Aquinas makes it clear that

²⁸ *In Matt* #403: "praemittit praemium quod consequitur istos qui istam doctrinam accipiunt" (...) "Primo ergo describit beatitudinem observantium [doctrinae]".

²⁹ *In Matt* #973: "omnia gravia et impossibilia levia facit amor. Unde si quis bene amat Christum, nihil est ei grave, et ideo lex nova non onerat".

performing the virtuous acts described in the beatitudes is not optional.³⁰

Item nota quod actus virtutum sunt illi de quibus lex praecipit; merita autem beatitudinis sunt actus virtutum; et ideo omnia quae praecipiuntur et infra continentur, referuntur ad istas beatitudines. Unde sicut Moyses primo proposuit praecepta, et post multa dixit, quae omnia referebantur ad praecepta proposita: ita Christus in doctrina sua, primo praemisit istas beatitudines, ad quas omnia alia reducuntur.

Likewise, note that the acts of the virtues are those about which the law commands; moreover, the merits of the beatitudes *beatitude* are acts of the virtues; and therefore all those things which are commanded and are contained below are referred back to these beatitudes. Hence just as Moses first set down the commandments, and afterwards said many things which were all referred back to the commandments given, so Christ in his teaching first sets forth these beatitudes, to which all the others are reduced.

In this passage, two statements are implied: one on law in general, and one on the beatitudes as a form a law. With regard to law in general, Aquinas reminds the reader that ‘law’ prescribes acts of virtue. Or, to use a concept from Aristotle that Aquinas adopts in the *Summa*: “the end of any law is that men should be made just and virtuous”.³¹ The beatitudes are the beginning of Jesus’ law, just as the Decalogue was the beginning of Moses’ law. The law of Jesus Christ is distinct from the old law and any other law, because it is not restricted to prescribing virtuous acts. It prescribes virtue

³⁰ *In Matt* #411. Correction of the English translation is mine. For the relation between the Decalogue and the other commandments in the Old Testament see: *S.Th.* I-II, q. 100, a. 11.

³¹ *S.Th.* I-II, q. 107, a. 2 resp: “Finis vero cujuslibet legis est ut homines efficiantur justi et virtuosii”.

“above the human manner” to all those bound by it. And it can do so, because it also provides the means necessary to observe these precepts.

The beatitudes describe the perfection of the Christian life. In Aquinas’ perception, the Sermon on the Mount contains the practical application of the more general statements made in the beatitudes. This is also evident from the inclusion Aquinas creates in his commentary. After commenting on the entire Sermon on the Mount, he refers back to the beatitudes and explains how they are fulfilled by the precepts of the sermon.³²

5. The End of the Beatitudes: Reward

From merit and law, Aquinas moves on to the final part of the treatise: reward (*praemium*). In classic philosophy, virtue rewards itself by giving those who exercise it a happy life. The divine virtues of the beatitudes lead to a divine reward: “God is the reward of those who serve Him”.³³ Aquinas stresses that the reward promised in the beatitudes cannot be had fully in this life: “anything that can be found in any life, the Lord promises in its entirety of God”.³⁴ But rather than offering an extensive discussion of the second part of each beatitude, as one might expect, Aquinas discusses the first six beatitudes. In doing this, he describes different ways toward happiness. People strive for riches and dignity, and this is what the Lord promises. But the road toward this dignity is one of poverty, and the riches promised are not earthly goods but heavenly riches.³⁵

³² *In Matt* #679. Following Augustine, Aquinas connects each of the seven beatitudes to a part of the sermon.

³³ *In Matt* #412: “Circa primum notandum, quod Deus est praemium eorum qui ei serviunt”.

³⁴ *In Matt* #412: “quidquid inveniri potest in qualibet vita, totum Dominus repromisit in Deo”.

³⁵ That the riches promised are those of heaven becomes clear in *In Matt* #417.

Concluding this treatise, Aquinas goes on to further emphasize the way in which a person can obtain the promises of the beatitudes.³⁶

Et notandum quod ista praemia, quae Dominus hic tangit, possunt dupliciter haberi, scilicet perfecte et consummate, et sic in patria tantum: et secundum inchoationem et imperfecte, et sic in via. Unde sancti habent quamdam inchoationem illius beatitudinis. Et quia in hac vita non possunt explicari illa sicut erunt in patri, ideo Augustinus exponit secundum quod sunt in hac vita *beati ergo pauperes spiritu*: non spe tantum, sed etiam re. Lc. XVII, v. 21: *regnum Dei intra vos est.*

And one should notice that these rewards, which the Lord touches upon here, can be had in two ways, namely perfectly and completely, and they are had in this way only in the homeland; or as a beginning and imperfectly, and they are had in this way in this life. Hence the saints have a certain beginning of that beatitude. And because these things cannot be explained in this life as they will be in the homeland, therefore Augustine explains them according as they are in this life; therefore, *blessed are the poor in spirit*: not in hope only, but also in actuality. *For lo, the kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21).

There is an important difference between the reward of virtue as the classic philosophers saw it, and the reward of the virtues of the beatitudes. The Greek philosopher can say that virtue rewards itself by making the virtuous person happy. In the beatitudes, the reward is not merely the outcome of a virtuous life. It is a gratuitous gift of God, who chooses to reward the virtuous person. The reward is promised by the Lord, the merits are made possible by the infusion of grace, and the reward is eventually given freely. Through the

³⁶ *In Matt* #413.

gifts of the Holy Spirit “Christ drew men up from the earth”.³⁷ D. Mongillo fittingly described this dynamism as a parabola, “originating from infinity, flowed out over our earth to then draw it along on the way toward the Father”.³⁸

The beatitudes are not a jigsaw puzzle, each giving a piece of full happiness. Rather, to introduce an image of my own, this series of seven forms a sort of spiral staircase. The advantage of this image is that it does not present the way toward happiness as a linear process. Rather, the believer, led by grace, gradually ascends to God through a life of virtue. As the staircase turns, the believer gains new insights and moves toward higher objectives. From the bottom of the staircase, the rejection of material wealth, as one who is poor in spirit, the believer ascends to his ultimate end: being called and actually being a child of God.

6. The Contribution of the *Lectura*

In this limited discussion, we have seen how the commentary provides further insight into Aquinas’ theology of the beatitudes. The reader who continues to read beyond the sections discussed here, will find that the general remarks on the beatitudes are related to very concrete actions and situations of human life. Getting angry, striving for possessions, making peace with one’s neighbour, feeling sorry for others, these are all situations in which Aquinas sees an opportunity for a person to live the beatitudes. And it is this concrete application that is the special focus of the commentary.

To the debates on virtue, the focus of our attention, the commentary contributes three things: *context*, *clarification*, and *vocabulary*. By *context*, I mean the time in which the commentary was given. There

³⁷ *In Matt* #418: “Christus autem de terra sursum trahebat”.

³⁸ D. Mongillo, T. Sabuzi, ‘Le Beatitudini: Rilettura di Matteo 5’, in D. Lorenz, S. Serafini (ed.), *Studi 1995*, Roma, Pontificia Università S. Tommaso d’Aquino, 1995, 150: “Si può parlare di una ‘curva parabolica’ della Beatitudine, originata dall’infinito, riversata sulla nostra terra per attrarla poi nel cammino verso il Padre.”

are plausible arguments in favor of dating the commentary to the academic year 1271-1272.³⁹ This would mean that Aquinas was working on the *Prima Secundae* while he lectured on Matthew. Knowing this, challenges us to do further research and to find out to what extent these lectures form “the very source and structure of theological exposition”. Second, the commentary offers a *clarification* of certain themes. In the *Summa*, Aquinas discusses the old and the new law at length. The commentary clarifies certain key elements of the new law: what acts is Aquinas thinking of when he states that any law prescribes virtuous acts? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer who tries to fulfill the precepts of the law? The commentary directs our attention to the Sermon on the Mount, as another source of answers to these questions. This text is in turn clarified by the *Summa*, which offers an in-depth treatment of issues that are only discussed in passing in the lectures on Matthew. With the third aspect, *vocabulary*, I refer to certain differences in terminology between the *lectura* and other works that make us aware of subtle changes in theological emphasis that we can see in Aquinas. In the commentary, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are described as helping a person to act “above the human manner”, and in this Aquinas is consistent with his earlier writings on the subject. However, when Aquinas has to describe the operation of the gifts in the *Summa*, he uses a different terminology.⁴⁰ The acts

³⁹ T. Gałuszka, *Tomasza z Akwinu - Lectura super Matheum cap. I-II: Studium historyczno-krytyczne i edycja tekstu*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Esprit SC, 2011, 302-303. Torrell disagrees, on the grounds that Aquinas would have been too busy: J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin: Sa Personne et Son Oeuvre*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 3rd edition, 2015, 90.

⁴⁰ I became aware of this shift through the book of De Guibert: J. de Guibert, *Les Doublets de Saint Thomas d’Aquin: Leur Étude Méthodique – Quelques Réflexions, Quelques Exemples*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1926. Cf. M.S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2005, 141 ff. For Aquinas’ discovery of the *Liber de Bona Fortuna*, and possible motives for his use of it, see: V. Cordonier, ‘La Doctrine Aristotélicienne de la Providence Divine selon Thomas d’Aquin’, in:

are no longer described as helping to act above the human manner, but as an “instinctus”, “motus”, or “impulsione” of the Holy Spirit. This reflects the influence of the *Liber de Bona Fortuna*. For some reason, Aquinas deemed it necessary to depart from what he had always said on the subject, and he did so during or after commenting on Matthew. Because our study of the commentary makes us aware of this shift in terminology, we know we have to pay closer attention to the use of certain words in the *Summa*.

The beatitudes play an important role in the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas. They provide a framework for his discussion of human happiness and how to achieve it. What I hope to have shown in this article is that our understanding of Aquinas’ view of the beatitudes is deepened by a study of the commentary on Matthew. Here, Aquinas engages directly with the primary source of his theology, Sacred Scripture. In the *Summa Theologiae* he stresses the importance of following the *modus loquendi* of Scripture, in the commentary we find what he believes Scripture is speaking of. Aquinas offers concrete examples of how a given beatitude may inform human action. By relating the beatitudes to the entire Sermon on the Mount, he further clarifies how Christians can be “men and women of the beatitudes”. And he firmly places this life of virtue within the Christian life, in which the believer acts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As a friar preacher, Aquinas naturally reflects on the fact that Jesus preaches a sermon to the multitudes. The sermon is, in Aquinas’ words, the ‘doctrine’ of Christ. This fact is so important to him, that he structures most of his commentary around it.⁴¹ Jesus came to sow the seeds of his doctrine, and the heart of this doctrine is found in the beatitudes. The reader’s efforts to understand Aquinas’ commentary on this

P. D’Hoine, G. van Riel (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2014, 495-515.

⁴¹ Aquinas divides the commentary in three sections: the entrance of Christ in this world (Mt. 1-2), the advance of Christ through this world (Mt. 3-20), and his departure from it (Mt. 21-28).

doctrine will be rewarded with new insights, and eventually with a deeper understanding of Aquinas' view on happiness, the beatitudes, and the moral life of the human person.

[Anton ten Klooster, Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Nieuwegracht 65, 3512 LG Utrecht, The Netherlands; A.M.tenKlooster@uvt.nl]

**THOMAS VON AQUIN: KONSEQUENTER LEHRER DER
BARMHERZIGKEIT.
KONKRETE ASPEKTE EINER DIAKONISCH-
MISSIONARISCHEN PASTORAL**

Michael Estler

1. Aktueller Tumult um die Barmherzigkeit

Seitdem Papst Franziskus bei seinem ersten Angelus-Gebet am 17. März 2013 auf das Barmherzigkeitsbuch von Walter Kasper hingewiesen hatte, ist das Thema Barmherzigkeit in aller Munde. Nicht zuletzt hat das Jahr der Barmherzigkeit einen Trend verstärkt, der suggeriert, die Kirche habe vor Papst Franziskus einen barmherzigen Gott nicht gekannt oder zumindest nicht verkündet. Dabei darf man nicht vergessen, dass schon Papst Johannes Paul II. das Thema sehr am Herzen lag. Ich erinnere nur an die Einführung des Sonntags der Göttlichen Barmherzigkeit.

In der aktuellen Diskussion wird häufig die Frage der Verkündigung eines barmherzigen Gottes mit der Frage nach der Zulassung von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen zur Kommunion verknüpft. Letztere gilt vielen als Prüfstein barmherzigen Handelns. Bezeichnenderweise wird diese Verknüpfung wohl auch von Papst Franziskus geteilt. Darauf lässt jedenfalls eine Aussage des Papstes schließen, die Erzbischof Bruno Forte am 3. Mai 2016 zitierte, als er das nachsynodale Schreiben *Amoris laetitia* vorstellte: „Wenn wir uns auf direkte Weise zur Kommunion an wiederverheiratet Geschiedene äußern, wird dies viel Tumult auslösen. Daher sprechen wir nicht direkt darüber. Sorge dafür, dass die notwendigen Voraussetzungen in die Wege geleitet werden; ich werde mich dann um die Schlussfolgerungen kümmern.“¹

¹ “Se parliamo esplicitamente di comunione ai divorziati e risposati – ha riferito monsignor Forte riportando una battuta di Papa Francesco – questi non sai che casino che ci combinano. Allora non ne parliamo in modo diretto, fai in modo che ci siano le premesse, poi le conclusioni le trarrò io” (online im WWW unter URL:

Die Schlussfolgerungen, um die sich der Papst kümmern wollte, sind offensichtlich im nachsynodalen Schreiben *Amoris laetitia* nachzulesen. Den einen geht dieses Schreiben nicht weit genug, weil sie auf ihre Fragen keine konkreten Antworten finden, anderen geht es viel zu weit, weil sie vermuten, dass der Papst es mit den katholischen Normen nicht mehr so genau nehme.² Offensichtlich besteht nur in dem Punkt Einigkeit, dass man jene Antworten vermisst, die man von der Kirche so lange gewohnt war und die alles bis ins letzte Detail zu regeln versuchten.

Was genau ist in diesem Schreiben passiert? Ist darin ein neuer Stil zu beobachten oder ist die Vorgehensweise nur diplomatischer, wie etwa das Papstzitat von Bruno Forte suggerieren könnte?

Um eine Antwort auf diese Fragen zu erhalten, empfehle ich einen Blick in die Theologiegeschichte. Thomas von Aquin ist in diesem Punkt – so scheint mir – noch konsequenter als der Papst, weil er die theologischen Grundlagen für seine Vorgehensweise liefert. Ausgerechnet Thomas, dem man ja eher unterstellen möchte, er versuche alles bis in die kleinste Verästelung hinein zu regeln! Ebendieser Thomas, so behaupte ich, steht Pate für eine Theologie, die den Stil des nachsynodalen Schreibens *Amoris laetitia* stützt. Seine Patenschaft wird in seinem Werk dort konkret, wo wir erfahren, wie er lehrt, mit welchem Selbstverständnis er forscht und das Erforschte an seine Schüler weitergibt.

Da all dies in seinem tiefen Verständnis der Barmherzigkeit Gottes gründet, möchte ich in einem ersten Schritt einige Aspekte zu diesem Thema aus der *Summa Theologiae* aufgreifen (2.1), bevor ich in einem zweiten Schritt auf sein Selbstverständnis als Lehrer zu sprechen komme (2.2).

Anhand dieser Einsichten lassen sich in einem dritten Schritt konkrete Schlussfolgerungen für die eingangs umrissenen konkreten pastoralen Fragestellungen ableiten (3).

<http://www.zonlocale.it/2016/05/03/-nessuno-si-deve-sentire-escluso-dalla-chiesa-/20471> [19.05.2016]).

² Vgl. etwa Christian Geyer in einem FAZ-Artikel “Man reize diesen Herrscher nicht” zur Pius-Bruderschaft vom 09.05.2016.

2. Was Thomas *über* und *wie* er Barmherzigkeit lehrt

2.1 Was Thomas über die Barmherzigkeit in der *Summa* lehrt

Barmherzigkeit ist Thomas zufolge in höchstem Grade Gott zuzusprechen, allerdings nicht im Sinne eines Gefühls. Sie ist an ihrer *Wirkung* zu erkennen.³ Barmherzig wird genannt, wer ein erbarmendes Herz hat, weil es traurig gestimmt wird durch das Elend eines anderen, wie wenn es sein eigenes wäre.⁴ Barmherzigkeit ist das Mit-leiden mit dem Elend eines anderen.⁵ Der Barmherzige arbeitet folglich darauf hin, das Elend des anderen zu beheben, gleichsam wie sein eigenes.⁶ Darin liegt die *Wirkung* der Barmherzigkeit.⁷ Nicht das Gefühl also, aber diese Wirkweise spricht Thomas Gott zu. In jedem der Werke Gottes finden sich nach Thomas Gottes Barmherzigkeit und Wahrheit.⁸ Ebenso waltet in jedem der Werke Gottes Gerechtigkeit.⁹ Ein Werk der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit setzt nach Thomas aber immer ein Werk der Barmherzigkeit voraus und gründet in ihm.¹⁰ So offenbart sich in

³ “Misericordia est maxime Deo attribuenda: tamen secundum effectum, non secundum passionis affectum” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

⁴ “[...] misericors dicitur aliquis quasi habens miserum cor: quia scilicet afficitur ex miseria alterius per tristitiam, ac si ex et eius propria miseria” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

⁵ “Misericordia est compassio miserae alterius” (*STh* II-II, q. 30, a. 1 ad 2).

⁶ “Ex hoc sequitur quod operetur ad depellendam miseriam alterius, secut miseriam propriam, sicut miseriam propriam, sicut miseriam propriam” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

⁷ “[...] et hic est misericordiae effectus” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

⁸ “[...] in quolibet opere Dei misericordia et veritas inveniuntur” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4 resp.).

⁹ “Et sic oportet in omni opere Dei esse iustitiam” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4 resp.).

¹⁰ “Opus autem divinae iustitiae semper praesupponit opus misericordiae, et in eo fundatur” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4 resp.).

jedem Werk Gottes die Barmherzigkeit, wenn man es von seiner Wurzel her betrachtet.¹¹

Thomas spricht im Hinblick auf Gottes Güte, Gerechtigkeit, Freigebigkeit und Barmherzigkeit von der Mitteilung der Vollkommenheiten (*communicatio perfectionum*), jedoch jeweils in anderer Hinsicht.¹² Die Menschwerdung Gottes nennt Thomas „Ankunft der göttlichen Barmherzigkeit“¹³. Durch sie will Gott den Schwachheiten der Menschen abhelfen.¹⁴ Denn Gott kommt in höchstem Maße zu, das Elend anderer zu beheben, insofern man darunter jedwede Schwachheit versteht.¹⁵ Insofern kann gefolgert werden: Die Offenbarung der Barmherzigkeit Gottes hat in Jesus Christus ihren *konkreten Ort*. Gottes Barmherzigkeit ist also mehr als eine der vielen Eigenschaften Gottes.

Barmherzigkeit offenbart Gottes metaphysisches Wesen.¹⁶ Sie offenbart gerade in der Menschwerdung, wie er ist. Durch

¹¹ “Et sic in quolibet opere Domini apparet misericordia, quantum ad primam radicem” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 4 resp.).

¹² “Sed considerandum est quod elargiri perfectiones rebus, pertinet quidem et ad bonitatem divinam, et ad iustitiam, et ad liberalitatem, et misericordiam: tamen secundum aliam et aliam rationem” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

¹³ “Unde patet quod non debuit adventum misericordiae differre usque in finem mundi” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 6 ad 3).

¹⁴ “[...] omnem defectum expellunt, pertinet ad misericordiam” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

¹⁵ “[...] sed repellere miseriam alterius, hoc maxime ei competit, ut per miseriam quemcumque defectum intelligamus” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 resp.).

¹⁶ Ähnlich wie bei Thomas gründet nach Papst Franziskus Gottes Barmherzigkeit in seinem innersten Wesen. Allerdings dehnt Franziskus – vielleicht in Anlehnung an Kasper (vgl. Kasper, *Barmherzigkeit*, 31) – die „Zielgruppe“ von den „Elenden“ auf die „Armen“ aus, obwohl nicht alle, die *miser* sind, zu den Armen gehören: „Im Herzen Gottes gibt es einen so bevorzugten Platz für die Armen, dass er selbst ‚arm wurde‘ (2 Kor 8,9). [...] Denen, die unter der Last von Leid und Armut lebten, versicherte er [Jesus], dass Gott sie im Zentrum seines Herzens trug [...]; mit ihnen identifizierte er sich: ‚Ich war hungrig, und ihr habt mir zu essen gegeben‘ und er lehrte, dass die

Körperliches wollte Gott dem Menschen ein Heilmittel bieten.¹⁷ Thomas erklärt, die Glosse zitierend: „Es gab keinen anderen Grund für das Kommen Christus des Herrn als die Rettung der Sünder. Nimm alle Krankheiten und Wunden hinweg, dann bedarf es keiner Arznei mehr.“¹⁸ Die Menschwerdung Jesu ist „Ankunft der Barmherzigkeit“ Gottes, da sich Gott des Elends der Menschen annimmt. Nach einem Wort des Johannes sollte das Geheimnis der Menschwerdung die Menschen retten: „So sehr hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn dahingab, damit jeder, der an ihn glaubt, nicht verlorenghe, sondern das ewige Leben habe“ (Joh 3,16).¹⁹ Dieser Weg war (nach Augustinus) der beste, um das menschliche Elend zu heilen.²⁰

Die Menschwerdung Gottes war zu unserem Heil notwendig, denn durch sie haben wir vielfältigen Gewinn²¹:

Barmherzigkeit ihnen gegenüber der Schlüssel zum Himmel ist (vgl. Mt 25,35 f.). Für die Kirche ist die Option für die Armen in erster Linie eine theologische Kategorie und erst an zweiter Stelle eine kulturelle, soziologische, politische oder philosophische Frage. Gott gewährt ihnen ‚seine erste Barmherzigkeit‘“ (Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 197. Nr. 198).

¹⁷ “[...] etiam per corporalia ei salutis remedium exhiberet” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 3 ad 1).

¹⁸ “Nulla causa veniendi fuit Christo Domino, nisi peccatores salvos facere. Tolle morbos, tolle vulnera, et nulla est causa medicinae” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 3 s. c.).

¹⁹ “Sed contra, illud per quod humanum genus liberatur a perditione, est necessarium ad humanam salutem. Sed mysterium divinae incarnationis est huiusmodi: secundum illud Joan. 3: ‚Sic Deus dilexit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret, ut omnis qui credit in ipsum non pereat, sed habeat vitam aeternam’” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 s. c.).

²⁰ “Unde dicit Augustinus, 13 *de Trin.* (cap. 10): ‘Ostendamus non alium modum possibilem Deo defuisse, cuius potestati omnia aequaliter subiacent: sed sanandae miseriae nostrae convenientiorem alium modum non fuisse’” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

²¹ “Ergo necesse fuit ad humanam salutem Deum incarnari” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 s. c.). “Sunt autem et aliae plurimae utilitates [...]” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

- der Glaube gewinnt mehr Gewissheit, da Gott selbst zu uns spricht²²
- die Hoffnung wird außerordentlich gestärkt²³
- die Liebe wird aufs höchste entflammt²⁴
- für rechtes Handeln hat er sich selbst zum Vorbild gemacht²⁵
- sie zielt auf die volle Teilhabe am Göttlichen, worin wahrhaft die Seligkeit des Menschen besteht, sie ist das Ziel des menschlichen Lebens²⁶
- und schließlich war sie notwendig, um die Drangsal und Not des Menschen zu wenden²⁷

Die Botschaft von der Barmherzigkeit bei Thomas bedeutet folglich, dass sich Gott durch die Menschwerdung seines Sohnes der Menschen wirksam und leibhaftig annimmt. Wichtig ist für Thomas, dass wir im menschengewordenen Wort ein Vorbild des rechten Handelns haben. Denn in menschlichen Tätigkeiten, wo Erfahrungen ausschlaggebend sind, bewegen Beispiele mehr als Worte.²⁸ Thomas bemerkt diesbezüglich:

Er (Christus) sagt also, dass ich dieses (die Füße waschen) vor allem getan habe, um euch ein Beispiel zu geben; von daher müsst auch ihr einander die Füße waschen, weil ich das mit dieser Tat beabsichtige. Denn in den menschlichen Handlungen bewegen

²² “Primo quidem, quantum ad fidem quae magis certificatur ex hoc quod ipsi Deo loquenti credit” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

²³ “Secundo, quantum ad spem, quae per hoc maxime erigitur” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

²⁴ “Tertio, quantum ad caritatem, quae maxime per hoc excitatur” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

²⁵ “Quarto, quantum ad rectam operationem, in qua nobis exemplum se praebuit” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2).

²⁶ “Quinto, quantum ad plenam participationem divinitatis, quae vere est hominis beatitudo, et finis humanae vitae” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

²⁷ “Similiter etiam hoc utile ad remotionem mali” (*STh* III, q. 1, a. 2 resp.).

²⁸ “In operationibus enim et passionibus humanis, in quibus experientia plurimum valet, magis movent exempla quam verba” (*STh* I–II, q. 34, a. 1 resp.).

die Beispiele mehr als die Worte. Das nämlich tut und erwählt ein Mensch, das ihm als ein Gut erscheint: daher gibt er mehr zu erkennen, dass es sich um ein Gut handelt, wenn er es selbst erwählt, als dass er (nur) lehrt, dass es zu wählen ist. Daher kommt es, dass, wenn jemand etwas sagt, aber demgegenüber etwas anderes tut, er anderen mehr Anreize gibt durch das, was er tut, als durch jenes, was er lehrt.²⁹

Hinter diesen Gedanken steht das Axiom: „*Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*“³⁰. Wir Menschen können und dürfen durch die Menschwerdung des Wortes dem Beispiel Jesu folgen. Die vom fleischgewordenen Wort ausgehende Gnade gelangt äußerlich wahrnehmbar zu uns. Und deshalb wird von der inneren Gnade, durch die die Leiblichkeit des Menschen dem Geist unterstellt wird, das äußerlich wahrnehmbare Handeln hervorgebracht.³¹ Von daher wird verständlich, warum auch in Bezug auf das *äußere Handeln* nach Thomas die Barmherzigkeit die größte aller Tugenden ist.³²

Denn für sich genommen ist die Barmherzigkeit die größte aller Tugenden. Denn es gehört zum Begriff der Barmherzigkeit, zum anderen (Mitmenschen) hinzuströmen und – was mehr ist – dass sie einer Schwäche der anderen aufhilft; und dies kommt im

²⁹ “Dixit ergo, quod hoc ideo feci ut darem vobis exemplum; et ideo debetis alter alterius lavare pedes, quia hoc in facto illo intendebam. Nam in actibus hominum plus movent exempla quam verba. Id enim homo agit et eligit quod videtur ei bonum: unde magis ostendit esse bonum quod ipsemet eligit, quam quod docet esse eligendum. Et inde est quod quando aliquis dicit aliquid, et tamen aliud facit, magis suadet aliis quod facit, quam illud quod docet: et ideo maxime necessarium est ex ipso facto exemplum dare” (*In Jo*, Caput XIII, Lectio II [1781]). Dt. Übers. nach Rohling, *Omne scibile*, 283.

³⁰ Vgl. *STh* III, q. 37, a. 1 ob 2; q. 40, a. 1 ad 3 und Schenk, “Omnis Christi action”, 111–117.

³¹ “Et ideo convenit ut per aliqua exteriora sensibilia gratia a Verbo Incarnato profluens in nos deducatur; et ex hac interiori gratia, per quam caro spiritui subditur, exteriora quaedam opera sensibilia producantur” (*STh* I–II, q. 108, a. 1 resp.).

³² Vgl. hierzu auch Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 37.

höchsten Grade dem Höherstehenden zu. Deshalb wird das Erbarmen gerade Gott als Wesensmerkmal zuerkannt; und es heißt, dass darin am meisten seine Allmacht offenbar wird.³³

Nach Thomas ist die menschliche Barmherzigkeit ein Gott wohlgefälligeres Opfer als andere Opfergaben, weil sie dem Nutzen der Mitmenschen näherkommt als andere Opfer.³⁴ Gott selbst bedarf unserer Opfer nicht.³⁵ Wenn, dann sollen Opfer dem Nächsten nutzen.³⁶ Hier haben wir die Herzmitte des Christlichen erreicht, die in vielen Texten der frühen Kirche zutage tritt: die geistlichen und leiblichen Werke der Barmherzigkeit.³⁷

2.2 *Wie Thomas Barmherzigkeit lehrt*

In seiner *Summa Theologiae* greift Thomas für die Barmherzigkeit ein ihm vertrautes Bild auf, wenn er bemerkt: „Denn es gehört zum Wesen der Barmherzigkeit, zum anderen hinzuströmen.“³⁸ Das Bild des „Hinströmens“ verwendet Thomas bereits in seiner Antrittsvorlesung³⁹, die er im Jahr 1256 in Paris als angehender

³³ “Secundum se misericordia quidem maxima est. Pertinet enim ad misericordiam quod alii effundat; et, quod plus est, quod defectus aliorum sublevet; et hoc est maxime superioris. Unde et misereri ponitur proprium Deo; et in hoc maxime dicitur eius omnipotentia manifestari” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 resp.).

³⁴ “Et ideo misericordia, qua subvenitur defectibus aliorum, est sacrificium ei magis acceptum, utpote propinquius utilitatem proximorum inducens” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 ad 1).

³⁵ “Non enim indiget sacrificiis nostris” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 ad 1).

³⁶ “[...] sed vult ea sibi offerri propter ... proximorum utilitatem” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 ad 1).

³⁷ Theobald hat dies in seiner Studie *Eucharistie als Quelle sozialen Handelns* an vielen Texten der frühen Kirche gezeigt (vgl. u. a. Irenäus *Adv. Haer.* IV 18,6 in Michael Theobald, *Eucharistie als Quelle sozialen Handelns*. Eine biblisch-frühkirchliche Besinnung, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2012, 256–257).

³⁸ “Pertinet enim ad misericordiam quod alii effundat” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 resp.).

³⁹ Vgl. hierzu u. a.: Michael Estler, *Rigans montes (104,13), Die Antrittsvorlesung des Thomas von Aquin in Paris 1256*, Stuttgart 2015.

Lehrer der Theologie gehalten hat.⁴⁰ Im „Hinströmen“ beschreibt Thomas in der Antrittsvorlesung das, was die Lehrer den Hörern vermitteln. Wenn Thomas für das Wesen der Barmherzigkeit und das Wesen des Lehrens dasselbe Bild verwendet, ist das wohl kaum nur ein Zufall. Denn beides, Barmherzigkeit und Weisheit, hat seinen Ursprung in den „Tiefen Gottes“, das heißt in seinem Innersten.⁴¹ Mehr noch: Beides entspricht dem, wie Gott sich durch Offenbarung selbst mitteilt.⁴² Die Mitteilung der Barmherzigkeit und Weisheit sind also mehr als eine bloße Analogie.

2.2.1 Die Lehrer

Thomas beschreibt in seiner Antrittsvorlesung das „Hinströmen“ im Bild des fließenden Wassers, das aus einer Quelle entspringt. Er entnimmt dieses Bild der figurativen Sprache der Psalmen. Ausgehend von Psalmvers 104,13 („Der die Berge von seinen Höhen aus bewässert: Von der Frucht deiner Werke wird die Erde gesättigt.“)⁴³ bemerkt er: Dem Sinn dieses Psalmverses nach „sehen wir Regengüsse aus den Höhen der Wolken herausfließen. Durch sie werden die Berge bewässert. Sie lassen aus sich Flüsse hervorströmen. Durch sie wird die Erde gesättigt und fruchtbar gemacht“⁴⁴. Dieses biblische Bild überträgt er wie folgt:

⁴⁰ *“Similiter etiam nec totum quod doctores capiunt, auditoribus effundunt”* (Antrittsvorlesung I, 89).

⁴¹ Vgl. zum Beispiel Estler, *Rigans montes* (104,13), 176.

⁴² Vgl. oben: Die Menschwerdung Gottes nennt Thomas „Ankunft der göttlichen Barmherzigkeit“. Und: *“Sacra autem doctrina propriissime determinat de Deo secundum quod est altissima causa: quia non solum quantum ad illud quod est creaturas cognoscibile (quod philosophi cognoverunt, ut dicitur Rom 1: ‘Quod notum est Dei, manifestum est illis’); sed etiam quantum ad id quod notum est sibi soli de seipso, et aliis per revelationem communicatum”* (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 6 resp.).

⁴³ *“Rigans montes de superioribus suis, de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra”* (Antrittsvorlesung I, 83).

⁴⁴ *“Videmus autem ad sensum a superioribus nubium imbres effluere, quibus montes rigati et flumina de se emittunt, quibus terra satiata fecundatur”* (Antrittsvorlesung I, 84).

Auf ähnliche Weise wird von den Höhen der göttlichen Weisheit der Geist der Lehrer bewässert. Sie sind mit den Bergen gemeint und durch ihren Dienst wird das Licht der göttlichen Weisheit zum Geist der Hörer hinabgelenkt.⁴⁵

Damit hat der Lehrer teil an der Mitteilung von Gottes Weisheit und (auch!) Barmherzigkeit. Aus dem Vergleich zieht Thomas für die Lehrer⁴⁶ weitere Folgerungen:

- (1) Wie die Bergeshöhen, so ragen auch die Lehrer empor aus der Erde und sind dem Himmel nahe. Daher sollen die heiligen Lehrer allein dem Himmlischen anhangen.⁴⁷
- (2) Ähnlich wie die Gipfel der Berge zuerst durch die Lichtstrahlen angestrahlt werden, empfangen die heiligen Lehrer zuerst die Strahlen der göttlichen Weisheit.⁴⁸
- (3) Wie das Land durch die Berge vor den Feinden geschützt wird, so müssen auch die Lehrer der Kirche den Glauben vor Irrtümern schützen.⁴⁹

Aus diesen Folgerungen leitet Thomas drei Konsequenzen ab:

⁴⁵ “Similiter, de supernis divine sapientie riganatur mentes doctorum, qui per montes significantur, quorum ministerio lumen divine sapientie usque ad mentes audientium deriuatur” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 84).

⁴⁶ Diese ‘heiligen Lehrer’ sind für Thomas zunächst die biblischen Schriftsteller, dann auch die Kirchenlehrer — also auch die Bischöfe — und natürlich die Theologen.

⁴⁷ “Propter montium altitudinem. Sunt enim a terra eleuati celo uicini. Sic enim sacri doctores terrena contempnendo solis caelestibus inhiant” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 86).

⁴⁸ “Primo enim radiis illustrantur. Et similiter sacri doctores mentium splendorem primo recipiunt. Sicut montes enim doctores primitus radiis diuine sapientie illuminantur” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 86).

⁴⁹ “Tertio, propter montium munitionem, quia per montes terra ab hostibus defenditur. Ita et doctores ecclesie in defensionem fidei debent esse contra errores” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 86).

- (1) Alle Lehrer der Heiligen Schrift müssen herausragen durch die Vorbildlichkeit ihres Lebens, damit sie zum wirkungsvollen Verkündigen fähig sind.⁵⁰
- (2) Sie müssen erleuchtet sein.⁵¹
- (3) Sie müssen für den „Streit der Meinungen“ bewehrt sein, um Irrtümer widerlegen zu können.⁵²

Thomas geht es hier um kein überhöhtes Lehreriideal, sondern um den anspruchsvollen Charakter eines *Dienstamtes*, wie es beispielsweise auch Papst Franziskus in *Evangelii Gaudium* mit dem Bild des Kanals beschreibt:

Ich träume von einer missionarischen Entscheidung, die fähig ist, alles zu verwandeln, damit die Gewohnheiten, die Stile, die Zeitpläne, der Sprachgebrauch und jede kirchliche Struktur ein Kanal werden, der mehr der Evangelisierung der heutigen Welt als der Selbstbewahrung dient.⁵³

Ähnlich wie Thomas beschwört Papst Franziskus im Bild des Kanals die Art und Weise der Vermittlung. Sie soll einem Bewässerungskanal gleichen, der die „Wasser“ von Gott her zu den Menschen bringt. Thomas geht es um den Dienstcharakter des *Lehreramtes* als eines Amtes, das Teil eines umfassenden Kommunikations- bzw. Offenbarungsgeschehens ist und in den Tiefen Gottes seinen Ursprung hat.⁵⁴ Prügl zählt nicht umsonst diesen Teil der Antrittsvorlesung zum „*revelatory type*“⁵⁵.

Wie die Berge bewässert und beleuchtet werden, so auch die Lehrer. Ihre Fruchtbarkeit ist nicht ihnen zuzuschreiben, sondern

⁵⁰ “Omnes igitur doctores Sacre Scripture esse debent alti per uite eminentiam, ut sint ydonei ad efficaciter predicandum” (*Antrittsvorlesung I*, 87).

⁵¹ “Debent esse illuminati” (*Antrittsvorlesung I*, 87).

⁵² “Muniti, ut errores confutent disputando” (*Antrittsvorlesung I*, 87).

⁵³ Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 27.

⁵⁴ “Tertio: quantum ad uirtutem communicandi, quia Deus propria uirtute sapientiam communicat. Unde per se ipsum ‚montes rigare‘ dicitur. Sed doctores sapientiam non communicant nisi per ministerium” (*Antrittsvorlesung I*, 90).

⁵⁵ Prügl, *Medieval Biblical Principia*, 260.

dem Wirken Gottes.⁵⁶ Der Lehrer nimmt teil an ihm: „Gabe ist von ihrem inneren Wesen her Weiter-Gabe. Es gehört zur christologischen und pneumatologischen Grundstruktur von Offenbarung und Gnade, die empfangene Gabe anderen mitzuteilen.“⁵⁷ Der Dienst des Lehrers gleicht der Funktion des Kanals. Er soll fähig und geeignet sein, die Wasser so fließen zu lassen, dass sie – das heißt das Wort Gottes – beim Empfänger ankommen können. Die Aufgabe des Lehrers besteht darin, die heiligen Wasser so zu kanalisieren, dass sie Frucht und Leben hervorbringen können. Das erinnert an die Funktion der Suonen bzw. Bewässerungskanäle im Wallis. Sie führen das Wasser auf die trockenen Felder, wo es dringend benötigt wird.⁵⁸ In dieser Metapher kommt deutlich zum Ausdruck, dass gerade dem Mangel (Dürre, Trockenheit) abgeholfen wird. Das ist aber *per definitionem* nach Thomas die Wirkweise der göttlichen Barmherzigkeit. Hier wird deutlich, warum Thomas – wie John O’Callaghan richtig bemerkt – vor dem Hintergrund der *sacra doctrina* (!) den Begriff der *misericordia* transformiert.⁵⁹

Da wir Menschen in den Vermittlungsprozess der Barmherzigkeit und Güte Gottes einbezogen sind, sind die drei oben genannten Aspekte für diesen Prozess und damit auch für eine diakonisch-missionarische Pastoral von besonderer Relevanz.

1) *Wirkungsvolles Verkündigen*: Die Verkündigung der Frohbotschaft ist die wesentliche Sendung der Kirche und

⁵⁶ “Unde fructus montium non ipsis, sed diuinis operibus tribuitur. ‘De fructu’, inquit, ‘operum tuorum’” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 90). Vgl. hierzu auch Estler, *Rigans montes*, 343-346.

⁵⁷ Vgl. Scheuer, “*Aliis communicare*”, 75.

⁵⁸ Vgl. hierzu auch: Johannes Gerber, *Wandern an sagenhaften Suonen*, 9.

⁵⁹ “The result of *Misericordia* being a natural moral virtue in Aquinas ist hat even as he transforms it against the background of *Sacra Doctrina*, insofar as his analysis is correct we can see how inadequate the philosophers’ treatments of it are, treatments bordering on failure, achieved after a very long time, with a great deal of error” (O’Callaghan, “*Misericordia* in Aquinas”, 231).

damit erste und oberste Priorität einer diakonisch-missionarischen Pastoral.⁶⁰ Sie ist durch nichts zu ersetzen. Keine Aktion käme ihr an Würde und Größe gleich.

- 2) *Erleuchtetes Beten*: Einen Verkünder des Wortes Gottes, der nicht innehält, um zu beten und sich erleuchten zu lassen, nennt der Papst einen falschen Propheten, Betrüger und eitlen Scharlatan.⁶¹ Die Zeit des Gebetes ist eine Zeit, dem Herrn zu erlauben, den Prediger zu erleuchten und zu erneuern.⁶² Auch bei Thomas ist das Gebet zentral: „Daher muss man Gott bitten!“⁶³
- 3) *Mutiges Beschützen*: Vorbild ist Gott selbst, der wie die Berge sein Volk umgibt: „Wie Berge Jerusalem rings umgeben, so ist der Herr um sein Volk“ (Ps 125,2). Wer andere vor Gefahren behütet, tut, was Gott selbst tut. Für einen Theologen wie Thomas gehört zu dieser Schutzfunktion selbstverständlich die Abwehr von Verfälschungen der Glaubenslehre: „Die Lehrer müssen gefestigt sein, damit sie die Irrtümer durch Disputieren widerlegen.“⁶⁴ Hier gilt es behutsam auf die Substanz zu achten. So kann eine „Schutzfunktion“ ausüben auch heißen, nicht einer Formulierung treu zu bleiben, sondern den Menschen die „Substanz“ zu überbringen.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Vgl. Paul VI., *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Nr. 14.

⁶¹ „Doch wenn er nicht innehält, um das Wort Gottes mit echter Offenheit zu hören, wenn er nicht zulässt, dass es sein Leben anrührt, ihn in Frage stellt, ihn ermahnt, ihn aufrüttelt, wenn er sich nicht Zeit nimmt, um mit dem Wort Gottes zu beten, dann ist er tatsächlich ein falscher Prophet, ein Betrüger oder ein eitler Scharlatan“ (Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 151).

⁶² Vgl. Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 152.

⁶³ Vgl. *Antrittsvorlesung* I, 91.

⁶⁴ *Antrittsvorlesung* I, 87.

⁶⁵ „Denn im Glaubensgut der christlichen Lehre ist das eine die Substanz [...] ein anderes die Art und Weise, diese auszudrücken. Manchmal ist das, was die Gläubigen beim Hören einer vollkommen

2.2.2 Die Hörer

Parallel zur Funktion und Stellung des Lehrers entwickelt Thomas, von Ps 104,13 ausgehend, Überlegungen zur Stellung der „Hörer“. Die Hörer werden im Gleichnis der Erde bildlich dargestellt.⁶⁶ Aus der Feststellung, dass die Erde (im Gegensatz zum Himmel) unten liegt, fest, stark und fruchtbar ist, leitet Thomas drei Folgerungen ab:⁶⁷ Ähnlich müssen die Hörer demütig, stark und fruchtbar sein.⁶⁸ Hinsichtlich der Fruchtbarkeit bemerkt Thomas: „Aber Fruchtbarkeit wird verlangt in Bezug auf das eigene Finden, durch welches ein guter Hörer von wenig Gehörtem vieles berichten möge.“⁶⁹

Die Fruchtbarkeit bezieht Thomas auf die *inventio*, das Entdecken. Wird Wissen durch fremde Hilfe erworben, spricht man von *disciplina*; geschieht der Vorgang der Erkenntnis durch die Eigenkraft der Vernunft, dann spricht man von *inventio*.⁷⁰ *Inventio* bedeutet so viel wie selbstständiges Finden und Forschen bzw.

musterhaften Sprache empfangen, aufgrund ihres eigenen Sprachgebrauchs und -verständnisses etwas, was nicht dem wahren Evangelium Jesu Christi entspricht. In der heiligen Absicht, ihnen die Wahrheit über Gott und den Menschen zu vermitteln, geben wir ihnen bei manchen Gelegenheiten einen falschen ‘Gott’ und ein menschliches Ideal, das nicht wirklich christlich ist. Auf diese Weise sind wir einer Formulierung treu, überbringen aber nicht die Substanz” (Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 41).

⁶⁶ “Auditorum conditionem, quae sub terre similitudine figuratur” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 88).

⁶⁷ Vgl. *Antrittsvorlesung* I, 88.

⁶⁸ Vgl. *Antrittsvorlesung* I, 88.

⁶⁹ “Sed fecunditas quantum ad inuentionem, per quam ex paucis auditis multa bonus auditor annuntiet” (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 88).

⁷⁰ Vgl. Pesch, *Theologie des Wortes*, 454. Vgl. auch Estler, *Rigans montes*, 216 ff.

erstmaliges Entdecken von Neuem und entspricht der heutigen Bedeutung des Ausdrucks „kreativ“.⁷¹

Das Zitat des Thomas besagt dann: Durch das eigene Finden vermag der Hörer den wenigen Worten, die er erhält, viel zu entnehmen, um es weiterzugeben.

Wenn Thomas die Hörer ermutigt, aus wenigem möglichst vieles zu machen, hat er mit dieser Forderung den Erfolg seiner eigenen Lehrtätigkeit quasi aus der Hand gegeben.⁷² Nicht seiner Fähigkeit, sondern Gott traut er zu, dass er aus einem winzigen Samenkorn Großes wachsen lassen kann. Für die Lehrer heißt das, auch mit „Leerstellen“ die Hörer in die Freiheit zu entlassen und sie zu befähigen, ermächtigen und ermutigen, das Werk weiterzuführen.⁷³ Das ist die logische Konsequenz (!) der Bestimmung des ministeriellen Amtes als eines Kanals, dessen Wasser am Ort ihrer Bestimmung dem schöpferischen Mitwirken der Empfänger anheimgegeben sind.

Wer so sein Amt versteht, muss in letzter Konsequenz so durchlässig sein, dass eben in den Menschen die „Wirkung“ von Gottes Barmherzigkeit sich in einem offenen Prozess des Entdeckens bzw. als Antwort auf die Mitteilung und Vermittlung von Gottes Wort entfalten kann. Barmherzigkeit ist – wie Kasper richtig betont – „ein nicht ableitbares freies Geschehen, das selber nur wieder in Freiheit angenommen oder auch verweigert werden kann“⁷⁴.

3 Barmherzigkeit im Hinblick auf wiederverheiratet Geschiedene?

Die Metapher der bewässerten und bewässernden Berge ist – wie wir gesehen haben – ein ausdrucksstarkes Bild für Gottes

⁷¹ Vgl. Schmidl, *Homo discens*, 58 und Di Maio, *Il concetto*, 403, Anm. 71.

⁷² Vgl. hierzu auch Estler, *Rigans montes*, 358.

⁷³ Vgl. hierzu die Überlegungen von Schöttler zur Predigt als offenem Kunstwerk: Schöttler, *Predigt als Schriftauslegung*, 250 ff.

⁷⁴ Kasper, *Barmherzigkeit*, 39.

Barmherzigkeit. Denn zum Erbarmen gehört, dass es sich auf die anderen ergießt („*quod alii effundat*“⁷⁵) um die Not (die „Dürre“) zu beheben. Daher möchte ich die vorausgehenden Überlegungen fruchtbar machen für die mit dem Thema Barmherzigkeit heutzutage so eng verknüpfte Frage der Zulassung von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen zum Sakrament der Eucharistie.

3.1 Erste Vorbemerkung: erste Grenze

Da es bei der Barmherzigkeit grundsätzlich um die Behebung einer Not geht, trifft das Argument der Barmherzigkeit für die Zulassung von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen zur Kommunion den eigentlichen Kern der Sache nicht. Barmherzig zu handeln hieße in diesem Falle nämlich nicht, dem Mangel des Sakramenteneempfangs abzuhelfen, sondern der Not der Menschen, die ursprünglich ja nicht aus der Verweigerung des Sakraments resultiert. Denn welche Not sollte behoben werden: die des Sakramenteneempfangs oder die der gescheiterten Ehe? Da Gottes Zusage der Liebe und Treue nun einmal für die erste Ehe gilt, denn das gehört ja zu einem „Sakrament“, würde er sich selbst widersprechen, wenn er die Not nicht dadurch beheben wollte, dass er die erste (gescheiterte) Ehe zu „retten“ versuchte.

Das mag ein Grund sein, warum der Katechismus der katholischen Kirche den Ausschluss von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen vom Sakramenteneempfang mit dem *ius divinum*⁷⁶ begründet:

„Wer seine Frau aus der Ehe entlässt und eine andere heiratet, begeht ihr gegenüber Ehebruch. Auch eine Frau begeht Ehebruch, wenn sie ihren Mann aus der Ehe entlässt und einen anderen heiratet“ (Mk 10,11–12). Die Kirche hält deshalb daran fest, dass sie, falls die Ehe gültig war, eine neue Verbindung nicht als gültig anerkennen kann. Falls Geschiedene zivil wiederverheiratet sind, befinden sie sich in einer Situation, die dem

⁷⁵ „Pertinet enim ad misericordiam quod alii effundat“ (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 resp.). Thomas verwendet hier das gleiche Bewässerungsvokabular wie in seiner Antrittsvorlesung: Vgl. z. B. „Similiter etiam nec totum quod doctores capiunt, auditoribus effundunt“ (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 89).

⁷⁶ Vgl. hierzu etwa Streit, *Welcher Gott*, 19.

Gesetz Gottes objektiv widerspricht. Darum dürfen sie, solange diese Situation andauert, nicht die Kommunion empfangen. Aus dem gleichen Grund können sie gewisse kirchliche Aufgaben nicht ausüben. Die Aussöhnung durch das Bußsakrament kann nur solchen gewährt werden, die es bereuen, das Zeichen des Bundes und der Treue zu Christus verletzt zu haben, und sich verpflichten, in vollständiger Enthaltbarkeit zu leben.⁷⁷

Das ist „starker Tobak“. Papst Benedikt XVI. *em.* bekräftigt diese Aussagen in seinen im Jahr 2014 veröffentlichten „Gesammelten Schriften“, wenn er von der „Unmöglichkeit“⁷⁸, die heilige Eucharistie zu empfangen, schreibt. Hoping meinte, dass dieser aus dem Jahr 1972 stammende und aktuell umgearbeitete Text Ratzingers Einfluss auf die ordentliche Bischofssynode 2015 in Rom haben werde.⁷⁹ Dies ist wohl auch geschehen, wie das eingangs erwähnte Papstzitat von Bruno Forte zeigt. Die vom emeritierten Papst vorgenommenen Textänderungen können aber auch als Kommentar zur Rede „Das Evangelium von der Familie“⁸⁰ verstanden werden, die Kasper im Frühjahr 2014 auf Einladung von Papst Franziskus im Konsistorium gehalten hat.⁸¹ Ist damit alles gesagt, was zu diesem Thema zu sagen ist bzw. gesagt werden kann?

3.2 Zweite Vorbemerkung: zweite Grenze

Ganz offensichtlich ist nicht alles gesagt, denn in seiner Generalaudienz am 5. August 2015 meinte Papst Franziskus mit Blick auf wiederverheiratet Geschiedene:

„Diese Menschen sind ja keineswegs exkommuniziert – sie sind nicht exkommuniziert. Und darum darf man sie auch absolut

⁷⁷ KKK, 1650.

⁷⁸ Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften* 4, 621.

⁷⁹ Vgl. Hoping, *Wider die Vereinnahmung*, 49.

⁸⁰ Kasper, *Das Evangelium von der Familie*, Freiburg / Basel / Wien 2014.

⁸¹ Vgl. Hoping, *Wider die Vereinnahmung*, 47.

nicht als Exkommunizierte behandeln – sie gehören weiterhin zur Kirche.“⁸²

Fast wörtlich identisch (!) schrieben im Jahr 1993 bereits die Bischöfe der oberrheinischen Kirchenprovinz in ihrem Hirten Schreiben: „Sie sind [...] nicht exkommuniziert [...]; sie sind und bleiben Glieder der Kirche.“⁸³ Und in den „Grundsätzen“ desselben Schreibens unterstreichen die Bischöfe fast schon beschwörend: „Sie sind auch nicht exkommuniziert, d. h. gänzlich und grundsätzlich aus der Gottesdienst- und Sakramentengemeinschaft ausgeschlossen.“⁸⁴

Spielt Papst Franziskus bewusst auf dieses Schreiben an oder ist es nur Zufall, dass er im Vorfeld der Familiensynode diese Selbstverständlichkeit in Erinnerung ruft? Denn *de facto* werden wiederverheiratet Geschiedene nach can. 915 CIC wie Exkommunizierte behandelt:

„Zur heiligen Kommunion dürfen nicht zugelassen werden Exkommunizierte [...] nach Verhängung oder Feststellung der Strafe sowie andere, die hartnäckig in einer offenkundigen schweren Sünde verharren.“

Der Ausschluss von der Kommunion ist nach can. 915 CIC konkreter Ausdruck dieser Strafe für jene, die offenkundig in schwerer Sünde verharren. Was will der Papst mit seiner Aussage bewirken? Will er sagen, dass wiederverheiratet Geschiedene den Status der Kinder vor der Erstkommunion haben? Aber sie sind nun einmal Erwachsene und keine Kinder mehr. Deshalb erwägt das Papier der oberrheinischen Bischöfe als Konsequenz die Möglichkeit einer Gewissensentscheidung Einzelner für die Teilnahme an der Eucharistie.⁸⁵ Im Hinblick auf die Praxis der Zulassung wiederverheiratet Geschiedener zur Kommunion stellen

⁸² Franziskus, Generalaudienz am 5. August 2015, online im WWW unter URL:

http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/08/05/papst_%E2%80%99Ewiederwiederverheiratete_nicht_wie_exkommunizierte_behandeln/1163102 [06.08.2015].

⁸³ Die Bischöfe, *Hirtenschriften*, 11.

⁸⁴ Die Bischöfe, *Grundsätze*, 26.

⁸⁵ Vgl. z. B. Die Bischöfe, *Grundsätze*, 30.

die oberrheinischen Bischöfe fest: „Wer hier anders handelt, tut dies gegen die Ordnung der Kirche.“⁸⁶ Dass die oberrheinischen Bischöfe mit ihrem Schreiben aber selbst gegen diese Ordnung gehandelt haben, daran lässt „das Schreiben an die Bischöfe der katholischen Kirche über den Kommunionempfang von wiederverheiratet geschiedenen Gläubigen“ der Glaubenskongregation von 1994 keinen Zweifel. Man darf sich mit Recht fragen, ob sich Papst Franziskus bewusst auf ein ähnliches Glatteis begeben und eine „Grenze“ ausloten will, die knapp an das Schreiben der oberrheinischen Bischöfe heranreicht?

3.3 Zwischen nicht exkommuniziert und nicht zur Kommunion zugelassen

Die Anzahl jener Menschen, die *nicht exkommuniziert* und *nicht zur Kommunion zugelassen* sind, ist weitaus größer als man auf den ersten Blick vermuten könnte. Der entscheidende Punkt – und da ist Söding zuzustimmen – ist nämlich gar nicht das Problem der Zulassung von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen zum Sakrament der Eucharistie, sondern zum Sakrament der Beichte:

Nach einer gescheiterten Ehe wäre ein Hinzutreten zum Tisch des Herrn ohnehin nur möglich, wenn das Sakrament der Versöhnung empfangen worden wäre. Das gilt für diejenigen, die bekennen müssten, die Ehe gebrochen zu haben, aber in anderer Weise auch für all diejenigen, bei denen die Schuld nicht einfach zu verteilen ist. Die Betrogenen dürften keinen Hass im Herzen tragen, wenn sie an der Eucharistie teilnehmen wollen. Die Lossprechung aber kann nur erfolgen, wenn die Sünden bereut und bekannt werden und wenn der Wille zur Wiedergutmachung und Besserung da ist. Die Lossprechung müsste hingegen verweigert werden, wenn es keinen Vorsatz gäbe, ‚nicht mehr‘ zu sündigen, wie Jesus es nach Joh 8,1–11 der Ehebrecherin mit auf den Weg gibt. Hier stößt das Bußsakrament an Grenzen, wenn jeder Geschlechtsakt außerhalb der nach wie vor gültigen ersten Ehe als schwere Sünde beurteilt wird, dauerhafte Enthaltensamkeit von den Betroffenen aber nicht versprochen werden kann, sei es, weil die

⁸⁶ Die Bischöfe, *Grundsätze*, 13.

Schwäche ihres Fleisches, sei es, weil die Stimme ihres Gewissens sie daran hindert. Die Systematik des katholischen Eherechts lässt wiederverheirateten Geschiedenen keinen Zugang zu den Sakramenten offen, weil sie, wenn sie nicht enthaltsam sind, in ‚objektiver‘ Sünde leben und diese Sünde nicht bereuen, sondern ständig wiederholen.⁸⁷

Man kann sich fragen, wem diese (in sich stimmige!) Logik heute noch einsichtig zu machen ist und wer diese so noch praktiziert. Denn die Betroffenen sehen schon gar nicht mehr ein, weshalb sie eine schwere Sünde begehen, wenn sie sexuellen Verkehr mit ihrem (neuen) Partner haben.⁸⁸ An diese Tatsache anschließend darf man sich weiter fragen, ob es nicht gegen die relativ geringe Zahl von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen noch die viel größere Zahl der Nichtverheirateten und Verheirateten gibt, die in objektiver ‚schwerer‘ Sünde leben, diese nicht bereuen, sondern sie ständig wiederholen und trotzdem die Sakramente empfangen? Realistisch betrachtet dreht sich die ganze Diskussion um die Zulassung der wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen nur um die Spitze eines Eisberges. Sie ist eine Diskussion um einen kleinen Teil der Christen, der für einen großen Teil, den wir längst aus den Augen verloren haben oder den wir einfach nur dulden, Pate steht. Müssen wir uns als Theologen und Seelsorger daher nicht den Weheruf gefallen lassen: „Weh euch, ihr Schriftgelehrten und Pharisäer, ihr Heuchler! [...] Ihr siebt Mücken aus und verschluckt Kamele“ (Mt 23,23–24). Müssten wir uns nicht auch um das Problem jener nicht unbeachtlichen Zahl von Menschen zu kümmern, die sich längst vom Bußsakrament verabschiedet haben und dennoch wie selbstverständlich zur Kommunion gehen. Ratzinger hat völlig Recht, wenn er diesbezüglich mahnt: „Die Unmöglichkeit (für wiederverheiratet Geschiedene), die heilige Eucharistie zu empfangen, wird nicht zuletzt auch deswegen als so verletzend empfunden, weil gegenwärtig praktisch alle in der Messe Anwesenden auch zum Tisch des Herrn hinzutreten.“⁸⁹ Seien wir doch einmal ehrlich: Nach dem II. Vatikanum hat sich eine

⁸⁷ Söding, „Geschieden“, 211.

⁸⁸ Vgl. Söding, „Geschieden“, 214.

⁸⁹ Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften* 4, 621.

pastorale Schiefelage eingeschlichen, die ohne weiteren noch größeren Schaden nicht wieder zu beheben ist. Wer bewusst auf den Empfang des Sakraments der Eucharistie verzichten muss, lässt sich eine derartige „Bloßstellung“ vor versammelter Gemeinde heute kaum noch gefallen. Da bleibt man lieber der gottesdienstlichen Versammlung am Sonntag fern. Notfalls hat man ja noch den Fernsehgottesdienst.

3.4 *Zu Hilfe kommt uns Thomas*

Dieser schmale Grat hat ein von keinem ausgesprochenes, aber von vielen eingehaltenes „Gesetz“ hervorgebracht: Man redet nicht über Dinge, die anstößig sind und man duldet Zustände, die man nicht ändern kann. Die Kommunion empfangen als Relikt der Volkskirche mitunter Menschen, die nicht mehr wissen, wie und was ihnen geschieht, und die zur Rechtfertigung ihres Tun einzig auf ihre Taufe verweisen könnten. Muss man nicht auch diesen Kirchgängern gerechterweise den Zugang verwehren? Weil ich Gottes Gesetz nicht abschaffen, die Disziplin der Kirche nicht ändern und den Tatbestand einer „schweren“ Sünde nicht uminterpretieren kann, ersuche ich Papst Franziskus und Thomas um Rat.

„Wenn man ein pastorales Ziel und einen missionarischen Stil übernimmt, der wirklich alle ohne Ausnahmen und Ausschließung erreichen soll, konzentriert sich die Verkündigung auf das Wesentliche, auf das, was schöner, größer, anziehender und zugleich notwendiger ist.“⁹⁰

Also beginnen wir noch einmal beim Wesentlichen, bei Gottes Gesetz. Es ist ein wesentliches Argument in der Pastoral für wiederverheiratete Geschiedene. Selbst Söding hält aufgrund einer breiten Jesustradition, die für eine lebenslange Bindung der Eheleute eintritt, die Rede von Gottes Gesetz im Zusammenhang mit der Ehe im Gegensatz zu Striet⁹¹ für richtig: „Sie ist schrifttheologisch fundiert, moralisch orientiert und juristisch so

⁹⁰ Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 35.

⁹¹ Vgl. etwa Magnus Striet / Rita Werden, „Welcher Gott will welches Gesetz? Unterschiedliche Gottesvorstellungen in der Rede vom *ius divinum*“, in *Herder Korrespondenz* 69 (2015), 19–23.

definiert, dass, wenn irgendwo, dann hier die Kategorie des *ius divinum* passt.⁹²

Thomas nennt in seiner Antrittsvorlesung das Wort der Heiligen Schrift (*hic est liber mandatorum Dei*⁹³) Gottes ewiges Gesetz (*permanet autem in eternum haec lex*⁹⁴). An diesem Gesetz hält Thomas unumstößlich fest. Gleichzeitig vertraut er darauf, dass Gott die entsprechende Frucht dieses Gesetzes in den Hörern hervorbringt, wenn er nur als Lehrer seinen Dienst (durch wirkungsvolles Verkündigen, erleuchtetes Beten und mutiges Beschützen) ausübt. Wer seinen Dienst in diesem Sinne versteht, der kann loslassen, Macht und Kontrolle abgeben. Denn die Frucht ist unverfügbar. Sie darf den göttlichen Werken zugeschrieben werden.⁹⁵ Folgerichtig erachtet Thomas das neue Gesetz als ein eingegebenes Gesetz der Gnade des Heiligen Geistes – der Kraft des Glaubens an Christus.⁹⁶ Daraus folgt weiter: Was für Gottes Gesetz gilt, muss auch für das Dogma gelten: Niemand hat Verfügungsmacht über die Freiheit des Menschen. Weil der Hörer frei ist, muss seine „Kreativität“ komplementär zur Güte und Barmherzigkeit Gottes gesehen werden. Und wenn Gott ein Gott der Güte und Barmherzigkeit ist, dann muss gelten, dass Gott den Menschen als Freiheitswesen respektiert und anerkennt. Denn die Kontrolle ist bei Thomas ausdrücklich dem Zugriff des Lehrers entzogen.⁹⁷ Papst Franziskus äußert sich zu dieser Thematik wie folgt:

⁹² Söding, „Geschieden“, 190.

⁹³ *Antrittsvorlesung* II, 92.

⁹⁴ *Antrittsvorlesung* II, 95.

⁹⁵ „Unde fructus montium non ipsis, sed diuinis operibus tribuitur“ (*Antrittsvorlesung* I, 90).

⁹⁶ “[...] Quod principaliter nova lex est lex indita” (*STh* I–II, q. 106, a. 1). “[...] quod in scriptura Evangelii non continentur nisi ea quae pertinent ad gratiam Spiritus Sancti [...]” (*STh* I–II, q. 106, a. 1 ad 1). “Per fidem autem Christi pertinet homo ad novum testamentum. Unde quibuscumque fuit lex gratiae indita, secundum hoc ad novum testamentum pertinebant” (*STh* I–II, q. 106, a. 1 ad 3).

⁹⁷ Vgl. Estler, *Rigans montes*, 355 ff.

Es ist eine vermeintlich doktrinale oder disziplinarische Sicherheit, die Anlass gibt zu einem narzisstischen und autoritären Elitebewusstsein, wo man, anstatt die anderen zu evangelisieren, sie analysiert und bewertet und, anstatt den Zugang zur Gnade zu erleichtern, die Energien im Kontrollieren verbraucht.⁹⁸

Häufig verhalten wir uns wie Kontrolleure der Gnade und nicht wie ihre Förderer. Doch die Kirche ist keine Zollstation, sie ist das Vaterhaus, wo Platz ist für jeden mit seinem mühevollen Leben.⁹⁹

Wenn schon der Papst nicht kontrolliert und die Kirche keine Zollstation ist, kann auch ich an der Kommunionbank keine Zollstation errichten und meine Energien nicht im Kontrollieren verbrauchen. Im Namen Gottes die Menschen zu kontrollieren ist etwas, was sich mir verbietet. Im Namen Gottes dagegen die Frohe Botschaft mit Freimut, Kraft, Freude und Entschiedenheit zu verkünden ist etwas, was mir mein Glaube gebietet. Was heute fehlt, ist eine Hermeneutik, die eine Praxis der bloßen *Duldung* – theologisch verantwortet – in eine Praxis der *Verantwortung* überführt.¹⁰⁰

Ich kann keinen Anstoß nehmen an den Menschen, die der Einladung des Herrn zum Festmahl aufgrund des gehörten und im Herzen erwogenen Wortes Gottes folgen. Ansonsten würde ich mir wie ein Pharisäer oder ein Schriftgelehrter vorkommen, der zu den Jüngern Jesu sagt: „Wie könnt ihr zusammen mit Zöllnern und Sündern essen und trinken?“ (Lk 5,30). Ich frage mich: Muss die Praxis und der Wunsch vieler, die Kommunion „trotzdem“ zu empfangen, nicht so sehr als pastorale Schiefelage, sondern mehr als ein „Zeichen der Zeit“ gesehen und anerkannt werden? Ist dieser Wunsch nicht das Zeichen einer Zeit, in der uns Jesus „pausenlos wiederholt“¹⁰¹: „Gebt ihr ihnen zu essen!“¹⁰² (Mk 6,37). Setzt das

⁹⁸ Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 94.

⁹⁹ Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 47.

¹⁰⁰ So meint Striet, es müsse ein ‘Gesetz’ geben, das keines ist, das vorschreibt, sondern eines, das dazu auffordert, das Leben verantwortet zu gestalten (vgl. Striet, *Gottes Schweigen*, 152).

¹⁰¹ Vgl. Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 49.

¹⁰² Vgl. Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 49.

Sakrament der Eucharistie überhaupt den Empfang des Bußsakramentes voraus, wie oftmals bei der Vorbereitung der Kinder auf die Erstkommunion suggeriert wird? Bietet nicht die aktuelle – von vielen als zu *lax* empfundene – Praxis die Chance, das Sakrament der Buße aus dem Schattendasein eines Vorbereitungssakraments auf die Eucharistie herauszuholen und ihm eine eigenständige Dignität zuzuerkennen? Ist es nicht auch vorstellbar, dass der häufige Empfang der Eucharistie zu einem würdigeren Empfang des Bußsakramentes disponiert? Die Feier der Eucharistie hat doch selbst sündenvergebende Wirkung: „Trinkt alle daraus; das ist mein Blut, das Blut des Bundes, das für viele vergossen wird *zur Vergebung der Sünden*“ (Mt 26,28).

Ich muss ihn immer empfangen, damit er immer meine Sünden vergibt. Wenn ich ständig sündige, muss ich immer ein Heilmittel haben.¹⁰³

Dieses Bewusstsein hat sich in den Kirchen der Reformation besser erhalten als bei uns Katholiken. Ich erinnere daran, dass Jesus die Gesellschaft von Zöllnern und Sündern nicht scheute (Lk 5,27–30), dass zu seinem Festmahl Arme, Krüppel, Lahme und Blinde willkommen waren (Lk 14,12–14) und dass der *barmherzige* Vater gerade für seinen verlorenen Sohn ein Gastmahl bereite (Lk 15,11–32).¹⁰⁴ Ist es nicht der tiefste Ausdruck von Gottes Barmherzigkeit, dass er niemanden vom Festmahl ausschließt? „Geht also hinaus auf die Straßen und ladet *alle*, die ihr trifft, zur Hochzeit ein“ (Mt 22,9). Was diese Einladung Gott kostet, zeigt die Anwesenheit des Verräters beim letzten Abendmahl Jesu. Ihm gilt in übertragenem Sinn das Wort: „Mein Freund, wie konntest du hier ohne Hochzeitsgewand erscheinen?“ (Mt 22,12). Das Kreuz ist daher ein Zeichen von Gottes bedingungsloser Zusage seiner Gemeinschaft mit uns Menschen. Ist insofern nicht die Mahlgemeinschaft der tiefste und innigste Ausdruck von Gottes Sehnsucht, unserer „Schwäche

¹⁰³ “Quia semper pecco, semper debeo habere medicinam” (Ambrosius, *De sacramentis*, IV, 6, 28, 152–153). Vgl. Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 47, Anm. 51.

¹⁰⁴ Vgl. Bonny, “Die Bischofssynode”, 289 ff.

aufzuhelfen“¹⁰⁵? Dazu passt ein weiteres Zitat von Papst Franziskus:

Die Eucharistie ist, obwohl sie die Fülle des sakramentalen Lebens darstellt, nicht eine Belohnung für die Vollkommenen, sondern ein großzügiges Heilmittel und eine Nahrung für die Schwachen.¹⁰⁶

Der Papst zieht zur Begründung seiner Aussage in den Fußnoten keine geringeren Autoritäten als Ambrosius (siehe oben) und Cyrill von Alexandrien heran:

Ich habe mich geprüft und erkannt, dass ich unwürdig bin. Denen, die so reden, sage ich: Und wann werdet ihr würdig sein? Wann werdet ihr also vor Christus erscheinen? Und wenn eure Sünden euch hindern, näherzukommen, und wenn ihr niemals aufhört zu fallen — wer bemerkt seinen eigenen Fehler, sagt der Psalm – werdet ihr schließlich nicht teilhaben an der Heiligung, die Leben schenkt für die Ewigkeit?¹⁰⁷

Daraus gilt es, so Papst Franziskus, pastorale Konsequenzen zu ziehen:

Diese Überzeugungen haben auch pastorale Konsequenzen, und wir sind berufen, sie mit Besonnenheit und Wagemut in Betracht zu ziehen.¹⁰⁸

Besonnenheit und Wagemut: Warum den Wagemut Gottes nicht als Vorbild nehmen?

„ Gott handelt barmherzig, nicht indem er etwas gegen seine Gerechtigkeit tut, sondern indem er über die Gerechtigkeit hinaus

¹⁰⁵ “[...] quod defectus aliorum sublevet” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 resp.).

¹⁰⁶ Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 47.

¹⁰⁷ “Ubi vero probavi meipsum, indignum me esse video. Quandonam ergo dignus eris, o quisquis haec dicis; quandonam teipsum Christo sistes? Nam si te peccata usque deterreant, labi autem cessaturus sis nunquam: «Quis enim delicat intelliget?» ut sanctus ait Psalmista, vacuus omnio comperiere sanctificationis illius quae in aeternum nos servat” (Cyrill von Alexandrien, *In Joannis Evangelium* IV, 583–586). Vgl. Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 47, Anm. 51.

¹⁰⁸ Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 47.

etwas wirkt, wie wenn jemand einem Gläubiger, dem er hundert Denare schuldet, von sich aus zweihundert gibt.“¹⁰⁹

Thomas folgert, dass die Barmherzigkeit die Gerechtigkeit nicht aufhebt, sondern eine gewisse Fülle der Gerechtigkeit ist.¹¹⁰ Barmherzigkeit als Fülle der Gerechtigkeit?

Eine allgemeine Zulassung zur Eucharistie von wiederverheiratet Geschiedenen wie auch die Öffnung des Zugangs zu den Sakramenten für alle, die in objektiver schwerer Sünde leben und diese ständig wiederholen, hieße Gott zum Schuldner von zweihundert Denaren eines Gläubigers zu machen, dem er nur einhundert Denare schuldet. Gott ist aber frei und er darf jedem, dem er hundert Denare schuldet, auch mehr geben. Es ist seine Entscheidung, wie er der Schwäche der Menschen aufhelfen möchte.¹¹¹

Im Hirtenschreiben der oberrheinischen Bischöfe von 1993 lag die Last der Verantwortung beim einzelnen Seelsorger.¹¹² Ein Seelsorger sollte eine *dienende* und *vermittelnde* Funktion, wie Thomas sie beschreibt, ausfüllen. Die letzte Verantwortung aber liegt bei Gott, der die Frucht seines Wortes in den Hörern hervorbringt, und bei diesen selbst, gemäß dem Wort des Apostels Paulus: „Jeder soll sich selbst prüfen“ (1 Kor 11,28).¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ “Deus misericorditer agit, non quidem contra iustitiam suam faciendo, sed aliquid supra iustitiam operando: sicut si alicui cui debentur centum denarii, aliquis ducentos det de suo, tamen non contra iustitiam facit, sed liberaliter vel misericorditer operator” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 ad 2).

¹¹⁰ “Ex quo patet quod misericordia non tollit iustitiam, sed est quaedam iustitiae plenitudo” (*STh* I, q. 21, a. 3 ad 2).

¹¹¹ Vgl. hierzu: “Pertinet enim ad misericordiam quod alii effundat; et, quod plus est, quod defectus aliorum sublevet” (*STh* II–II, q. 30, a. 4 resp.).

¹¹² Vgl. Söding, “Geschieden”, 214.

¹¹³ Vgl. hierzu: “Relatio der deutschsprachigen Gruppe”, 135.

4. Fazit: Ein weiterer Titel für Thomas?

Thomas hat in der Auslegung von Psalm 104,13 seiner Antrittsvorlesung in einer Treue am Dogma festgehalten, die nicht auf Kosten der Freiheit des Einzelnen geht. Das Aushalten dieser Spannung verdankt Thomas einer Theologie, die sich aus dem Ursprung des innersten Wesens Gottes, seinen „geheimnisvollen Höhen“¹¹⁴ erschließt. Thomas hat in diesen Höhen die Tiefen¹¹⁵ des Geheimnisses Gottes berührt, das mit Recht das Geheimnis seiner Barmherzigkeit genannt werden darf.

Doctor communis und *doctor angelicus* sind die bekanntesten Ehrentitel, die mit Thomas von Aquin in Verbindung gebracht werden. Ein „Ehrendokortitel“ wurde ihm bisher noch nicht zugedacht: *doctor misericordiae*. Dabei trifft dieser das Selbstverständnis des Thomas weit mehr als die anderen Titel. Denn während die herkömmlichen Titel den Gelehrten Thomas und sein Werk ehren, bringt letzterer seine Auffassung vom Zweck der Theologie und den ihr angemessenen Vermittlungsprozess zum Ausdruck, dann auch die daraus resultierende Funktion des Theologen und schließlich seine eigene Einstellung und Spiritualität.

Sein Vorbild als konsequenter Lehrer und Verkünder der Barmherzigkeit kann uns in den Unsicherheiten unserer Tage helfen Gottes Barmherzigkeit so zu verkünden, dass wir die Freiheit und Verantwortung des einzelnen Menschen ernst nehmen ohne dabei in billige und beliebige Antwortversuche zu verfallen. Die Theologie des heiligen Thomas entspricht einer missionarischen Entscheidung¹¹⁶, von der Papst Franziskus träumt und die längst für unsere Kirche überfällig ist. Es ist die Entscheidung, die Jesus Christus schon am Anfang in der Auseinandersetzung mit den Pharisäern und Schriftgelehrten getroffen hat: „Weh euch, ihr Schriftgelehrten und Pharisäer, ihr Heuchler! Ihr gebt den Zehnten von Minze, Dill und Kümmel und lasst das Wichtigste im Gesetz

¹¹⁴ Vgl. *Antrittsvorlesung* I, 84.

¹¹⁵ Vgl. *Antrittsvorlesung* I, 85.

¹¹⁶ Vgl. Franziskus, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nr. 27.

außer acht: Gerechtigkeit, Barmherzigkeit und Treue“ (Mt 23,23). Es ist dieselbe Entscheidung vor der wir auch heute stehen, nämlich die Entscheidung, ob wir uns auf den Zehnten konzentrieren und alles bis ins letzte Detail regeln und kontrollieren wollen, oder ob wir das Wichtigste leben.

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[Michael Estler, Beethovenstr. 1, 89073 Ulm, Germany; mi-estler@t-online.de]