

The *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas

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Thomas Aquinas undertook three summaries of Christian doctrine, only one of which, the *Summa contra gentiles*, he completed. The *Compendium of Theology*, also incomplete, used the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity as structural principles. The *Summa theologiae* is by common consent Thomas's masterpiece, and, though it remained incomplete—broken off because of a mystical experience after which the saint considered his writings to be “so much straw”—it was so planned that it was possible for later editors to complete it by cannibalizing discussions from Thomas's commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the 12th century summary of Christian doctrine of which, along with Scripture, the aspiring theologian had to display mastery.

I Introductory

1 The Immediate Setting

St. Thomas Aquinas began to write the *Summa theologiae* in 1268, just half a dozen years before his death, perhaps the most tumultuous and demanding years in his life as a master of theology. Shortly after beginning the work, Thomas returned to Paris to occupy for a second time one of the Dominican chairs in theology. The university was in an uproar over the issue of so-called Latin Averroism. Certain masters on the Faculty of Arts were taken to put forward the view that they could accept as philosophical Aristotelian tenets at variance with their Christian faith while continuing to believe the opposite of those tenets. Thomas, like his master Albert the Great, saw the thought of Aristotle as an unequivocal boon for the Christian faith. Unsurprisingly, Thomas took to task those who were both misinterpreting Aristotle and tainting him with their own theological heterodoxy. The ironic consequence of this effort to save Aristotle from his misguided champions was that Thomas himself became the target of those theologians, most of them Franciscans, who saw Aristotle as a menace, teaching things in conflict

with Christian revelation. Indeed, the Condemnation of 1277, appearing a few years after Thomas's death, listed among condemned propositions some Thomistic tenets.

The second Parisian professorship of Thomas Aquinas saw him fulfilling the usual tasks of the master of theology, commenting on Scripture, holding disputed questions, as well as writing a number of polemical opuscula aimed at clarifying the issues in dispute. *On There Being Only One Intellect Against the Averroists* argued that the Averroist interpretation of agent intellect which undermined personal immortality was simply a bad reading of the text of the *De anima*. *On the Eternity of the World* argued that Aristotle's view that the world is eternal was a plausible philosophical position that was nonetheless contradicted by Revelation. Apart from Revelation, the question could not be settled.

Thomas's defense of Aristotle against the charge of teaching things contrary to Christian faith cannot convey his complete attitude toward Aristotle. Amazingly, during the same period that saw the commencement of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas began to compose the close textual readings of the Aristotelian treatises, twelve in all, not all of them complete. What we see, accordingly, is an author undertaking the work which would become his acknowledged masterpiece, fulfilling all the usual tasks of a regent master of theology, writing polemical works against those masters of arts whose excesses could put Aristotle under a permanent cloud, and writing commentaries on the Aristotelian treatises which, in the estimate of some, alone would have insured him fame as a philosopher.

2 The addressee of the *Summa theologiae*

Thomas's professorial work as well as the polemical pieces written during this period have an obvious purpose, as do no doubt the commentaries on Aristotelian treatises. But to whom is the *Summa theologiae* addressed? What reader does Thomas have in mind? The question seems easily answerable by appeal to the prologue to the work in which Thomas, observing that the teacher of Catholic truth should address not only his peers but also those who are just beginning the task. It is to these beginners that the work he undertakes is addressed. This is all the more necessary because beginners are likely to be confused by works filled with a mass of useless questions, articles and arguments, and which moreover do not observe the proper order of teaching. These faults are traced to the fact that such works are expositions of books or occasioned by matters currently under dispute. It is these faults that Thomas will endeavor to avoid. From this we can

conclude that he will follow the proper order of the discipline and keep the line of development lean and focused.

This prologue would seem to promise a corrective to the manner of instruction in the university, where the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard functioned as the basis for the theologian to discuss matters of Christian doctrine. On this view, the *Summa* would be viewed as a move to revise university instruction in theology. Father Leonard Boyle, in an influential lecture, has called this interpretation into question. The fact that the work was begun while Thomas was teaching at the Dominican Studium in Rome, leads Boyle to see the *Summa* as having the much more specific aim of defining how young friars should be instructed. From this vantage point, Boyle sees the first and third parts of the work, which bracket the moral part, as meant to locate moral considerations in the broader context of the discipline lest the pastoral work of the Dominicans be based on an instruction too narrowly and exclusively aimed at their work as confessors and preachers.

Even if Boyle's suggestion be true, however, the prologue suggests that Thomas also had in mind the procedures in the Faculty of Theology at Paris. A good part of the work was written in Paris and can reasonably be thought to have in mind all the beginning students of that institution and not just Thomas's fellow friars. In either case, the assumption of this initiation into theology is that the students addressed have already studied theology, as the opening discussion of the work makes clear.

3 The Structure of the Work

The *Summa* is divided into three parts. Each part is made up of questions which are subdivided into articles of varying number. There are 119 questions that make up the first part (*Prima Pars*), and they comprise a total of 594 articles. The second part of the work, by far the longest, is subdivided into two parts (*Prima Secundae* and *Secunda Secundae*); the first is made up of 114 questions comprising 615 articles, the second contains 179 questions and a total of 927 articles. The third part of the *Summa* remained incomplete when Thomas died in 1274. He had written 90 questions with a total of 546 articles. That is a total of 1473 articles.

The basic unit of the *Summa* is the article, whose structure reveals its origin in the disputed and quodlibetal questions which balanced the work of textual interpretation in medieval education. A question is posed and then an answer to it proposed, followed by a number of supporting arguments. At that point, there is a reversal of field, an authority is invoked which indicates that the tack taken is questionable. There follows the body of the article

which argues for the opposite of the proposed answer. That done, Thomas takes up *seriatim* the arguments given for the rejected answer and indicates that they fail to support it.

This procedure can be exemplified by taking any article at random. Consider article 1 of question 59 of the First Part of the *Summa*. Question 59 is concerned with the will of angels and contains four articles. The first asks if the angel has a will. The suggested answer is negative and three considerations are adduced to support that negation. The first is from Aristotle's *On the Soul*, which tells us that will is in reason, but the mind of angels is not reason, but something higher. Therefore they have no will.

Second, another appeal to *On the Soul*, will is a kind of appetite, but appetite connotes imperfection since it bears on what is not had. But there can be no such imperfection in angels. Therefore, the angel has no will.

The third argument is also based on *On the Soul* and Aristotle's teaching that the will is a moved mover, being moved by knowledge of the desired thing. But angels are immobile since they are incorporeal, therefore, etc.

The direction of the consideration is abruptly altered with the *Sed contra est* and an appeal to St. Augustine who in his *On the Trinity* says that the image of the Trinity is found in mind according to memory, understanding and will. But the image of God is found in angels as well as men, since the angelic mind is capable of knowing God. So there must be will in angels.

The body of the article is introduced by the phrase *Respondeo dicendum quod: I answer that it must be said that...* What must be said is that we have to recognize that the angel has a will. Why? Whatever proceeds from the divine will is inclined by appetite to the good in its own way. Sometimes this inclination is a natural, without knowledge, as plants and inanimate bodies incline to what is good for them. Call this natural appetite. With other things the inclination to their good follows on cognition, not that they grasp the notion of the good as such, but rather this or that good thing. Thus the senses know the white, the sweet, etc. Call this sense appetite. There are yet other things that incline to the good because they grasp the notion of goodness; they are not just inclined to a particular good but to the particular as exemplifying goodness. This is what is meant by will. Since the angelic intellect grasps the universal notion of good, it is clear that the angel has a will.

Thomas now turns to the arguments which sought to deny this. In discussing the first, he goes on about the distinction between sense perception and intellection and of the appetites or desires consequent upon them. He includes angelic intellection in the scope of reason and thus undermines the objection.

As for the second, it is indeed true that appetite connotes what is not had, but it is not only this that is desired and loved, but also what is possessed. The origin of names can be illuminating but sometimes it can be misleading.

The third argument is countered by drawing attention to the analogy of “move.” Physical motion is the act of the imperfect—what is potential—but the movement of will is the act of the perfect.

This basic scenario is reenacted over and over as the *Summa* progresses. The article we have been looking at is not wholly typical—no article is—but the prominence of appeals to Aristotle in it is not rare. And we see that Thomas rejects supposed implications of the Aristotelian text while clearly embracing its account of reason and appetite.

The published quodlibetal and disputed questions of Thomas are not transcripts of actual public debates, but are occasioned and guided by them. In the *Summa* Thomas gives us, so to say, a closet drama, suggesting the trajectory by which our mind arrives at a resolution. A question is interesting to the degree that there seem to be good reasons for opposed answers to it. By exploring each of these and settling the matter in favor of the one, the soul’s conversation with itself—to invoke Plato—is vividly put before us. One need not of course employ the literary genre of the *Summa* in order to convey the fact that the mind progresses by confronting opposed answers to a question and opting for one of them on the basis of argument. The *Summa contra gentiles* strikes a modern reader as a more standard kind of scholarly prose; the work is divided into books and chapters, but in the chapters, though the dialectic is not explicit in the manner of the *Summa*, the same mark of the intellectual life is present. A. J. Ayer’s *Problem of Knowledge* has always struck me as a marvelous example of the basic intellectual drama, maneuvering between plausible answers to a question, arguing for the one and against the other, then moving on to the next issue. In the *Summa*, aimed as it is at beginners, this drama is made as explicit as possible.

4 Sacred Doctrine

“In order that our task might be contained within certain limits, it is necessary first to ask of sacred doctrine what it is and what its scope is.”

What exactly is the *Summa* a summary of? Theology, of course, but what is that? The opening question of the *Summa* fittingly sets out to establish the subject matter of the discipline called theology. In that opening question,

Thomas uses the phrase “sacred doctrine” to refer to the subject matter, but in a way that has occasioned a good deal of discussion. But that discussion will be unintelligible to us without taking into consideration the initial discussions of question 1 of the *Prima Pars*.

The opening article of the *Summa* asks why there is need for any discipline beyond philosophy; the implied comparison with philosophy leads to asking if the present teaching is a science, a single science, more worthy than other sciences, such as the philosophical ones; can it be called wisdom; does it offer arguments. Finally, Thomas asks if Sacred Scripture should use metaphorical language and whether it is fitting that biblical texts should have a plurality of meanings. Those different meanings are the literal, the allegorical, the anagogical and the moral.

This suite of questions would be unintelligible apart from the acceptance of the scientific methodology laid out in the Aristotelian logical works, the *Organon*. The conception of knowledge as being theoretical or practical and of theoretical knowledge as organized into different sciences in terms of different subject matters did not entail simply that there are a lot of different sciences. Philosophy as the umbrella term of these disciplines ordered them to wisdom—philosophy is the love or quest of wisdom—in which such knowledge as we can attain of God is had. It is because of the comprehensive character of philosophy so viewed that the question arises as to whether anything further is needed. Thomas argues that there is indeed need for a teaching beyond that found in the philosophical disciplines. This is so because man is ordered to God as to an end which surpasses the ability of reason to comprehend. But the end must be known if it is to be pursued. Thus the revelation of this end incomprehensible to reason is necessary for our salvation.

The two theologies Aristotelian philosophy culminates in a wisdom that is also called theology. The question must accordingly arise: what is the relationship between the theology of the philosophers and the theology based on Sacred Scripture? Thomas’s answer to this provides us with a general comparison of philosophy (including its theology) and Christian theology, between reason and faith, between the natural and the supernatural. What characterizes philosophy is that it begins with truths in the common domain, in principle known by everyone, naturally. The ultimate starting points are not derived from proof or argument, but are taken to be self-evident. Of course, it is possible to deny them, but their defense takes the form of showing the denial to be incoherent, as that one must invoke the principle

of contradiction in order to deny it. Philosophical arguments form a vast Ariadne's thread thanks to which the most obscure and recherché claim must be shown to be based on those truths everyone knows. Thus, talk about God depends upon knowledge of and talk about the changeable things around us.

By contrast, theology in the sense of the *Summa* has as its starting points truths revealed by God and accepted on the basis of faith because they are not self-evident in the manner of natural principles. The principles of theology are held to be true because of the authority of God who reveals them. The Christian holds that there is a trinity of persons in the godhead, that there are two natures, one divine, one human, in the person of Christ, that Christ's sacrifice has redeemed us, that we will rise again and exist forever as embodied souls, etc. etc. If asked how he knows these things to be true, the believer can respond by showing that they have indeed been revealed and have been held by the faithful since apostolic times. Thus the master of theology had to be *magister sacrae paginae*, an expert in Scripture. His training emphasized this. We have many of the commentaries Thomas Aquinas wrote on various books of the Bible—on all the epistles of Paul, on the gospels of John and Matthew, on Job, on the Psalms, on Isaiah. Thomas's inaugural lecture at Paris was devoted to the structure of the Bible and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Scholastic theology However regulative of its inquiries revelation is, the *Summa* is quite unlike a commentary on Scripture. Presupposing what has been revealed, it casts revelation into an order which permits a progressive, non-repetitive discussion of the contents of the faith. In order to do this, Aristotelian methodology is invoked, as is clear from the immediately foregoing. Philosophical sciences differ from one another because they have different particular starting points or principles. Theology will differ from them all because of the peculiar nature of its principles. But a science must also have a subject matter of which things are proved, as the geometer proves the properties of the plane triangle. What is the subject of Christian theology? God. In this it differs from the theology which culminates the philosophical quest. The subject of natural or philosophical theology is being as being, that is, the most comprehensive grasp of the things that are whose ultimate cause, God, is sought. Thus God is the cause of the subject of philosophical theology but the very subject of the theology based on Sacred Scripture.

The human mind, dependent as it is on sense experience, has as its con-

natural object the natures of perceived things, material things. God can be the subject of theology only because through revelation the human mind is given a privileged entry to a God's eye view of reality. For all that, revelation respects the primacy for us of sense knowledge. Hence the prominence of metaphors and symbolic language in Scripture, proportioning what is revealed to our mode of knowing. Thus, in both natural and supernatural theology the language is what Thomas calls analogous; that is, terms which originally and obviously mean sensible things, are extended and their meanings purified so that they can, however imperfectly, be used to speak of the immaterial and divine. Natural theology extends only to such knowledge of God as is derivable from knowledge of sensible things. Supernatural theology bears on truths about God undreamt of in philosophy, but for all that its mode of knowing and naming remains dependent on sense experience.

Preambles of faith There are two kinds of truth about God, those which can be derived from our knowledge of sensible things, and those which God vouchsafes in revelation and which would not otherwise come into our ken. This might suggest two independent and unrelated collections of truths. But it is the connection between natural and supernatural knowledge of God that Thomas emphasizes and which characterizes his theology. Among the things that the human mind can come to know about God using its natural powers are, that God exists, that He is one, that He is intelligent, that He is the cause of all else, and so on. Thomas never suggests that he is making an exhaustive list of such truths. Among the truths about God known only through revelation are the trinity, the union of natures in Christ, and so on. These latter are called mysteries of faith, since they cannot be understood or comprehended in this life, but must be accepted as true on faith. By contrast with the mysteries, those truths about God that can be known, demonstrated from truths about sensible things, are called preambles of faith.

The examples just given make it clear that the preambles of faith are included in and implicit in the revelation of the mysteries of faith. One who accepts that there is a trinity of persons in the godhead accepts that God exists. In other words, those truths about God which can be known by natural means are included in revelation. The believer holds from his mother's knee not only the mysteries of faith but also those truths about God that philosophers have proved. Why, Thomas asks, does God reveal what is naturally knowable? His answer is that the naturally knowable truths about God are difficult of attainment, the fruit of years of study, the

attainment of the few gifted and fortunate enough to devote themselves to study. But nothing is more important for the way we lead our lives than knowing that God exists. Thomas takes it to be a mark of divine mercy that through revelation, both the simple and the wise are given immediate certainty about a matter of such moment for how we should live.

If faith is the acceptance of something as true on the basis of another's authority rather than because we grasp and understand what is said, those truths about God which can never be comprehended in this life are objects of faith par excellence. Naturally knowable truths, the preambles of faith, are not objects of faith in the full sense, for the reason that one can begin by believing them and then, on the basis of argument and proof, come to know them. The preambles are thus part of revelation but not matters of faith in a full sense. The fact that some of the things that have been revealed can be known takes on great importance for Thomas in showing the reasonableness of accepting as true what we cannot in this life understand. If some revealed things can be known in the strong sense and thus seen to be intelligible, it is not irrational to accept the revealed mysteries. This is an argument for the reasonableness of believing the mysteries, not a proof that they are true. Faith is a testing expedient for the human mind, not a final condition. The believer will be rewarded with a beatific vision in the next world in which, as St. Paul said, he will see even as he is seen. Let these considerations serve as preliminary to taking a tour of the *Summa theologiae*. After we have done that, we can more conveniently take up a number of issues that will occur to one reading this work at the outset of the third millennium.

II A Tour of the *Summa*

1 Part One

God is the subject of Sacred Doctrine and in the first part of the *Summa* Thomas discusses two things, first, the nature of God, what God is, and, second, the divine causality. Although the text itself does not gather questions into groups, save by implication, it has become customary to speak of such groupings as treatises. Thus, the treatment of God's being and nature in Part One, comprises two treatises, the first of which (questions 2-26) considers God as one and the second of which (questions 27-43) considers him as triune.

God as One The treatment of the divine nature recalls philosophical achievements and subsumes them into a higher purpose. Question 2, article 3

contains the famous “five ways” (*quinque viae*) of proving that God exists, a reminder to his readers of what they would have studied prior to commencing theology. The divine attributes are then taken up—the divine simplicity, perfection, goodness, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, unity. Having thus spoken of what God is, Thomas goes on to speak of his activity, of the divine knowledge and will, and then of His justice and mercy, his providence and power.

In the midst of this discussion of the divine attributes, Thomas turns to the presuppositions of the inquiry, asking in question 12 how God can be known by us and in question 13 how he can be named or spoken of by us, that is, in human language. These discussions bring home to us that, however much the desire for God defines us, there is a vast disproportion between our capacity to understand and the divine nature, something which is mirrored in the language we use to speak of Him (or that He uses to speak of himself to us). The proportionate object of our mind, the first and easiest thing for us to know, Thomas insists, is the nature of sensible things. Whatever else we know must be derived from this knowledge—knowledge of ourselves as well as knowledge of God. From a purely natural point of view, it would be easy to be discouraged and to give up all hope of coming to some knowledge of the divine. But the believer has been addressed by God and his inquiries are guided by revelation.

God as triune The treatise on the Trinity is governed by the Scriptural passages which convey that there are three persons in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Any effort to make this mystery less obscure, that is, to show that, however incomprehensible to us, it is not incoherent, requires a discussion of three, of nature, and of person. Although it is a revealed truth that is being discussed, the notions of number, nature and person are first understood in more accessible applications. Nonetheless, it has often been pointed out that there was precious little in the ancient philosophers on the notion of person. Such philosophical presuppositions are often developed within the *Summa*—sometimes as original contributions, sometimes as recalling a philosophical doctrine and modifying it—and then turned to the specifically theological purpose, in this case, to say something about the three persons in the divine nature. Thus it is that Thomas contributes to philosophy even as he is doing theology.

God as creator The rest of Part One (questions 44-119) treats of the creative causality of God. Everything other than God owes its entire being

to the divine causality. God creates without any presupposed matter (*ex nihilo*). Aristotle had thought that the world was eternal. Thomas allows that this is a logical possibility and that the believer holds the opposite, not because he has some knockdown proof, but because of revelation.

The creatures God causes are not just unrelated individuals but form a vast hierarchical order. Preeminent among creatures are the angels and Thomas discusses their nature, their intelligence, their will and their origin in questions 50-64. Thomas is known as the Angelic Doctor and one reason is the attention he lavished on the angels. Philosophers had spoken of immaterial substances other than God but their discussions seem jejune compared to Thomas's, but then he is not engaging in free speculation but throughout being guided by what has been revealed to us about the angels, good and bad. We may be sure that Thomas would have been shocked by the suggestion that he was making a fundamentally original contribution here. He was simply reflecting on the common patrimony, admittedly in an uncommon way.

The Six Days of creation are discussed in questions 65-74, after which comes the Treatise on Man (questions 75-102). He begins by noting the special interest of the theologian. "It falls to the theologian to consider man's nature, but to consider his body only insofar as it relates to soul." Of course the human soul is the substantial form of an organic body so a good deal must be said of both and Thomas accordingly relies heavily on Aristotle's biological writings. How soul and body form one substance, how it is possible for the soul to exist apart from the body, the powers of faculties of the soul, man's cognitive powers, the creation of man—this menu of questions suggests how this treatise might be thought of simply as a remarkable summary of philosophical doctrine. But that would be to fail to see the contextual point of recalling such philosophical tenets. It is man as understood in Christian revelation that controls the discussion, a bodily creature, yes, but one destined for an eternal union with God. That ultimate goal may be said to govern the whole treatise on man.

Divine governance God's governance continues his act of creation and in questions 103-119, Thomas discusses providence, the role of angels in the universe and their influence on men, and finally human reproduction.

2 First Part of the Second Part

In his prologue to this part, Thomas cites St. John Damascene's explanation of what is meant by saying that man is made to the image and likeness of

God. This means that he has intelligence and free will and power over himself. It is man as image of God that Thomas now considers, man as the cause of his own acts thanks to his free will.

Ultimate end Questions 1-5 form a little treatise on man's ultimate end. An act is undertaken for some purpose; we can be asked why we do what we do, and thus are accountable or responsible for our deeds. Not only is there a goal of this act or that, of this kind of act or that, there is an overall ultimate point of everything that we do. Anything is pursued as a good, but the goods we pursue are particular, partial, and leave our desire unassuaged. God is not just a good, he is goodness, and thus it is Him that we implicitly seek in all we do. God is our ultimate end, and the attainment of the end is called happiness. Thomas blends the natural and supernatural marvelously in this discussion. The philosopher's account of what our end consists of is an imperfect one; the revealed knowledge of our destiny provides us with an account of perfect happiness. By not opposing the natural and supernatural, the philosophical and revealed, Thomas enables them to complement one another.

Human acts The subject of moral doctrine is human acts—moral action and human action are synonymous—but what counts as a human act? Some activities are truly ascribed to humans but nonetheless are not human acts, e.g. digesting, growing, aging. We don't freely bring these about and besides they are found in non-humans as well. Voluntary acts proceed from knowledge and will, which is why ignorance or duress can lessen or destroy the act as human. Thomas develops an intricate account of acts of will, three bearing on the end, three on the means, with the suggestion that a complete human act incorporates them all, and that an act may be broken off at various points short of completion. The internal voluntary activity manifests itself in bodily acts commanded by will. Lifting one's hand, taken as such, has no moral valence, but it may be done to make a bid, ask permission to leave the room, test the wind, etc., etc. Apart from the intention with which they are performed such occurrences have no moral interest. In discussing the appraisal of action, Thomas distinguishes the goodness and badness of interior acts from the goodness or badness of external acts. All in all, concise as it is, this is a remarkable account of human action.

Virtues When a human act is performed well it can be said to possess its virtue or excellence. But virtue is not episodic but the constituent of

moral character. In order to talk about virtue, Thomas first gives us a Treatise on the Passions (questions 22-48), then discusses habits (questions 49-54). The passions or emotions are the matter of the moral virtues, those appetitive reactions to the sensed that occur willy-nilly but which must be brought into an integrated human life, made amenable to reason. The habitual responsiveness to rational direction on the part of our emotions is what Thomas means by moral virtues.

Perhaps nowhere is the synthetic genius of Thomas more evident than in his discussion of virtue. The intellectual as well as moral virtues must be taken into account, and the relation between them from a moral point of view; the cardinal virtues, temperance, courage, justice and prudence are related to the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity. Virtue as a human acquisition, on the one hand, and virtue as infused in us by grace, are compared. The gifts of the Holy Ghost and the way in which the Beatitudes function in defining morality are discussed. Of course no discussion of virtue would be complete with a consideration of vice and sin. In many ways these distinctions among virtues provide the roadmap for the second part of the second part of the *Summa*.

Law Perhaps no treatise of the *Summa* has received more independent attention in recent years than that on law (questions 90-108). Eternal law, natural law and human law are seen to be analogates of a common term. Civil or human law is the controlling meaning of the term but of the things called law, eternal law is causative of all the others. The natural law is the peculiarly human participation in divine providence and human law must be guided by our fundamental judgments of good and evil. The discussion of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, is of particular interest, and the distinction of moral, judicial and ceremonial precepts of the Old Law. The gospels provide us with the new law.

Grace This part ends with a short treatise on grace (questions 109-114), its nature, necessity and kinds.

3 Second Part of the Second Part

This is by far the largest part of the *Summa* in which Thomas, having discussed virtues in general in the preceding part, now enters into a detailed discussion of the virtues. Ten treatises have been distinguished in this part, but it is possible to see the part as falling into three major discussions.

The Theological Virtues Questions 1-46 are devoted to faith, hope and charity. These are taken up *seriatim*. The specific act of each is clarified, then the cause and effects of the virtue. The relevant gifts of the Holy Ghost come into play and the precepts which bear on the virtue. The vices opposed to each are discussed—e.g. infidelity as opposed to faith, despair as opposed to hope, hatred as opposed to love.

The Cardinal Virtues The discussion of prudence, justice, courage and temperance extends from question 47 through 170, and provides Thomas with the basic structure for discussing particular virtues. Each virtue is distinguished into its integral or constitutive parts and its subjective parts, or subtypes, as well as its potential parts. Opposed vices, the relevant gift of the Holy Ghost, and precept, as well the theological virtues, characterize the discussion. The treatise on justice (questions 57-122) dominates the part. Distributive and commutative justice are the subjective parts or species of the virtue. Homicide, retribution, capital punishment and the role of the judge are noteworthy elements of the discussion. Fraud and defamation are among the vices opposed to justice, and religion is presented as a potential part of justice. The gift of piety is linked with justice; as for the precepts related to justice, question 122 is devoted to the Decalogue. By comparison, the treatment of courage seems brief (questions 123-140), but that on temperance does not (questions 141-170).

States of Life This part ends with a discussion of such charisms as prophesy, the distinction between the active and contemplative lives, and finally a discussion of the episcopacy and the religious life.

4 Part Three

The first part of the *Summa* dealt with God and the production of creatures; the second part was concerned with the way in which man, the image of God, can be united with his creator through moral activity. Part Three is concerned with Christ, the God-Man, and the means he has instituted for our salvation. “Because Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as testified by an angel, “absolving his people from their sins” (Mt 1,21), showed us the way of truth in himself through which we can arrive at the happiness of immortal life by resurrection, if the task of theology is to be complete we must, after speaking of the ultimate end of human life and of virtues and vices, turn our attention to the very Savior of all and the benefits he has won for the human race.”

The Incarnation In Jesus Christ, God became man in order to save us from our sins. Questions 1 -26 are concerned with this great mystery of Christianity. Just as the discussion of the Trinity in Part One required clarification on the notions of nature and person, so too in the discussion of God made man. The one person of Christ has a divine as well as a human nature. As a consequence, some things can be truly attributed to him because he is human, and others because he is divine. As divine, Christ is omniscient, as human he grows in wisdom and grace. Among the most striking aspects of this treatise are the precisions introduced in the analysis of such sentences as “God is man,” “Man is God,” “God became man,” “Man became God.” One finds these in question 16. The Virgin Mary is discussed along with her divine son, the manner of his conception and birth. Christ’s earthly life, his teaching and the miracles he performed, as well as his transfiguration are examined.

Christ’s Passion The suffering and the death of Jesus are the subject of questions 46- 52. Was it necessary that Christ die in order to save mankind from sin? Was it necessary that he die as ignominious a death as he did? Thomas discusses the fittingness of all the details of Christ’s passion, not deducing them from something prior, but as an *ex post facto* analysis of what God actually chose as the best and most effective means. The death and burial of Christ, like everything else in this treatise, are governed by what we are told in Scripture. The resurrection (questions 53-56) and the ascension are next discussed, followed by Christ’s being seated at the right hand of the Father and his role as the future judge of the world.

The Sacraments The rest of what Thomas managed to complete of Part Three deals with the sacraments, the means instituted by Christ to dispense his graces to mankind. He begins with a discussion of what a sacrament is and why they are necessary in the economy of salvation. Grace, participation in the life of God, is the principal effect of a sacrament. There are seven sacraments which form an order. Baptism (question 66-71) is the first and fundamental mode of entry into the life of grace, with confirmation sealing one’s membership in the Body of Christ. Then Thomas turns to the Eucharist, and we are indeed fortunate that he completed this treatise as well as the following on penance, at which point he put down his pen and left his masterpiece unfinished. Thomas wrote the hymns for the Office of Corpus Christ, which was instituted during his lifetime. Ever since those Thomistic hymns have been sung in churches throughout the world. The Eucharist is

unique among the sacraments in that its species, bread and wine, actually become the body and blood of Christ who is thus really present in the Eucharist. Thomas's discussion of the words of consecration whereby the priest confects the Eucharist are further instances of linguistic analysis which can gladden the heart of an analytic philosopher. Since in this life the believer is prone to fall from grace, penance was instituted to give him pardon and the peace of reconciliation.

III Reflections

The maxim of St. Anselm, *fides quaerens intellectum: faith seeking understanding*, has been proposed as the best key to the *Summa*. The author and his readers are believers reflecting on the truths of faith, not in the hope of understanding them in any comprehensive way, but casting such oblique light on them as is available. Another maxim, this one from Thomas himself, could provide a motto for the work. Grace presupposes nature and does not destroy it. Nature here stands for the capacities with which any person is endowed which enable him to perform the characteristic tasks of the human agent. Much knowledge is at the service of practice but even practical knowledge presupposes that one has grasped truths about the world and oneself. It is not a peculiarity of an elite to pursue knowledge. Thomas accepts enthusiastically the ringing assertion with which Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics*, "All men by nature desire to know." Any surprise this claim may cause us is immediately allayed by the gloss on it: a sign of this is the delight we take in our senses, especially the sense of sight. It is from such universal and inescapably human desires that Aristotle develops his conception of philosophy. All men wonder and seek to understand the why of things. The philosopher extends this quest and pursued it to the ultimate causes of all that is. Hence it is that philosophy reaches its term in theology, such knowledge as we glean of God from the things around us, taken as his effects.

The fundamental questions that drive philosophy—what is the point of life? Is death the end? What is the difference between good and bad?—receive their answers, however exiguous they may seem to the believer, and those answers are as good as the arguments and discourse that sustain them. The image of the wise man is of an ancient sage who has devoted his life to these questions and finally found an answer to them. The believer on the other hand can be exemplified in a child at its mother's knee, simply being handed answers to the questions that pestered the philosophers. In

one fell swoop, so to speak, he has wisdom at his fingertips. No wonder that many believers thought that the faith simply replaced philosophy, rendering it no longer necessary. If there is anything that characterizes the thought of Thomas Aquinas it is of the continuing and necessary interrelation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy.

The philosophy in question is that which Thomas found in Aristotle. Nor would he have thought it one possible philosophy among others. When he had seen the cogency of its principles he saw as well that this philosophy was capable of assimilating any truth wherever it might be found. Hence the relish with which he read such a thinker as the so-called Pseudo-Dionysius and the anonymous Book of Causes, both Neoplatonist in orientation. It seems clear that Thomas did not think he was engaged in a kind of philosophy; the philosophy he held is Aristotelian, but piety and gratitude apart, that is by the bye. The massive role that Aristotle plays in the thought of *Summa*. Thomas, including his theology, may seem the strongest argument that it is obsolete. Surely we have come a long way from Aristotle. Does Thomas really think that describing what comes to be as the result of a change as composed of matter and form expresses a truth about the world? Well, he does, and if Aristotelian natural philosophy is defenseless, the whole edifice of Thomism crumbles. Of course anyone who is content to read the *Summa* simply as an index of how its 13th century author thought, will not be interested in testing what he reads as truth claims. That option is not open to one who takes seriously the continuing role that the thought of Thomas Aquinas is meant to play for Roman Catholics.

The Leonine Revival Leo XIII issued an encyclical in the summer of 1879 called after its opening Latin words *Aeterni Patris* which is credited with initiating a revival of interest in the thought of Thomas Aquinas that continued unabated until the 1960s when many were convinced that the Second Vatican Council had declared an end to the hegemony of Thomas in philosophy and theology. For all that, authoritative repetitions of Leo's desire have marked the papacy since the close of the council, and John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* was widely taken to be his updated version of *Aeterni Patris*.

Leo's encyclical was meant to be a corrective. He was recommending the thought of Thomas Aquinas as a remedy for philosophical errors which threatened to bring social, moral and political ruin. It is this assumption that lifts the papal encyclical from the status of thoughts on the curriculum or a testimony on his favorite author. The mark of philosophy as found

in Thomas Aquinas which sets it off from modernity is its realism. That is, Thomas held that the human mind is a capacity to know reality, the way things are, and that knowing them provides a clue to their ultimate source, God. Modern philosophy had taken a subjective turn, had made problematical the relationship between our thoughts and ideas and anything “out there.” Variations on this relationship characterized thinkers after Descartes, but obsession with it does seem to mark the modern. It is as if we begin with thought and wonder if it stands for, is representative of, anything else. This entails skepticism about ordinary claims to know things, since they are untroubled by the “critical problem.” Philosophy will convince us that our supposed knowledge of things is far more about us and our mode of knowing than any putative independent reality beyond thought. Needless to say, if the world cannot be known, then its cause cannot be known, and that men can from the things that are made come to knowledge of the invisible things of God, in St. Paul’s phrase, is thereby denied. Leo felt that epistemological subjectivity led to relativism and worse. His encyclical pays philosophy the enormous compliment of assuming that it matters.

The modern turn was taken on the assumption that philosophy as found in Aristotle is simply naive. But if the modern turn is called into question, the discussion opens up again, and during the heyday of the Thomistic Revival defenses of realism went hand in hand with criticisms of modern idealism. It is clear enough to anyone who reads the *Summa* that its value is dependent in large part on the defensibility of the philosophy it brings to the task of reflecting on faith. Since Vatican II, as indicated, interest in Thomas waned somewhat and there were efforts to substitute for Aristotle some more recent and acceptable (to the modern mind) philosopher. That of course is another story. What remains is the crucial dependence of Thomas’s theology on the philosophy it presupposes.

Natural and Supernatural The prominence of philosophy in theological discourse of Thomas has sometimes been taken to mean that he is reducing the truths of faith to natural principles of appraisal. In some large sense, that is of course true. Thomas insists that the mysteries of faith do not violate the principle of contradiction. But of course to acquit the mystery of the Trinity of incoherence is not to establish that it is true. Let us look at a particularly neuralgic discussion that would seem to provide the critic with damning ammunition.

The first five questions of the First Part of the Second Part are, as we have seen in our survey of the work, devoted to the discussion of man’s

ultimate end, the point of it all. What is the good for man? That question had been posed by Plato and Aristotle and Thomas was of course familiar with the latter's treatment of it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle's suggestion was that we should proceed as we do when we ask if a car is good or if someone is a good dentist. A car is good if it performs its function well and so, *mutatis mutandis*, a dentist is a good one if he performs his function well. If, then, man has a function, we can expect that the good of man will lie in performing that function well. And man has a specific function or work and it is rational activity. The doing well of that activity, its excellence or virtue, will constitute human goodness. Despite the difficulties this parallel presents, Aristotle goes on to give an account of what sort of life fulfills the requirements of the human function.

When we turn now to the discussion of ultimate end and happiness in the *Summa* it may seem to differ little from a purely philosophical analysis. Indeed, the references to Aristotle outnumber those to Scripture or any Christian writer. One who reads as he runs could well get the impression that what Thomas has to say of ultimate end and human happiness has the same status as Aristotle's analysis, so what does it mean to call it theology? Theology, we have been told, is governed by revelation, by truths that have been vouchsafed to us and that are beyond the reach of natural reason and philosophy. Surely, a Christian believer who raises the question of the ultimate end of human persons could be expected to begin with the promise of heaven, of a life beyond this one. But Thomas goes on and on about how happiness as if, for him as for Aristotle, he is speaking of fulfillment in this life.

In order to get at the nature of theology in St. Thomas, and in the *Summa*, it would be well to expand on this difficulty. Is Thomas reducing talk of human happiness to what a philosopher might come up with? Why this extraordinary prominence of Aristotle in discussing a question where the specific Christian answer would seem clearly something undreamt of in philosophy? But perhaps we have said enough so that the relationship between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith, can emerge more clearly.

A reading of those five questions will make clear that Thomas thinks Aristotle has given a good account of human happiness, what he will call its *ratio* or meaning. The ultimate end which is sought for its own sake and for the sake of which everything else is sought. It is an achievement, not a mere gift, and it is stable, a steady possession of the human agent. And so on. In calling this the *ratio* of happiness, Thomas is suggesting that we must then go on to ask in what these conditions will be realized. That is, there

is the *ratio boni*, the notion of the good, and then the thing or vehicle of that notion, that in which the idea is realized. The first point to recognize, then, is that Thomas accepts the notion of happiness, of ultimate end, of the human good, that he finds in Aristotle.

So how then does his account differ from Aristotle's? In part, it is the same. When Thomas looks at Aristotle's account of the realization of the notion of happiness he does not reject it as false. But shouldn't he? The account that Aristotle gives of what constitutes our happiness, how we realize it, is markedly different from the Christian account of our ultimate aim. There is no doubt of this. If, now, Aristotle's account of the realization of the notion of happiness were presented as complete, then there would be a conflict and one would have to choose either the Aristotelian complete account or the Christian. That things do not reach this point is due to the fact that Aristotle himself describes his realization account as less than perfect. The text Thomas cites is 1101a20. On its basis he is able to say that Aristotle has confessedly provides us with an imperfect account of happiness and that leaves room for a compatible perfect account, which incorporates and perfects the incomplete account. That is what the Christian teaching on our last end does. Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.

The Errors of Aristotle The historical setting in which Thomas Aquinas worked, particularly while he was writing the *Summa*, was charged with controversy over the role Aristotle could play for Christians. If it was the case, as it seemed to be, that Aristotle taught things contradictory of Christian belief, and in matters large and important, his role for the Christian thinker would be affected. Initially it might suffice to convict Aristotle of error by contending that he effectively denied a Christian tenet. But there would remain the philosophical task of showing where he went wrong. There were some, it is true—they are called Latin Averroists—who seemed untroubled by such conflict, but the serious believer could scarcely consider it trivial. Because of the insouciance of the Latin Averroists, many theologians became anti-Aristotelian. Thomas Aquinas found himself in the role of defending Aristotle against his careless friends as well as his increasingly impatient foes. The three major charges against Aristotle were that he held that the world is eternal (whereas believers hold that “in the beginning” God created heaven and earth), that he did not think the human soul survived death (which would undermine the Christian promise of the next world), and that he thought it would be demeaning for God to know things other than himself (whereas for the believer, his eye is on the sparrow...).

On the second and third charges, Thomas argued that the text of Aristotle simply does not support the interpretation that puts him in conflict with the faith. Averroists, originals and Latin, misread the text of *On the Soul* and the *Metaphysics*. Properly read, they reveal an Aristotle who complements and does not contradict the faith. The first charge presented a special difficulty. There is no doubt that Aristotle assumes the world is eternal, that it makes no sense to say that it has come to be. Clearly that contradicts the notion of a temporal beginning of the world. Thomas first establishes that God could have produced an eternal world. It is logically possible. And so is the contradictory. Of course they are not compossible, one or the other is true, and a temporal world is true for the Christian only on the basis of revelation. There is no argument that can so establish it that its contradictory is impossible. So, if Aristotle is in error, teaching something in conflict with truth, the truth in question is one that has its basis in faith not reason such that Aristotle could have been right.

This may suggest how enthusiastically Thomas went about the defense of Aristotle. Clearly for him it would have been an unmitigated disaster if Aristotle had ceased to function in the medieval university. No one who reads these polemical works in defense of Aristotle can possibly imagine that they are cynical efforts to twist the text to a Christian purpose. In the last years of his life Thomas undertook the task of commenting on the treatises of Aristotle. These are a magnificent accomplishment. One may think Thomas mistaken here or there in his reading of Aristotle, but is unlikely to think his purpose is anything other than understanding the text. For him, as for Dante, Aristotle was the master of those who know.