
Part III
Theological Contexts and Purposes

Thomism After Thomism: Aquinas and the Future of Theology

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"Thomas *after* Thomism?" you ask. While you may question the wisdom, you surely will want to acknowledge the courage of a speaker who proposes to address such a topic in a symposium where the memory and achievement of that quintessential Thomist, Jacques Maritain, are revered. Still, you wonder: can any sort of rigorous inquiry proceed under so dubious a banner? Allow me to explain.

My objective in this paper is to commend to Christian theologians a new reading of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. I understand this reading to be an alternative to one that appears to have been standard in the neo-Thomistic movement, particularly in Gerald McCool's account of it. Hence, the talk here of a "post-neo-Thomistic" theological appropriation of Aquinas. The suggested reading depends on an account of the properly theological uses to which Aquinas put philosophical analysis and construction as he sought to exhibit the intelligibility of the Christian faith. I shall illustrate the viability of this reading with reference to two topics, one drawn from the beginning of the *Summa Theologiae* (the doctrine of the triune God) another drawn from the end (the doctrine of the sacraments). This discussion will serve to indicate the potential range of Aquinas's contribution to present and future theology. Though I mean to appeal to theologians, I shall strive to do so in ways that will be of interest to philosophers as well.

I

Writing in *Church History* fifteen years ago, historian Marcia Colish remarked that "a consideration of the historiography of Thomas's place in modern thought reveals the fact that the Angelic Doctor's substantial postmedieval reputation has not generally been matched by an equally plentiful measure of historical understanding. For two generations, historians of the Middle Ages have made great strides toward the systematic recovery of the historical Thomas Aquinas. But the task of uncovering the historical significance of his thought within the chang-

ing contexts of postmedieval culture still awaits its Grabmanns and Chenu.¹ The kind of historical account that Professor Colish has in mind here—and of which her essay provides an enticing sketch—has yet to be written. Nonetheless, thanks to Gerald McCool's work, we now possess at least a comprehensive philosophical interpretation of the most recent phase of the postmedieval career of the thought of Aquinas.²

In Fr. McCool's interpretation, this properly "neo-Thomistic" phase of postmedieval Thomism runs roughly from a mid-nineteenth-century revival, through the official commendation of Aquinas in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879, to its demise as a movement sometime in the Vatican II era. What defines the neo-Thomistic movement in Fr. McCool's account of it was its endeavor to found Christian theology upon a reconstruction of a coherent philosophical system based upon Aquinas's philosophical and theological writings. But, according to Fr. McCool, this endeavor—despite its remarkable achievements—can no longer be sustained. The arguably irreversible pluralization of philosophical perspectives in the postconciliar Catholic world and within twentieth-century Thomism itself has effectively subverted the quest for a unitary philosophical basis for theology that was the hallmark of the neo-Thomistic project.

Ongoing historical study of nineteenth and twentieth century Catholic theology—of the sort advocated by Professor Colish—will undoubtedly entail some important revisions of Fr. McCool's complex thesis. I shall not be suggesting such revisions here. Rather, I want to let Fr. McCool's analysis of the rise and fall of neo-Thomism give me license to wonder about the shape of a possible "post-neo-Thomistic" theological career for Aquinas.

Elsewhere I have ventured an interpretation of the relative eclipse of Aquinas in much late-twentieth-century Catholic theology, with the telling exception of transcendental Thomism.³ It was not simply that in postconciliar Catholic theological circles, neo-Thomism—and with it Aquinas himself—came to be associated with resistance to the prevailing agendas of *ressourcement* (reaffirmation of Christian identity by ap-

1. Marcia L. Colish, "St. Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective: The Modern Period," *Church History* 44 (1975): 433.

2. Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977); *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989). See Robert E. Lauder's discussion of these books in "On Being or Not Being a Thomist," *The Thomist* 55 (1991): 301-319.

3. J. A. DiNoia, "American Theology at Century's End: Postconciliar, Postmodern, Post-Thomistic," *The Thomist* 54 (1990): 499-518.

peal to its ancient sources) and *aggiornamento* (renewal through the modernization of Christian thought and institutions). More to the point—and here my interpretation converges with Fr. McCool's—neo-Thomism cultivated a reading of Aquinas's theological works that seemed to construe their diffuse philosophical components as a philosophical system which had in turn provided the basis of Aquinas's theology. Rightly or wrongly, this perception of the neo-Thomistic project fueled the opposition to it on the part of a growing number of theologians throughout the twentieth century. Many Catholic theologians came finally to be convinced that systematic use of Aquinas in theology would require the prior commitment to adopt the philosophical system that neo-Thomists claimed to have distilled from his works. Increasing pluralization in philosophy made it hard to sustain this kind of commitment and, according to Fr. McCool, in the end it just collapsed.

I want to get clear on what I understand to be the validity of this complaint about neo-Thomistic readings of Aquinas. Two points are relevant here.

In the first place, I want to avoid charging neo-Thomists with a misreading of Aquinas—as if there were some standard reading that furnished a measure for assessing assorted construals of his thought. This leads to the largely fruitless debate among conflicting claimants to his legacy. Like the legacy of Augustine and other great thinkers, the legacy of Aquinas is rich enough for many heirs to lay claim to portions of it, neo-Thomists as well as transcendental Thomists, not to mention Thomists of the strict observance, Maritainians, or contemporary Christian philosophers. Thus, I see no reason to rule out a reading of Aquinas that strives to derive a set of coherent philosophical positions—in natural philosophy, metaphysics, philosophical psychology, and moral philosophy—from his theological and philosophical writings and to field a reconstruction called "Thomism."

Secondly, the use made of Aquinas by neo-Thomists can be defended on historical grounds. They saw the distillation of a *philosophia perennis* as crucial to mounting a response to the challenge of modernity. In the view of many neo-Thomists (and other theologians as well), this challenge was in large measure a properly philosophical one, resting as it did on a long tradition of philosophical reflection stretching back to Descartes. Furthermore, philosophical errors were regarded as the root of typically modernistic theological positions. In such circumstances, philosophically oriented neo-Thomistic readings of Aquinas could justly claim both plausibility and effectiveness.⁴

4. See Aidan Nichols's discussion of the neo-Thomistic revival in *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp. 328-43.

But I want to suggest an alternative way of construing the philosophical component in Aquinas's theology, one that avoids the impression that his theological positions are largely parasitic upon a philosophical system derivable from his thought. The importance of such a reading is that it focuses on the properly theological role—the formal interest—that philosophical analysis and construction play in Aquinas's arguments in the *Summa Theologiae*.

According to this reading, philosophical analysis and construction are moments intrinsic to theological thinking in the *Summa*, that is, to the ordered and progressive explication of the doctrines of the faith in such a way as to exhibit their intelligibility. The interweaving of philosophical analysis and construction in the web of theological argument in the *Summa* is in the service of properly theological affirmation. The outcome is not a theological/philosophical system, but a highly ramified complex of interrelated dialectical arguments, always open to embracing or engaging alternative positions that can be rationally justified.⁵ The principle of unity and coherence is supplied by the mysteries of the faith in their own interconnection and intelligibility, itself rooted in the *scientia divina*. The exigencies of doctrinal and theological affirmation are seen to demand an unflinching theological realism, and it is for this reason that wide-ranging appeals are made to philosophy and other non-theological disciplines. At each turn in the larger argument, such appeals function as needed to secure the intelligibility of the doctrine under consideration, whether it be the concept of relation in the Trinity, or the concept of making in creation, or the concept of end in moral life, or the concept of disposition in grace and the virtues, and so on.

Neo-Thomists saw this, but they tended to formulate their perception in terms of the reconstruction of an all-encompassing speculative system. Whether or not this historical judgment of neo-Thomism can be sustained in every case, such a position can be usefully contrasted with the reading that is being suggested here—a reading in which coherence and integration are seen to be functions chiefly of an overarching theological vision rather than a philosophical system.

The aptness of this construal of the role of philosophical arguments in the *Summa* can be confirmed by contrast with readings of this work that are misreadings in a true sense. I have in mind readings that approach the *Summa* as if it were a theological encyclopedia. In such misreadings the *Summa Theologiae* is consulted as a compendium of self-contained entries on an assortment of theological topics. Persistent

5. I have been influenced in my formulation of this point by Alasdair MacIntyre's discussion of Aquinas in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

objects of such misreadings are the arguments for the existence of God (read as if they had some entity other than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in view) or Aquinas's early discussion of the problem of evil (construed in isolation from his treatment of sin in the *Secunda Pars* and redemption in the *Tertia*). In fact, each topic is expounded in connection with the rest and can only be fully understood in the setting of the whole. In this connection, a helpful analogy for picturing the place of the reader of the *Summa* is to imagine him or her standing at the mid-point of a sphere upon whose inner surface the text has been inscribed. In this way—to return to our concerns in this paper—one recognizes that the more conspicuously philosophical components have their logical home in an overarching theological argument explicating the mystery of God's gracious dealings with humankind from creation, in the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, and glory of his Son, and through the sending of the Spirit.

The *Summa's* sparing methodological passages support this reading of the role of philosophy in the explication of the Christian faith. Though transposed to a new—a “supernatural”—level of activity, ordinary patterns of human perception, thought, and language are internal to knowledge and talk about God in faith and, ultimately, in vision. According to Aquinas, the life of grace involves not the infusion of a set of capacities geared exclusively to engagement with God, but the transformation and empowerment of natural capacities for exercise at a new level. Hence, wherever relevant and appropriate, the results of nontheological inquiries as well as the logic of assertion and argument can be brought to bear on the theological explication of the contents of Christian faith. With respect to its overarching formal interest, theology is thus a field-encompassing field, and nontheological disciplines contribute to its pursuit of understanding and explication of divine revelation. Because of the prominence of the role of philosophy here, these issues are usually considered under the rubric “theology and philosophy.” But other nontheological disciplines contribute to theological understanding and explication, notably literary criticism, history, sociology, psychology, and the natural sciences.⁶

6. This paragraph gathers several strands of Aquinas's thought on the nature of theological thinking, drawn particularly from his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate* and from the more self-consciously methodological passages in *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 1; 12-13; 32-42. For more thorough discussion of these issues, see J. A. DiNoia, “Authority, Public Dissent and the Nature of Theological Thinking,” *The Thomist* 52 (1988): 185-207, and “Knowing and Naming the Triune God: The Grammar of Trinitarian Confession,” in *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, forthcoming). For a congruent reading of

At this juncture, we need some illustrations to grasp the significance of the suggested reading of the role of the philosophical component in Aquinas's theological arguments.

II

Consider first Aquinas's discussion of the triune God in *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 2-43. Here is a glaring instance of the difficulties posed by treating the philosophical components as independent of the overarching theological argument. In part, these difficulties stem from the textbook division of Aquinas's unified treatise on the triune God that became standard in the historical transmission of Aquinas's thought. According to this division, Ia. 2-26 (concerning the existence and nature of the triune God) was taken to constitute the tract "De Deo Uno" and Ia. 27-43 (concerning the distinction of the persons in the triune God) the tract "De Deo Trino." When read back into Aquinas, the implication of this textbook distribution of materials is that the Christian doctrine of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—functions as a kind of appendix to the purely philosophical account of the existence and nature of God. Whether justified as an account of subsequent theology, this constitutes a profoundly mistaken reading of Ia. 2-43.⁷

That the discussion of the existence and nature of God in Ia. 2-26 has a properly theological role to play is clear from Aquinas's prior description of the nature of theological inquiry (Ia. 1). To assert that theology gets its subject matter from revelation entails that faith in God constitutes one of the principles of the inquiry now getting underway. The triune God is already "in place," so to speak, in his full Christian characterization. The burden of the argument in Ia. 2 on the existence of God is to assert that the one confessed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the cause of the world. Through an interweaving of philosophical and scriptural premises, the subsequent argument in Ia. 3-26 exhibits something of the kind of life the triune God enjoys as cause of the world.⁸ The

Aquinas, see Michel Corbin, *Le chemin de la theologie chez Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972).

7. In his otherwise brilliant book, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 341-43, Michael Buckley mistakenly reads the disjunction between "De Deo Uno" and "De Deo Trino" into Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. Nicholas Lash is critical of this misreading in his lucid discussion of the matter in "When Did the Theologians Lose Interest in Theology?" in *Theology and Dialogue*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 131-47.

8. See P. T. Geach's discussion of the connection between the Five Ways and the divine attributes in "Aquinas," in *Three Philosophers*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), pp. 109-118.

force of these arguments is to secure the particularistic claim to universality which the Christian community makes for its doctrines.

Philosophically shaped arguments concerning God's existence function to secure this universal claim. Starting with observable features of the world, such arguments affirm the divine agency as the source of these features and of the world order as a whole. Whatever their logical merits or probative force, their position at the beginning of the theological inquiry signals the logical space that Christians' claims are understood to occupy. This discussion functions to locate Christian worship, nurture, practice, and belief with respect to the widest possible conceptual map.⁹ The triune God who is adored, confessed, and proclaimed in the Christian community has not only a local, narrative, or contextual reference within the usage of a particular cultural and linguistic community. He is none other than the cause of the world.

While developed in connection with scientific and metaphysical claims, such arguments are subsumed in a properly theological and scripturally based inquiry. They do not displace, but rather presuppose the reading of Scripture as a "canonically and narrationally unified and internally glossed . . . whole centered on Jesus Christ, and telling the story of the dealings of the Triune God with his people and his world in ways that are typologically . . . applicable to the present."¹⁰ In effect, philosophical analysis and construction enable Aquinas to address the question (here and in subsequent discussions of the divine nature and agency, of angelic and human natures, and, finally and decisively, of Jesus Christ as divine-human agent): what must be true of the main characters of the Christian narrative for it to have the features Christians claim for it, truth and "followability"? Philosophy and other nontheological disciplines contribute as needed to filling out these complex characterizations. A literary analogy may help at this juncture. In a critical study of Melville's *Moby Dick*, for example, the complex narrative need not be continually retold in the course of literary analysis of the motivations and structure of the main characters. In somewhat the same way in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas presumes his readership's detailed familiarity with the Christian narrative in order to show—or, more accurately, to remove obstacles to seeing—that its central claims are true and its chief injunctions followable.

9. For a more thorough discussion of these issues, see J. A. DiNoia, "Philosophical Theology in the Perspective of Religious Diversity," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 401-416.

10. George A. Lindbeck, "Scripture, Consensus and Community," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 75.

Aquinas thus provides a powerful model of theological affirmation and realism over against alternatives that locate the reference for Christian talk about God either in human experience of God or in the linguistic practices of the community.¹¹ The philosophical component in his discussion of the existence and nature of the triune God serves purposes internal to this properly theological project. In this discussion, the triune God is not left behind but presupposed. The burden of Ia. 2-26 is to affirm that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together one God, sharing the single divine life of sheer existence (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*).¹²

III

For another illustration of the role of philosophical analysis and construction in theological argument in Aquinas's conception of it, let us turn to the final questions of the *Summa* concerning the sacraments (3a. 60-65). Extended consideration of this topic here will also serve to suggest ways in which Aquinas's discussion can contribute to current sacramental theology.

In its broadly neo-Scholastic textbook transmission, Aquinas's sacramental theology suffered a fate similar to that of his theology of the triune God. Again, a misconstrual of its philosophical component is at least in part to blame. For various reasons—not the least of which was the influence of the nominalist preference for contractual over ontological categories in theological explication—the textbook tradition came to view issues of sacramental efficacy largely in juridical terms. This juridical approach was wed to one or another theory of causality in establishing an excessively legalistic framework for treating questions of the effectiveness of sacramental actions and linking these with questions about validity, form, and so on. This conjunction of classical sacramental theology (often in some sense dependent on Aquinas) with juridicism made the metaphysical elements in that theology the object of

11. In his "Postmodern Dogmatics: Toward a Renewed Discussion of Foundations in North America," *Communio* 17 (1990): 180-191, Walter Kasper underscores the importance in theology of "passing beyond hermeneutics to ontological questions" (p. 189).

12. An otherwise philosophically rigorous work noteworthy for its lack of attention to the theological setting of Aquinas's discussion of divine simplicity is Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989). For a philosophically oriented but more traditional treatment of these issues, see Leo J. Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990). Ingolf U. Dalferth's *Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988) casts light on all the issues discussed in this paper.

a sustained (though strategically indirect) attack in the preconciliar period in the approach to the sacraments characteristic of the *ressourcement*. The new style of sacramental theology appealed to biblical, patristic, historical, and liturgical studies to break the hold of neo-Scholasticism on the theology of the sacraments prior to Vatican II.

In order to appreciate the significance of the philosophical component in Aquinas's sacramental theology, it must be distinguished from the juridical terms in which sacramental efficacy came to be framed in textbook theology. Its potential contribution to the current discussion will be easier to identify.

The *ressourcement* theology generated a vast body of knowledge about the sacraments and provided the framework for the sorely needed renewal of sacramental liturgy and practice which was one of the first fruits of Vatican II. But practitioners of the *ressourcement* theology did not always possess the analytical tools, not to mention the philosophical interests, to press some of the conceptual issues posed and at least addressed by classical sacramental theology. Rahner and Schillebeeckx stand out in this period as systematic theologians who endeavored to appropriate the new knowledge about the sacraments in order to field well-developed sacramental theories dependent in part upon transcendental or phenomenological reconstructions (respectively) of Scholastic theology of the sacraments.¹³ Two conceptual issues stand out: (1) integration (the need to bring together the variety of methodologies and subfields in a comprehensive theological approach to the sacraments) and (2) theological realism (the need to take account of the full breadth of Christian claims about what occurs in these activities). The philosophical component in Aquinas's sacramental theology can be understood to contribute to the elucidation of both issues.

The most obvious feature of the sacraments is that they are ritual activities in which the Catholic Christian community engages on special occasions and for designated purposes. Considered as activities, they can be "observed" to comprise a number of elements which can be listed more or less at random as follows: rites, forms of words, formal gesture and movement, use of sacred texts, symbolic actions, distinction of roles (ministers, recipients/candidates, assembly), worship and invocation of God, use of physical objects, ruled actions, sacred place and vesture, particular occasions in communal and personal life, memorializations or imitations of Christ's actions, enactment of intentions and purposes of the community with regard to itself as a whole or with regard to

13. See Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

individual members, and the belief that this enactment realizes and mysteriously achieves divine purposes and intentions.

Given the complexity of the sacraments as activities, study of them can take a variety of different perspectives. To make this point more technically: a variety of different methodologies, involving distinctive scholarly specializations and interests, can fruitfully be applied to the study of the sacraments. Generally speaking, these specializations take one or more of the elements listed above as central to attaining an overall view of the sacraments en bloc. The following specializations come to mind: liturgiology, biblical studies, canon law, history, hermeneutics, scientific study of religions (anthropology, comparative religion, history and phenomenology of religions, and various subspecialties), canon law, sociology, and psychology. In addition to these disciplines, and often in combination with them, a variety of philosophical frameworks come into play: Scholasticism, phenomenology, personalism, existentialism, hermeneutical theory, analytical philosophy, etc. It has always been recognized that the sacraments are complex in this way and thus capable of study from different points of view (e.g., Augustine applied a theory of symbols adapted from Neo-Platonic epistemology and aesthetics to the study of the sacraments). But the proliferation of specializations and methodologies, characteristic of contemporary scholarship in general, has come to be typical of current study of the sacraments.¹⁴

Since the sacraments are activities (admittedly complex ones) of the Christian community, it follows that an adequate description of them would have to take account of their place within the overall pattern of life which the Christian community commends and fosters. If the Christian pattern of life is seen as aimed toward loving union with God, then the sacraments should be viewed as central activities by which this personal union with God is deepened and enhanced in the participants in these sacramental actions. In the sacraments, we can see this overall aim embodied in a variety of activities: confession, renunciation, praise, petition, promise, pledge, commitment, commission, empowerment, consolation, forgiveness, initiation, intercession, etc. The sacraments, because of their richness as ritual, prayerful actions, affirm many of the central elements of the Christian faith. This factor becomes clear when we analyze, in a rough way, a sacrament like Baptism and discover there the intersection of many of the deepest Christian convictions repre-

14. For details of current sacramental theology, see Kevin W. Irwin's surveys of "Recent Sacramental Theology," *The Thomist* 47 (1983): 592-608; 52 (1988): 124-47; 53 (1989): 281-313; and "Sacramental Theology: A Methodological Proposal," 54 (1990): 311-42.

sented and enacted: God's gracious love in calling human beings to be in union with him, our need to be rescued from the consequences of our sinful condition, the prefiguration of our baptism in Christ's at the Jordan, our participation in the mystery of his death and resurrection, our renunciation of sin, our incorporation into the community of Christ's Church, our promise to foster this life of faith in ourselves and in others, our empowerment to participate in other sacramental activities of the community, and so on. Because of the richness of the sacraments in affirming and enacting the central convictions and intentions of the community, a variety of theological subfields contribute to a full account of the sacraments: Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, theological anthropology, eschatology, etc. Contemporary theology of the sacraments reflects the interplay of all these theological subfields.

The foregoing sketch of the complexity of the subjects requiring attention in sacramental theology suggests, in the first place, the need for integration of the vastly enriched fund of knowledge about the sacraments generated by liturgical and historical studies. Although Aquinas encountered a simpler body of data and theological subfields, his sacramental theology supplies a model for the desired integration. Particularly germane is his conception of the way that theology relates to other disciplines. The theological appropriation of the results of nontheological inquiries (formally speaking) can only be successful if it strives to incorporate this knowledge into a synthesis shaped by a conception of theology as *sacra doctrina* with God as its primary object. According to this conception, theology is a field-encompassing discipline that re-shapes the knowledge provided by subfields according to its own interests and principles. Such appropriation occurs widely in all fields of scientific and humanistic studies when one discipline (e.g., medicine) adopts the conclusions of other disciplines (e.g., biology, chemistry, and so on) and adapts these to its own purposes. Theological appropriation of the findings of biblical, historical, patristic, liturgical, and other studies (which themselves have an integrity as disciplines in their own right) does not entail theological *imperialism*. Indeed, it is arguable that only appropriation at a higher level protects a broad field, requiring interdisciplinary studies—like sacramental theology—from being co-opted by one or another parallel discipline—like canon law or liturgics.

Furthermore, as Aquinas's example demonstrates, an adequate theology of the sacraments cannot avoid the difficult conceptual problem posed by the Christian belief in the conjunction of divine and human agency in the accomplishment of sacramental effects. The issue of sacramental realism cannot be addressed simply by rehearsal of the

historical development of sacramental theology or by a description of the symbolic richness of the sacramental ritual. Some conceptually sophisticated account of what philosophers like to call the problem of double agency is fundamental to securing the sacramental realism of Christian affirmation.

At issue in the question of how a double agency comes into play in the sacraments is the conviction that the effects believed by the community to be achieved by the sacramental activities surpass what human beings are capable of achieving on their own: for example, in baptism the conferral of grace entails an alteration of the interior states of persons to an extent beyond anything a human agent can achieve; in the eucharist, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ; and so on. So an adequate sacramental theology will need to address not only the question of the convergence of two agencies in the achievement of a particular effect, but also the question of how the effect of the human agent can be embraced by the purposes and intentions of the divine agent. It is not clear how such issues could be sorted out without some appeal to philosophical analysis and construction. Aquinas turned to available scientific and metaphysical accounts of causality in trying to deepen theological understanding of the mystery of this double agency in the sacraments. When firmly distinguished from the juridicized conceptuality in which his sacramental theology has been transmitted, this philosophically shaped account of sacramental efficacy can be acknowledged and deployed as a potent instrument for theological affirmation.¹⁵

IV

The topic of this conference has been the future of Thomisms. I take the reading of Aquinas's use of philosophy in theology proposed here to be vital to the future of theology.

Various observers have suggested that this future will be a postmodern one—in which case I find myself in the unenviable position (linguistically at any rate) of commending a post-neo-Thomistic Aquinas to postmodern theologians. But I will forebear to adopt this fractious babble. David Tracy recently remarked that we are in an age in doubt about how to name itself. Are we living through an extended modernity,

15. The potential of the kind of reading of Aquinas's sacramental theology suggested here is brilliantly realized in Colman E. O'Neill's *Sacramental Realism: A General Theory of the Sacraments* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983) and *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, rev. ed. Romanus Cessario (New York: Alba House, 1991).

postmodernity or antimodernity? he asks, implying that these are labels not for the times but for the positions we adopt towards them.¹⁶ To be sure, there is a shift away from the sorts of concerns that dominated modern consciousness—its turn toward inwardness as Charles Taylor has brilliantly described it in his *Sources of the Self*.¹⁷ But, as Taylor makes clear, modernity continues to maintain a vigorous afterlife. If the term “postmodern” has any value as a description of theological trends—as Walter Kasper has recently suggested—it is a heuristic one that signals a shift towards objectivity, nonfoundationalism, and a realism of sorts.¹⁸

I have suggested elsewhere that there are reasons to believe that a reading of Aquinas like the one sketched in this paper can play an important role in theology’s postmodern future.¹⁹ In these final remarks, I want to consider briefly the pluralism of theology’s postmodern present and future to which Fr. McCool has drawn our attention. The intellectual environment of Catholic theology has undergone pluralization in at least three areas: pluralism of specializations, philosophical pluralism, and religious pluralism. Aquinas has relevance for each.

First, a marked internal pluralization of theology arises from the diversification of theological specialities. This development is not something new, but continues trends already well established in Protestant theology in the nineteenth century. At the present time, a powerful countertrend seeks not so much to suppress the new specializations as to recover the conception of a unified inquiry that can integrate theology’s assorted subfields.²⁰ My brief discussion of sacramental theology will have to suffice to suggest that Aquinas’s notion of theology as a field-encompassing field (in technical Thomistic language, the “subalternation of sciences”) has a significant contribution to make to the current quest for unity in theology.²¹

Secondly, the more or less common framework of discourse furnished for past Catholic theology by various cognate forms of Scholastic philosophy has yielded increasingly to philosophical pluralism. For one thing, this kind of pluralization makes conversation across theological

16. David Tracy, “On Naming the Present,” *Concilium* (1990/91): 66-85.

17. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). See James J. Buckley, “A Return to the Subject: The Theological Significance of Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*,” *The Thomist* 55 (1991).

18. Kasper, “Postmodern Dogmatics,” p. 190.

19. DiNoia, “American Theology at Century’s End.”

20. For a penetrating discussion of these issues, see Edward Farley’s influential *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), and his subsequent essays collected in *The Fragility of Knowledge* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress, Press, 1988).

positions more difficult. The challenge is not simply one of communication, however, but also one of constructive assessment. Strategies for appraising and appropriating alternative philosophical conceptions are needed to maintain unity in faith in the midst of diversity in theology. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, Aquinas provides a striking model of such strategies in operation. Describing Aquinas's appraisal and use of Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions, MacIntyre notes that Aquinas strove "to enable Augustinians to understand how, by their own standards, they confronted problems for the adequate treatment of which, so long as they remained in the confines of their own system, they lacked the necessary resources; and in a parallel way to provide the same kind of understanding for Averroistic Aristotelians."²² What this means in practice, MacIntyre indicates, is that for Aquinas "no claim to rational superiority . . . can be made good except on the basis of a rationally justifiable rejection of the strongest claim to be made out of the opposing point of view." MacIntyre continues: "For one view to have emerged from this encounter with its claim to superiority vindicated it must first have rendered itself maximally vulnerable to the strongest arguments which that other and rival view can bring to bear against it."²³ Aquinas's strategy for entertaining and assessing alternative positions furnishes a model for Catholic theology in its philosophically pluralistic environment.

Finally, Aquinas also has something to contribute to Catholic theology's encounter with the alternative systems of belief and practice embodied in the world's major religious traditions. Thus—to return to Aquinas's theology of the triune God and to introduce a concrete illustration—philosophical argument would be needed in conversations between Buddhists and Christians. Segments of the Buddhist community seem to be nontheistic in their doctrines, and their canonical and commentatorial literatures possess highly subtle explanations for the prevalence of theistic beliefs in other religious traditions. Presumably, in conversations with Buddhists, Christians would need to invoke patterns of argument analogous to those sketched by Aquinas in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa* (and elsewhere). A readiness to advance such arguments would be a way of taking Buddhist objections to theistic

21. On Aquinas's account of the subalternation of sciences, see William A. Wallace, *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology* (Washington, D. C.: The Thomist Press, 1962), pp. 36–45. On the logic of the interrelation of fields of argument, see Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

22. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 173.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

beliefs seriously. Given the empirical bent of Buddhist patterns of reflection and argument, there would be considerable scope here for empirically based discussions such as those elaborated in the Five Ways and similar arguments. Patterns of argument appealing to objective states of affairs would have an important role in the religiously pluralistic environment of current theology. Only these kinds of arguments presuppose a field broad enough to sustain interreligious conversations. The issues can be joined in a common logical field, so to speak, where rival particularistic claims to universality would be taken seriously and debated. The readiness to advance arguments would make it possible for a true meeting of minds—though not necessarily agreement—to occur. It seems clear that, in order to rise to the occasion (logically speaking), appeals to history, narratives, texts, personal experiences, and the like would need to be combined with philosophical arguments having features of objective states of affairs as their context. Aquinas's incorporation of such arguments in his theology provides a model for Christian engagement in interreligious conversation.²⁴

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For the question "Thomas after Thomism?" read "Is there a theological life for Aquinas after the gradual displacement of the neo-Thomistic synthesis in Catholic theology underway for several decades?" I have argued here that an affirmative response to this question depends at least in part on a more dialectical and less systematic construal of the philosophical component of Aquinas's theology. It remains to be seen whether theologians will find this kind of reading both viable and serviceable.

24. See DiNoia, "Philosophical Theology in the Perspective of Religious Diversity" and "Pluralist Theology of Religions: Pluralistic or Non-Pluralistic?" in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 119-34. For application of Aquinas to various issues posed by religious pluralism, see my *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming).