

AQUINAS'S READING OF ROMANS: THE MULTIPLE LITERAL SENSE AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON PAUL ¹

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In the world of modern Pauline scholarship, one past interpreter of the Apostle who is often overlooked is Thomas Aquinas.² While we recognize this may be due to Thomas's pre-modern hermeneutic and scholastic terminology, we are convinced that modern interpreters of the Apostle have an invaluable resource in the *Doctor Communis*. In particular, in this article we suggest that Thomas's hermeneutic of the multiple literal sense could be an important tool that could help bridge some of the exegetical divides that currently plague modern Pauline hermeneutics.

In order to demonstrate this, we begin by elucidating Thomas's idea of Scripture's multiple literal sense. Next, we examine two instances of Thomas's use of the multiple literal sense in his commentary on Romans, beginning with Romans 3:3 and moving to an analysis of Romans 1:16–17 by bringing Thomas into conversation with James D. G. Dunn. We end this article with some concluding suggestions concerning Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 and Thomas's teaching on the gift of wisdom in order to highlight how his hermeneutic of the multiple literal sense can enable us to read Scripture as *Dei Verbum* mandates "in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written."³

1 This article is a slightly revised version of chapter 9 that appeared in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2012). Used with permission.

2 Among the various exceptions to this assertion that could be mentioned, we would like to highlight the work of Christopher T. Baglow, "Modus et Forma": A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the *Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios*, *Analecta Biblica* 149 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2002), and Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2005).

3 *Dei Verbum* 12, as cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 111. For an attempt at drawing out the hermeneutical implications of this phrase, see Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., "Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Spirit in Which It Was Written (*Dei Verbum* 12c)," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives I*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 220–266.

We have two overriding goals in this article: first, to demonstrate that Thomas's use of the multiple literal sense does not lead to exegetical equivocation or confusion; second, to highlight how Thomas's hermeneutic of the multiple literal sense can offer a way forward beyond some of the exegetical impassés that currently exist among Pauline scholars. In order to reach these goals we must first begin by explaining what constitutes the hermeneutic of the multiple literal sense for Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas and the Multiple Literal Sense of Scripture

We are not the first to discover Thomas's understanding of Scripture's multiple literal sense. Indeed, he affirms the multiple literal sense in six different works, which his interpreters have studied and debated for centuries.⁴ Nor does Thomas claim to have invented the idea, which, like so many of his other fundamental notions, he inherited from Augustine. In question 4 of *De potentia*, Thomas identifies two interpretive errors that must be avoided and proceeds to explain both:

The first is for someone to say that something manifestly false must be understood in the words of Scripture . . . for there cannot be anything false under divine Scripture passed on by the Holy Spirit, just as there cannot be anything false under the faith that is taught by it. The other is that someone wants to force Scripture to one sense in such a way that other senses that contain truth in themselves and that can, with due regard for the circumstances of the letter, be fitted to the letter⁵ are entirely excluded. For this belongs to the dignity of divine Scripture, that under one letter it contains many senses.⁶

4 See John F. Boyle, "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio Textus*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, eds. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 3–8; Franziscus Cueppens, "Quid S. Thomas de multiplici sensu litterali in s. Scriptura senserit?" *Divus Thomas* 33 (1930): 164–175; Mark F. Johnson, "Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 117–141; Robert G. Kennedy, "Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Scripture" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985). On the six works and their dating, see Johnson, "Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense," 120.

5 By "letter," Thomas here means the *word itself* that serves as the basis for the literal sense.

6 *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei* q. 4, a. 1 (translation ours). Thomas continues: "For this belongs to the dignity of divine Scripture, that under one letter it contains many senses in such a way that it is suited to different human minds, so that everyone is amazed that he can find in Scripture the truth he has conceived in the mind. By this it can also be defended more easily against unbelievers in that when anyone finds his own interpretation of Scripture to be false he can fall back on another one. Thus it is not unworthy of belief that Moses and the other authors of the Holy Books were given to know various truths

In rejecting the first error, Thomas simply affirms the divine inspiration of Scripture and shows how it excludes the possibility of error for the divine and human authors. In rejecting the second, Thomas clearly asserts the possibility of multiple meanings in the literal sense, which then leads him to conclude, with St. Augustine, that “every truth that can be fitted to the divine Scripture with due regard for the circumstances of the letter is its sense.”⁷

It is possible that Thomas intends to state nothing more than a general pastoral norm, as opposed to an absolute rule for exegesis. That Thomas recognizes the spiritual value of plural meanings of the Scriptural text is evident when he further states: “For this belongs to the dignity of divine Scripture, that under one letter it contains many senses in such a way that it is suited to different human minds, so that everyone is amazed that he can find in Scripture the truth he has conceived in the mind.”⁸ Since, however, Thomas was never one to separate spirituality from scholarship, any more than Augustine, it seems more likely that he intends to affirm what is both solid pastoral advice and a sound rule of biblical interpretation.⁹ We suggest that Thomas's view of the multiple literal sense is confirmed by his application of the principle in his many biblical commentaries, especially his commentary on the book of Romans. Here again, we are not the first readers of Thomas's commentaries to have noticed this pattern of multiple meanings of the letter. For example, John Boyle observes:

If a given passage of Scripture admits of two different interpretations, two different meanings such that they satisfy Thomas's modest criteria of legitimate interpretation—not contrary to truth and fitting the circumstance of the letter—what is one then to do? Which interpretation is

that men would be able to understand, and that they expressed them under one sequence of the letter, so that each of these senses is the sense of the author. Thus, even if other truths, which the author did not understand, are fitted to the letter by the interpreters of Sacred Scripture, without any doubt the Holy Spirit, who is the principal author of divine Scripture, understood them. Consequently every truth that can be fitted to the divine Scripture with due regard for the circumstances of the letter, is its sense.”

7 *Ibid*: “Unde omnis veritas quae, salva litterae circumstantia, potest divinae Scripturae aptari, est eius sensus.” Latin taken from *Corpus Thomisticum*, ed. E. Alarcón (Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra: 2000–), <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/qdp4.html>, translation ours.

8 *Ibid*. (translation ours).

9 Thus, we can distinguish between objective and subjective grounds for a multiple literal sense: the objective ground is based primarily on the divine authorship of Scripture, and secondarily on the basis of refined styles of human communication (for example, double entendre). The subjective ground is primarily based on a pastoral view of God's purpose in communicating truth to many people of varied capacities, and secondarily on the need to apply the rule of faith and charity to competing interpretations.

the right one? The opportunities for this question abound in Thomas's commentary (on the Gospel according to St. John). Time and time again, Thomas provides two or more patristic interpretations for a single scriptural passage. He does not judge one to be correct, the other not; by his own criteria no such judgment can be made. So in answer to the question, "Which is the true meaning of the letter?" the answer is simply, all of the above. What Thomas does in practice by presenting multiple interpretations of the letter, he affirms in principle: the literal sense admits of many meanings.¹⁰

In his short but luminous essay on Thomas's treatment of "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio Textus*," Boyle notes this recurring tendency in the Doctor's commentaries without examining any specific instances. For purposes of illustration, we will now consider two examples from his Romans commentary where Thomas affirms a multiple literal sense.¹¹

Thomas on Romans 3:3 and the Pistis Christou Debate

We begin our analysis of Thomas's use of the multiple literal sense by examining the virtue of "faith" as Paul introduces it in the rhetorical question in Romans 3:3: "Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?" Thomas explains the literal sense by positing two views of faith:

253. [. . .] This [the faithfulness of God] can be understood in two ways: in one way, as referring to the faith by which one believes in God. For the faith of believers is not nullified by those who have not believed, because the evil in some members of society does not nullify the good in other members. [. . .] In another way, it can be understood as

10 Boyle, "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio Textus*," 5. He concludes: "Recall the principle from *De potentia*: one not ought to insist upon one's own interpretation to the exclusion of other interpretations which in their content are true and in which the circumstance of the letter is preserved. If Thomas is, at least to us, surprisingly uninterested in pursuing what is the meaning of the author as such, he is also uninterested in determining a single meaning of the letter. If the former is a dead end, the latter is simply the wrong question: There is not necessarily one single meaning for each passage of Scripture. Some admit of more."

11 Beyond our two extended examples, as was noted above Thomas employs the multiple literal sense frequently in his commentary on Romans, and as Boyle noted in regard to Thomas's commentary on John, often Thomas simply lays out the various options without adjudicating between them. For more examples of this in his Romans commentary, see numbers 98, 212, 277, 424–427, 563, 565, 602–603, 658–674, 705, 728, 825, 828, 848, 856–858, 879, and 881–882, among others.

referring to the faith with which God is faithful in keeping his promises: "He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). This faithfulness would be nullified, if it happened that the Jews had no advantage, just because some have not believed. For God promised to multiply that people and make it great: "I will multiply your descendants" (Gen. 22:16).

According to Thomas and his use of the multiple literal sense in this passage, the first sense of faith is objective, that is, God as the object of our belief; while the second sense is subjective, since God is the subject who is faithful to fulfill his covenant promise to bless the seed of Abraham, as he swore on the occasion of the *Aqedah* (Gen. 22:16). It is possible that modern Pauline scholars might hear the familiar echoes of the contemporary *pistis Christou* (πίστις Χριστοῦ) debate in the interpretative options laid out by Thomas.

Ever since Richard Hays published his dissertation, entitled *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, in defense of the subjective genitive reading, many interpreters have felt constrained to decide between the two apparent rival senses of "faith" in Paul: is it subjective genitive ("the faithfulness of Christ"), as advocated by Hays, along with Douglas Campbell and Luke Timothy Johnson, among others,¹² or rather is it an objective genitive ("our faith in Christ"), as advocated for by Dunn and others?¹³ While Romans 3:3 is not a perfect example—for in this instance it is clearly not the "faith of Christ," but the "faithfulness of God," and furthermore, this is a case where the subjective genitive (God's faithfulness) certainly appears to be the primary meaning—we would suggest that it is possible to gain some valuable hermeneutical insights for approaching the *pistis Christou* debate from how Thomas handles this passage. While it is somewhat surprising to see how clearly Thomas sets forth the interpretive options, it is also a little disconcerting to see how Thomas apparently overlooks the apparent contradiction between the two different views. Or does he?

A closer reading of Thomas suggests that he proposes an integral reading of Paul's notion of faith, which affirms the first meaning, the faith of believers, and then subordinates it to the second, the faithfulness of God. Thus, Thomas shows how they are not only logically compatible, but mutually related. As his analysis demonstrates, he does this in three steps.

12 See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); Douglas A. Campbell, "Romans 1:17: A *Crux Interpretum* for the *Pistis Christou* Debate," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994): 265–285; Luke Timothy Johnson, "Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1982): 77–90.

13 See James D. G. Dunn, "Once More, PISTIS CHRISTOU," in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 4, *Looking Back, Pressing On*, eds. E. E. Johnson and D. M. Hay (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 61–81.

First, Thomas traces Paul's point about God's faithfulness back to the historical setting of the original promise, when God first swore a covenant to bless the seed of Abraham on the occasion of the *Aqedah* (Gen. 22:16). Thomas thereby establishes the historical grounds for the priority of God's faithfulness to his sworn promise. Thomas continues to track the Apostle's reasoning in the verses that immediately follow and finds additional proof for the priority of divine faithfulness, especially in the face of human unbelief: "Then when he says, *Let it not be!*, he shows that it is unfitting for God's faithfulness to be nullified on account of men's unbelief. [. . .] Hence, it is plain that man's mendacity or unbelief in not adhering to the truth does not nullify God's truth or faithfulness."¹⁴

Second, Thomas advances a very different kind of proof, one that appears to be something of a metaphysical tangent. He immediately shifts the discussion away from the two aspects of faith, divine and human, over to a seemingly abstract analysis of the twofold nature of truth. Readers may ask, why the tangent? We would suggest that Thomas wants to demonstrate the priority of divine faithfulness in relation to human belief by building an argument on metaphysical grounds for the ontological primacy of God in the order of knowing and how this necessarily precedes and enables intellectual knowledge for humans by way of a derivative participation in divine truth:

255. [. . .] This [divine faithfulness in relation to human unbelief] is easier to understand, if we consider that truth implies agreement between thing and understanding. But things are in agreement with our understanding in one way and with God's in another way. For our intellect derives its knowledge from things; consequently, the cause and measure of our truth stems from the thing's being. For an opinion is called true or false depending on whether the thing is as stated or is not. Hence, our understanding can be true or it can be false, for it can be in agreement or disagreement. But whatever is open to being or not being needs someone acting to make it be; otherwise, it continues not to be. For as air without something illuminating it remains dark, so our intellect by itself, unless it is enlightened by the first truth, continues in falseness. Hence, of himself every man is false in his intellect and is true only in virtue of participating in the divine truth: "Send out thy light and thy truth" (Ps. 43:3). The divine intellect, on the other hand, is the cause and measure of things. For this reason it is of

itself unfailingly true, and everything else is true inasmuch as it conforms to that intellect. Similarly, considering truth on the part of the thing, man of himself does not have truth, because his nature is convertible into nothing. Only the divine nature, which is not produced from nothing or convertible into nothing, has of itself truth.

Thomas thinks his readers will grasp Paul's teaching about faith more easily once they step back and consider the human intellect's dependence on God as the First Truth. As divine truth is "the cause and measure of our truth," so divine faithfulness is the cause and measure of our faithfulness. In sum: it isn't one or the other; it's one (the divine), therefore the other (the human). Modern readers may be tempted to consider this line of reasoning as completely beside the point or write it off as an unfortunate specimen of medieval eisegesis, in this case reading Aristotle's understanding of causality back into Paul. We would propose, alternatively, that Thomas's argument makes a great deal of interpretive sense, especially if we recognize that this second line of argument, on etiological grounds, demonstrates the subordination of human faith to divine faithfulness on the basis of metaphysical causality.

Third, Thomas completes his analysis of the twofold literal sense of faith in Romans 3 by comparing our situation as believers to a similar situation in which a sinful David found himself trusting in God's faithfulness. In the next line of his commentary, Thomas notes how the next phase of Paul's argument involves a citation from the most famous of David's penitential psalms:

256. Then when he says, *As it is written*, he proves his statement on the authority of a text in Psalm 51 (v.4): *That thou mayest be justified in thy words and prevail when thou art judged*. How this is to the point can be gathered from considering what the Psalmist had said just ahead of it. For he says just before this, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," and then: "So that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment." For God through the prophet Nathan had promised David that God would establish David's kingdom forever in his seed, as is gathered from 2 Samuel (7:16). But later, when David fell into serious sin, namely, adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11:2 ff), some said that on account of these sins God would not keep the promises made to him.

257. Hence, the Psalmist's intention bears on two things. First, that God's justice, which involves keeping His promises, is not changed on account of sin. Touching on this he says, *that thou mayest be justified in thy words*, i.e., that You may be shown just in your words, since You do not disregard them because of my sins: "All the words of my mouth are righteous" (Prov. 8:8); "The Lord is faithful in all his words" (Ps. 145:13). Secondly, that God's promise imitates men's judgment. And this is what he says, *and prevail*, namely, by keeping Your promise, *when thou art judged*, namely, by men, that on account of my sins You did not keep Your promises: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21), which is said to men. Accordingly, it is truer of God.

On the basis of this argument from analogy, Thomas shows how Paul's citation of David's psalm reinforces the proper understanding of "faith" here in Romans 3; so God's faithfulness is clearly elevated over ours and made the source and measure of our own faith. Before moving on to consider our other text in Romans, three observations are in order.

First, Thomas's extended discussion of the proper understanding of the twofold meaning of faith consists of three distinct lines of argument. The first is advanced along the lines of *history*, as Thomas argues from Paul's use of the example of Abraham, who received the promise from God. The second is advanced along the lines of *etiology*, as Thomas argues for the priority of divine causality to human knowledge and belief. The third is advanced along the lines of *analogy*, as Thomas argues from Paul's comparative use of David to showcase God's faithfulness and mercy in the face of human sin. At this point it is worth noting that these three lines of argument correspond to three functions of the literal sense mentioned by Thomas in article 10 of the *Summa theologiae*, where Thomas builds on the teaching of Augustine and affirms that history, etiology, and analogy all belong to the literal sense.¹⁵

15 ST I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod illa tria, historia, aetiology, analogia, ad unum litteralem sensum pertinent. Nam historia est, ut ipse Augustinus exponit, cum simpliciter aliquid proponitur, aetiology vero, cum causa dicti assignatur, [. . .] analogia vero est, cum veritas unius Scripturae ostenditur veritati alterius non repugnare." Latin text taken from *Corpus Thomisticum*. Here Thomas is responding to Augustine's theory: "The writing which is called the Old Testament lends itself to a fourfold division; namely, according to history, according to etiology, according to analogy, and according to allegory" (*De utilitate credendi*). Augustine distinguishes four senses of Scripture, but not the traditional four (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical), which he and Thomas affirm elsewhere. Thomas clarifies Augustine's meaning by showing how these three elements (history, etiology, analogy) all pertain to the literal sense, while the allegorical is identified with the spiritual sense. It is also worth noting that in his *respondeo* Thomas follows

As a second observation, we would point to the convergence of Thomas's view of the dual meaning of faith for Paul with the covenantal understanding of God's faithfulness and justice, pointing to an inseparable connection for Paul between God's faithfulness and justice and our own. Thus, God's justice is more than divine rewards for the good and divine punishment for the bad; God's justice consists, rather, of his faithfulness in keeping his sworn covenants to bless Israel and the Gentiles, even when they are unjust and unfaithful, through the promised seed of Abraham and David, that is, Christ. As Thomas notes:

258. It should be noted that God's promise to David was to be fulfilled in Christ's incarnation. Hence it was a predestinative prophecy, in which something is promised as destined to be fulfilled in every way; whereas something promised or foretold by a prophecy of warning is not predicted as destined to be fulfilled in every way but according to men's merits, which can change. Therefore, if the promise made to David had not been fulfilled, it would have been prejudicial to God's justice; whereas the non-fulfillment of a promise made through a prophecy of warning is not prejudicial to God's justice, but indicates a change in deserts. [. . .] Therefore, it is plain, according to this sense, that man's sin does not exclude God's faithfulness.

Thomas's comments here are similar to Dunn's analysis when the latter states: "The covenant God counts the covenant partner as still in partnership, despite the latter's continued failure."¹⁶

Third and finally, Thomas's reading fits nicely with Adolf Deissmann's still intriguing solution of "Christ-faith" taken as a "genitive of fellowship" or "mystical genitive" that is the result of being "in Christ."¹⁷ While Thomas's

Augustine in affirming the possibility of a text having multiple literal meanings: "Quia vero sensus litteralis est, quem auctor intendit, auctor autem sacrae Scripturae Deus est, qui omnia simul suo intellectu comprehendit, non est inconveniens, ut dicit Augustinus XII confessionum, si etiam secundum litteralem sensum in una littera Scripturae plures sint sensus" (ST I, q. 1, a. 10).

16 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 344. While this statement from Dunn clearly sounds like Thomas's analysis of Rom. 3:3, he actually made it in the context of discussing the "righteousness of God" in Rom. 1:16–17, the text to which we will turn in the next section of this article.

17 See Adolf Deissmann, *Paulus, Eine Kultur-Und Religionsgeschichtliche Skizze* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911); idem, *View Larger Image Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. W. E. Wilson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 162–183. Other scholars have also suggested a "both-and" approach to *pistis Christou*, such as Morna Hooker and Sam Williams. See Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge:

account is rooted in divine inspiration, his account offers not merely linguistic but also a theological rationale for Deissmann's mystical genitive reading of *pistis Christou*. Yet this manner of reading Paul is relevant not only for the question of how to best account for *pistis Christou*, it is also directly relevant for another highly contested genitive phrase, "the righteousness of God" in Romans 1:16–17, a passage to which we now turn.

Thomas and James Dunn on Romans 1:16–17

We turn our attention to one of the most important and controversial passages in the entire Pauline corpus, Romans 1:16–17, by bringing Thomas into conversation with James Dunn. Before turning to a more extended analysis of Dunn's interpretation of this text, we will turn to Thomas's analysis of "the justice (righteousness) of God." Thomas states:

102. [. . .] This (the justice of God) can be understood in two ways. In one way it can refer to the justice by which God is just: "The Lord is just and has loved justice" (Ps. 11:7). Taken this way, the sense is that the *justice of God*, by which he is just in keeping his promises, is revealed in it [*in eo*], namely, in the man who believes the Gospel, because he believes that God has fulfilled what he promised about sending the Christ. And this is *from faith*, namely, [the faithfulness] of God who promised: "The Lord is faithful in all his words (Ps. 145:13); *to faith*, namely of the man who believes. Or it can refer to the justice of God by which God makes men just. For the justice of men is that by which men presume to make themselves just by their own efforts: *Not knowing the justice of God and seeking to establish their own justice, they did not submit to the justice of God* (Rom. 10:3). This justice [of God] is revealed in the gospel inasmuch as men are justified by faith in the gospel in every age.

Pauline scholars will immediately recognize these two interpretative options as the two opposing sides of the contemporary debate on how to interpret Paul's phrase *dikaïosynē Theou* (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) that exists between many of the advocates of the New Perspective on Paul, who maintain that it refers to God's covenantal righteousness (subjective genitive), and the older Protestant and Catholic perspectives respectively, who maintain that it refers to the righteousness that God gives to those who believe (genitive of origin or

objective genitive).¹⁸ While it would be understandable to turn to Thomas in hopes that he would be able to help adjudicate between these rival positions, what is fruitful about Thomas's analysis of this text is precisely that he does not adjudicate, but employs the hermeneutic of the multiple literal sense. Far from actually avoiding the issue, Thomas appears to offer both interpretative options as not only compatible, but valid. It even appears that Thomas presents the first view in such a way as to lead directly to the second, which accords with history and etiology, both of which belong to the literal sense. In other words, it is God's faithfulness to his historically situated covenant promises that leads him to make both Jew and Gentile righteous members of his covenant community. At this point it is conceivable that some modern interpreters of Paul will find this solution untenable, for this not only could lead to confusion and equivocation, but would mean that the human author meant to communicate more than one literal meaning, a conclusion that many an exegete would be hesitant to draw. However, perhaps to the surprise of some, James Dunn is not one of them.

Romans 1:16–17 has been one of the most important texts in Dunn's rather prolific engagement with the Apostle Paul, and while coming to some rather different conclusions than Luther, Dunn notes that "I could empathize with Luther's experience."¹⁹ While the importance of Romans 1:16–17 can be seen in the various places where Dunn offers an extended analysis of the

18 For an overview of the history of interpretation of Rom. 1:16–17, see Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle*, 1–9. Although there is common ground between Catholics and Protestants in regard to recognizing that the righteousness of God is a gift that is given to believers by grace through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, the kind of common ground that allowed for the signing of the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine on Justification*, there are still some important differences with respect to how one is given the saving righteousness of God. A number of Protestant exegetes and theologians still hold to the Reformation's account of justification that claims that believers are justified because their sins are imputed to Christ while his righteousness is imputed to believers in an extrinsic and exclusively forensic manner through faith alone. For a summary of this position see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 212–213. For recent attempts at defending such an account, see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 469–484, in particular; and Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 102–125, in particular. In distinction, the Catholic account argues that the forensic nature of Pauline justification is realistic in regard to both Christ and the believer; that is, God's gift of righteousness comes from Christ to those who believe, yet given so that believers truly become just by grace through faith. For recent attempts at defending such an account, see Jean-Noël Aletti, *Justification by Faith in the Letters of Saint Paul: Keys to Interpretation*, trans. Peggy Manning Meyer (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2015); Thomas D. Stegman, S.J., "Paul's use of DIKAIÖ-Terminology: Moving Beyond N. T. Wright's Forensic Interpretation," in *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 496–524.

19 James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 3n.8.

passage,²⁰ what is even more important for our purposes is how he interprets two key parts of the passage itself. The first part is Dunn's handling of *dikaio-synē Theou* in Romans 1:17 and the conclusions he is able to draw from that exegesis in his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. In his massive two-volume commentary on the book of Romans (1988), Dunn says this about the phrase *dikaio-synē Theou* (Rom. 1:17a):

Righteousness is not something which an individual has on his or her own, independently of anyone else; it is something which one has precisely in one's relationships as a social being. People are righteous when they meet the claims which others have on them by virtue of their relationship. [. . .] So too when it is predicated of God—in this case the relationship being the covenant which God has entered into with his people. [. . .] This understanding of Paul's language largely removes two issues which have troubled Christian theology for centuries. (1) Is "the righteousness of God" subjective or objective genitive; is it an attitude of God or something he does? Seen as God's meeting of the claims of his covenant relationship, the answer is not a strict either-or, but both-and, with the emphasis on the latter. [. . .] (2) *δικαιοῦν*, "to justify" does it mean "to make righteous" or "to count righteous?" This is the classic dispute between Catholic and Protestant exegesis. [. . .] Since the basic idea is of a *relationship* in which God acts even for the defective partner, an action whereby God sustains the weaker partner of his covenant relationship within the relationship, the answer is really *both*.²¹

Far from attempting to minimize his claim that both *dikaio-synē Theou* and *dikaion* have multiple aspects to their literal meaning, Dunn reaffirms it ten years later in *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (1998):

The recognition of the essentially relational character of Paul's understanding of justification also speaks with some immediacy to the traditional debates of post-Reformation theology. In fact, it largely undercuts them and leaves much of the dispute pointless. The debate on whether "the

20 See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38a (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 40–49 in particular, and *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 340–345. See also idem, *The New Perspective on Paul*, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," 193–212.

21 Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 40–42 (his emphasis).

righteousness of God" was subjective or objective genitive, "an activity of God" or "a gift bestowed by God," can easily become another piece of either-or exegesis. For the dynamic of relationship simply refuses to conform to such analysis. In contrast, Paul took it for granted that God's righteousness was to be understood as God's activity in drawing individuals into relationship as "the power of God unto salvation." The other dispute, as already noted, was whether the verb *dikaioō* means "make righteous" or "reckon as righteous." But once again the basic idea assumed by Paul was of a relationship in which God acts on behalf of his human partner, first in calling Israel into and then in sustaining Israel in its covenant with him. So once again the answer is not one or the other but both. The covenant God counts the covenant partner still in partnership, despite the latter's continued failure. But the covenant partner could hardly fail to be transformed by a living relationship with the life-giving God.²²

It is clear from these passages that Dunn is uncomfortable forcing the interpretation of *dikaïosynē Theou* and *dikaioō* (*dikaïoun*)²³ into what he calls "another piece of either-or exegesis." Due to the relational and participatory nature of covenantal soteriology, Dunn claims that these terms have multiple aspects to their literal meaning, and, much like Thomas, claims these aspects

22 Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 344 (his emphasis).

23 For a defense of taking *dikaioō* to mean "to declare righteous" in an exclusively forensic manner, see Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1–8*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991); idem, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); and Thomas Schreiner's discussion of "God's Saving Righteousness," in Thomas J. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 189–217. For a defense of taking *dikaioō* to mean "to make righteous," see M. J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul: Epître aux Romains* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1950); Edgar J. Goodspeed, "Some Greek Notes," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73, no. 2 (1954): 86–91; and Chris VanLandingham, *Judgment and Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 242–332. While it is beyond the scope of this article to comment on this debate at length, we are in significant agreement with the position of Michael Gorman in his recent work *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* (p. 101), where he affirms that *dikaioō* is both juridical and participatory, noting that Paul is a soteriological realist who teaches that the saving righteousness of God is not imputed, but cruciform and deiform. As Gorman affirms: "Does a participatory understanding of justification rule out its juridical dimension? By no means! Rather, it says that in Pauline theological forensics God's declaration of 'justified' now is a 'performative utterance,' an effective word that does not return void but effects transformation. Thus God's declaration now of 'justified!' accompanies the divine crucifixion and resurrection of the believer and effects, by the Spirit, a real, existential process of transformation, which is nothing like a legal fiction."

harmoniously work together to allow for a “both-and” interpretation. To be sure, Dunn is making his case on the basis of his definition of the words while Thomas’s interpretation is primarily rooted in the belief that the text is divinely inspired.²⁴ Nonetheless, Dunn appears to be seeking to move from the sign to the signified in order to claim that the “righteousness of God” must entail both the subjective and objective meanings. Therefore, while operating from different sets of hermeneutical presuppositions, Dunn’s reading of Romans 1:17 leads him to affirm something like a multiple literal sense, or at least a complex and hierarchically structured literal sense, for the text appears to lead him to move from the sign to the thing signified in order to fully account for its meaning.

Turning now to the second aspect of Dunn’s interpretation of Romans 1:16–17 relevant to our purposes, in his analysis of Paul’s use of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17b, he notices something very curious about how Paul chooses to cite the passage. Instead of deciding between the Septuagint’s (LXX) rendering that “the righteous out of my faith (fullness) shall live” and the Masoretic Text’s (MT) rendering that “the righteous (man) by his faith (fullness) shall live,” Paul actually appears to choose neither rendering and instead opts for “the righteous out of faith/faithfulness shall live” (Rom. 1:17b).²⁵ Beyond the interesting debate concerning which of the two versions Paul was more likely dependent on, Dunn finds Paul’s choice to be of great significance, for he claims that it sheds light on Paul’s hermeneutical method regarding the Old Testament:

24 In other words, even on syntactical grounds alone it is possible to affirm a modified multiple literal sense. Due to both of our primary examples being genitive phrases, it is worth mentioning the “general” genitive of Max Zerwick, the “plenary” genitive of Daniel Wallace, and the “mystical” genitive of Adolf Deissmann as three examples of those who argue for the possibility of something like a syntactical multiple literal sense for certain genitives. See Maximilian Zerwick, S.J., *Biblical Greek*, English ed. adapted from the 4th Latin ed. by Joseph Smith, S.J. (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2005), 12–14; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 119–121; Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. William E. Wilson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 162ff. With that being said, analogous to how grace builds on nature in his theology in general, Thomas’s account of the multiple literal sense builds on and surpasses these syntactical accounts by more directly rooting the multiple literal sense in the divine authorship of sacred Scripture.

25 The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), which sometimes preserve a text form antedating and different from the MT (Masoretic Text), in this case sides with the MT, based on the interpretation (*pesher*) offered in Column VIII of the Habakkuk *Pesher* (1QpHab). See *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 1, 1Q1–4Q273, eds. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 17. The scribe interprets the “just” as living “on account of their toil and of their loyalty to the Teacher of Righteousness.”

In the tradition of Jewish exegesis Paul would not necessarily want to narrow the meaning to *exclude* other meanings self-evident in the text forms used elsewhere, so much as to *extend* and broaden the meaning to include the sense he was most concerned to bring out. The various rules of interpretation already current in Pharisaic circles at the time of Paul (the seven “middoth of Hillel”) were designed to draw out as much meaning as possible from the text.²⁶

In other words, according to Dunn, Paul intentionally decided not to choose between the LXX and the MT, but in modifying the text by removing the possessive pronoun, Paul intended to draw out of the text an interpretation that includes both God's righteousness and human righteousness through faith. Dunn comments:

It is unlikely that Paul, in dictating these words, was unaware of the two alternative renderings of the text—“by *his* faith(fulness) and “by *my* (= God's) faith(fulness).” Nor is it likely that he removed or ignored the possessive pronouns (“his,” “my”) with a view to persuading his addressees to take the verse in a wholly new and unexpected way. Had he entertained such an intention we would have expected a clearer formulation of the Habakkuk quotation, whereas in fact his quotation is so ambiguous that commentators have never been able to agree on how it should be read. The point which has usually been missed is that Paul's citation is *deliberately* ambiguous. That is to say, Paul does not want to give Hab. 2:4 a new sense, and to do so by *excluding* the alternative understandings; if so, he made a bad job of it. Rather he wants to read *as much meaning* into the verse as possible—just what we would expect a Jewish exegete, especially a Pharisee, to do with a text of Scripture.²⁷

26 Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 45 (his emphasis). In fact, drawing on this notion of Rabbinic exegesis, Dunn claims in his *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), that Paul is here using a “Peshier Quotation” (92). On page 91, Dunn defines a “Peshier Quotation” in the following manner: “In the case of midrash, peshier (and allegory) the OT text is usually quoted and then the interpretation added. But in this other type of exegesis the actual quotation of the text embodies its interpretation within the quotation itself—what is perhaps best described as a targumic interpretation or (as I prefer) a peshier quotation. The incorporation of the interpretation within the text itself sometimes leaves the text verbally unaltered, but usually it involves modifying the actual text form.”

27 Ibid., 48 (his emphasis). Fortunately, Dunn's previous statement on page 45 was much better than this one in regard to how Paul handled the texts of the Old Testament. In

While Dunn's claim depends in part on the rather conjectural hypothesis that Paul had access to both the LXX and the MT as we now have them,²⁸ Paul's citation of Habakkuk 2:4 does not specify whose faithfulness the righteous man will live by, so regardless of whether this ambiguity was intentional or not, Paul's citation lends itself nicely to a multiple literal sense reading. Due to the aforementioned ambiguity concerning whose faithfulness the righteous man will live by, it appears best to allow for both God's faithfulness and the believer's faithfulness to be valid interpretations of the text, for to necessarily limit the meaning of the text to an "either-or" is to force the text to be more specific than it is.²⁹ While Thomas does not employ the multiple literal sense for Romans 1:17b, in light of our analysis above we would suggest that a multiple literal sense reading of the verse is consistent with Thomas's hermeneutical principle outlined in *De potentia*, namely, that it is a hermeneutical error "to force Scripture to one sense in such a way that other senses that contain truth in themselves and that can, with due regard for the circumstances of the letter, be fitted to the letter are entirely excluded."³⁰

At this point we can begin to see more clearly both the benefit and the challenge that a critical re-appropriation of Thomas's multiple literal

this passage on 48, Dunn says that Paul "wants to read as much meaning *into* the texts as possible," while on 45 he says that the Pharisees looked to "draw *out* as much meaning as possible from the text." While the difference might be only one of wording, we would suggest that Dunn's assertion that Paul looked to "draw out as much meaning as possible" from the text accords well with Paul's exegesis of the Old Testament, while any notion of Paul reading meaning into the text would be problematic. We would also suggest that Paul was an astute exegete of the Old Testament who was able to bring out the full meaning of Old Testament texts in light of Christ's eschatological redemption. For more in this regard, see G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

- 28 In fact, while we find Dunn's explanation of Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4 both interesting and possible, we are not entirely persuaded, for it is conjectural that Paul had before him both the MT and LXX as we now have them. Interestingly, in §104 of his commentary, Thomas states that Paul is drawing on the LXX for Habakkuk 2:4, which does appear to be the more likely of the two sources, but even that is not demonstrable. So why do we make use of Dunn's analysis here? We draw on his analysis in order to highlight the importance of Thomas's multiple literal sense, for regardless of whether Dunn's hypothesis is valid, Paul's citation of Habakkuk 2:4 is precisely the kind of passage for which the multiple literal sense is able to draw out of the text the fullness of meaning intended by both the human and divine authors.
- 29 In light of our previous discussion concerning the meaning of the phrase *pistis Christou*, it is worth noting here that Reasoner follows Dunn in his interpretation of Rom. 1:17b and allows this hermeneutical move to help clarify the *pistis Christou* debate. As Reasoner notes, "Since Paul drops the *mou* from the Septuagint of Habakkuk 2:4, choosing instead to say that the righteousness that comes *ek pisteōs eis pistin* in Romans 1:17, it seems best to follow Morna Hooker and Sam Williams in seeing Christ's faithfulness that calls for a human response of faithfulness within the *pistis Christou* phrase." See Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle*, 39.

30 *De potentia* q. 4, a. 1 (translation ours).

sense offers to modern Pauline studies, for while such an approach allows for a richer and more comprehensive reading of texts such as Romans 1:17, it goes beyond simply a grammatical multiple literal sense by affirming that it “belongs to the dignity of divine Scripture, that under one letter it contains many senses.”³¹ As was noted above, for Thomas, this is due to Scripture’s dual authorship, for since God is the principal author of the sacred page, the interpretative options cannot be limited simply to what was in the mind of the human author, but must include the divine author as well. For many modern exegetes, this is inherently problematic, for a clear and distinct idea of the divine mind is necessarily impossible, while earlier interpreters such as Thomas were not interested in a clear and distinct account of the divine mind in the modern sense, but a truthful account that is in accord with the limitations and capacities of human knowledge. In regard to the witness of Scripture, the words on the page reveal the mind of both the human and divine authors, and since the latter is perfect in knowledge and the creator of all that exists, his divine knowledge of words and things allow for the words of Scripture to signify more than what the human author could understand. While this could certainly lead to equivocation and confusion, Thomas is clear that as long as a given interpretation is in accord with the words and their context, as well as the realities of the deposit of faith, it can be reasonably asserted that such an interpretation is in accord with the mind of the divine author and the order of things as created by him.

Reflections on Thomas’s “Multiple Literal Sense” Hermeneutic

However, with this being said, at this point it could be reasonably asked: is the multiple literal sense of Thomas really necessary when modern exegetes like Dunn allow for a grammatically driven multiple literal sense and do so in a manner that does not open the door to uncritical pious conjecture?

We would propose that the answer to this question is yes, and that a careful appropriation of Saint Thomas’s multiple literal sense can provide a path forward for modern Pauline scholars, a path beyond “either-or” exegesis. For while Dunn is clear that those who insist on the righteousness of God being either a subjective or objective genitive fall into “another” case of “either-or” exegesis, what often remains unclear is how today’s readers of the Apostle Paul are able to move beyond this fallacy of the “exegetical false choice.” We would like to suggest that Thomas’s multiple literal sense offers such a hermeneutical way forward, an option that is not simply a grammatical one, although it includes that as well, but an ontological one.

While this hermeneutic may make some exegetes uncomfortable, we also hope we have accomplished our other goal, which was to show that Thomas’s

31 Ibid. (translation ours).

affirmation of multiple literal meanings for a given text does not necessarily lead to equivocation or confusion.³² In fact, for Thomas, the multiple literal meanings of a given text are distinct but not separate, or as Jacques Maritain has made famous, Thomas “distinguishes to unite.”³³ This we also saw Dunn attempt to do in his handling of the righteousness of God, for while he noted two distinct aspects to the phrase, he was able to keep them united as a result of the relational nature of covenant soteriology. What makes Dunn advocate for multiple meanings for the righteousness of God is remarkably close to what serves as the basis for Thomas’s use of the multiple literal sense, and that is the irreducible fullness of the covenant God. In other words, what Dunn is driving at is what Thomas lived by, for as an exegete of Scripture, the Angelic Doctor sought out not only a word or concept that allowed him to make the most sense of the text, but rather the reality that the texts revealed. In his engagement with the exegetical method of Thomas, Brevard Childs

32 On the coordination of different meanings of the literal sense, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., asserts: “In reply to this we say if the names used were equivocal, as in the case of dog used to denote the terrestrial animal and the heavenly constellation, then I concede the assertion; but if the names are analogous, then I deny it. Thus heaven denotes both the starry firmament and the angels, and [daily] bread is understood in the ordinary sense of the term and it also means the Holy Eucharist. But if it is a case of two subordinated analogates, or of two that are coordinated under a higher, and if no false sense arises from this, then there is no equivocation” (Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa*, trans. Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B., S.T.D. [St. Louis: Herder, 1954], 91). Moreover, it is not as though exegetes who reject the multiple literal sense in favor of a simple solitary meaning can claim to have dispelled equivocation and confusion by arriving at a consensus regarding the literal sense of even a single verse or phrase in the New Testament. This is not to deny the indispensable role of the historical-critical method; however, it only serves as a reminder that the divine inspiration of Scripture is no less indispensable for proper exegesis. See Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 25–62 in particular.

33 Maritain’s maxim may be applied to other areas of Thomas’s exegesis. For example, by distinguishing between the literal and spiritual senses, we discover how they are united (as words and deeds) in the human testimony to God’s saving acts. Care should be taken, then, not to treat the literal and spiritual senses as though they are hermetically sealed or separated from each other. For example, Paul describes Adam as a “figure” (*typos*) of Christ in Rom. 5:14; the literal sense of the text is inseparable from the Apostle’s spiritual (allegorical) exegesis of Gen. 3, in view of the Christ event. Likewise, in 1 Cor. 10:1–4, Paul compares ancient Israel’s “baptism into Moses,” along with the manna and water from the rock, with the New Covenant gifts of Baptism and the Eucharist, respectively. The literal sense of that text is Paul’s spiritual exegesis of various Old Testament texts; or to be more precise, Paul’s teaching about Christ and the sacraments is literally an allegorical and tropological reading of ancient Israel’s Exodus traditions. Noting the convergence of the literal and spiritual sense in Paul may serve to correct a common misunderstanding that assigns the literal and spiritual senses to the human and divine authors, respectively, as though they are divisible, like oil and water. See Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O’Neill (New York: Herder and Herder, 2000); Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

defined this as the "ontological interpretation" that was "an essential feature of Thomas's theological approach to the substance of scripture."³⁴ In fact, we would suggest that it was in this very pursuit of the ontological realities revealed by Scripture that Thomas was able to recognize that certain texts have multiple literal meanings, for the same God who created the world also authored the pages of Scripture, and by intimate knowledge of the divine author, Thomas was unwilling to arbitrarily limit divine semiotics, for Thomas knew that God chose his words carefully and doesn't need human exegetes to make his revelation more precise.

Likewise, we would suggest that Thomas's subject, Paul, was able to expound the divine mysteries he received only through the grace of union with Christ. For Paul's Damascus Road encounter was far more than a religious experience, for in seeing the Risen Christ, Paul saw the righteousness of God in a way that transcended his previous notions of what covenantal righteousness constituted, so that he could tell the Philippians, "whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:7–8, RSV/CE).³⁵ Furthermore, as Dunn rightly notes, the righteousness of God is relational because it is personal and covenantal. We would further suggest that exegesis is relational because it is also covenantal, and therefore personal and participatory.³⁶ Indeed, in order to interpret most adequately the meaning of the righteousness of God and justification for the Paul of the Damascus Road revelation, one must know these realities by experience, for they are inherently relational. The multiple literal sense of Thomas Aquinas is one kind of hermeneutical method that results from a covenantal and participatory relationship with the Triune God and his divine mysteries, which have historical, etiological, and analogical aspects.³⁷ For, those who know the Triune God through the Person of the Holy Spirit also know the principal

34 Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 160, cited in Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 11.

35 For some attempts at delineating the definitive nature of the Damascus Road encounter in the life and teaching of Paul, see James D. G. Dunn, "'A Light to the Gentiles' or 'The End of the Law'? The Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul," chap. 4 in *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 89–107; idem, "Paul's Conversion: A Light to Twentieth Century Disputes," chap. 15 in *The New Perspective on Paul*, 347–365; and Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

36 For two recent attempts to expand on the claim that exegesis is a covenantal and participatory enterprise, see Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, and Scott W. Hahn, "Worship in the Word: Toward a Liturgical Hermeneutic," *Letter and Spirit: A Journal of Catholic Biblical Theology* 1 (2005): 101–136.

37 This is not to imply that the multiple literal sense is the only hermeneutical method that

Author of the text who inspired the human author to write words that are able to contain multiple true meanings.³⁸

We can anticipate the kind of objections that this suggestion could raise from the current world of Pauline scholars, such as claiming that this hermeneutic is historically irresponsible or even neo-gnostic. Yet, far from being gnostic and ahistorical, this is a pneumatic hermeneutic for everyone who is united to the trans-historical body of Christ by the Spirit, also known as the historically situated covenant people of God.³⁹ As Hays rightly notes in regard to Paul's reading of the Old Testament: "The story that Paul finds in Scripture is an account of God's dealing with a people. Consequently, *if we learned from Paul how to read Scripture, we would read it ecclesiocentrically*, as a word for and about the community of faith. Scripture discloses its sense only as the text is brought into correlation with living communities where the Holy Spirit is at work."⁴⁰ Furthermore, the basis for this kind of hermeneutic also comes from Paul himself. In contrasting the wisdom of "this age" with the wisdom of God, Paul tells the Corinthians:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no

can result from a covenantal and personal participation in the divine mysteries, but a rather important one, particularly for modern Pauline hermeneutics.

38 This is true whether or not the human author was aware of all of the possible meanings. As Thomas teaches in *De potentia* q. 4, a. 1: "Thus, even if other truths, which the author did not understand, are fitted to the letter by the interpreters of Sacred Scripture, without any doubt the Holy Spirit, who is the principal author of divine Scripture, understood them. Consequently every truth that can be fitted to the divine Scripture with due regard for the circumstances of the letter is its sense."

39 Levering relates this line of thinking to the biblical texts and their authors when he notes: "The texts and their human authors are already historically caught up in a participatory relationship, however obscure, with the trans-temporal realities of faith (Israel as God's covenantal people, Jesus Christ, the Mystical Body, the sacraments, and so forth)." See Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 5.

40 Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 184 (his emphasis).

one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them for they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself judged by no one. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:6–16)

Paul is telling the Corinthians that only those who are taught by the Spirit of God are able to fully understand what he teaches, for they have the mind of Christ. Furthermore, in light of Paul speaking of the role that the Holy Spirit plays in relationship to understanding the wisdom of God, it is worth connecting what Thomas teaches concerning the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom to the enterprise of hermeneutics. According to Thomas, all those who are united to Christ through the Holy Spirit have the gift of wisdom, which enables them to know the truths of revelation by experience, or "to suffer divine things."⁴¹ In fact, in teaching that the gift of wisdom corresponds to the seventh beatitude, Thomas teaches that all those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit participate in the Sonship of Wisdom Begotten, Jesus Christ. In commenting on the reward promised in the seventh beatitude, Thomas teaches:

The reward is expressed in the words, *they shall be called the children of God*. Now men are called children of God in so far as they participate in the likeness of the only-begotten and natural Son of God, according to Rom. viii. 29, *Whom he foreknew . . . to be made conformable to the Image of His Son, Who is Wisdom Begotten*. Hence by participating in the gift of wisdom, man attains to the sonship of God.⁴²

In light of our previous discussion concerning Dunn's appropriate emphasis on the relational nature of covenant soteriology, it would be hard to find a soteriology more relational and covenantal than Thomas's teaching

41 See ST II–II, q. 45, a. 2.

42 ST II–II, q. 45, a. 6, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981).

that those who participate in the Spirit's gift of wisdom are "sons in the Son."⁴³ This adoptive sonship allows for the children of God to know the truth by experience through the pneumatic gift of wisdom, a gift that can enable Pauline exegetes to move beyond simple talk about verbal signs, to actual participation in supernatural realities "from the inside."⁴⁴

For those who are open to such an ontological hermeneutic,⁴⁵ we have suggested that the multiple literal sense of Thomas Aquinas is an option worthy of careful reconsideration and critical re-appropriation. For it is participatory, relational, and covenantal, as are two of the central realities, Pauline exegetes attempt to interpret, *pistis Christou* and *dikaiosynē Theou*. For the multiple literal sense of Thomas Aquinas is unitary, but not solitary, for it seeks to interpret Scripture "in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written."

43 For two excellent works on the participatory nature of Thomas's soteriology, see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation from Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publishing, 1990); and Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

44 We are indebted to Father Brian Shanley for this wonderful phrase "from the inside" to describe the knowing that results from the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom. See his commentary on question one of the *Summa theologiae* in *The Treatise on the Divine Nature: Summa Theologiae 1, 1–13*, trans., with commentary, by Brian J. Shanley, O.P. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Group, 2006), 164.

45 According to Thomas, this pursuit of the realities revealed by God through human language is at the very heart of the virtue of faith. As he teaches, "The believer's act (of faith) does not terminate in the propositions, but in the realities (which they express)." *ST* II–II. q. 1, a. 2, ad 2, as cited in CCC 170.