

AQUINAS'S RECEPTION OF PAUL: READING THE TESTAMENTS TOGETHER

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I. Introduction

In *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (2014), I examined Thomas Aquinas's reception of Paul in Aquinas's greatest work of *sacra doctrina*.¹ Aquinas considered fourteen epistles in the New Testament to have been authored by Paul, including Hebrews, and I included each of these epistles in my study. Although my tabulation was done by hand—and although the precise number depends upon such things as whether one counts references that are mediated by the *Gloss*—there are approximately 2,198 citations of the 14 Pauline epistles in the *Summa theologiae*, ranging from 600 citations of Romans to 1 citation of Philemon. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas quotes 934 of the 2,336 verses in the fourteen Pauline epistles. Romans has a particularly strong presence in the *Summa theologiae*. He quotes 203 of its 436 verses, and he quotes more than two-thirds of the verses of the following chapters of Romans: chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Fundamental to my argument in the book is that Aquinas's treatises cite Paul in a way whose strength depends upon a cumulative approach. It is not so much the particular citations that exhibit Aquinas's dependence on Paul, since the particular citations may be present for a wide variety of purposes, including simply to formulate a minor objection or to address a theological problem that would never have occurred to Paul himself. Instead, my study of each of the citations in particular treatises of the *Summa theologiae* shows that on a particular topic, Aquinas refers to the same Pauline texts that most inform contemporary historical-critical scholarship, thereby giving Aquinas's treatise on the particular topic a strong Pauline presence. Secondly, I show that the variety of ways in which Aquinas uses particular Pauline verses—the examples I give in the book are Romans 1:20, 1 Corinthians 13, and Philippians 2:5–11—reveal the ways in which one Pauline passage, in Aquinas's hands, can contribute to multiple theological conversations, including both the ones that we and Paul would expect and ones that neither Paul nor we would expect. Thirdly, I demonstrate that even in treatises that do not

1 Matthew Levering, *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

have a large number of references to Paul—the best example of this is *Summa theologiae* I, qq. 2–43, on the triune God—Aquinas’s way of locating Pauline texts at certain important junctures gives the treatise a strong Pauline flavor nonetheless. Fourth, I make clear the extent to which Aquinas succeeds in drawing upon Paul to illuminate post-Pauline theological questions: one sees this especially in such treatises as those on baptism, grace, and the virtue of religion, in each of which Aquinas comments at length upon ecclesiastical practices and theological problems that are not known to Paul, and this pattern holds as well for the Romans 1:20 and 1 Corinthians 13. Fifth, I show how Aquinas employs Pauline passages to clarify (and at times to take the potential sting out of) other Pauline passages: the best example of this is found in Aquinas’s lengthy treatise on the Mosaic law, where Aquinas uses positive Pauline verses about the Torah to clarify the meaning of negative verses. Sixth, I show how richly Pauline some of Aquinas’s discussions are, the best example of this being Aquinas’s theology of Christ’s Passion (III, qq. 46–49)—which should be no surprise, given the central place of the Cross in Paul’s theology.

As a contribution to the topic of Aquinas’s reception of Paul, my book focused on the *Summa theologiae* in part because earlier studies—such as Maria Margherita Rossi’s *Teoria e metodo esegetici in S. Tommaso d’Aquino: Analisi del Super Epistolas Sancti Pauli Lectura ad Romanos* (1992); Christopher Baglow’s “*Modus et Forma*”: *A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios* (2002); and the edited volume *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas* (2012), already had focused on particular Pauline commentaries written by Aquinas.² In the present essay, however, I wish to take another approach to Aquinas’s reception of Paul. Namely, I will investigate how Aquinas receives Paul in his *Commentary on Jeremiah*. I explore how Aquinas receives Paul as a source for interpreting the Old Testament (what Paul calls “Scripture”). The reception of Paul is in fact an important part of Aquinas’s reception of the Old Testament because each Testament illumines the other. Reading the two Testaments as mutually interpreting ensures that Aquinas is able to read the Christian Bible as a providentially guided unity.

Attending to the reception of Paul in Aquinas’s *Commentary on Jeremiah* may help us to challenge the neglect of the New Testament in most contemporary biblical commentaries on the Old Testament. Even Christian

2 See Maria Margherita Rossi, *Teoria e metodo esegetici in S. Tommaso d’Aquino. Analisi del Super Epistolas Sancti Pauli Lectura ad Romanos* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1992); 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* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 2002); *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

biblical scholars committed to the unity of Scripture exhibit this neglect.³ In his *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, for example, Walter Brueggemann only occasionally refers to the New Testament. Importantly, Brueggemann grants that “the book of Jeremiah does not belong to the scholarly guild. It belongs more properly to the synagogue and the church, who have, all through the centuries, attended to its preservation and reading.”⁴ He emphasizes that these communities (Israel and the Church) are existentially open to being challenged and unsettled by the encounter with divine holiness mediated by the text of Jeremiah.⁵ While promising to “focus on what the text of Jeremiah meant in its ancient speaking and hearing,” therefore, Brueggemann encourages a certain kind of theological quest for what Scripture “means” now, within the modern synagogue or Church as formed by the broader cultural context.⁶ But Brueggemann cites Romans only five times in the course of his

3 A critical understanding of history—as distinct from a secular understanding of history—has no grounds for ruling out the providential governance that enables earlier biblical texts to be open to and be illumined by later biblical texts. On this point see for example Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O'Neill (New York: Crossroad, 2000); Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today,” trans. Adrian Walker, in *Opening Up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, eds. José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez-Navarro (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–29; Joseph Ratzinger/ Pope Benedict XVI, “Foreword,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xi–xxiv; Maurice Blondel, *History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru, in Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 221–287; Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); Francis Martin, *Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006).

4 Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), xiii.

5 Ultimately, Brueggemann argues that Jeremiah transcends both guild and synagogue/church, and is fundamentally a public document, speaking equally to everyone, that “speaks to and from and about deep public disruption” and thereby makes a liberative point that all people should be able to hear, whatever their academic or religious commitments, so long as they are willing to have their assured ideas challenged (*ibid.*, xiv). He proposes that we should read Jeremiah in our contemporary context “as children of the disruption, left to wonder about the disruption as a venue for the Holy One” (*ibid.*, xiv).

6 *Ibid.*, 19. Typical of Brueggemann’s way of reading scriptural texts is the following comment about the book of Jeremiah, a comment whose actual disruptiveness (that is, whose lack of conformity to accepted norms) seems minimal in the academic and religious circles in which Brueggemann works: “When the text is read and heard as a critique of ideology and as a practice of alternative imagination, the text continues to have power and pertinence in many subsequent contexts, including our own. Indeed, the text has the powerful capacity to cause us to rediscern our own situation, to experience our situation in quite new ways, and to participate in our own historical situation with new liberty and fresh passion—liberty and passion that arise in and with faithfulness. Such a text, when read critically, characteristically assaults every ‘structure of domination’ with its self-serving and misrepresenting propaganda, including our own military, technological,

495-page commentary on Jeremiah; and he cites the other Pauline epistles only seven times. Specifically, he cites Romans 1:20–25 in discussing Jeremiah 2:11 on Israel’s abandonment of God in favor of idols; Romans 2:25–29 in discussing Jeremiah 9:25 on the punishment of “those who are circumcised but yet uncircumcised”; Romans 1:25 in describing Jeremiah 10:1–16 with its condemnation of idolatry; Romans 5:3–5 in treating Jeremiah 29’s portrait of hope in the midst of obedient suffering; and Romans 8:38–39 in discussing the promise of divine fidelity to Israel contained in Jeremiah 31:36. In each case, he cites the Romans text but does not quote its words, so Paul’s own voice is not heard in the commentary.⁷

Brueggemann’s theological bent means that he includes many more New Testament citations than most interpreters of Jeremiah. Even R. E. Clements, in his 272-page *Jeremiah* commentary in the explicitly Christian series *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (published by John Knox Press, a Presbyterian publishing house), cites the New Testament only ten times in his commentary—and does not cite Romans at all.⁸ Clements generally cites these texts either because they have a direct allusion to Jeremiah or in order to take note of a later historical development, rather than to interpret the text of Jeremiah itself.

By contrast with Brueggemann and Clements, Aquinas draws abundantly upon Romans (as well as numerous other New Testament texts) for illuminating Jeremiah. When he wrote his *Commentary on Jeremiah*—likely in the period 1250–1252—Aquinas was not yet a Master of *Sacra Pagina* but was still serving as the biblical bachelor for Albert the Great. The *Commentary on Jeremiah* is a cursory commentary, much briefer than Aquinas’s later commentaries on biblical books of similar length. The commentary contains some use of the mystical sense, but generally sticks with the literal sense. It frequently contains “collationes” or assemblages of scriptural texts, where Aquinas takes a word or a phrase from Jeremiah and develops its spiritual and pastoral implications by connecting it with other biblical texts. In his

consumer-oriented establishment. Such a text, when read imaginatively, issues a forceful invitation to an alternative community of covenant, including a risky invitation in our own time to practices of justice, risks of compassion, and sufferings for peace” (ibid., 18). It is unclear what actual “risks” and “sufferings” Brueggemann has in mind for his readers or himself, since opposition (of a rather flaccid kind, while continuing to live at a relatively high standard of living) to our “military, technological, consumer-oriented establishment” is de rigueur in academic and liberal-Christian circles.

7 It is possible that I missed a citation of Romans (or of another New Testament book or classical theologian), since Brueggemann’s book does not have an index and so I did my own tabulation.

8 This number assumes that my quick count is accurate, since Clements’s book does not have an index either. I am certain that my count is essentially accurate, even if I missed one or two citations. See R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988).

magisterial study of Aquinas's life and work, Jean-Pierre Torrell discusses the *Commentary on Jeremiah* only in passing and focuses instead upon Aquinas's *Commentary on Isaiah*.⁹ Similarly, the edited volume *Aquinas on Scripture* (2005) contains an excellent essay on the *Commentary on Isaiah* by Joseph Wawrykow, but no discussion of the *Commentary on Jeremiah*.¹⁰ Despite the renewed interest in Aquinas's biblical commentaries, his *Commentary on Jeremiah* continues to receive strikingly little attention.

In the remainder of this essay, I survey Aquinas's use of Romans in his *Commentary on Jeremiah*. How and why does Aquinas consider Paul's letter to be helpful for interpreting the prophecy of Jeremiah? How does his use of Romans in the *Commentary on Jeremiah* enhance our understanding of his reception of Paul?

II. Romans in Aquinas's *Commentary on Jeremiah*

In the *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Aquinas's twenty-one citations of Romans include the following chapters of Romans: 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 16. The first thing to notice, then, is that the citations cover the Epistle to the Romans fairly comprehensively, with citations from the main theological discussions contained in Romans. When one looks more closely at the citations, more can be said. In the *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Aquinas refers most frequently (five times) to Romans 11, largely because of its insistence that God has not abandoned Israel and that God wills to save Israel. It is evident to Aquinas that God's saving intention toward Israel accords with the prophecy of Jeremiah. Aquinas refers three times to Romans 1, in each case for a quite different purpose. Because of its emphasis upon God's fatherhood and God's intimate knowledge of his people, he cites Romans 8 twice. He refers twice to Romans 13, and twice to Romans 6:21: in both cases Aquinas's emphasis is on the need to obey God and the foolishness of not doing so. He cites Romans 5:3 twice with respect to the way in which suffering—a central theme of Jeremiah—leads to glory. He cites Romans 2 twice, and although the citations make different points, they are united by a focus on the need to obey God.

According to Brueggemann, the book of Jeremiah does three main things. First, it reads the political events of his time, which are pushing Israel toward disaster and exile, "through the categories of covenantal obligation and covenantal sanctions."¹¹ Second, it shows that God will not be bound

9 See Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), chapter 2.

10 See *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005).

11 Brueggemann, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 7.

by the covenantal sanctions, since God's love for his people Israel—what Brueggemann calls “God's fundamental inclination toward Judah” and “God's inexplicable yearning” toward his recalcitrant people—ensures that God will bring good for Israel out of the disaster of exile.¹² Third, the book of Jeremiah “critique[s] and reject[s] the claims of the royal-temple ideology,” according to which the kingship and temple could not be defeated or destroyed because God, having staked his truthfulness upon their perdurance, would always preserve them.¹³

Aquinas addresses each of these themes, and indeed it would be impossible for a commentary on Jeremiah to avoid the themes of covenantal sanction, the restoration of Israel due to God's love, and the critique of presuming upon the kingship and temple. Each of these themes appears in a notable way in the first thirty-three of Jeremiah's fifty-two chapters. We find citations of Romans in Aquinas's discussion of the following chapters of Jeremiah: 3, 4 (twice), 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23 (three times), 27, 31, 32, 33, and 38. Seventeen of the first thirty-three chapters contain a reference to Romans, which is a significant commentatorial presence. How, then, do these references function in the *Commentary on Jeremiah*?

Divine Fatherhood and Wayward Children

The first reference is to a portion of Romans 8:15: “you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Aquinas is discussing Jeremiah 3, where God depicts himself as first Israel's husband and then as Israel's father. Both of these images signal God's profound love for Israel and make even more poignant the fact that Israel has spurned God and worshipped the gods of the nations. In Jeremiah 3:14–15, God depicts himself as Israel's father and lord: “Return, O faithless children, says the Lord; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” In Jeremiah 3:19–20, God describes himself as Israel's father and husband: “I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel.” In Jeremiah 3:22, finally, the image of father predominates: “‘Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness.’ ‘Behold, we come to thee; for thou art the Lord our God.’” This image governs the remaining verses of chapter 3, in which the children of Israel fully confess their guilt and proclaim that salvation comes

12 Ibid., 5. Brueggemann also terms this inclination “God's yearning pathos” (ibid.), with “pathos” signifying God's freedom to act according to his emotion of love rather than according to strictly rational entailments of justice.

13 Ibid., 7.

only from God. Aquinas employs Romans 8:15, with its emphasis on God as Father, within a set of spiritual *collationes* reflecting upon the greatness of God's fatherhood. The point is to suggest that our own (Christian) cry "Abba! Father!" was present already in the Old Testament—and would have been even more present had Israel avoided idolatry—because God is the father of all creatures and the father of Israel.

The second reference to Romans in the *Commentary on Jeremiah* appears in Aquinas's discussion of Jeremiah 4:22, where God complains that his people do not know him: "they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but how to do good they know not." Again the theme is frustrated fatherhood, God's yearning for his children who do not honor him. Aquinas focuses upon the cost of not knowing God as father—namely the fact that such children "are skilled in doing evil, but how to do good they know not." He observes a parallel here to Paul's exhortation in Romans 16:19, "I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil." In fact, God's complaint about his children Israel can be seen to apply all too closely to the Church in Romans 16:17–18, where Paul warns against "those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught. . . . For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded." The covenantal people of God (Israel and the Church) are united by a need to cry out for their Father (God) and by the need to do good rather than evil.

The next reference to Romans comes in Aquinas's discussion of Jeremiah 4:30–31. In Jeremiah 4:30–31, God depicts Israel both as a prostitute whose life is now threatened by her former lovers and as a woman in the anguish of labor pains whose life is threatened by death. At first glance, this seems to have little to do with Romans 2:29, cited by Aquinas: "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal." In the same place, Aquinas cites a number of other biblical texts that use the term "circumcision" in a metaphorical way, such as Leviticus 26:41, where God speaks of the Israelites' "uncircumcised heart." Aquinas's emphasis is on the fact that we find life and salvation only in God. The Israelite "who is one inwardly" will not be the "desolate one" of whom God says (speaking of Israel as a whole): "In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers [the gods of the nations] despise you; they seek your life" (Jer. 4:30). Likewise, the Israelite "who is one inwardly," in heart, will not be abandoned to death and destruction as she (Israel as a whole) tries to bring forth her child.

The next reference to Romans comes in the commentary on chapter 7. In Jeremiah 7:28, after preparing the prophet to expect that the people will

not listen to his words, God commands Jeremiah: “You shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.’” The reference to the nation’s “lips” calls to Aquinas’s mind a passage from Romans 10:10, “For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.” When we obey the word of God and confess the truth, we will be saved. The same pattern of salvation is found in Jeremiah and in Paul, and the latter helps us to appreciate the path taught by the former.

Aquinas returns to Romans 2 in order to illumine Jeremiah 8. In Jeremiah 8:6, God complains bitterly against Israel’s sinful refusal to obey God’s law. He states that “no man repents of his wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Every one turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle.” Aquinas makes clear that this condition was not limited to the Jewish people by quoting Romans 2:5, where Paul says of both Jews and Gentiles that “by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.” If Jeremiah could say that “no man repents,” so could Paul in his day. The only solution, according to Paul, is found through faith in Christ, who is “the righteousness of God” and whom God mercifully puts forward “as an expiation” for sins (Rom. 3:22, 25).

To sum up thus far: Aquinas is tracing in Romans the problems that frustrate God in the book of Jeremiah. God’s people, to whom he wishes to be a father, refuse to worship God, do not know how to do good, cover their rebellion by an external show, reject God’s word, and lack repentance. The whole of Romans’s proclamation of Christ can be seen as a solution to problems named by the book of Jeremiah, since according to Romans 2–3 all people are in this rebellious situation.

God’s Wisdom, Sovereignty, and Fidelity

Aquinas’s next quotation of Romans focuses on the foolishness of humans who lay claim to any wisdom in comparison with God’s wisdom. He strings together a set of biblical quotations about how our minds and hearts are blinded by our pride. In Jeremiah 10:25, the prophet implores God: “Pour out thy wrath upon nations that know thee not, and upon the peoples that call not on thy name; for they have devoured Jacob.” Here the concrete historical situation is the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. Aquinas reads the verse in light of Romans 1:22, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools”—a foolishness that produces the absurdity of idolatry. The Babylonians were foolish idolaters who thought of themselves as wise, and so were the Israelites as described by Jeremiah. Aquinas observes that when we grow impressed by our own wisdom, we are bound to fall away from the true God from whom real wisdom comes.

It follows that the situations of the conquering Babylonians and the defeated Israelites are united not only by pride, but also by the salutary instruction that both sides give to all who wish to be more than wayward children of God. We can be true children of God only through humility.

Jeremiah 11:21–23 has to do with the “men of Anathoth,” Jeremiah’s hometown (see Jer. 1:1), who threaten Jeremiah and try to compel him to stop prophesying. God promises to punish these men. Aquinas offers a “mystical” interpretation of the “men of Anathoth” that suggests that they signify the men of Jerusalem who, having formerly been obedient to the Lord, later persecuted Christ. He supports this mystical interpretation by reflecting on the “fatness” or “richness” of the olive tree, a “richness” that symbolizes devotion and holiness. In this regard he cites Romans 11:17, where Paul observes that “some of the branches were broken off, and you [Gentiles], a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree [Israel].” Anathoth was a place of “richness” of devotion, but Anathoth has turned against the Lord and now wishes to stop Jeremiah from speaking God’s word, even by killing Jeremiah. This fall from grace on the part of the men of Anathoth, a city once filled with the richness of the “green olive tree,” reminds Aquinas of the leaders of Jerusalem in Jesus’s day. The point here continues Jeremiah’s (and Aquinas’s) reflections upon God’s wayward children.

Since God did not reject Israel for what it did to Jeremiah (and to himself), this point tells in favor, of course, of God’s ongoing faithfulness to Israel. Aquinas will discuss this ongoing faithfulness further on in the commentary, but suffice it to say for now that Aquinas’s citation of Romans 11:17 belongs within the context of Romans 11:1 (“has God rejected his people? By no means!”) and Romans 11:26 (“all Israel will be saved”). How God responds to Israel’s persecution of Jeremiah should instruct us with respect to how God will respond to Israel’s persecution of Jesus: God does not reject his people.

The next reference to Romans appears in Aquinas’s discussion of Jeremiah 12. In Jeremiah 12, it is difficult to discern whether it is the prophet or the Lord who is speaking, since both of them (the prophet and the Lord) are bemoaning the situation of Israel, which has been given up to its enemies due to its wickedness. Aquinas suggests that if we take Jeremiah 12:7–9 to be the prophet who is speaking, we can interpret it in a mystical sense as the words of Christ: just as Jeremiah the prophet exposed himself to mortal danger and left his house and heritage in order to announce the word of God, so too did Christ (who concealed his divine majesty to take on our infirmity). In the literal sense, given Jeremiah 12:7’s statement that “I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies” (and similar statements found in verses 8 and 9), Aquinas calls to mind a set of biblical passages describing God’s abandonment

of his people, including Romans 1:28: "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct." Although this verse can be taken to apply solely to the Gentile idolaters, it obviously applies to the Israelites as well, since Paul goes on to make clear that the Israelites too "are under the power of sin" (Rom. 3:9). It is crucial to register that God's abandonment of those who reject him is an abandonment rooted in a deeper fidelity, since from a wider vantage point God is still seeking their salvation (just as the Babylonian exile is an abandonment but not the end of God's people Israel).

Jeremiah 15 contains the next reference to Romans. In Jeremiah 15:19–20, God reassures Jeremiah, who has begun to despair over his lonely and persecuted situation. God tells Jeremiah, "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. . . . And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you." Jeremiah 15:21, which prompts Aquinas to cite Romans, contains a further consoling promise from God to Jeremiah: "I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless." Aquinas comments on this text by pairing Romans 5:3 with Isaiah 43:1. Romans 5:3 contains Paul's well known proclamation that "we rejoice in our sufferings." The point is that we can bear undeserved suffering, but only if we know that God will be a true father to us and will care for us. Paul knows this through Christ, whereas Jeremiah (a figure of Christ) receives direct assurance from God.

In Jeremiah 17, the focus is on God's strength and trustworthiness. God warns against trusting in human beings rather than in God, and Jeremiah (still in the midst of sufferings) confesses that the Lord is Israel's hope and that only the Lord can save. God sees the heart, which is often treacherous. In Jeremiah 17:10, God describes his omniscience and power to judge: "I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." This passage prompts Aquinas to recall the statement of Paul in Romans 8:27, "he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." In this passage, Paul has been discussing his own and the whole creation's suffering and dependence upon the Spirit of Christ and upon the working of God. The basic message of Jeremiah 17 is similar in terms of dependence upon God, but the reference to Romans transposes Jeremiah 17 into a Trinitarian key. The key point is that God knows those who serve him and that God can be trusted to save such persons.

Jeremiah 18 again turns to Israel's rebellion and disobedience, God's coming punishment of Israel, and the terrifying plots against Jeremiah's life. Commenting on Jeremiah 18:15, "my people have forgotten me, they burn

incense to false gods," Aquinas cites Romans to confirm and strengthen the warning that Jeremiah gives against false gods. In Romans 6:21, Paul rhetorically asks his audience what they gained from their past idolatrous ways: "what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death." This point bears upon Jeremiah 18 because obviously the Israelites seek to gain something by burning "incense to false gods." Jeremiah's message to them is that they will thereby obtain only punishment. Paul, too, emphasizes that only death comes from sin against God. Jeremiah reports that the people, who are under threat from Babylon, reply to him and his suggestions: "That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart" (Jer. 18:12). These plans of theirs, as Paul might have known, bring them only shame and death. The underlying message again is reliance upon God in time of suffering.

In discussing Jeremiah 20, Aquinas draws upon a verse from Romans that he employed earlier to illumine Jeremiah 15. The verse is Romans 5:3, in which Paul affirms the deeply paradoxical claim that "we rejoice in our sufferings." Jeremiah 20 describes one of the lowest points of the prophet Jeremiah's career. A powerful Jewish priest, Pashhur, commands that Jeremiah be beaten and put in the stocks for prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem. In response to this humiliation, Jeremiah cries out to the Lord in agony about the mockery he (Jeremiah) is enduring. Without ceasing to praise God, Jeremiah cries out, "Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, 'A son is born to you,' making him very glad" (Jer. 20:14–15). The prophet's cursing the day of his birth in verse 14 leads Aquinas to quote Romans 5:3 about rejoicing in suffering. At first glance, this citation seems to be completely miscast, since the prophet is doing the very opposite of rejoicing. In fact, Aquinas is here setting forth an objection: how could a holy prophet such as Jeremiah fail to rejoice in the suffering that God wills for him? Aquinas answers that Jeremiah is fully justified to curse the day of his birth insofar as that day represents tribulations. Insofar as Jeremiah is cursing something evil in itself—tribulations—he has not sinned; he would only sin if he did evil on account of tribulations. Aquinas emphasizes that Paul only rejoices in tribulations insofar as they are a path to eternal reward. Likewise, God promises Jeremiah that he will be blessed: "I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless" (Jer. 15:21). Only in light of such hope can undeserved suffering, in itself an evil, be endured.

Aquinas's commentary on Jeremiah 22 also returns to a previously cited text from Romans: Romans 6:21, which we found also in his discussion of Jeremiah 18. Aquinas is discussing Jeremiah 22:22, where the Lord proclaims

doom to King Jehoiakim and to all Judah: “The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds, and your lovers shall go into captivity; then you will be ashamed and confounded because of all your wickedness.” The root of this humiliation, Aquinas notes, is pride, which according to Romans 1 is the root of idolatry. The leaders of Judah have been caught up in idolatry and they will now reap their “return” (Rom. 6:21), namely destruction. The shame that they will feel when this happens reflects Romans 6:21’s reference to “the things of which you are now ashamed.” In Jeremiah 22, the leaders have not yet felt this shame, but they soon will, given their idolatry.

In Jeremiah 23, the positive promises of God toward his wayward people Israel resume. Although God again warns the leaders of Israel about their impending doom, God promises new leaders who will restore Israel. God proclaims: “Behold, the days are coming . . . when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer. 23:5). Commenting on Jeremiah 23:6, “In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely,” Aquinas connects the days of this “righteous Branch” with the coming of Jesus Christ. Does the prophet therefore mean that in Jesus’s days “Judah will be saved”? Aquinas argues that one must distinguish here between Jesus’s first coming and his second coming. At Jesus’s second coming, Judah will indeed be saved, just as Paul says in Romans 11:26 (cited by Aquinas): “all Israel will be saved.” Thus, Jeremiah prompts Aquinas to affirm that God still cares for the Jewish people as his covenantal people. Of course, Aquinas does not separate the salvation of Israel from Christ—nor does Paul. The meaning of Romans is thereby informed by Jeremiah and vice versa.

Jeremiah 23 attacks false prophecy. God condemns the false prophets who try “to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal” (Jer. 23:27). Commenting on this verse, Aquinas’s concern is how to identify the true prophet. Humility strikes him as the key element. He quotes Romans 12:3, where Paul says that “by the grace given to me I bid every one of you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him.” Had the false prophets of Jeremiah’s time heeded such counsel, they would have refrained from being false prophets; instead, they were attached to their own importance and served to buttress the desperate (and false) hopes of the people of Judah who were about to be conquered and cast into exile. Like Israel, the Church will thrive only when those who speak with authority in the community “think with sober judgment” and do not attempt to exceed the particular gifts given to them by God.

Aquinas applies Romans also to another verse from Jeremiah 23. In Jeremiah 23:40, after warning again about the coming exile, God says to the people who abuse his name (such as the false prophets): "I will bring upon you everlasting reproach and perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten." The danger of "everlasting reproach and perpetual shame" is a real one not only for people of Israel but also for the members of the Church, as Paul makes clear by urging that "it is full time now for you to wake from sleep" (Rom. 13:11). In commenting on Jeremiah 23:40, therefore, Aquinas cites Paul's exhortation that "the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12). Since Jeremiah 23 is about false prophets, it is apropos that Aquinas call to mind the need to "cast off the works of darkness."

Aquinas cites Romans 13 again when commenting on Jeremiah 27:8. This passage has to do with Jeremiah's political prudence. In Jeremiah's day, Judah was caught between two powers, Egypt and Babylon. The temptation for the king of Judah was to try to play one off against the other, and thereby to escape a crippling vassalage. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord repeatedly warned Judah against alliance with Egypt; whereas the false prophets were encouraging the king to make alliance with Egypt rather than to submit to Babylon. In Jeremiah 27:8, we find a stark warning against any attempt to oppose Babylonian power: "But if any nation or kingdom will not serve this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, says the Lord, until I have consumed it by his hand." Aquinas connects this prudent political command with that of Paul in Romans 13:5, "Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience."

It would seem, however, that Paul is offering a general rule while Jeremiah is communicating a command only for a particular case. Is Aquinas's connection of the two passages therefore misleading? I think not. Recall Romans 13:1, where Paul states that "there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." This statement sounds very similar to Jeremiah 27:5, where God claims complete authority over all kings and empires. God states through the prophet Jeremiah, "It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant" (Jer. 27:5). This does not mean that God has abandoned his people Israel to idolaters. On the contrary, God goes on to promise that in due time Babylon itself will be overthrown: "All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes; then

many nations and great kings shall make him their slave” (Jer. 27:7). Thus, the point that Jeremiah 27 is making turns out to be profoundly consistent with Romans 13:5: God oversees which nations and rulers will have power. This does not mean that God approves the sins of those nations and rulers, since in fact they will be punished for their sins.

Let me pause here to take stock. Aquinas has shown that Jeremiah and Romans illuminate each other in significant ways. The following themes are preeminent, in addition to the ones I noted earlier regarding God as father of rebellious, untruthful, idolatrous children:

- All Judah/Israel will be saved
- The puffed-up pride and idolatry of false prophets and leaders
- God’s sovereignty over all human rulers
- God’s promise to protect and redeem those who suffer innocently
- God’s “abandonment” of his people rooted in a deeper fidelity—seeking their salvation
- Jeremiah as a figure of Christ
- Dependence upon God

In all these themes, God’s wisdom, sovereignty, and fidelity continually stand out as the basis for all Jeremiah’s teachings, despite his own misery (due to the foolish leaders of Judah) and despite the misery of Judah (conquered by Babylon) and the misery of Babylon (stuck in idolatry). Paul, who yearns for the salvation of all Israel, also proclaims the wisdom, sovereignty, and fidelity of God in Jesus Christ and his Spirit.

The Restoration of Israel

The next three citations of Romans in Aquinas’s *Commentary on Jeremiah* all come from Romans 11. Two of them have to do with the salvation of Israel, while one has to do with the wisdom of God. The first comes in Jeremiah 31, the chapter that contains the glorious promise of the “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31). When he cites Romans 11, Aquinas is commenting on Jeremiah 31:1, where the Lord reassures Israel: “At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.” Aquinas appreciates that Jeremiah 31 stands as one of the greatest prophesies of the restoration of Israel. He argues that “at that time” may signify either the time of the return

from exile, when (in Aquinas's view) members of all twelve tribes came together again as one people rather than being divided into "Israel" and "Judah," or the time of the eschatological consummation, when "the full number of the Gentiles" has come in and "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25–26). Here one sees again Aquinas's recognition, in light not only of Paul but also of Isaiah, that God does not reject his people Israel, even though God does draw the Gentiles into the restored Israel.

Jeremiah 32 contains a further hopeful promise about the future restoration of Israel, combined with the ominous promise that Judah would indeed be handed over to exile in Babylon. The chapter first describes Jeremiah's imprisonment for prophesying that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Jerusalem (which was under siege) and that Zedekiah would go into exile in Babylon. Without denying that this punishment will indeed come soon, Jeremiah purchases the land of Hanamel (his cousin) in Anathoth. By purchasing the land of Hanamel at the Lord's command, Jeremiah shows by a divinely ordained sign that God will restore Israel. The exile will not last forever; in the future, after the exile, the land will once again be bought and sold by Benjaminites. In a lengthy prayer, Jeremiah asks God why God commanded him to buy the land during the siege. God responds by saying that the Babylonians are his instruments in punishing the Israelites for their idolatry. Specifically, the Israelites "set up their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to defile it," and the Israelites "built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech" (Jer. 32:35).

Aquinas comments on a portion of Jeremiah's lengthy prayer, in which Jeremiah calls God "great in counsel" (Jer. 32:19)—to which words are added, in Aquinas's Latin version, "and incomprehensible in thought" (in the RSV the phrase is: "and mighty in deed"). The key point that Jeremiah is making is that God's plan is unfathomably wise. While acknowledging and praising God's wisdom, of course, Jeremiah is also asking why he had to purchase Hanamel's land during a time of siege. Aquinas draws a parallel with Romans 11:33, where Paul, in the midst of bemoaning Israel's widespread rejection of Jesus (recall that Paul in his anguish even says that "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race" [Rom. 9:3]), nonetheless praises the wisdom of God's plan for Israel: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom. 11:33). Paul cannot see fully why "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" (Rom. 11:25); it remains a "mystery" (Rom. 11:25) for him, but he knows that God permits it for a good purpose. As we have seen, Paul insists that indeed "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26) and that "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom 11:32). The parallel

that Aquinas draws is thus quite apt. Just as Jeremiah witnesses a grievous situation for Israel but prophesies that Israel will be restored, Paul witnesses a grievous situation for Israel but prophesies that God's mercy is the key to the mystery and that "all Israel will be saved." Both Paul and Jeremiah praise the wisdom of God's plan precisely in the midst of a terrible situation for Israel.

The last reference to Romans 11 occurs in Aquinas's commentary on Jeremiah 33. In this chapter, Jeremiah is still in prison by order of King Zedekiah. His prophecy, however, contains words of hope and restoration. God reiterates that he will punish Israel with destruction at the hands of the Babylonians, but God also promises that in the future he will "restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me" (Jer. 33:7–8). In the passage that Aquinas is commenting upon when he cites Romans, God complains about those who imagine that God will not be faithful to his people. God states, "Have you not observed what these people are saying, 'The Lord has rejected the two families which he chose' [Aquinas identifies these two families as either Israel and Judah, or the house of David and the Levitical priests]? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight" (Jer. 33:24). God goes on to say that only if the very stars in heaven and the sun and moon fail, could his covenant with Israel fail; and the Lord promises that he will "choose one of his [David's] descendants to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Jer. 33:26). The point is that the Lord will not abandon Israel, no matter how bad things look. Aquinas hammers home this point by reference to Paul's emphatic insistence upon the Lord's fidelity to Israel according to the flesh: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" (Rom. 11:1). Again, Paul helps Aquinas to underscore, with Jeremiah, God's enduring covenant faithfulness to the people of Israel.

In the *Commentary on Jeremiah's* final reference to Romans, Aquinas is discussing Jeremiah 38, which describes the persecution of Jeremiah by King Zedekiah and by the people of Jerusalem, a persecution that came upon Jeremiah due to his negative prophesying during the siege of Jerusalem. Recall that the people of Jerusalem "took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by the ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire" (Jer. 38:6). An Ethiopian eunuch went to the king to protest this treatment of Jeremiah, and in response the king commanded the eunuch to lift Jeremiah up out of the cistern before he died of thirst. Commenting on Jeremiah 38:6, Aquinas remarks that the name of the eunuch, "Ebedmelech," means "servant of the king"—thereby implying the humility

of the eunuch. Aquinas compares "Ebedmelech" to "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." Ebedmelech, of course, is a servant not simply of King Zedekiah, but most importantly of Jeremiah whose life he saves. Ebedmelech's name thus identifies him in the same way that "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ" identifies Paul. Jeremiah serves here as a figure of Christ, and Ebedmelech as a righteous man who humbly and zealously serves Christ. The restoration of Israel will lead the Ethiopian eunuch to serve the suffering prophet of Israel; indeed all people, in humility, must become servants of Christ.

III. Conclusion

In his commentary *Jeremiah: The World, the Wound of God* (1999), the peace activist Daniel Berrigan reads Jeremiah in light of the political and economic situation of America in the 1990s, with a keen eye to the preceding decades as well. Commenting on Jeremiah 25, Berrigan compares the prophet's situation of seemingly having accomplished nothing to his own situation and those of his fellow activists. Despite their unremitting labors, he notes, "The nuclear arms race proceeds at full speed, unimpeded, though due to the iniquity of what enemy, new or old, one is hard put to say."¹⁴ As far as the poor are concerned, says Berrigan, "We are now intent on virtuously disposing of, demonizing, victimizing, causing to disappear from public places, those multitudes whom the system itself has created—which is to say, the unproductive poor. A species of ethnic cleansing is underway in the cities."¹⁵ Just as Jeremiah did not lose hope, Berrigan does not lose hope. The reason is simple: "What nobler life than one passed in heroic vindication of truth! Could we too but believe it! Be comforted, Jeremiah. Then and now, servitude to idols is the only loss."¹⁶ At the same time, Berrigan does not disguise the difficulty of a life spent trying to cast off "servitude to idols." A key task in his view is to discern how to build a community, a household, that truly stands against the idols of the age. In light of Jeremiah 31–32, he strives to build up "a community of conscience" that will "offer a measure of hope and light, when the public light is all but quenched, and the law of war and weaponry bears down hard."¹⁷

In a manner comparable to the way in which Berrigan's reading of Jeremiah is inflected by his reading of American politics and economics, Aquinas's reading of Jeremiah is inflected by Romans. In the citations of Romans that are present in his commentary (keeping in mind that these citations end with chapter 38 of Jeremiah), Aquinas highlights three themes:

14 Daniel Berrigan, S.J., *Jeremiah: The World, the Wound of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 104.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 108.

17 Ibid., 133.

God's frustrated fatherhood (in Jer. 3–8) of his idolatrous and unrepentant children; God's wisdom, sovereignty, and fidelity (in Jer. 10–27) in light of the foolishness and pride of both Judah and Babylon and in light of the sufferings of his servant Jeremiah and his people Israel; and the promise of the restoration of Israel (in Jer. 31–38), along with the nations, as represented by the Ethiopian eunuch. Not only is this an excellent exposition of the main themes and development of the book of Jeremiah, but it also fits broadly with the main themes and structure of Romans. Reading Jeremiah in light of Romans, and thus in light of Christ, amplifies, rather than detracts from, Jeremiah's fundamental pattern of condemnation of sin, punishment by exile, and (in light of the innocent suffering of God's prophet) glorious restoration.

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul places the condemnation of idolatry front and center. To practice idolatry—whose root is pride—means to fall into a variety of other sins, indeed, means to fall into all other sins. The very heart of everything, then, is to obey God and to allow nothing to take the place of God. This is Jeremiah's message too. Jeremiah has much more to say about (for example) Sabbath observance than about economic inequality, and much more to say about trusting God's plan and not opposing the power of Babylon than about the evil of empire. By reading Jeremiah in light of Romans, Aquinas is able to bring Jeremiah's specific critique of Israel to bear upon the Christian community that is subject to pride and to ignoring God, and that therefore is subject to condemnation and loss of the privileges of adoptive sonship.

The humility required of God's people by Jeremiah and by Romans undercuts any easy way of identifying who is on the side of those who serve Christ (and Jeremiah) as distinct from the side of those who persecute Christ (and Jeremiah). Aquinas pairs Romans 11 with passages in Jeremiah where the Lord insists that he will restore Israel and that he will save Israel. In Romans 11:1, as in Jeremiah, this clearly means Israel according to the flesh. Via Romans, Aquinas makes clear that the Christian community itself has to take care not to "create dissensions" and serve our "own appetites" (Rom. 16:17–18). Paul emphasizes that Christians can presume on nothing other than God's mercy in Christ, just as Jeremiah tells the Israelites that they can depend upon nothing other than God. We must be humble, not proud; otherwise we too will be condemned. We must keep our focus on God rather than on any human solution to our problems, no matter how seemingly correct. This does not mean that we should be politically apathetic—Jeremiah certainly was not—but it does mean that our solution must always first and foremost be a deeper commitment to crying out "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15). Thus, Aquinas's reception of Paul in his *Commentary on Jeremiah* not only shows the

extraordinary extent of shared concerns between Jeremiah and Paul but also invites us into the pattern of redemption according to which Christ bestows upon God's people "the spirit of sonship" (Rom. 8:15).