

Saint Thomas and the Development of Doctrine

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Introduction

THE “DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE” commonly refers to the unfolding of Christian faith into hitherto unformulated and undefined doctrinal propositions. It is the successive unfolding of the one, once and for all given revelation completed by and in Christ and possessed by apostolic faith, into newly articulated doctrines. I take it that the original possession of revelation, the original formulation of faith, was itself propositional, located in the propositions of the Bible, in such dicta as the confession that “Jesus is Lord,” and “he has risen from the dead,” and “he will come again.” Sometimes revelatory propositions summarize a narrative of events, of course, and this is not unimportant, since certain truths about God cannot be manifested except on the basis of a history captured in narrative. For instance, in the Isaian reflection on the Old Testament story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, her establishment in the Promised Land, the kingdom and then the kingdoms, Jewish exile, and return from exile, there are statements about God’s providence and eternity. The narrative itself is the prior and necessary demonstration of this providence and eternity, without which Isaiah cannot formulate his teaching about them. Evidently, the narrative of the mission of Jesus and its conclusion are the necessary presupposition of what Saint Paul teaches, quite “didactically,” in Galatians and Romans. And there are smaller narrative communications of truth, too: the narrative of Jesus’s calming of the storm on Lake Galilee and the subsequent worship of the disciples is a declaration of his divinity. What is to be noticed, however, is this, that the original possession of revelation and so every initial access to the Realities disclosed by revelation through deed and event—namely, the triune God, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and so on—this possession is in language. And

although saving assent to revelation requires the interior assistance of the Holy Spirit, it remains a saving assent to the exterior word of biblical truth (see Rom 10:14–17), the exterior word spoken by apostle and evangelist. The point of departure for the development of doctrine, therefore, is not in the first place some wordless experience, either historical or transcendental, of God and his Christ, but assent in faith to the creed and the reading of Scripture the creed enables and controls.

We recognize the phenomenon of development when we see four things. The first thing to see is that there is a “one,” an integral cognitive whole, “revelation” as such “closed with the death of the last apostle.” The second thing to see is a “many” into which this one is unfolded or developed or articulated, which unfolding occurs—third thing to notice—within a temporal expanse in which the “many” are formulated and articulated. Fourth, there is required also our ability—a Christian ability of reason illumined by faith—to discern and verify that it really is the one, integral cognitive whole that is exfoliated into the many subsequent doctrinal propositions. Without the first thing, the one perduring whole of revelation, we have not development but transformation, a self-contradictory plurification of Christian discourse where one age says something different from another. Without the second thing, the many articulations of the one, there is no development but only repetition. Without the third thing, temporal expanse, the question does not arise as to the maintenance of the apostolicity of the Church for us, the maintenance of the truth across time. And without the fourth thing, the ability of reason to recognize that the one really is truly and rightly unfolded in the many, our faith in the apostolicity of the Church turns into fideism. It is a condition of the possibility of genuine development of doctrine that it be able to be recognized as such. This recognition, of course, is magisterial, but it also engages the *sensus fidei* of all the faithful. Moreover, this ability, while it requires faith, requires also certain *auxilia*, two *auxilia* in fact, namely, metaphysical skill and historical learning.

There is also a fifth thing ordinarily contained in the idea of the development of doctrine, a function especially of the third and fourth things above—temporal expanse in which the many appear and our ability to affirm them as expressing the one revelation. Together, they imply that it is only the different expressions of some one revealed truth, different expressions and precisions that come later, that enable us to apprehend and appreciate the revealed truth more fully. This means in turn, fifth, that we judge the adequacy of *earlier* expressions and the theological success of *earlier* exponents of faith by the measure of the *later* expressions. Or, as John Henry Cardinal Newman says in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*:

It is indeed sometimes said that the stream is clearest near the spring. Whatever use may fairly be made of this image, it does not apply to the history of a philosophy or belief, which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full.¹

In other words, the future preserves the past in changing it, and for us to know the past, we have to know what it becomes in the future.

So much for an initial attempt to fix what we are speaking of when we say “development of doctrine.” Now, is there a recognition of this fact, and an understanding of its nature, and an awareness of its causes, in Saint Thomas?

Saint Thomas and the Development of Doctrine

Did Saint Thomas recognize the fact of doctrinal development? The answer to this question is that he did, although some distinguished theologians have denied it. Avery Dulles, for example, held that Thomas’s view that revelation is complete with the death of the last apostle² and that as to the “essentials of faith,” all is present from the time of Christ,³ effectively precluded a recognition of development.⁴ The explications of the articles Saint Thomas admits will therefore be something minor and negligible; there can be no recognition of real development according to Dulles, since these explications are statements of what the Church has always already known from the time of the closure of revelation.⁵ Christopher Kaczor, on the other hand, finds that all three of the theories or ways of development Dulles treats of—the logical-propositional, the organic-intuitionist, and the situational, where development is a matter of translation—are operative in Saint Thomas.⁶

¹ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, 1909 [originally 1845; rev. 1878]), ch. 1, sect. I, no. 7.

² See St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] III, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3. Translations from *ST* will be my own. All other translations (whether primary sources or current scholarship) are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ St. Thomas, *In III Sent.*, d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, sol. 1, ad 5: “Implicit faith is explicated in determinate articles of faith. And this explication has been completed through Christ; whence it is not licit to take away from or to add to his teaching as to the essentials of faith [Fides implicita explicatur in articulis fidei determinatis. Et haec explicatio completa est per Christum; unde eius doctrinae quantum ad essentialia fidei nec diminere nec addere licet].”

⁴ Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Resilient Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 46.

⁵ Dulles, *Resilient Church*, 46.

⁶ Christopher Kaczor, “Thomas Aquinas on the Development of Doctrine,” *Theo-*

Kaczor is a more recent expositor of Thomas on development. Dulles, however, reflects a wide-spread opinion in the twentieth century about what Saint Thomas was and was not capable of appreciating. In mid-century, Jean Daniélou flatly denied that Thomas had any notion of history.⁷ Just because the idea of history is strange to Thomism, we must return to thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa and Irenaeus in order to engage a modern world dominated by the philosophies of Hegel and Henri Bergson. Without an idea of history, of course, the idea of development of doctrine cannot get off the ground.

In fact, and a fact easy to verify, the question of whether Saint Thomas recognized doctrinal development can be settled very expeditiously. In the prooemium of the *Contra errores Graecorum* (1263), Saint Thomas explains why the dicta of the ancient Fathers can seem doubtful to us.

The first thing is that the errors that arise about the faith give the holy doctors of the Church an occasion to hand on the things that belong to the faith with greater circumspection in order to avoid the errors that arose. Just so, it is evident that the holy doctors who lived before the error of Arius did not speak so expressly about the unity of the divine essence as later doctors; and the same thing happened with other errors.

He illustrates this by comparing the early Augustine on free will with the post-Pelagian Augustine on free will. He concludes:

Whence, if there are things to be found in the sayings of the ancient doctors that are not said with as much caution as is maintained by moderns, they are not to be despised or rejected, but neither are these things to be used just as such. Rather, they should be reverently explained.⁸

logical Studies 62 (2001): 283–302. For the three theories, see Dulles, *Resilient Church*, 39–53. Much earlier, Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., and H.-D. Simonin, O.P., find in St. Thomas the key subjective principle required to explain development, namely, the discursive and so temporal character of human knowing by way of making judgments (propositions) (M.-D. Chenu, “La Raison psychologique du développement du dogme d’après saint Thomas,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 13 [1924]: 44–51; H.-D. Simonin, “La Théologie de la foi et le développement du dogme,” *Revue thomiste* 14 [1937]: 537–56).

⁷ See Jean Daniélou, S.J., “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” *Études* 249 (1946): 5–21.

⁸ The Latin can be found at isidore.co/aquinas/ContraErrGraecorum.htm, along

Two comments are in order. First, things touching the unity of the divine essence are not minor or negligible matters, but crucially important to the integrity of the apostolic faith. The growth in accuracy of expression over the course of the Arian controversy was not a matter of ornament and decoration, and Saint Thomas recognizes that fact. Second, paraphrasing and commenting on this text from the *Contra errores Graecorum*, Jean-Pierre Torrell says: "We can appreciate the orthodoxy of authors before Nicaea or Chalcedon in an adequate way only in the light of the councils that are after them."⁹ In other words, we have here as good a recognition of Newman's remark about the spring and the mouth of the river as we could want. And that is to say that we have here as good a recognition of the fact and importance of development as we could want.

We should expect this if, following Torrell, we recognize the importance of Saint Thomas's grasp of the historical character of human knowledge, both for the individual and for humanity as a whole—reason, after all, is *discursive*—and recognize that he has a very definite view of the historical character of human existence, with a quite definite view of the God-given *shape* of this history and its parts. We should expect this also, as Torrell shows again, when we understand his interest in just the issues that make a historian a historian—questions about the authenticity of texts and the hermeneutical challenges of translation, questions of the historical context in which a text is composed. Given such things, we can by no means be surprised at Thomas's attention to "doctrinal development."¹⁰ We should ourselves be quite un-historical and anachronistic, of course, if we expected his historical achievement in considering the growth of doctrine to look like nineteenth- and twentieth-century treatments of the same.

The closest Saint Thomas himself comes to discussing in any detail what we call "development of doctrine" occurs in the first question of the treatise on faith in the *Summa theologiae* [ST], on the object of faith, at the beginning of the *secunda secundae*. In the seventh article of question 1, he asks whether the articles of faith grew in number with the passage of time. He answers that there is an order to be found in the articles of faith, just

with an English translation, but the translation here is my own.

⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., "Saint Thomas et l'histoire: état de la question et pistes de recherches," *Revue thomiste* 105 (2005): 355–409, at 401.

¹⁰ See Torrell, "Saint Thomas et l'histoire," 356–81, for his theology of history, and 381–405, for a consideration of his historical interest and expertise. His theology of history can be encapsulated in the some such phrase as the following (my formulation): "from the Trinity to the Trinity (*exitus–reditus*) through the enormous contingency of the Incarnation" (see esp. 361–363). But there are all the patristic and medieval partitions of history to be considered, as well.

as in the principles of a science, in that some are contained implicitly in others. Hebrews 11:6 says that those who draw close to God “must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Implicit in the confession that God exists are “all the things that we believe exist eternally in God,” which would include the Trinity of Persons, and implicit in the confession of God’s providence for those who seek him are the Incarnation and Christ’s Passion. Thus, he concludes, “as to the substance of the articles of faith, there is no growth in them through the passage of time,” which is to say that faith always includes believing that God exists and is provident. But “as to the explication [of the articles], the number of articles has grown.”

This recognition of growth in the number of articles is a recognition of growth across the Testaments, from the Old to the New, whereby Christians “explicitly” know more than the children of Israel. No such similar growth is recognized, however, since the time of Christ. If the knowledge of faith has proceeded across the Testaments from what befits childhood to what befits maturity, as the reply to the second objection makes clear, we are now in the time of perfection. So, we now see more distinctly what we are to hope for compared with Old Testament people (*ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1), and “those who were closer to Christ either before him, like John the Baptist, or after him, like the apostles, knew the mysteries of the faith more fully” (ad 4).¹¹

But this does not say all. When Saint Thomas asks in this same question on the object of faith, in article 9, whether the articles of faith are suitably found in the creed, he answers yes. The *sed contra* urges that “the universal Church cannot err because it is governed by the Holy Spirit,” and that “the creed is published by the authority of the universal Church,” just as the number of the articles is suitably determined by that same authority (a. 8). However, there are two creeds, the Apostles’ Creed and the Creed of the Fathers (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed), and some of the arguments that introduce article 9 have their point of departure in this fact. It is objected that it is unfitting that there be many professions of faith, since there is only one faith. Thomas answers that there must be many creeds because of the many heresies, although the creeds differ only in that “in one there is more fully explicated what is contained in another

¹¹ What does “more fully” (*plenius*) mean? It need not mean a discrete knowledge of all subsequent ecclesial formulations of what belongs to faith. For discussion of apostolic knowledge, see, e.g., Charles Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Hierarchy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 132–36.

implicitly" (a. 9, ad 2). "Implicitly" is evidently used here more narrowly than in saying the Incarnation is implicitly contained in confessing the providence of God (a. 7).

Again, it is further objected that since the creed is the rule of faith, the Apostles' Creed ought to be able to be sung publicly at Mass, as is the Nicene Creed. Thomas answers that the Nicene Creed "is declarative of the Apostles' Creed," but that since it was published "in the time of persecution," it is fitting that it be recited secretly at Prime and at Compline (a. 9, ad 6).

So we have here two ways to say how later determinations of truth are related to earlier ones: they may say what the earlier expression says "implicitly" or they may "declare" it more fully. In any case, and even if Saint Thomas does not here embrace the legend according to which the apostles themselves wrote the Apostles' Creed, it is clear from question 1 that he supposes the Church was from the time of Christ fully in possession of the Catholic faith as a whole.¹² It is equally the case, however, if we remember the prooemium of the *Contra errores Graecorum*, that we are not dealing with minor or indifferent matters in this further declaration and explication of the faith.

The last article of question 1 asks whether it belongs to the Roman pontiff to order and publish a new edition of the creed. Saint Thomas answers that it does so belong to the pope, as canon law attests and as is grounded in Christ's charge to Peter to strengthen the faith of his brothers (Luke 22:32) and the necessity that there be one faith in the Church (1 Cor 1:10). The first and second objections to the article, however, insert the question of papal authority, first, into the history of salvation, and second, into the history of the Church. The first objection argues from article 7 that, since there are no new articles of faith to be expected now that Christ has come, there is no need for a new edition of the creed, and so it does not belong to the Roman pontiff to publish one. Saint Thomas replies that, although the truth of faith is "sufficiently explicated" in the teaching of Christ and the apostles, "perverse men 'pervert to their own perdition' (2 Pet 3:16) apostolic doctrine and the other Scriptures." Therefore, there must be a further "explanation of faith against the errors that arise in the course of time" (*temporibus procedentibus*). Revelation is complete, but it is delivered to a history in which perverse men will require it to be further

¹² For the legend, see Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), ch. 1 (esp. 21–22, 25, 30–31). The legend is not in Augustine (27–28).

explained. So, there is need of papal authority so to explain it.

The second objection brings things to a fine point. The Council of Ephesus forbade anyone to “profess or re-write or compose” another creed than the Nicene Creed and this was repeated at Chalcedon. Saint Thomas answers that this prescription is aimed at private persons. But Ephesus and Chalcedon did not take away the power to publish a new creed, “not indeed as containing another faith,” but one that “better explained the same faith” (*eamdem fidem magis expositam*). And this need will arise with the emergence of heresy. So, the sense of the faith can be expressed in multiple ways, better explained over the course of time, given the rise of new heresy. Doctrine finds further expression, new expression, over the course of time. What is this to say if not that it develops? Doctrine therefore has a history. Now, it is precisely this history that Saint Thomas examines in the fourth book of the *Summa contra gentiles* and to that we turn.

Development and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*

What Saint Thomas admits in the *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 10, ad 1—namely, that *temporibus procedentibus* there will be required a more detailed explanation of faith against heretical error—is not much on display in the *Summa theologiae*. It is not a focus of attention. It is, however, very much on display in the *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium* (*Summa contra gentiles* [hereafter, simply *Contra gentiles*; see note]).¹³ The display of the contrast of error and Catholic truth is pressed into the overall aim of the *Contra gentiles*, which is to manifest the truth of the Catholic faith and eliminate the errors opposed to it.¹⁴ In this fashion, Saint Thomas’s practice can tell us much of what he thought about what we call the development of doctrine.

This double aim of manifesting truth and reproofing error follows from

¹³ The Latin can be found in St. Thomas, *Liber de veritate Catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium seu Summa contra gentiles*, 3 vols., ed. C. Pera, O.P., P. Marc, O.S.B., and P. Caramello (Turin: Marietti, 1961). For English of part I, see *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book One: God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); for English of part IV, see *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Four: Salvation*, trans. Charles J. O’Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1975). *Liber de veritate Catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium* is more likely the original title according to René-Antoine Gauthier, O.P., “Introduction,” in *Saint Thomas d’Aquin, Somme Contre les Gentils* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1993), 109. For the difference between a *summa* and a *liber*, see 146–47 of Gauthier’s introduction. For the remainder of this article, having given the commonly used title for recognition, I will cite the work simply as *Contra gentiles*, rather than by either genre term.

¹⁴ *Contra Gentiles* I, ch. 2, no. 2 (Marietti no. 9).

the office of the wise man which Thomas here takes up, for “it belongs to one and the same science . . . to pursue one of two contraries and to oppose the other.”¹⁵ It is not for apologetic purposes, therefore, that Saint Thomas concerns himself so much with heretical opinion in book IV but precisely in order to manifest the truth. René-Antoine Gauthier explains as follows.

In order to be in full possession of the truth, it is not enough to have accomplished the first task of the wise man, which is to speak the truth; it is also necessary to acquit oneself of the second, which is to show the cause of the opposed error. The task of the wise man is complete only when he shows that the same reason on which his adversary bases his error is in reality in accord with the truth that has been demonstrated.¹⁶

So, the aim of the *Contra gentiles* requires a careful and explicit examination of errors bearing on the Trinitarian and Christological, sacramental theological, and eschatological doctrine of the Catholic faith.

Now the history of Trinitarian and Christological error is in fact one history,¹⁷ and though preserving the formal distinction between the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, Saint Thomas more rather than less follows the very course of heretical opinion from the fourth century to the seventh in the first half of *Contra gentiles* IV. As to the Trinity, we move from the adoptionism of Cerinthus and Ebion (first century), which was renewed by Paul of Samosata (third century) and strengthened (Saint Thomas says) by Photinus (fourth century), to Sabellius (third century), and then on to Arius and Eunomius (fourth century). Then comes the question of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent error of Macedonianism (fourth century), and so ends the list of Trinitarian errors, save for the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son.

¹⁵ *Contra gentiles* I, ch. 1, no. 3 (Marietti no. 6). See also *ST* I, q. 14, a. 8, corp. (“est eadem scientia oppositorum”), and I-II, q. 54, a. 2, ad 1: “For although things that are contrary in species differ in reality, there is still the same reason for knowing both, because one is known through the other [Quamvis autem contraria specie differant diversitate rerum, tamen eadem ratio est cognoscendi utrumque: quia unum per aliud cognoscitur].” For further references on this point, see the notes to Marietti no. 6 in the Marietti edition.

¹⁶ Gauthier, O.P., “Introduction,” 155. Note that the object of “convincing” (*convincere*) is not some person to be persuaded, but an erroneous opinion to be refuted (150–55).

¹⁷ See for instance John Behr, *Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2, *The Nicene Faith*, pt. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 2–8.

Turning to the Incarnation, the error of Ebion and Cerinthus, Paul of Samosata, and Photinus, who all deny the divinity of Christ, is reprised, since it bears on the mystery of the Incarnation as well as on that of the Trinity. Then Thomas turns to the humanity of Christ, as did the history of heretical error: touching first on the body of Christ and the mistaken opinions concerning it of the Manichees (third century), Valentinians (second century), and Apollinaris (fourth century); and then on the soul of Christ, and the opinions thereon of Arius and (again) Apollinaris (fourth century), and folding in Origen here from the second century. After the elements of the union have been treated, the union itself is examined, again following the history of the thing: Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius (fifth century), and then Eutyches (mid-fifth century). Then we come to Macarius of Antioch on the human will of Christ (seventh century), which position reduces to the monophysitism of Eutyches. Saint Thomas extends his treatment of the union of divinity and humanity of Christ into the middle ages and the three opinions Peter Lombard recounts in his *Sentences*, two of which are Nestorian: first, the *habitus* theory of Peter Abelard (twelfth century) and finally the double *supposita* account of the Archbishop of Sens (twelfth century?).¹⁸

Because Saint Thomas takes up the office of the wise man in the way he does in the *Contra gentiles*, aiming to manifest the truth and manifest it expressly in reproofing error, the order of the Trinitarian theology and Christology in the *Contra gentiles* is quite different from that of the *Summa theologiae*. This is worth noting.

In the *ST I*, Saint Thomas proceeds from the *priora in se* to the *priora quoad nos*. So, in dealing with the Trinity in the *prima pars*, he moves from the processions (q. 27) to the relations (q. 28) to the Persons (qq. 29–42) to the missions (q. 43). But in *Contra gentiles* IV, he moves from the procession of the Son (chs. 2–3) as illumined by the heresies of Photinus (chs. 4 and 9) and Sabellius (chs. 5 and 9) and Arius (chs. 6–8) to that of the Holy Spirit (ch. 15), illumined by Macedonianism (chs. 16–18) and the controversy over the *Filioque* (chs. 24–25). In *ST III*, the Christology proceeds from the *convenientia* of the Incarnation (q. 1), to the union (q. 2), to the Person assuming (q. 3), and then on to the assumed nature (qq. 4–6) and the perfection of the powers of the assumed humanity (qq. 7–15). After considering the consequences of the union (qq. 16–26), we end with the theology of the events of the life of Christ (qq. 27–59). The manifestation

¹⁸ It is true that, in speaking of the suitability of the Incarnation (*Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 50), St. Thomas returns us to the fifth century and the Pelagian denial of original sin.

of the Catholic truth about the Incarnation in *Contra gentiles* IV, on the other hand, takes up first the true divinity of Christ (ch. 28), and next the true humanity of Christ (chs. 29–33), and only then the mode of union (chs. 34–38), and ends with a consideration of the *convenientia* of the Incarnation, what the *Summa theologiae* had put first. While the *Summa theologiae* begins each treatise with a partial, imperfect, but fruitful understanding of the mystery—for the Trinity in I, q. 27, aa. 1–3, and for the Incarnation in III, q. 2, a. 2, corp. and ad 3 (looking forward however to q. 17, a. 2)—the *Contra gentiles* offers this demonstration of the possibility of Trinity (chs. 11–13, 19) after having demonstrated the truth of the processions, just as it offers a demonstration of how to understand the possibility of the Incarnation (ch. 41) only after having demonstrated its truth from Scripture (ch. 39).

What are we to conclude from these very different orderings of topics? The order of an achieved science of the truth of some thing, an order that proceeds from causes to effects and from principles to the principled, is different from the order of the manifestation of the truths of that science in history.

Development by Way of reading Scripture in the *Contra Gentiles*

Saint Thomas is not a “Denziger theologian.” I mean that he does not manifest the truth of the Catholic faith exclusively or even first of all by calling on the authority of the Church, of pope or council as the case may be. He calls on them as suits his argument and with whom he is arguing, as we shall see. What he calls on in the first place and constantly is Scripture. He betrays here the easy confidence of Catholic faith that Sacred Scripture and the Church speak with one voice, the confidence that God himself, in his own voice and through the inspired word, manifests the truths he wishes all to embrace.

Gilles Emery notes the standard way in which Saint Thomas manifests Catholic truth by engaging heretical Trinitarian opinion in the *Contra gentiles*. There are six steps. First, he summarizes the position. Second, he states the premises from which it proceeds. Third, he lists scriptural authorities whence it allegedly follows. Fourth, he names the persons who hold the position. Fifth, he establishes the contrary truth of the Catholic faith from Scripture. Last, he answers the scriptural arguments put forward by the heretics.¹⁹

¹⁹ Gilles Emery, O.P., “Le traité de saint Thomas sur la Trinité dans la *Somme contre les Gentils*,” *Revue thomiste* 96 (1996): 5–40, at 16. Although I will keep to my own renderings of Emery, there is an English translation of this essay, “The Treatise of

The pattern is not maintained for the Christology. Generally, we have, first, the name or names of those upholding heretical opinion, second, a statement of the position, and third, the scriptural warrants for the statement of Catholic truth (bk. IV, chs. 28–36: Photinus, Mani, Valentinus, Apollinaris on the body of Christ, Arius and Apollinaris on the soul, Apollinaris on the rational soul of Christ, Theodore and Nestorius on the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, Eutyches on the union, and Marcarius on the one will of Christ). Most of the time, Saint Thomas gives us the scriptural warrants adduced for heterodox opinion. But there is nothing really to adduce for the docetism of the Manicheans (ch. 29). For Photinus, we are directed back to chapter 4. And Saint Thomas groups certain positions together, making for a very economical exposition. For instance, we do not learn the theological premise whence the docetism of the Manicheans proceeds until the similar position of Valentinus is addressed in the following chapter (ch. 30). Nonetheless the vindication of Catholic truth is in each of these chapters predominantly scriptural, with the sole exception of the argument against Eutyches—a mostly though not exclusively metaphysical effort (ch. 35), which contrasts markedly with the very lengthy, very extensive *scriptural* arguments mounted against Nestorius in the preceding chapter. The implication seems to be that if Nestorianism is an exegetical failure, monophysitism is a philosophical failure.

The numbers attest to the overwhelmingly scriptural nature of the argument. The treatment of Arianism, for instance, employs 106 texts by my count. Emery reports the analysis of J. A. Fidalgo Herranz.²⁰ He counts 127 citations from the Old Testament and 335 from the New in chapters 1–26, the Trinity section of book IV. This is roughly a third of the 1,498 biblical references he finds in the entire *Contra gentiles*. In the Christology section, chapters 27–55, my rough and ready count (and counting repeated uses of the same text) gives 177 citations. This is deceptive, however, in that, for instance, chapter 46, on whether Christ was born of the Holy Spirit, gives no citations of Scripture, but refers us back to chapters 19 and 21, in the treatment of the Trinity, where there are many.

On this showing, the development of doctrine is the reading of Sacred Scripture. We feel Nicaea and the First Council of Constantinople in the

St. Thomas on the Trinity in the *Summa contra Gentiles*,” in Gilles Emery, O.P., *Trinity in Aquinas*, trans. Matthew Levering (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003), 71–120, at 86–87.

²⁰ Emery, “Le traité de la Trinité,” 18n55 (“Treatise on the Trinity,” 89n56), sends us to J. A. Fidalgo Herranz, “La SS. Trinidad en la Suma contra los Gentiles: fuentes bíblicas” (PhD diss., Universidad de Navarra, 1980), 145–46.

background of chapter 7 (Arius) and chapters 17 and 18 (Macedonianism). But they are not mentioned expressly. In chapter 7, there are many arguments that conclude the Son is not a creature; he is said to be “derived from the substance of God” (*ex substantia Dei derivatur*),²¹ “true God” (*verus Deus*),²² and “equal to the Father” (*aequalis Patri*),²³ and Saint Thomas asserts that “there is numerical identity of nature and essence in the Father and the Son [*eadem numero est natura et essentia Patris et Filii*].”²⁴ But we read no Greek here and are content with saying the Son is *eiusdem naturae cum Patre*.²⁵ What is express is the teaching of Scripture, hardly changed by the introduction of the formalities of such language as “essence” and “nature,” “equal” and “same.”

If we read these two tracts closely, however, we will discover a sort of implicit claim Saint Thomas makes about the logic of dogmatic development disclosed in the history of heresy and the history of the Church’s reading of Scripture. The claim is made, first, in the arrangement of the heresies touching on the divinity, distinction, and generation of the Son. Chapters 4 and 5 give us Photinus and Sabellius and an immediate refutation of each. But the solution of their arguments is not given until chapter 9, *after* the three chapters on Arianism. Why this arrangement? The introductory lines of chapter 6 present Arianism as a sort of logical next step after Photinus and Sabellius. If the Son of God did not take his origin from Mary, as Photinus wants, and if the Father does become the Son by being born of Mary, perhaps there is a generation of the Son prior to the Incarnation, and so there is Arius.

All three are compared in chapter 7. Photinus and Sabellius admit only a human generation of Christ. Arius admits to his generation in another nature. Only the Catholic faith confirms a truly divine and eternal generation. Sabellius confesses the divinity of Christ, while Photinus and Arius do not. But Arius and Photinus hold to the distinction of Christ from the Father.²⁶

Therefore, Thomas concludes, the Catholic faith keeps to the middle road: it holds with Arius and Photinus against Sabellius that the Person of the Father is other than the Person of the Son, that the Son is begotten, but the Father entirely unbegotten; but with Sabellius against Photinus and

²¹ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 5 (Marietti no. 3407).

²² *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 7 (Marietti no. 3408).

²³ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 13 (Marietti no. 3414).

²⁴ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 20 (Marietti no. 3421).

²⁵ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 25 (Marietti no. 3426).

²⁶ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 24 (Marietti no. 3425).

Arius, it holds that Christ is true and natural God, the same in nature as the Father, although not the same in person. And from this, an indication of the Catholic truth can be gathered. For, as the Philosopher says, even falsehoods give witness against each other, for they stand apart not only from the truth but from one another.²⁷

In chapter 9, furthermore, the point is made that the considerations that refute Arius illumine the erroneous opinions of Photinus and Sabellius. For the distinction of Christ taken as man and Christ taken as divine, a distinction made in confronting Arius,²⁸ provides the key to answer the arguments of Photinus, who denies the divinity of Christ because of the weakness and infirmity of his humanity.²⁹ And the Catholic response to Arius in asserting an identity of nature in two Persons,³⁰ not two gods, gives answer to Sabellius.

This structuring of the material tells us that three hundred years of heretical history, from the second century to the fourth, make a kind of logical unit. We do not understand Photinus and Sabellius fully until we understand Arius. In this way, the manifestation of the one Catholic truth takes time, as much time as is needed for the interrelated heresies to work themselves out.³¹ In this way, we might well say, the history of heresy is more manifest *as* a history—a more evident succession of changes—than the history of doctrine, where an abiding identity subsists unchanged from the first century.

The same thing is true also for the manifestation of the truth of the Incarnation. The question of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ logically follows the consolidation of the truth of his human body and human soul and divinity.³² Even so, Nestorius substantially returns us to the Christology of Photinus.³³ And the solution of Eutyches to the question of union returns us either to the docetism of Mani or to Apollinarism.³⁴ Chapter 41, furthermore, opposes the natural union of Arius, Apollinaris, and Eutyches to the accidental union of Nestorius and his medieval followers.³⁵ Once again, we are looking at a patristic trajectory of

²⁷ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 7, no. 25 (Marietti no. 3426).

²⁸ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 8, nos. 4 and 7 (Marietti nos. 3340 and 3431–32).

²⁹ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 4, nos. 5–9 (Marietti nos. 3362–66).

³⁰ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 8, no. 1 (Marietti no. 3427).

³¹ St. Thomas remarks in *Super I Cor* 11, lec. 4 (Marietti no. 628; for I Cor 11:19), that God permits the evil of heresy only to draw out good from it.

³² *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 34, no. 1 (Marietti no. 3694).

³³ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 34, no. 32 (Marietti no. 3724).

³⁴ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 35, no. 8 (Marietti no. 3732e).

³⁵ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 41, no. 1–5 (Marietti nos. 3790 and 3792–93).

at least two hundred years. Scripture unfolds its riches only across time.³⁶

Development by Way of Reading Scripture as the Fathers Read It

Saint Thomas is not suggesting anything original when he points out the mutual connections and illuminations of the heresies when they are considered together. This is a received understanding. Relative to the positions of Photinus, Sabellius, and Arius, Saint Hilary of Poitiers remarks that one conquers another and in this way each demonstrates that the Church conquers all.³⁷

In their several assertions and denials, there are points in which each heresy is in the right in defense or attack; and the result is that the truth of our confession is brought into clearer light.³⁸

Saint Hilary and Saint Thomas have the same idea of how to manifest Catholic truth, the same idea that the wise man's office includes the refutation of error.³⁹ The very title of a work of Vigilius of Thapsis, *Dialogue against the Arians, Sabellians, and Photinians*, suggests the same point and illustrates it as expressly as does Saint Hilary.⁴⁰ This fifth-century work, cast as a debate between the heretics just mentioned, both with one another and with Saint Athanasius, is germane to understanding Saint Thomas's procedure in the *Contra gentiles*, moreover, since he makes large use of it in the early chapters of the fourth book.⁴¹

³⁶ St. Thomas certainly thinks of the development of heresy from Manichaeus to Apollinaris concerning the humanity of Christ as a unit, the history recounted in *Contra gentiles* IV, chs. 29–33, for he recapitulates it in his commentary on Matthew, probably later than the *Contra gentiles* (1269–1270); see *Super Matt* 1, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 21; for Matt 1:1).

³⁷ St. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 1.26 and 7.7, trans. E. W. Watson, L. Pullan, et al., in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2nd ser. [NPNF2], vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995). Emery maintains that this is a traditional patristic theme (“Le traité de la Trinité,” 15–16 [“Treatise on the Trinity,” 86]). See also Emery, “Le photinisme et ses précurseurs chez saint Thomas,” *Revue thomiste* 95 (1995): 371–98, at 384n88. For the *Contra gentiles* and St. Hilary, see Joseph Wawrykow, “The *Summa Contra Gentiles* Reconsidered: On the Contributions of the *De Trinitate* of Hilary of Poitiers,” *The Thomist* 58 (1994): 617–34.

³⁸ Hilary, *De Trinitate* 7.7.

³⁹ *Contra gentiles* I, ch. 2, no. 2 (Marietti no. 9); and see *Contra gentiles* I, ch. 1, nos. 3–4 (Marietti nos. 6–7).

⁴⁰ Vigilius Tapensis, *Contra Arianos, Sabbelianos, et Photinianos Dialogus* (PL, 62:179–238). For the illustration, see 1.12 and 1.15–16.

⁴¹ For what follows, see Emery, “Le photinisme,” 383–98.

Saint Thomas employs the *Dialogue* in characterizing the position of Photinus in chapter 4, in the same chapter for its refutation, and in chapter 5 in characterizing the position of Sabellius. Sometimes he follows it quite carefully, as to text and to interpretation. For instance, part of Saint Thomas's refutation of Photinus is as follows in chapter 4.

Filius Dei dicit, Ioan., 3, 13: *Nemo ascendit in caelum nisi qui descendit de caelo, filius hominis qui est in caelo*; et iterum, Ioan. 6, 38: *Descendi de caelo, non ut faciam voluntatem meam, sed voluntatem eius qui misit me*. Apparet ergo eum fuisse antequam de caelo descenderet.

[The Son of God says: "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the son of man who is in heaven" (John 3:13); and again: "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me" (John 6:38). It therefore appears that he existed before he came down from heaven].⁴²

And here is Vigilius (Arius is speaking):

Domini nostri Jesu Christi vox est in Evangelio dicentis: *Nemo ascendit in caelum, nisi qui de caelo descendit, Filius hominis qui est in caelo* (Joan. 3, 13). Et iterum: *Descendi de caelo, non ut faciam voluntatem meam, sed voluntatem ejus qui misit me Patris* (Joan. 6, 38). Apparet ergo jam fuisse, qui de caelo descenderat, ut Photinus erubescat.

[The voice of our Lord Jesus Christ is saying in the Gospel: "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (John 3:13). And again: "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the Father who sent me" (John 6:8). It therefore appears that he existed already, he who had descended from heaven, to the shame of Photinus].⁴³

Photinus introduces heretical opinion as to the understanding of the Incarnation, too, since, as Saint Thomas says, where there is no divinity, there is no mystery of the Incarnation.⁴⁴ Saint Thomas appeals, following Vigilius once again, to the descent and ascent of the Son of God to manifest this

⁴² *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 4, no. 11 (Marietti no. 3425).

⁴³ Vigilius, *Contra Arianos, Sabellianos, et Photinianos* 1.15 (PL, 62:190D–91A).

⁴⁴ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 28, no. 3 (Marietti no. 3641).

divinity, as well as to his self-emptying before the Incarnation and subsequent glorification by God after his death (Phil 2:6–7, 9).⁴⁵

Saint Thomas can rely on Saint Augustine's *De haeresibus* for the names of the heretics and some characterization of the heresy, as the notes to the English translation make evident.⁴⁶ But as we might expect, the influence of Saint Augustine is more extensive than that. This can be verified from the fact that the texts adduced for and against Arianism that appear in the fourth article of the third question of the *Super Boetium de Trinitate* are all taken up in the *Contra gentiles* (chs. 6–8). When we look to the *Super Boetium*, however, there are nine express citations of Augustine and the editors of the Leonine edition supply three more. Augustine's way of reading the texts then comes over into the *Contra gentiles*.⁴⁷ For instance, as to John 14:28—"the Father is greater than I"—we read at chapter 8 of book IV that this is so in virtue of the form of a servant that the Son takes up according to Philippians 2:6–7.⁴⁸ And that is exactly what we read in Augustine's *De Trinitate* 1.14–22.⁴⁹

Saint Thomas cites Saint Hilary as well as Saint Augustine on John 14:28 in the same article from *Super Boetium* (ad 1), according to whom the Father is greater in the way a principle is greater than what follows from it, but in such a way as giving all he has to what follows from him and therefore without any implication of inequality.⁵⁰ It could not surprise us to learn that Saint Thomas reads John 5:19 in the *Contra gentiles* as declaring that Father and Son possess one power and so are one in nature and essence, just as does Hilary.⁵¹ The argument of Photinus from the predestination of Christ to his purely creaturely status which Thomas treats at some length in the *Contra gentiles*,⁵² though it is in Vigilius, is also in Hilary.⁵³

⁴⁵ *Dialogus*, 1.15 (*PL*, 62:191A). See Emery, "Le photinisme," 387–88.

⁴⁶ See *Heresies* in St. Augustine, *Arianism and Other Heresies*, trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century [WSA] I/8, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1995).

⁴⁷ Emery, "Le traité de la Trinité," 17–18 ("Treatise on the Trinity," 88–9).

⁴⁸ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 8, no. 9 (Marietti no. 3430a).

⁴⁹ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 1.14 and 1.22, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., in WSA I/5, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Brooklyn, NY: New City, 1991).

⁵⁰ St. Hilary, *De Trinitate* 9.54.

⁵¹ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 8, no. 9 (Marietti no. 3432b), and St. Hilary, *De Trinitate* 7.18.

⁵² *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 4, no. 4 (Marietti no. 3463).

⁵³ Vigilius, *Contra Arianos, Sabellianos, et Photinianos* 1.13 (*PL*, 62:189B–C); Hilary, *De synodis* 38, in *NPNF2*, vol. 9. See Emery, "Le photinisme," 386 and note 100. There is appeal also to this work of Hilary in *Contra gentiles*, ch. 8, no.

Vigilius, Augustine, Hilary—this does not exhaust the patristic background of Saint Thomas's reading of Scripture, but enough has been said to indicate the very important role the Fathers play for Saint Thomas in the reproof of heresy and the manifestation of the truth of the Catholic faith.⁵⁴

In the previous section, it was noted that the development of doctrine is the reading of Sacred Scripture across time but we can now say more fully that development is the progressive reception of Scripture by the Fathers in meeting the challenge of heresy. To narrate development is to recast this progressive reception. It is important to note, however, that it is Scripture that is explicitly named by Saint Thomas, and not the Fathers (saving the exception in the next section). The Fathers are authoritative only as readers of Scripture, which has first, preeminent authority in matters of faith.

Development as Sealed by the Authority of Council and Pope

Saint Thomas confines himself to dealing with the arguments of the heretics on their own, scriptural terms. As has been mentioned, we feel the dogmatic decisions of Nicaea and Constantinople I in the background of *Contra gentiles* IV, chapter 7, on the procession of the Son, and of chapters 17 and 18, on the Holy Spirit. So also, everyone must think of Ephesus in reading chapter 34, on the error of Nestorius. But the councils are not mentioned explicitly in these chapters. Since Saint Thomas is speaking to Catholics in the *Contra gentiles*, and not to living heretics, this is not because the earliest heretics would not recognize the authority of the universal Church, which they would not, even as they would not recognize the authority of the exegesis of the orthodox Fathers, who also go unmentioned.⁵⁵ Rather, it is important for prosecuting his own aim that he refute heretical opinion on scriptural grounds, precisely in order to show that the Catholic faith just is the teaching of Sacred Scripture.⁵⁶ So in dealing with Trinitarian and Christological heresies in the *Contra gentiles*, it is not to

16 (Marietti no. 3436).

⁵⁴ Emery notes the role of St. Ambrose and his *De Spiritu Sancto* in St. Thomas's reading of Scripture in chs. 16, 17, and 23 of *Contra gentiles* IV, treating of the divinity of the Holy Spirit ("Le traité de la Trinité," 18n54 ["Treatise on the Trinity," 89n55]). Leo J. Elders, S.V.D., "La présence de saint Ambroise dans les écrits de Thomas d'Aquin," *Nova et Vetera* (French) 94 (2019): 77–102, deals only with explicit citations to Ambrose; because of the peculiar character of the *Contra gentiles*, Ambrose's influence disappears to ordinary sight, and Elders takes no note of it.

⁵⁵ See: *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 1, no. 10 (Marietti no. 3348); I, ch. 2, no. 3 (Marietti no. 11).

⁵⁶ This is, Emery says, "the decisive point of his purpose" ("Le traité sur la Trinité," 20 ["Treatise on the Trinity," 92: "the specific point he intends to make"]).

Saint Thomas's purpose to appeal to conciliar or patristic authority, though both are in the background and inform his own understanding of things. As Emery says, Saint Thomas's "anti-heretical biblical dossier appears fundamentally as a development of patristic exegesis."⁵⁷ And speaking again of Saint Thomas's teaching on the Trinity in the *Contra gentiles* (although we would not be mistaken to think of his teaching on the Incarnation, too), he offers an important summary of Saint Thomas's project:

It seems to us that we can say that Thomas proposes here *to recast in a personal way, by a scriptural and doctrinal review, the course of the Fathers and the councils*. If therefore the heresies are avoided, it is *because Scripture teaches something else than them*.⁵⁸

Now of course, Saint Thomas does appeal expressly to the Fathers by name in the *Contra gentiles* and to the councils in the question of the procession of the Spirit from the Son (chs. 24–25) and, in the Christological section, against Eutyches (ch. 35), and against medieval Christological opinion, to both Ephesus and Chalcedon (chs. 37–38).

In fact, and as is well known, Saint Thomas demonstrated a knowledge of conciliar teaching unusual for his day. This has been well researched, especially and recently by Martin Morard. There is in the first place Saint Thomas's knowledge of the conciliar acts of Ephesus and Chalcedon, available to him in the *Collectio Casinensis*, so called from a copy in the archives of Monte Cassino.⁵⁹ What is it a copy of? It is a translation of the acts of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon made in the sixth century by Rusticus, a deacon of the Roman Church and nephew of Pope Vigilius († 555). Where and in what manuscript Thomas would have read this collection

⁵⁷ Emery, "Le traité sur la Trinité," 18 ("The Treatise on the Trinity," 89: "The biblical arguments presented against heresies seem essentially an extension of patristic exegesis").

⁵⁸ Emery, "Le traité sur la Trinité," 21 (italics original; "Treatise on the Trinity," 93: "It would seem appropriate at this point to suggest that Thomas is here setting out to provide his own, personal account of Patristic and Conciliar writings based on scriptural and doctrinal sources. If therefore the heresies are dispelled, it is *because the doctrines involved are not what Scripture teaches*"). And he adds immediately following: "This illustrates very well, in a way peculiar to the *Summa contra gentiles*, the equivalence proposed in other texts of Thomas between sacred doctrine (theology) and Sacred Scripture."

⁵⁹ The *Collectio Casinensis* can be found in the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum [ACO]*, vols. I/3 and II/4, ed. E. Schwartz (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1929 and 1936).

of texts remains uncertain.⁶⁰ Saint Thomas's use of it, however, becomes prominent with the *Glossa continua in Matthaeum* (1263–1264), *Contra gentiles* IV (1264–1265), *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* (1264–1265), and thence into the great *Summa*.⁶¹ There is also his knowledge of the acts of Constantinople II in his Christology and exegesis, also groundbreaking for his time, and this, too, is researched by Morard.⁶²

The balance for *Contra gentiles* IV is as follows.⁶³ Chapter 24, on the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son, cites the *Collectio* once (Ephesus as received at Chalcedon) and Constantinople II once, which citation is a list of Fathers to be followed in matters doctrinal.⁶⁴ Chapter 25 cites the *Collectio* once (Chalcedon). Chapter 35, on Eutyches, cites the *Collectio* once (Chalcedon). Chapter 37, on the *habitus* theory of union, cites the *Collectio* once (Chalcedon). And chapter 38, on the *homo assumptus* theory, cites the *Collectio* four times, all from Ephesus, three of which are anathematisms from Cyril's Third Letter to Nestorius (*Salvatore nostro*), which Thomas understands to be received by Ephesus.⁶⁵ It is this

⁶⁰ Martin Morard, "Thomas d'Aquin lecteur des conciles," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 98 (2005): 211–365, at 349–350.

⁶¹ See the table in Morard, "Thomas d'Aquin lecteur," 246.

⁶² Martin Morard, "Une source de saint Thomas d'Aquin: Le deuxième concile de Constantinople (553)," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 81 (1997): 21–56, at 36.

⁶³ I am not including the three references to the Symbol of Faith, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, that St. Thomas makes in explaining the work of the Holy Spirit in the economy, where St. Thomas cites the creed as giving fitting descriptions of this work. In *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 20, nos. 4–5, the Holy Spirit is rightly called Lord (*dominum*) since the work of the government of the world is fittingly attributed to him as driving and moving things according as he is love (Marietti nos. 3572–73). Again, the Spirit is life giving (*vivificantem*) by the same reasoning in no. 6 of the same chapter (Marietti no. 3574). And in ch. 21, no. 6, the Spirit is justly said to speak through the prophets on the ground of 1 Cor 14:2, Matt 10:20, and 2 Pet 1:21 (Marietti no. 3578).

⁶⁴ See *Contra gentiles* IV, no. 6 (Marietti no. 3611): Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, Theophilus, John of Constantinople, Cyril, Leo, and Proclus. Thomas has already cited Athanasius, Cyril (from Ephesus), and Didymus for the *Filioque* at no. 5 (Marietti no. 3609). For Constantinople II and *Contra gentiles* IV, chs. 24 and 34, see Morard, "Une source," 22–28. The close association of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius in chs. 34 argues Thomas's dependence on Constantinople II. On the gradual recognition in the West of the authority of canons 4, 5, 8, and 9 of the last session, see Morard, "Une source," 53–54. These canons were important for St. Thomas's recognition of the heterodoxy of the *homo assumptus* theory of the Incarnation.

⁶⁵ In order of easiest accessibility, see the notes to chs. 35, 37, and 38 in the Marietti edition of 1961, and for chs. 24 and 25, see Emery, "Le traité de la Trinité," 32–34

knowledge of conciliar teaching from the *Collectio* that enables Thomas to reject the *homo assumptus* theory as certainly Nestorian and so certainly heretical.

The citation from the *Collectio* in chapter 25, a text from Chalcedon, has special relevance to our topic. Saint Thomas is answering the charge that the papal teaching of the *Filioque* violates conciliar prohibition to add anything to the creed.⁶⁶ Saint Thomas answers as follows.

The declaration of the Synod of Chalcedon says that the Fathers gathered at Constantinople corroborated the doctrine of the Synod of Nicea. This they did, “not as though to imply that the doctrine [of Nicea] was something less, but to declare by Scriptural testimonies the understanding of the Holy Spirit of their predecessors against those who attempted to reject that understanding.”⁶⁷

Earlier doctrine is “corroborated” not by any addition to it, which would be an addition to Catholic faith, which is impossible, since it is one and whole from the time of the apostles, but by spelling out what is “implicit” in it. Just after the above quotation, Thomas maintains that “the procession of the Holy Spirit is implicitly [*implicite*] contained in the Creed of Constantinople,” for what is understood of the Father must be understood of the Son, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. We have seen this idea

(“Treatise on the Trinity,” 106–14), and see Morard, “Thomas d’Aquin lecteur,” 271–73. See also the earlier work of G. Geenen, “En marge du Concile de Chalcedoine: Les textes du Quatrième Concile dans les oeuvres de Saint Thomas,” *Angelicum* 29 (1952): 43–59.

⁶⁶ See the decree of Ephesus in *ACO* I/3:133: “The Holy Synod decrees that no one is permitted to profess or to write or to compose another creed than the one that has been defined by the holy fathers who gathered at Nicea through the Holy Spirit; but those who dare to compose or profess another creed for those wanting to be turned to the acknowledgment of the truth, whether from the nations or from Judaism or from whatever other heresy, if they should be bishops or clerics, the bishops are to be deposed from the episcopacy and the clerics from the clerical state; but if they are laymen, they are to be anathematized [Decrevit sancta synodus aliam fidem nulli licere proferre vel conscribere vel componere praeter illam quae definita est a sanctis patribus qui Nicaeam per spiritum sanctum conveniunt; illos vero qui audent fidem aliam vel componere vel proferre volentibus converti ad agnitionem veritatis sive ex gentilitate sive ex Iudaismo sive ex alia qualibet haeresi, si episcopi quidem fuerint aut clerici, alienos esse episcopos ab episcopatu et clericos a clero; si vero laici sint, anathematizari]” (Ins. 11–17). St. Thomas would have seen something similar to this in his version of Rusticus.

⁶⁷ *Contra gentiles* IV, ch. 25, no. 4 (Marietti no. 3624).

before in the summary of the first question of the *ST* II. What it amounts to is finding conciliar warrant for the development of doctrine, a notable insight. Saint Thomas finishes his response to the accusation that the Latins have made “another” creed by observing that the authority of the pope moreover suffices for this addition for it is by his authority that “all the ancient councils were confirmed.”⁶⁸

The answer to those who deny the *Filioque* is a careful construction composed of appeal not only to Scripture, but quite explicitly to the orthodox Fathers, by name, and to conciliar teaching, named and express.⁶⁹ So also, for medieval Latin Christology (chs. 37 and 38) there is express appeal to the councils. In both cases, however, he is engaging people who certainly do recognize the authority of the universal Church, as well as the authority of patristic exegesis (especially for the question on the Spirit in ch. 24). The methodological strictures of the second chapter of *Contra gentiles* I, therefore, according to which one argues only by appeal to authorities recognized by one’s interlocutor, are observed. In chapter 35, where Saint Thomas expressly notes the condemnation of Eutyches by Chalcedon, anomalous? Not really, for Eutyches should have recognized the authority of Chalcedon even as he did the authority of Ephesus and Nicaea. We should remember too that, while Nestorius is shown to be erroneous by a lengthy review of scriptural passages from the New Testament, the argument against Eutyches proceeds mostly by way of reasoning on the meaning of “nature” and the theory of mixtures.

There are two questions that arise for us apropos of Saint Thomas’s appeal to conciliar teaching. First, we should ask more exactly what sort of knowledge Thomas thinks the councils gave him, and with what sort of authority. Second, what did his unusually detailed knowledge of conciliar teaching as measured against the ordinary custom of his time teach him about the manifestation of Catholic truth?

Since it is the authority of the universal Church, the authority of council and pope is superior to that of the Fathers but inferior to that of

⁶⁸ Whether papal authority is wholly satisfactorily related to the authority of councils in this fashion is something to take up on another occasion. Morard supposes Thomas’s attention to the procession of the Holy Spirit, the development in fullness of expression from one council to another, and papal authority is related to the prospects of reunion soon to be taken up at Second Council of Lyons (“Thomas lecteur,” 341–42, 352–53).

⁶⁹ In addition to Scripture and the Tradition of Fathers and councils, there is also a recourse to reason. See the exposition of Emery, “Le traité de la Trinité,” 20–21 (“Treatise on the Trinity,” 93–106).

Scripture.⁷⁰ As to the last:

Someone might think that that the definition of the aforesaid council [Nicaea] is to be preferred to the authority of the letter of the Old or New Testaments, which is altogether false. It must be understood that through conciliar teaching, a true understanding is received from Sacred Scripture. Only Catholics have this understanding, although the letter of Sacred Scripture is common to Catholics and heretics and Jews.⁷¹

“What is this to say,” Morard asks, “if not that the councils are conceived of as places of the ecclesial reception of scriptural Revelation and, therefore, of the emergence of dogma?”⁷² They are “providential occasions where, under the pressure of errors that must be eradicated,” the teaching authority of the Church truly declares the teaching of Scripture.⁷³ Councils give us the truth of the Scriptures, to which they are strictly subservient.

As to the second question, Thomas’s more intimate knowledge of the course of conciliar teaching—never dropping anything, but corroborating by the authority of Scripture what went before and drawing out implications of what had previously been said—this contains, according to Morard, “the seed of a consciousness, if not of development of dogma, at least of the historicity of its explication.”⁷⁴ The conciliar argument for development, noted above, we might say, is pregnant with the recognition that historicity and authority are not opposed, but conspire to maintain the Church in the truth of the Gospel.

Understanding What Faith Affirms

So far, we have been answering the following question with Saint Thomas: Why does the Church teach what she does as Catholic truth? The answer is that she teaches what she does about the Trinity and the Incarnation because that is what Scripture as understood by the Fathers and confirmed by the councils teaches. The manifestation of Catholic truth is therefore in the first place a showing of what it is we must assent to as taught by the word of God, read the way the Fathers read it, especially as in opposition to heretics, and summed up at strategic points by general councils of the Church.

⁷⁰ Superior to the Church Fathers: *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 12; q. 147, a. 3, ad 3.

⁷¹ Aquinas, *Contra errores Graecorum* I, ch. 32.

⁷² Morard, “Thomas d’Aquin lecteur,” 237.

⁷³ Morard, “Thomas l d’Aquin ecteur,” 237.

⁷⁴ Morard, “Thomas d’Aquin lecteur,” 238.

But the *Contra gentiles* teaches more than this about the manifestation of Catholic truth. Embedded in the text are certain questions that ask how we ought to *understand* what truths the Church teaches about the Trinity and the Incarnation. So, following the vindication of the generation of the Son from the Father against Arius in chapter 9, there is chapter 11—"How generation is to be understood in divinity"—preceded by rational arguments against the Incarnation (ch. 10) which are answered (ch. 14) only after a consideration of the Second Person as Wisdom and in his uniqueness (chs. 12 and 13), a consideration parasitic on chapter 11. Chapter 11, which understands the procession of the Son by analogy with the procession of the interior word in human cognition, is therefore strategic.⁷⁵ Chapter 19 asks how we must *understand* what is said about the Holy Spirit in Scripture, with the following chapters on the effects of the Holy Spirit in creation and in the economy of salvation parasitic thereon (chs. 20–21).⁷⁶ The analogy according to which the Spirit is in God the way the beloved is in the beloved dominates half of the treatment of the second procession, just as the analogy of the interior word dominates half of what is devoted to the treatment of the first.

Chapter 40, for its part, asks how we must *understand* what the Church teaches about the Incarnation on the basis of Scripture, summarized in chapter 39, and the understanding is developed by considering the humanity of Jesus as the conjoined instrument of the Word.⁷⁷ There follows a long consideration about various suitabilities relative to the Incarnation, crowned with a great argument as to the fundamental *convenientia* of God becoming man in the first place in chapter 54 (with objections before and solutions following in 53 and 55). Again, the history of heresy and the development of doctrine take up about half the treatment of the mystery, and the more metaphysically informed understanding of it the other half.

⁷⁵ On slow maturation of this analogy in St. Thomas's Trinitarian theology, see Harm Goris, "Theology and Theory of the Word in Aquinas: Understanding Augustine by Innovating Aristotle," in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 62–78. And see Emery, "La traité de la Trinité," 21–27 ("Treatise on the Trinity," 97–98).

⁷⁶ See Emery, "La traité de la Trinité," 28–30 ("Treatise on the Trinity," 102–6).

⁷⁷ For the sources of this analogy in St. Thomas, John Damascene, and St. Cyril of Alexandria, see Gilles Emery, O.P., "A Note on St. Thomas and the Eastern Fathers," *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person. Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 193–207, at 198–202, and the extended study of Theophil Tschipke, *L'humanité du Christ comme instrument de salut de la divinité* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003).

These chapters dedicated to understanding fulfill the second duty of a master of *sacra doctrina* that Saint Thomas lays out in one of his *Quodlibetal* questions. The first duty is to make known the truth, to remove any doubt about it by appeal to the relevant authorities. This Thomas does in the chapters devoted to establishing Catholic doctrine (chs. 2–3, 15, 27) and refuting heresy (chs. 4–9, 16–18, 23, 28–39). But the chapters referenced just above undertake a second duty, ordered not to removing error but to so instructing the hearers “that they might be led to an understanding of the truth.” And this occurs by an investigation of “the roots of the truth, making the hearers to know how what is said may be true.” If this is omitted, the arc of learning and the desire to know fails to attain its last end.

If the master determines the question by authorities alone, the hearer will be sure that things are so, but he will acquire nothing belonging to science or understanding and will go away with an empty mind.⁷⁸

Even if the understanding be non-demonstrative and imperfect, partial and analogous, as it must be when the questions are of God, answering questions for understanding the mysteries belongs to the manifestation of Catholic truth. For Saint Thomas, Catholic truth is not *sufficiently* manifested until there is some penetration of its intrinsic intelligibility, some pursuit of what moderns call “systematic theology.” The truth is not sufficiently manifested if we stop with showing merely that it must be affirmed. It is not sufficiently manifested until its splendor is manifested in some initial contemplation of its integral and proportionate parts intelligibly related to one another.

If what we have been showing in the previous sections of this essay is Saint Thomas’s understanding of the fact of the development of doctrine and how it develops, we see here at this point the *telos* of knowing this development and so knowing the necessity of affirming it relative to the authoritative voices, first of Scripture and next of the Fathers and the Church. Its *telos* is to enable us to pass over to a contemplation of the mysteries themselves, unto conforming ourselves to their own intelligibility and unto the praise of God. Doctrine develops unto the *intellectus fidei*.

This second duty of the master of theology is moreover expressly adverted to in the introduction to the *Contra gentiles*, where the point of attaining such understanding is specified more fully. For the manifestation

⁷⁸ *Quodlibet* IV, q. 9, a. 3 (my translation).

of truths of faith that exceed reason's capacity to demonstrate them and that transcend the truths of books I–III, there is another way beyond the appeal to authorities.

There are certain likely arguments [*rationes verisimiles*] that should be brought forth in order to make the divine truth known. This should be done for the training and consolation of the faithful [*ad fidelium exercitium et solatium*], and not with any idea of refuting those who are adversaries.⁷⁹

Exercitium, the work of disciplined study, attains to this manifestation at the level of understanding by the discovery of likely arguments, probable reasons, which in turn provide *solatium* to the faithful—consolation, encouragement, the joy of the wayfarer looking ahead to his homeland.⁸⁰ The analogies in book IV of the proceeding word in human cognition (ch. 11), of the presence of the beloved in the human lover (ch. 19), and of the relation of a principal to an instrumental cause (ch. 41) provide just such similitudes of the mysteries of faith. Last, the certitude of the remission of sins and of our hope for the beatific vision for those who become friends with God in Christ makes the Incarnation very *conveniens* (54).

With two comments we can end this section. First, such verisimilitudes of divine reality and probable arguments for divine providence do not alienate theology from Scripture. Rather, the analogy of the human interior word allows Aquinas in chapter 11 to conclude from the Second Person's status as Word to his reality as Son, and then also as Image, and finally as Wisdom (ch. 12). The analogy provides a way to knit together large pieces of scriptural testimony. It also enables a detailed exegesis within chapter 11 of John 1:1. So also, the understanding of the Holy Spirit as proceeding love governs the roundup of his works in creation and grace (chs. 20–22). The understanding of the humanity of Christ as instrument of his divinity (ch. 41) presides over the contemplation of his deeds and works in chapters 54 and 55.

Second, such verisimilitudes and probable reasons serve also in the refutation of heresy, for though they make no demonstration of Catholic truth, they serve to show that arguments to the contrary are but probable, and that unbelievers should not think Catholic truth is impossible (see

⁷⁹ *Contra gentiles* I, ch. 9, no. 2 (Marietti no. 54).

⁸⁰ For the sense of *exercitium* and *consolatio* here see Gilles Emery, O.P., "Trinitarian Theology as Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas," in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, 1–40, at 26–27.

chs. 10, 16, 40, 53). These are the final but necessary steps in the perfect contrast between revealed truth and heretical error.⁸¹ They therefore serve in a unique way to further the articulation of Catholic doctrine—to develop it.⁸²

Concluding Remarks

(1) For Saint Thomas, conciliar definitions amount to strategic summaries of a long contemplation of revealed mysteries communicated to believers in the Scriptures. The universal Church speaks in general councils, and therefore their authority is unmatched as a declaration of the truth of the Scriptures, of the nature of the mysteries. If formulating the definition is developing a doctrine, then the development of doctrine is in the first place an ecclesial work, an ecclesial utterance.

The active subject of development is therefore in some sense the Church herself as a whole. If it takes two or three hundred years for a unit of development to be realized (from Ebion to Sabellius to Arius, say), the abiding subject of developing the expressions of faith responsive to heresy transcends any individual Christian, any individual Father.

(2) For Saint Thomas, the conciliar interpretation of Scripture, and so the contemplation of the mysteries whence the definition arises, is carried out on behalf of the Church especially by the Fathers of the Church. His own marshalling of Scripture in the *Contra gentiles* is a marshalling of Scripture as understood by the Fathers, especially in their rebuttal of heresy, even if he omits the citations he gives in his more regularly composed and constructed university works.

No Father speaks with the authority of a general council, of course.⁸³ Still, Saint Thomas constructs his own mirror of scriptural witnesses in which the truth is beheld just as did the councils themselves, marshalling patristic witness, which is to say patristic interpretation of Scripture, unto the manifestation of Catholic truth. This is evident already from the time of Ephesus according to the record of its acts. The very way in which Ephesus makes its decision informs us of this fact, moreover, since it consists simply in the approval of Cyril's Second letter to Nestorius, a letter whose teaching turns on nothing except on how to read Scripture in the light of previous conciliar and patristic witness, the Creed of Nicaea and so the witness of its holy 318 fathers.

⁸¹ See "Trinitarian Theology," 19, 23–24, 35.

⁸² Think, for instance, of the introduction of the satisfaction of Christ in Trent's Decree on Justification.

⁸³ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8.

Why do the first great readers of Scripture have the authority they do, both for later Fathers and for Saint Thomas? The Fathers enact the obvious truth enunciated by Joseph Ratzinger to the effect that no revelation is made until it is received by faith, no teaching is accomplished unless someone learns, no word is spoken unless it is heard.⁸⁴ The Fathers, as a whole, are the first hearers of the word completed in Christ. They are therefore the best witnesses for us as to what really was said, taught, revealed by God. That the Fathers function in this way for Saint Thomas is revealed to us most clearly, perhaps, by the *Catena aurea*, the immense task of correlating the four Gospels with the patristic understanding thereof, verse by verse for each Gospel. The volume on Matthew's Gospel is contemporaneous with the last book of the *Contra gentiles*.

(3) The patristic reading of Scripture, and so the emergence of doctrinal definitions, takes place only over the course of many years, even centuries as has just been noted, as provoked by and in contrast to heretical readings opposed to themselves and not only to Scripture. The very arrangement of the chapters of the *Contra gentiles* devoted to the generation of the Son reveals this, as we have seen.

That it takes many years to come to a more perfect understanding of Catholic truth in contrast with heretical error is a recognition by Saint Thomas of what we today call the historicity of truth. Which should be no cause for surprise, once we attend to the discursive nature of rational mind which Saint Thomas labored to point out again and again in his treatment of man.⁸⁵ The distinction between truth and error becomes manifest only in many distinctions between truth and opposing errors, errors that are opposed to themselves as well as to the truth. Making distinctions, however, is a labor immersed in time.⁸⁶

Of course, it is by faith we know that the fourth- and fifth-century and subsequent expressions of her faith by the Church are expressions of apostolic faith. However, the history of the course of the Church's response to heresy such as Thomas gives us in the first half of the last book of the *Contra gentiles* really does serve to display this identity, although it does not display it certainly except to the satisfaction of a historical reason that is an instrument of faith, a servant.

⁸⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, "Importance of the Fathers for the Structure of Faith," in *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 133–52.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., *ST I*, q. 85, a. 5.

⁸⁶ See Robert Sokolowski, "Making Distinctions," in *Pictures, Quotations, and Distinctions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 55–91.

4. Just because development of doctrine is a matter chiefly of the reading of Scripture, Saint Thomas can be very relaxed about the terms of the conciliar definitions themselves. He does not belabor them, but lets the first building blocks, the basic distinctions by which we constitute the world, emerge naturally (a basic word!) from the reading itself. So words like “essence” and “nature” are introduced in chapter 7, on the generation of the Son. It turns out, lo and behold, that it is easy to sum up the reading of many Scriptures already canvassed with such words. When we need a distinction between a thing and a principle of a thing, between a hypostasis and a nature, that too shows up dutifully but quietly in chapter 39.

The point to such an exposition of Catholic truth is to emphasize that we want to hear the Scriptures, we want to hear the word of God, and we do not want the word of the Church, the word she formulates, to usurp the place of God’s word or obscure its primacy.

(5) Within Saint Thomas’s reading of the development of doctrine relative to the Trinity and the Incarnation, within the historicity of truth his acknowledgement of the slow reading of Scripture presents to us, there is also a systematic, logical pattern he discerns. Historicity, dependent as it is on matter, does not mean an unintelligible course of things. Historicity is not chaos, and it turns out that there is a sort of order embedded in the historical course of heresy, and so of doctrine. Thus, in treating the Incarnation in the *Contra gentiles*, Saint Thomas deals first with the natures to be united in the Hypostatic Union, because that reflects the course of historical error: an error first about the divinity of Christ (ch. 28), then about the humanity of Christ (chs. 29 and following), as to his body then as to his soul, and then follows the question of union (34). But this is an ordered sequence, one congruent with the very nature of the mystery, which serves at the same time as a framework for the orderly exposition of *sacra doctrina*. Saint Thomas reproduces the elements of this order in another sequence in the *Summa theologiae*, but he sees it also in the very history of heresy and Catholic truth from the second century to the fifth.

(6) The history of error does not stop with the age of the Fathers and the first five councils. It continues into Thomas’s own age, and surfaces in medieval opinions about the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. Here, the remedy once given for Nestorianism proves still powerful, but Thomas, because of his knowledge of history, is the first to see this.

(7) Last, the *telos* of knowing the development of doctrine is found in understanding the mysteries. The historically informed presentation of heresy and orthodoxy is crowned by a metaphysically informed contemplation of the mystery, a contemplation that satisfies the desire of the believer not only to know what is so but also to know how it can be so. So to speak,

the historically informed presentation wants so to be crowned.

But also, we would be naïve to think that the understanding of the mystery does not exercise its own influence on the presentation of history and heresy, as we see in how Saint Thomas shapes up the history of Christological heresy in terms of the orthodoxy it subverts in chapters 28–36.

* * * * *

Saint Thomas is an attentive student of the development of doctrine. What he pays attention to makes this development both historically and theologically intelligible. What he pays attention to can serve as a lesson as to what we ought to pay attention to also. N.V