

“He Who Eats Me Will Live Because of Me”: Eucharistic Indwelling and Aquinas’s Johannine Theology of the Missions of the Divine Persons

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Introduction

In the Bread of Life Discourse of John 6, Jesus begins his teaching by stating that he is the true bread from heaven sent from God to give life to the world. After “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι)¹ boast that Moses gave their fathers manna to eat in the wilderness, Jesus makes a contrast between the manna in the wilderness and himself as the “bread of life” (6:35). While the title “Bread of Life” carries a metaphorical sense, Jesus climaxes his discourse by

¹ For the difficulties in translating οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, see John Bergsma, “Qumran and the Concept of Pan-Israelite Restoration,” *Letter & Spirit* 8 (2012–2013): 145–59. Bergsma, following the work of Shemaryahu Cohen, notes that the word “Jew” has become an exclusively religious term. For this reason, “It should be used with great care when translating the Hebrew *yehûdî* and the Greek *ioudaîos*, because in antiquity these terms more commonly mean a ‘Judean’ in an ethno-geographic or political sense, not a ‘Jew’ in the religious sense” (147). Bergsma further states: “The English term ‘Jew’ is often used (inaccurately and anachronistically) to describe Judeans who are merely ethnically or politically associated with Judea, as well as Israelites of any time period. This confusion begins already with Josephus, who employs *ioudaîoi* indiscriminately to describe the people of Israel back to the time of Samuel at least (e.g. Ant. 6:30 *et passim*). Despite the antiquity of this conflation of terminology, it should be avoided, inasmuch as it leads to confusion and blurs the distinction between ancient Israel and the various forms of Judaism in the minds of students and even scholars themselves” (147).

insisting that believers eat of (ἐσθίω) or gnaw on (τρώγω) his flesh and drink his blood. Then, in John 6:57, Jesus makes the startling claim: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who eats [τρώγω] me will live because of me.” Jesus, here, connects his mission with the giving of his flesh as food for eternal life. At the same time, Jesus declares in John 17:3 that eternal life is predicated on the knowledge of God the Father and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. There seems to be a tension here in John’s Gospel. Do we have eternal life by eating or by knowing?

This article will explore the gift of eternal life communicated through the sacramental eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood and its relation to our coming to know the Father and the Son. It will be divided into two main parts. The first part will explore this as revealed in the text of the Gospel of John by examining what it means “to know God.” Next, I will show that Jesus has the power to give eternal life because he is Life itself and that John points to the root of this power as being derived from Jesus’s procession from the Father. Then, I will take up Jesus’s mutual abiding/indwelling language in John 6 and elsewhere in the Gospel and how this contributes to bringing eternal life to believers. The second part will show how St. Thomas’s teaching on the missions of the divine persons further clarifies Jesus’s teaching in the Gospel of John that eternal life comes about through both eating Christ’s flesh and coming to the knowledge of the Father and the Son and also gives greater theological insight into the Johannine theology of the Eucharist as the source of eternal life.

Gospel of John

John 17 and the Relational Name of the Father and the Son in Relation to Eternal Life

In John 17, Jesus prays from the vantage point of already having completed (17:4; τελειώσας) the work that the Father has given him to do. The work that Jesus speaks of is both a past event, consisting of the signs that witness that the Father has sent him (see 5:36; τελειώσω), but also the future event of the Cross (see 19:30; τετέλεσται).² Here, Jesus requests glorification by the Father in order that he, as Son, may glorify the Father in return. This mutual glorification is rooted in the power (ἐξουσίαν) that the Father has given to the Son over all flesh—the power to grant eternal life (17:2). Jesus

² See Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 403–4: “In his prayer Jesus will speak of the past and the future from an eternal perspective, but it is all grounded in the present, at this particular climactic point in salvation history: *Father, the [hour] has come* (v.1)” (emphasis original).

then defines eternal life in 17:3 as “to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.” There is an intimate connection, here, between knowing the Father (“the only true God”) and Jesus. Eternal life is not merely knowledge of the Father, but knowledge of the Father *as the one who sent the Son*.³ How does one know the Father? John 17 suggests that it is through the revelation of his *name*. There is a repeated refrain in John 17 of Jesus making known the Father’s name (17:6, 26) and keeping them in this name (17:11, 12). Looking back in the Gospel, we can recall that in John 5:43, Jesus associates the “Father’s name” with his mission: “I have come in my Father’s name.” The same can be said of John 10:25: “The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness to me.” Eternal life then seems to be connected with the revelation of the “name of the Father.” Yet, at the same time, as Joshua Coutts has noted, there is also a “strong emphasis on Jesus’s own name which pervades the Gospel of John: Followers ‘believe’ in (3.18) and pray in his name (14.14), suffer for his name (15.21), and have ‘life’ in his name (20.31), and the Spirit-Paraclete is sent in his name (14.26).”⁴ Given John’s emphasis on the interrelation of the Father and the Son (see 5:23, 38; 6:57; 7:16; 10:36; 12:44, 45; 14:7, 10, 11; 17:10, 21, 23) and Jesus’s emphasis on doing nothing *from himself*, but only what he has received/seen/heard from the Father, we can suggest that the “name of the Father” is not simply “Father,” but is rather *relational*—his name is “Father of the Son.” Likewise, the name of the Son is not simply “Son,” but “Son of the Father.”

Knowing God

Jesus, therefore, has the power (ἐξουσίαν) given to him by the Father to grant eternal life (17:2) to those who have come to know that Jesus is the *Son of the Father* and that God is the *Father of the Son*.⁵ When we compare John 17 with the prologue to the Gospel, we receive even further clarification on the nature of the eternal life that the Son has been sent to bring.⁶ John 1:12 tells us that to those who receive Jesus and believe *in his name*, Jesus gives power (ἐξουσίαν) to become children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ). As we have

³ See Whitacre, *John*, 407.

⁴ Joshua J. F. Coutts, *The Divine Name in the Gospel of John: Significance and Impetus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 126.

⁵ See Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 461: “This is not a gnostic promise of a saving ‘knowledge,’ but the promise of life that can be had by those who believe that Jesus Christ has told the saving story of God (cf. 1:18). The believer has eternal life by knowing the God revealed by Jesus, the *logos* of God. The revelation that makes eternal life possible for ‘all flesh’ (vv.2–3) has taken place in Jesus’ revealing words and works.” See also Whitacre, *John*, 406.

⁶ See Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 461.

suggested above, to believe in the name of Jesus is to believe in Jesus as *Son of the Father*. Being “kept in the name” of the Father, then, as Jesus prays for the disciples in John 17:11, is parallel to the formula in John 1:12 of “receiving” and “believing in the name” of the Son. To receive and believe in the Son and to be kept in the name of the Father is to *know* (γινώσκειν) the only true God (the Father), and Jesus Christ (the Son) whom he has sent (17:3).⁷ To those who know Jesus as the *Son of the Father* Jesus will give the gift of eternal life.⁸ Yet, how does one *know* God in a way that leads to eternal life? Is saving knowledge simply a recognition or perception that Jesus is the Son of God the Father—speculative knowledge—or is it something more?⁹

We can begin by stating that the knowledge that Jesus is sent to bring is more than the merely speculative knowledge that Jesus is the *Son of the Father* and that the Father is the *Father of the Son*. Surely, this is an aspect of what it means to have the saving knowledge that brings about eternal life, but it does not exhaust what Jesus speaks of in John 17:3. Further, the knowledge that Jesus gives is something that he himself possesses. That is, Jesus makes the Father known because he himself knows the Father (8:55; 17:25). This intimate knowledge of the Father comes from Jesus’s mutual indwelling with the Father—Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him (10:38; 14:10, 11, 20). Due to this mutual indwelling which gives the Son intimate knowledge of the Father, to know the Son is also to know the Father (8:19; 14:7). Thus, C. K. Barrett notes:

Knowledge of God cannot be severed from knowledge of his incarnate Son. . . . Saving knowledge is rooted in knowledge of a historical

⁷ See Bertil Gärtner, “The Pauline and Johannine Idea of ‘to Know God’ against the Hellenistic Background,” *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 2 (1968): 209–31, at 224: “According to the Prologue it is only through a transformation or re-creation that a man becomes capable of sharing the eternal life, the blessings of the heavenly world, a sharing that in the gospel as a whole is called ‘to know God.’ The process of transformation into the new existence is ‘to become a child of God.’” See also Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 17, lec. 1, no. 2187.

⁸ See Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2, bk. 6, ch. 5, trans. Edward Pusey (Oxford: James Parker, 1874), 490: “Very necessary then was it, for our Lord Jesus Christ to tell us, that those who have been called through faith to sonship and eternal life, not only ought to learn that the true God is One only, but that He is also a Father; and is the Father of One Who became flesh for our sakes, and Who was sent to restore the corrupted nature of rational beings, that is, of mankind.”

⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 491: “According to v. 3, the life which [Jesus] bestows is nothing other than the knowledge of God and of himself as the Revealer.”

person; it is therefore objective and at the same time a personal relation.¹⁰

This knowledge of the incarnate Son comes to the disciples through the mutual indwelling of the Son in the disciples and the disciples in the Son. Just as the Son knows the Father through the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father, so also that knowledge of the Father is mediated through the Son to the disciples in the mutual indwelling of the Son and the disciples. In John 10:14, Jesus teaches that those who are truly his sheep know Jesus and he knows them. Then, in 14:19–20, Jesus elaborates on how this mutual knowledge of one another will occur. After Jesus returns to the Father by way of his death, resurrection, and ascension, he will return to his disciples through the Holy Spirit. In that day, through the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in his disciples, Jesus promises that they will know that he is in the Father and that they are in him, and he in them.¹¹ Jesus makes a parallel statement later, in 17:25–26:

O righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you; and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.¹²

In revealing that he is the *Son*, Jesus has made known the Father's name as *Father of the Son*, but he will further make it known (γνωρίσω) in a way that

¹⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 504. See also Rodney Whitacre, *John*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 407: "Eternal life is not just a knowledge of God as revealed by the Son; it includes a knowledge of the Son himself."

¹¹ See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 423: "Knowledge of God which is life eternal is mediated by an historical transaction. Only through the 'departure' and 'return' of Christ, that is, through His actual death on the cross and His actual resurrection, is the life He brings liberated for the life of the world. If the goal is the unity of mankind with God, it is only by dying that Christ can 'gather the scattered children of God'; it is only by being 'lifted up' on the cross that He can 'draw all men to Him.' The prayer, 'that they may all be one, I in them and thou in me,' finds fulfilment only because He who offers it has laid down His life for His friends."

¹² πᾶτερ δίκαιε, καὶ ὁ κόσμος σε οὐκ ἔγνω, ἐγὼ δὲ σε ἔγνω, καὶ οὗτοι ἔγνωσαν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας· καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνωρίσω, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἡ καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς. Trans. from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

goes beyond mere speculative knowledge. It will be known in an experiential or affective way through the mutual love of the Father and the Son, that is the Holy Spirit, which is given to the disciples, causing Jesus to be in them. Bertil Gärtner, who sees John's teaching on this type of knowledge as a taking up and deepening of the Hellenistic principle of "like is known by like," concludes:

"To know God" is thus an expression of "like by like": only when the Paraclete-*Pneuma* had arrived, was the qualitative presupposition of knowing God created.¹³

The Holy Spirit dwelling in believers makes them have an immediate experiential knowledge of the Son, which through the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son gives experiential knowledge of the Father.¹⁴ It is this knowledge that gives eternal life.

In the sections that follow, I will further flesh out how eternal life is given through this knowledge that is communicated to believers by Jesus. I will show that John presents Eucharistic eating and drinking as the source of this experiential knowledge through the mutual indwelling of Jesus and believers that it brings about.

Jesus as Life Itself in John

The power that Jesus has to give eternal life is not a power that is outside of him. Rather, Jesus imparts eternal life because he is *life itself*. In John 14:6, along with Jesus declaring that he is the way (ἡ ὁδός) and the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια), he also declares that he is the life (ἡ ζωή). Earlier, in the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus describes himself as "the Bread of Life" (ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς; 6:35) who will give life to the world (6:33). Jesus as life itself has already been established at the beginning of John's prologue in 1:3–4, where the Evangelist states: "That which had come to be in him was life, and the

¹³ Gärtner, "Pauline and Johannine Idea," 226.

¹⁴ See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, Anchor Bible 29a (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 752: "For John . . . knowing God is not a purely intellectual matter but involves a life of obedience to God's commandments and of loving communion with fellow Christians (1 John i 3, iv 8, v 3). This is in agreement with the Hebrew use of the verb 'to know' with its connotation of immediate experience and intimacy." See also George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 297: "Such knowledge advances beyond the intellect to include relationship and communion; its revelation by the Son entails entry into the *koinonia* (fellowship) of the Father and the Son, which is the heart of life in the saving sovereignty (cf. Rev 21:3; 22:3–5)."

life was the light of men.”¹⁵ John began the first verses of his Gospel with an allusion to the creation of natural life in Genesis,¹⁶ but here in verses 3–4 and following he shifts to tell of the new creation to supernatural life.¹⁷ As the Word who was with God and is God (v. 1), this *life* who is the light of men, has come into the world to overcome the darkness of sin (v. 5) and to enlighten all men (v. 9) through the gift of eternal life (cf. 4:10).

Rooted in His Procession from the Father

Jesus as life itself is rooted in his procession from the Father. In John 5:26, Jesus tells his interlocutors that as the Father has life in himself, so also has the Father given to the Son to have life in himself (οὕτως καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ἔδωκεν ζωὴν ἑχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ).¹⁸ St. Thomas comments:

That has life in itself which has an essential, non-participated life, i.e., that which is itself life. Now in every genus of things, that which is something through its essence is the cause of those things that are it by participation, as fire is the cause of all things afire. And so, that which is life through its essence, is the cause and principle of all life

¹⁵ For this reading, favored by Nestle-Aland 28, see Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 6–7. See also Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Michael Tait (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 38–39.

¹⁶ See Beutler, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 40: “The flashback of the first verse of John’s prologue to the first verses of the Bible, Gen 1:1–2:4a, is clear. Both texts open with ‘in the beginning.’ They counterpose ‘light’ and ‘darkness.’ To the phrase ‘God spoke’ of Genesis corresponds the ‘Word’ of the prologue. Both texts speak of ‘coming into being’ (ἐγένετο is the most frequent verb form in the first creation account). Both also speak of ‘life’ as the work of God (in Genesis, applied to the creatures, Gen 1:20–30).”

¹⁷ See Beutler, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 39: “The transition from the creation ‘through’ (διὰ) the Logos in v. 3a to the γέγονεν ἐν at the beginning of v. 4, over which Bultmann stumbled, can be explained through the indication that v. 4 is precisely not dealing with the creation any longer but with salvation ‘in’ the Logos. . . . With ‘light’ and ‘life,’ two central catchwords of Johannine theology are introduced. Just as Jesus gives life (cf. 3:16, 36), and indeed is life (14:6), so he is also the light of the world (9:5; 8:12; 12:46). The incarnation of the divine Word is not directly expressed yet, but nonetheless appears to be presupposed here.”

¹⁸ See Beutler, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 156: “In v. 26, the evangelist abandons for a moment the traditional world of eschatological notions and speaks of Christ as the source of life in more theological language. The Father has life in himself, and he has also handed over this power to the Son. Here the prologue of the Gospel comes to mind (John 1:4), where the divine word appears as bearer and source of life.”

in living things. Accordingly, if something is to be a principle of life, it must be life through its essence.¹⁹

To have life through essence is the prerogative of God alone. Thus, Jesus signals that he, too, is God, just as the Father is God, and so is life itself. In John 6:57, Jesus likewise speaks of the life he has received from the Father and adds to it the concept of his mission from the Father: "As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father . . ." (καθώς ἀπέστειλέν με ὁ ζῶν πατήρ καὶ γὰρ ζῶ διὰ τὸν πατέρα . . .). The Father has sent the Son to communicate to man that life which is natural to God through the gift of himself (cf. 3:16–17; 6:53–57). The life that comes to man through the gift of the Son is the abundant life (10:10) that flows from the believer's status as a child of God in the Kingdom of God (see 1:12; 3:5).

*Life of Jesus Communicated to Believers through
Mutual Abiding/Indwelling*

The central question, however, is how one becomes a child of God in the Kingdom of God and so come to possess this gift of abundant life that the Son is sent to give. The answer is that this status as children of God is mediated *through* Jesus, by the Spirit/Paraclete (see John 14:15–18, 25–26; 15:26; 16:17–15),²⁰ and it is received and sustained, according to John, through the sacramental life of the Church, primarily through baptism and the Eucharist. In John 3, when Nicodemus comes to speak to Jesus under the cover of night, Jesus reveals to him how one is to receive this power of becoming children of God, which here is spoken of in terms of entering into the Kingdom of God (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ).²¹ Only by being born ἄνωθεν (anew or from above) of water and the Spirit (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος) is entrance into the family/

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 5, no 782. Unless otherwise noted, English quotes from *Super Ioan* are trans. Fabian Larcher and James Weisheipl (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 287.

²⁰ See Dodd, *Interpretation*, 187–200.

²¹ See Matthew Vellanicakal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1977), 213: "According to Jn 3:11–21 the kingdom of God is realized in Christ as Son of God. Apart from the Prologue, this passage is the only Gospel text in which Jn uses the term μονογενής. Here it occurs twice, and in v. 18 it occurs in the typical Johannine formula πιστεύειν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. Thus the imperfect faith expressed with a similar formula in 2:23, passing through the supernatural begetting described in 3:3–10, is transformed into authentic faith expressed in 3:18. So with faith in Christ as the only Begotten Son of God, one sees the Kingdom of God realized (v. 3) and enters into it (v. 5). So entering into the Kingdom of God means for Jn entering into a life of faith in, and communion with,

Kingdom of God possible (3:3, 5).²² On the part of Nicodemus, we see a bit of Johannine irony. Nicodemus is right in thinking that Jesus is speaking of becoming a child again, but he is mistaken in thinking that this will occur at the physical level, by entering back into one's mother's womb. Jesus, on the other hand, has a spiritual, sacramental birth in mind, whereby through the power of the Holy Spirit and the waters of baptism one is able to receive rebirth. For Jesus, this rebirth of water and Spirit is absolutely necessary for becoming a child of God and entrance into the Kingdom of God.²³ The same is true for the sacrament that completes divine begetting, the Eucharist.

Once we have entered initially into the family of God as children, our sonship must be sustained. Jesus Christ gives us an imperative that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, for if we do not, we will have no life in us (John 6:53). In the words of the Council of Trent, "[Christ] wished . . . that this sacrament be received as the soul's spiritual food which would nourish and strengthen those who live by the life of him."²⁴ How, then, does the act

Christ who is the Son of God, namely, to become children of God participating in His sonship."

²² See Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM, 1953), 75–76: "The relation of *rebirth* to *Baptism* is already a common conception in the early Church. The important Pauline chapter on Baptism, Romans 6, speaks in v. 4 of 'newness of life,' in which we walk, through Baptism into Christ's death. In Tit. 3.5, we have indeed a direct parallel with our passage: 'He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' But quite apart from the generally accepted connexion between rebirth and Baptism, a direct connexion is here expressed in Jesus' answer to Nicodemus' question in v. 4, a question which reveals Nicodemus' complete lack of understanding. He makes the meaning of ἀνωθεν γεννηθῆναι precise in that he now quite clearly speaks of Baptism (v. 5): 'Except a man be born of water and the spirit . . .' Bultmann and some other exegetes think, however, that the words ὕδατος καὶ should be struck out. But neither textual criticism nor the sense permit such an omission, for it is important for the author here, as throughout the whole Gospel, that the Spirit is present in material elements just as the *Logos* became flesh. But obviously there is a quite special connexion here with the Sacrament."

²³ See Vellanickal, *Divine Sonship*, 168–169: "Jesus announces a general and universal condition that is relevant to all men without exception. This condition of supernatural begetting is conceived as a fact that takes place at a definitive moment in the life of men. The categorical denial οὐ δύναται followed by the aorist infinitive suggests the absolute necessity of this spiritual begetting, even to enter the condition of seeing and entering the Kingdom of God." See also, Michael Dauphinais, "Christ and the Metaphysics of Baptism in the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Commentary on John*," in *Rediscovering Aquinas and the Sacraments: Studies in Sacramental Theology*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2009), 14–27, esp. 23–24.

²⁴ Council of Trent, sess. 13, ch. 2: "Sumi autem voluit sacramentum hoc tamquam

of partaking of the Eucharist give us everlasting life? Verses 56 and 57 of John 6 reveal the answer: "The one eating my flesh and drinking my blood abides [μένει] in me, and I in him" (v. 56).

Christ promises us that if we eat his flesh, then he will abide in us in such a way that we in return abide in him. Thomas Dubay explains:

The abiding is more than sacramental. It is indwelling. . . . The word, "abiding," indicates some sort of permanent duration, and yet the sacramental presence is merely transitory. The sense seems to be: "If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, I will be in you not only at that moment, but more, I will dwell in you abidingly, that is, I will live permanently in you as a result of your sacramental nourishment."²⁵

As an explanation of the efficacy of the mutual indwelling/abiding described in verse 65, John 6:57 reveals that the gift of Jesus's flesh and blood in the Eucharist is an essential part of his mission to give life to the world: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who eats me will live because of me." As Raymond Brown remarks:

In its brevity vs. 57 is a most forceful expression of the tremendous claim that Jesus gives *man a share in God's own life*, an expression far more real than the abstract formulation of II Pet i 4. And so it is that, while the Synoptic Gospels record the institution of the Eucharist, it is John who explains what the Eucharist does for the Christian.²⁶

This is made possible due to the nature of the flesh that we receive in the Eucharist, namely, flesh that has been united to the Word and glorified in his resurrection. Cyril of Alexandria states:

And since the flesh of the Savior has become life-giving (in that it has been united to that which is by nature life, namely, the Word from God), when we taste of it, then we have life in ourselves, since

spiritualem animarum cibum, quo alantur et confortentur viventes vita illius" (Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed., Latin-English edition ed. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], no 1638).

²⁵ Thomas Dubay, "Eucharist, Indwelling, Mystical Body," *Review for Religious* 26, no. 5 (1967): 910-38, at 915.

²⁶ Brown, *John I-XII*, 292-293 (emphasis original).

we too are united to that flesh just as it is united to the Word who indwells it.²⁷

The reception of this sacred flesh mingles with us in a miraculous way and we are in return mingled with the flesh of Christ so that, by this commingling, we participate in Christ's own life.²⁸ It is as if our flesh becomes Christ's own flesh, and if our flesh, then also our whole person.²⁹ Aquinas comments:

For this food is not changed into the one who eats it, but it turns the one who takes it into itself, as we see in Augustine, when he says, "I

²⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, vol. 1, bk. 4, ch. 1, trans. David R. Maxwell, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 236. See also Matthias Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1954), 493: "As a result of the Incarnation we are no longer merely adopted children of God. Through the sacred humanity we are received into the natural, only-begotten Son of God as His members, and as His members share in His personal relationship to the Father, somewhat as His own humanity does. But by the Eucharist we are bound to Him much more securely, and become His body much more perfectly; for He has not only taken His flesh from our flesh, but has returned to us the flesh that He assumed." See also Michael Dauphinais, "And They Shall All Be Taught By God': Wisdom and the Eucharist in John 6," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 312–17, who, following Aquinas, notes: "To receive Christ's flesh in a material way would not give life since flesh in and of itself has no power to give eternal life—not even Christ's flesh. To receive Christ's flesh in a spiritual way, however, does give life because Christ's flesh is understood to be united to the Word and to the Spirit (*Ioan.* 6, lect. 8, nn. 992–93)" (317).

²⁸ See Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, vol. 1, bk. 4, ch. 1, who uses the analogy of wax to describe this commingling: "If someone were to join wax with other wax, they will surely see that one has come to be in the other. In the same way, I think, the one who receives the flesh of our Savior Christ and drinks his precious blood, as he himself says, is found to be one with him, mixed together, as it were, and mingled with him through participation so that they are found in Christ, and Christ in them" (p. 239).

²⁹ Not, however, in a pantheistic, gnostic sense, but rather through participation. We ourselves do not become divine, but we are elevated in our nature to the divine life. See André Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, trans. Thomas E. Crane (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964), 69n33: "Thus the promise of resurrection is linked to the promise of the Eucharist. In effect, if the glorified Son of Man, whose flesh is vivified by the Spirit of God (VI:63), is to feed men with His flesh and blood, the salvation which He offers must affect their whole being, body as well as soul. Thus Jesus describes Himself as the resurrection and the life of men (*ego eimi hē anastasis kai hē zōē*), implying thereby that the divine life which he gives now will eventually be fulfilled in a resurrection of life (*anastasis zōēs*)."

am the food of the robust. Grow and you will eat me. Yet you will not change me into yourself, but you will be transformed into me.” And so this is a food capable of making man divine and inebriating him with divinity. . . . So this bread is very profitable, because it gives eternal life to the soul; but it is so also because it gives eternal life to the body.³⁰

This union with Christ is not the same as that brought about by baptism. It is a union that brings about a deeper, more intimate relationship with our Lord.³¹

This intimate union with Jesus allows us to know him in an experiential way by coming in contact with him substantially and allowing us to participate in the divine nature that is fully possessed by Jesus, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As C. H. Dodd explains:

γνῶσις is awareness of a relation of mutual indwelling of God and man. . . . For John this experience is made possible through the recognition of Christ as the revelation of God, of Christ as inseparably one with God; and it finds its completion in an experience of our own unity with Christ in God.³²

Thus, we see the wisdom of Peter when, after Jesus’s teaching about mutual indwelling through Eucharistic reception, he exclaims, “You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). The completion of the speculative knowledge that “Christ [is] inseparably one with God” and that he is the *Son of the Father* is found in the experiential/affective knowledge which comes through eating the flesh of Jesus.³³

³⁰ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 7, no. 972 (p. 183).

³¹ See Jules Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité: des origines au Concile de Nicée*, vol. 1, *Les origines* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1910), 513–14: “In the Eucharist, the union of Christ and the believer is consummated, along with the vivifying transformation of which it is the fruit; there is no longer a question only of adhering to Christ by faith, nor the incorporation into the body of Christ by baptism. This is a new union, at once very real and very spiritual: by it we can say that he who adheres to the Lord is not only one in spirit with him, but also one flesh. This union is so intimate, that Jesus does not fear to say: ‘Just as I live through the Father, in this way he who eats me will live through me.’ Without a doubt, this is only an analogy. But, the fact remains that, in order to respect it, it should be understood not as a moral union founded upon a similarity of feeling, but a real physical union, which entails the mixture of two lives, or rather, the participation by the Christian in the very life of Christ” (trans. mine).

³² Dodd, *Interpretation*, 169.

³³ See Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, vol. 2, ch. 5: “How does Christ speak

Dwelling in the Triune God

With this language of mutual indwelling, John is showing us that the place for the followers of Christ to dwell is in the true temple of Christ's body (see 2:21).³⁴ In him is also the place for the new worship in the Spirit and in truth (4:23, cf. 14:6).³⁵ The language of abiding (μένω) found elsewhere in

truth, when He says that eternal life is the knowledge of God the Father, the One true God, and (with Him) of the Son? I think, indeed, we must answer that the saying of the Saviour is wholly true. For this knowledge is life, travelling as it were in birth of the whole meaning of the mystery, and vouchsafing unto us participation in the mystery of the Eucharist, whereby we are joined unto the living and life-giving Word. And for this reason, I think, Paul says that the Gentiles are made *fellow-members of the body and fellow-partakers* of Christ; inasmuch as they partake in His blessed Body and Blood; and our members may in this sense be conceived of, as being *members of Christ*. This knowledge, then, which also brings to us the Eucharist by the Spirit, is life. For it dwells in our hearts, shaping anew those who receive it into sonship with Him, and moulding them into incorruption and piety towards God, through life according to the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, knowing that the knowledge of the One true God brings unto us, and, so to speak, promotes our union with, the blessings of which we have spoken, says that it is eternal life; inasmuch as it is the mother and nurse of eternal life, being in its own power and nature pregnant with those things which cause life, and lead unto it" (Pusey ed., 489; emphasis original). See also, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.20.5: "It is not possible to live apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship [μετοχής] with God; but fellowship with God is to know [γινώσκειν] God, and to enjoy his goodness" (trans. A. Roberts in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005]).

³⁴ See Ceslas Spicq, "L'origine johannique de la conception du Christ-prêtre dans l'Épître aux Hébreux," in *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Goguel* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1950), 259–60: "Effectively, according to John 2:19–22, Christ immediately makes allusion to his death and resurrection, which will be the condition and the beginning of the new spiritual cult. The sentence 'Destroy this temple' must be understood of the sanctuary of rock where the levitical cult is exercised, whereas 'I will raise it again in three days' intends the glorified body of Christ and which in the new economy will play the same role as the earthly temple, the center of the Mosaic religion. The entire cult is organized, in effect, based on a sanctuary. By driving out the animals from the temple and by purifying it, the Lord insinuates a different form of cult, where the victims will no longer be beasts without reason, and where as a result, the sanctuary will no longer be material. . . . It is Christ who, henceforth, will be offered in sacrifice and who, from his ascension, will inaugurate a new liturgy. The whole Christian cult is summarized in him" (trans. mine).

³⁵ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 43–44: "Worship through types and shadows, worship with replacements, ends at the very moment when the real worship takes place: the self-offering of the Son, who has become man and 'Lamb,' the 'Firstborn,' who gathers up and into himself all worship of God, takes it from the types and shadows into the reality of man's union with the living God. The prophetic gesture of cleansing the Temple, of renewing

John further supports this notion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ as the new place of the new temple worship. We see in John 14:23 that the Father and Son will make their home (*μονή*) with the one who keeps Jesus's word. No doubt, part of keeping the word of Jesus involves his command to eat his flesh and blood, which brings about the mutual abiding of Christ and the believer. Both *μονή* and *μένω* are from the same root, so a *μονή* is a place of abiding (*μένω*).³⁶ After Jesus's Passion, Sabbath rest, and resurrection, believers abide in Christ (and with Christ, the Father) as Christ promised in John 14:2–3. James McCaffrey elaborates on the significance of John 14:2–3 and its connection to 14:23:

As believers have dwelling-places (*μοναί*) with the Father in union with Jesus in Jn 14,2–3, so Jesus and the Father have an abiding-place (*μονή*) in every believer in Jn 14,23. The plural form *μοναί* of Jn 14,2–3 emphasises the individuality of the places which all believers have with Jesus in the Father. Inversely, the singular of Jn 14,23 emphasises the dwelling-place of the Father with Jesus in each disciple individually. In Jn 14,2–3 the Father becomes the spiritual area where the whole community of believers dwells individually in union with Jesus; in Jn

divine worship and preparing it for its new form, has reached its goal. The prophecy connected with it is fulfilled: 'Zeal for your house has consumed me' (Ps 69[68]:9; Jn 2:17). At the end it was Jesus's 'zeal' for right worship that took him to the Cross. This is precisely what opened the way for the true house of God, the 'one not made with human hands'—the risen body of Christ. And the interpretation that the Synoptic Gospels give to Jesus's symbolic act of prophecy is also fulfilled: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nation' (Mk 11:17). The abolition of the Temple inaugurates a new universality of worship, 'in spirit and truth' (cf. Jn 4:23), which Jesus foretold in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. Needless to say, the words 'spirit and truth' must not be taken in a subjectivist sense, as they were in the Enlightenment. No, they must be seen in the light of him who could say of himself: 'I am the truth' (Jn 14:6)." See also Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 270: "On the one hand . . . the Eucharist emphatically moves right to the center of Christian existence; here God does indeed give us the manna that humanity is waiting for, the true 'bread of heaven'—the nourishment we can most deeply live upon as human beings. At the same time, however, the Eucharist is revealed as man's unceasing great encounter with God, in which the Lord gives himself as 'flesh,' so that in him, and by participating in his way, we may become 'spirit.' Just as he was transformed through the Cross into a new manner of bodiliness and of being-human pervaded by God's own being, so too for us this food must become an opening out of our existence, a passing through the Cross, and an anticipation of the new life in God and with God."

³⁶ James McCaffrey, *The House with Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn. 14, 2–3*, *Analecta Biblica* 114 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988), 32.

14,23 each individual believer becomes the spiritual area where the Father dwells in union with Jesus.³⁷

Thus, with the reception of the Eucharist, the mutual abiding brings us into the dwelling place of Jesus, which is the dwelling place of the Father. At the same time, too, we become dwelling places—temples—of the Blessed Trinity.

The Analogy of the Vine and the Branches

In John 15:1–11, Jesus teaches about the gift of eternal life given to believers through the analogy of branches bearing fruit due to their connection with the vine. The vine–branch analogy is a continuation of Jesus's teaching in John 6 of mutual indwelling and eternal life given through the Eucharist.³⁸ Here as in John 6, the language of mutual indwelling/abiding is present: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (15:4).³⁹ Just as the vine is the source of life for the branches—if they are cut off, they die—so abiding in Jesus is our source of life. Dodd remarks:

[John] xv. 1–12 is based upon the symbol of the vine, which in itself suggests a unity like that of a living plant, in which a common life, flowing from the central stem, nourishes all the branches and issues in fruit.⁴⁰

³⁷ McCaffrey, *House with Many Rooms*, 165.

³⁸ See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism to the Transfiguration*, 261–62: "Let us recall that the parable of the vine occurs in the context of Jesus' Last Supper. After the multiplication of the loaves he had spoken of the true bread from heaven that he would give, and thus he left us with a profound interpretation of the eucharistic bread that was to come. It is hard to believe that in his discourse on the vine he is not tacitly alluding to the new wine that had already been prefigured at Cana and which he now gives to us—the wine that would flow from his Passion, from his 'love to the end' (Jn 13:1). In this sense, the parable of the vine has a thoroughly eucharistic background. It refers to the fruit that Jesus brings forth: his love, which pours itself out for us on the Cross and which is the choice new wine destined for God's marriage feast with man. Thus we come to understand the full depth and grandeur of the Eucharist, even though it is not explicitly mentioned here. The Eucharist points us toward the fruit that we, as branches of the vine, can and must bear with Christ and by virtue of Christ. The fruit the Lord expects of us is love—a love that accepts with him the mystery of the Cross, and becomes a participation in his self-giving—and hence the true justice that prepares the world for the Kingdom of God." See also Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 470, and Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 672–74.

³⁹ καθώς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἂν ἑαυτοῦ ἔαν μὴ μένῃ ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἔαν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε.

⁴⁰ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 196.

The fruit of eternal life is based upon continual union with Jesus.⁴¹ If one does not abide in Jesus, he will be cast forth and wither (15:6). The same warning was given in 6:53. To those who do not eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus, he declares, “you do not have life within you [οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς].” The union of mutual indwelling that takes place through the reception of Jesus’s body and blood in the Eucharist is what allows us to abide/remain in Jesus, the real vine (ἡ ἀμπελος ἡ ἀληθινῇ).⁴²

The outward sign of this abiding in Jesus is the keeping of Jesus’s commandments out of obediential love in imitation of his obediential love in keeping his Father’s commandments (John 15:10).⁴³ The commandment that the disciples of Jesus are to keep is to love as Jesus has loved (15:12). This love is no less than the sacrificial self-offering of Jesus on the Cross for “those he loves” (τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ; 15:13).⁴⁴ There is a parallel here with the Eucharistic principle found in John 12:24–26. Unless the grain of wheat falls and dies it does not bear fruit, but remains alone. Yet, if it dies, it bears much fruit. To give one’s life in imitation of Christ (see 12:26: “If any man serves me, let him follow me [ἐὰν ἐμοί τις διακονῇ, ἐμοὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω]”), that is, as a sacrifice to God, is to bear fruit for eternal life (12:25). Yet, as Raymond Brown notes:

⁴¹ See Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 420: “It is not enough to be with him and to have received his word; they must abide in him and he will abide in them (v. 4a: *meinate en emoi kagō en hymin*). There must be an ongoing lifegiving mutuality generated by the disciples’ union with Jesus and Jesus’ union with them. . . . Abiding in Jesus is the *sine qua non* of fruitfulness.”

⁴² See J. P. Heil, *The Gospel of John: Worship for Divine Life Eternal* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 107: “Indeed, eucharistic worship serves as a preeminent way of ‘remaining’ in Jesus. His directive to ‘remain in me, as I in you [μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, καὶ γὼ ἐν ὑμῖν]’ (15:4a) and his declaration that ‘the one remaining in me and I in him [μένων ἐν ἐμοί καὶ γὼ ἐν αὐτῷ]—this one produces much fruit’ (15:5) recall and resonate with his declaration that ‘the one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood in me remains and I in him [ἐν ἐμοί μένει καὶ γὼ ἐν αὐτῷ]’ (6:56). The one remaining in Jesus with the divine assistance afforded by the Eucharist ‘produces much fruit’ (15:5), future believers to have divine life eternal, but anyone who does not ‘remain’ in Jesus will be discarded as useless for producing such fruit (15:6).” See also, M. J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (Paris: Gabalda, 1948), 400.

⁴³ See Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 420–421: “Union with Jesus with its consequent fruitfulness is not a matter of enjoying the oneness that exists between the disciple and the master; it also consists of *doing something*, and without Jesus this is impossible. To bear fruit (v. 4b) means to do something (v. 5c). That ‘something’ has already been summarized in the command to love, which Jesus taught would be the hallmark of his disciples (cf. 13:34–35).”

⁴⁴ See Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 664, for the translation of φίλος as “loved one” or “beloved”.

Christian love does not simply *consist* in laying down one's life; but because it stems from Jesus, there is a tendency in Christian love that produces such self-sacrifice. This is why John xv 13 has left a greater mark on subsequent behavior than, for example, a similar sentence in Plato (*Symposium* 179B): "Only those who love wish to die for other."⁴⁵

We see, then, that the obedience that comes from abiding/remaining in Jesus finds its fullest expression in martyrdom. The one who has Christ abiding in him due to the grace of the Eucharist is given the strength to abide in Christ to the ultimate end of sacrificing his life in imitation of Christ.⁴⁶ "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:25). The martyr, empowered by Eucharistic communion with the Son, knows God beyond the speculative level and truly penetrates to the depth of experiential knowledge to realize that Jesus "is the resurrection and the life; he who believes in [Jesus], though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in [Jesus] shall never die" (11:25–26).

Adopted Sonship: The Goal of Mutual Indwelling

The goal of the mutual indwelling brought about by eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus, which in turn gives us experiential knowledge of the Father through the Son, is to have eternal life as children of God. Blessed Columba Marmion sees the Eucharistic reception as the ultimate act of sonship:

To receive Christ in the Eucharist is to . . . share in the highest possible measure in the Divine Sonship of Christ. . . . Eucharistic Communion is therefore *the most perfect act of our Divine adoption*. There is no time

⁴⁵ Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 664 (emphasis original).

⁴⁶ See Augustine, Homily 84 on John, no. 1: "This is what the blessed martyrs did with ardent love. If we aren't celebrating their memories in vain, and we approach the table of the Lord at the banquet at which they themselves were also filled, it behooves us also to prepare the same things as they did. That's why, of course, we don't commemorate them at this table like the others who rest in peace, such that we would also pray for them; it's rather that they pray for us, so that we might follow closely in their steps, because they fulfilled the charity than which the Lord said that nothing could be greater. For they presented to their brothers and sisters the same things as they likewise received from the table of the Lord" (*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 41–124, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century* [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2020], 301–2). See Augustine's Homily 27, no. 12, for an example of how the Eucharist strengthened St. Laurence for martyrdom.

when we can be more justly entitled to say to our Father in heaven: "O Heavenly Father, I abide in your Son Jesus, and your Son abides in me. Your Son, proceeding from you, receives communication of your Divine life, in its fullness. I have received your Son with faith. At that time, faith tells me, I am with Him. And since I share in His life, look at Him, through Him, with Him, as the Son in whom you are well pleased."⁴⁷

As the "most perfect act of our Divine adoption," the abiding in Christ that is brought about by Eucharistic reception is not something we must wait for at the end of time. Rather, for John, it is something partaken of now. Francis J. Moloney, in commenting on John 1:12, states:

The power given is not a promise but an achieved fact for those who receive and believe. A Johannine understanding of life and eternal life has been broached for the first time. One does not have to wait for an end-time to become a child of God. The choice of the aorist infinitive "to become" (*genesthai*) indicates that Johannine faith and so-called "realized eschatology" demand continual commitment. In a traditional eschatology the believer waits for the resurrection and the end of time for the final gifts of life and eternal life. In the Fourth Gospel these gifts are anticipated. They are available to the believer *now*, and are thus "realized."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, trans. Alan Bancroft (Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus, 2005), 383 (emphasis original).

⁴⁸ Moloney, *Gospel of John*, 38 (emphasis in original). See also Brown, *John I–XII*, cxvii: "In many ways John is the best example in the NT of realized eschatology. God has revealed Himself in Jesus in a definitive form, and seemingly no more can be asked. If one points to OT passages that seem to imply a coming of God in glory, the Prologue (i 14) answers, 'We have seen his glory.' If one asks where is the judgment that marks God's final intervention, John iii 19 answers, 'Now the judgment is this: the light has come into the world.' In a figurative way Matt xxv 31ff. describes the apocalyptic Son of Man coming in glory and sitting on the throne of judgment to separate the good and the bad. But for John the presence of Jesus in the world as the light separates men into those who are sons of darkness, hating the light, and those who come to the light. All through the Gospel Jesus provokes self-judgment as men line up for or against him; truly his coming is a *crisis* in the root sense of that word, where it reflects the Gr. *krisis* or 'judgment.' Those who refuse to believe are already condemned (iii 18), while those who have faith do not come under condemnation (v 24). Even the reward is realized. For the Synoptics 'eternal life' is something that one receives at the final judgment or in a future age (Mark x 30; Matt xviii 8–9), but for John it is a present possibility for men: 'The man who hears my words and has faith in Him who sent me *possesses* eternal

We truly participate in eternal life here and now through the sacrament of baptism and the Eucharist. Eternal life as children of God begins with baptism and is realized more and more through our continual reception of the Eucharist.

Summary

The saving knowledge that consists of knowing God the Father and Jesus, the Son who is sent by the Father, is more than merely speculative knowledge. It is also an experiential/affective knowledge brought about by mutual indwelling, the effect of which occurs through eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ. In receiving Christ in the Eucharist, the believer comes in contact substantially with Christ's flesh and blood, which is hypostatically united to his divine nature. This contact with the divine nature, mediated through Christ's flesh, allows us to know God experientially. This knowledge of / participation in God is what gives us eternal life. We can see it as a chain of knowledge that leads to life. Through eating the flesh of the Son, we come in contact with the Son and know him experientially. The Son, by nature and from all eternity, intimately knows the Father, possessing the same nature as and coming forth from the Father. The Father has life in himself and Jesus is also life itself since he is in the Father and the Father in him. Having been sent from the Father, Jesus gives the life that he is to those who eat and drink his flesh and blood. Moreover, because this Eucharistic indwelling is mediated by the Holy Spirit, we ourselves become dwelling places or temples of the Blessed Trinity.

In the next section, I will explore how St. Thomas Aquinas's theology of the divine missions illuminates Jesus's teaching in the Gospel of John that eternal life comes through both Eucharistic eating and experiential knowledge. In doing so, we will see that Aquinas's Trinitarian theology allows one to more fully flesh out the role of the Holy Spirit in giving us eternal life through Eucharistic reception. Further, Aquinas's theological insights will also provide us with a fuller understanding of the nature of experiential knowledge.

Thomas Aquinas on the Missions of Divine Persons

Mission in General

Since the mission of the Son from the Father is a dominant theme in the Fourth Gospel, some have taken the language of sending in John (πέμπω;

life . . . he has passed from death to life' (v 24). For Luke (vi 35, xx 36) divine sonship is a reward of the future life; for John (i 12) it is a gift here on earth" (emphasis original).

ἀποστέλλω) to imply that the Son, *secundum divinitatem*, is subordinate to the Father.⁴⁹ The first objection put forth by St. Thomas in the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] I, q. 43, a. 1, follows this line of thought in order to deny that it is fitting for a divine person to be sent. “For one who is sent is less than the sender.”⁵⁰ Thus, it seems that if, on the one hand, the sender is greater than the one sent and, on the other hand, in the Gospel of John the Son is clearly described as being sent from the Father, then the evidence for the Son’s subordination in John is insurmountable. Yet Aquinas distinguishes between three ways in which one who is sent proceeds from the sender as principle. The first way is according to command (*imperium*), in the way in which a master sends a servant. The second is according to counsel (*consilium*), in the way in which a counselor advises a king to go to war. The third is according to origin (*origo*), in the way in which a flower is sent forth from a tree.⁵¹ The first two ways (command and counsel), Aquinas teaches, bring about an inferiority on the part of the one sent. For, one who commands is greater than the one he commands, and likewise the counselor is wiser than he whom he counsels.⁵² If, therefore, the Father sent the Son according to command or counsel, this would imply that the Son is subordinate to the Father. Yet Aquinas states that the mission of a divine person does not proceed by way of command nor counsel. But, does this not go against the clear words of Jesus in John’s Gospel, where he says:

“The Son can do nothing from himself, except what he sees the Father doing” (5:19).

“The Father loves the Son and shows him all things that he is doing” (5:20).

“As I hear, I judge” (5:30).

“As the Father commanded me, that I do” (14:30).

⁴⁹ For a more recent example, see Christopher Cowan, “The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 1 (2006): 115–35.

⁵⁰ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 1, obj. 1 (unless otherwise noted, all English quotes of *ST* are trans. Laurance Shapcote, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012]).

⁵¹ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 1, corp.

⁵² *ST* I, q. 43, a. 1, ad 1.

St. Thomas argues that there are two ways that this does not fall into being sent by command or counsel. First, if what Jesus says is to be taken according to his divinity, then:

The Father's *showing* and the Son's *hearing* are to be taken in the sense that the Father communicates knowledge to the Son, as He communicates His essence. The command of the Father can be explained in the same sense, as giving Him from eternity knowledge and will to act, by begetting Him.⁵³

The second way he says is the better way, and that is to interpret Jesus's words according to his human nature, in which case the problem is solved. For Jesus as a divine person, however, the only way he can be said to be sent is according to a procession of origin, since this is the only way that does not introduce imperfection in the divine persons, for a procession of origin is according to equality. This affirmation of a divine person being sent in the manner of a procession of origin is in accord with the Scriptures' consistent witness of the oneness of God.⁵⁴ The Father and the Son are equal because they are one in substance, each possessing the divine nature fully.⁵⁵

One can note here the sapiential ordering of Aquinas's *Summa* in that he treats of the mission of divine persons immediately after the question about the equality and likeness among the divine persons (*ST I*, q. 42). This is a shift from his treatment in the commentary on the *Sentences*, where he treated the missions within the context of Pneumatology.⁵⁶ As Gilles Emery has noted:

⁵³ *ST I*, q. 42, a. 6, ad 2.

⁵⁴ Cf. Exod 20:3; Deut 4:35; 5:7; 6:4; Isa 43:10; 44:6; Mal 2:10; Mark 12:29; John 10:30; 17:3; 22; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; Jas 2:19.

⁵⁵ See *ST I*, q. 39, a. 2. See also *Super Ioan* 10, lec. 5, no. 1451, where in commenting on Jesus's words in John 10:30 ("I and the Father are one."), Aquinas notes: "Now through this a twofold error is excluded: namely, that of Arius, who divided the essence, and that of Sabellius, who combined the persons, so that thus we are freed from both Charybdis and Scylla. For through this insofar as he says 'one,' he frees us from Arius; for if one, then there is not a difference. Through this, on the other hand, insofar as he says 'we are,' he frees from Sabellius; for if we are, then the Father and the Son is one person and another person" (trans. mine).

⁵⁶ See Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 361–62: "Without dismissing the notion of 'temporal procession' from consideration, St. Thomas' discussion in the *Summa Theologiae* (*Prima Pars*, q. 43), foregrounds the idea of *mission*. He no longer puts mission in the study of the Holy Spirit: it is now set after the question of the equality of the persons, within his investigation of 'the comparison of the persons to each

This structure is a good indication that the consideration of the persons in their immanent divine life is not separated from the Trinitarian economy: the question of the missions closes the investigation of “the distinction of persons in God” or “the Trinity of persons in God”: it creates the bridge between the field which studies God’s mystery as it is in itself, and the field of God’s design in creation. The missions of the divine persons are what ultimately make sense of the gift of existence, human work and vocation, the mysteries of the humanity of Christ (the “mission of the Son”), the sacraments and eschatology.

Thus, the equality that exists in the eternal procession of the Son from the Father remains in the temporal procession.

Another aspect of the mission of a divine person involves the relation of the one sent to the place where he is sent. The one sent will begin to be present in that place either as one who was never there before or as one who was previously in that place but now exists there in a new way. Now, since there is one common mode by which God exists in all things through his essence, power, and presence, just as the cause existing in the effects which participate in his goodness,⁵⁷ it would have to be the case that the divine person is sent to where he previously existed, yet in some new way. For the Son in his visible mission “is said to be sent by the Father into the world, according as he began to be in the world visibly by taking on flesh [*per carnem assumptam*], and nevertheless he was previously in the world.”⁵⁸ Further, the Son does not cease to be where he once was in being sent. A local separation occurs between the one sent and the sender when the one sent is sent to where he previously was not. Yet, as stated above, this is not the case with the mission of a divine person. Rather, in the visible mission of the Son, he is present in the world in a new way—in his Incarnation—and is not moved locally from the right hand of the Father in heaven.⁵⁹

other.’ A panorama comes in view at this point. The enquiry into the missions brings the study of the persons’ mutual relations to a head: to think about the missions is still to consider the persons in their relationships, their divine being, and their own properties. In fact, by pinning down which of the persons are sent and which of them ‘send,’ this question will examine the personal interrelationships implied by one person’s sending. So when theologians turn to the Trinity’s work of sanctification, they do not shift their attention away from the mystery of the Trinity in itself; and conversely, our investigation of the Trinity in its mysterious intimacy comes to completion when we reflect upon the Trinitarian economy.”

⁵⁷ See *ST I*, q. 43, a. 3, corp.

⁵⁸ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 1 (trans. mine).

⁵⁹ See *ST I*, q. 43, a. 1, ad 2. Cf. *Super Ioan* 1, lec. 6, nos. 143 and 144.

For St. Thomas, then, mission (which expresses the temporal term together with the relation to the principle⁶⁰) always involves two aspects, reference of origin (being *from*) and reference to the point of arrival, either in the sense of a new arrival or a new mode of being at the same place (being *toward*). The reference of origin is the eternal procession of the Son from the Father. If we were to stop here, strictly speaking, we would not have yet reached the designation of "mission."⁶¹ The reference to the point of arrival adds the temporal term and extends the eternal procession into the temporal mission.⁶²

Now that we have set forth, with the help of St. Thomas, the contours of the mission of a divine person in general and specifically of the Incarnation of the Son (his visible mission), we will next explore the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit which is given through *gratia gratum faciens*.⁶³

The Invisible Mission of the Holy Spirit

In the gift of eternal life given by the Son, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role. In John 16:7, Jesus insists that his return to the Father is necessary, because without it the Holy Spirit will not be sent. The mission of the Holy Spirit, who is sent from the Father in the Son's name (see John 14:26), will bring about the grace necessary for eternal life (*gratia gratum faciens*). As we stated above, "mission" is a temporal sending of a divine person. The invisible mission of a divine person is in such a way that he is present in a new way in anyone and he is given as possessed by anyone. In *ST I*, q. 43, a. 3, St. Thomas raises the question as to whether the Holy Spirit in his invisible mission is given according to the *donum gratiae gratum facientis* alone. The concern is that if this is the case, then the Holy Spirit himself will not be given, but only his gifts.⁶⁴

Aquinas answers that beyond God being in all things by his essence, power, and presence according to the common mode, as the cause of all that exists, there exists also a special mode of God's presence, whereby he is in the rational creature as an object known is in the knower (*cognitum in cognoscente*) and the beloved is in the lover (*amatum in amante*). The rational creature attains to God himself through his operations of knowledge and

⁶⁰ See *ST I*, q. 43, a. 2, corp.

⁶¹ Although, Aquinas does admit that "procession" can be taken in both an eternal and temporal sense, in that the Son proceeds eternally as God and temporally in his Incarnation. See *ST I*, q. 43, a. 2, corp.

⁶² See *ST I*, q. 43, a. 2, ad 3.

⁶³ The phrase *gratia gratum faciens* is translated literally as "the grace that makes pleasing." It is, however, commonly translated as "sanctifying grace."

⁶⁴ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 3, obj. 1.

love. This special mode is only brought about through this *donum gratiae gratum facientis*.⁶⁵

Further, we only possess that which we freely use (*uti*) and enjoy (*frui*). *Gratia gratum faciens* perfects the creature so that he can freely use the created gift itself and likewise disposes the soul to possess and enjoy the divine person himself. This is signified when it is said that the Holy Spirit is given as a gift of grace.⁶⁶ Therefore the invisible mission takes place according to *gratiam gratum facientem* and the divine person is sent and given.⁶⁷ Aquinas notes that through this special mode, God not only exists in the rational creature, but dwells in him as in a temple.⁶⁸ Here, it is not just the Holy Spirit who dwells, but the Father and Son as well (see John 14:23). As Jeremy Wilkins notes:

The created term of the mission of the Spirit is *gratia gratum faciens*. But this term is not personally assumed by the Spirit, and therefore is not a principle of proper operations. The Spirit himself is sent and given, but he does not assume a created nature as a principle of proper operations *ad extra* and therefore does not come alone. Hence, the gift of the Spirit entails the indwelling of the whole Trinity. In giving their love, their Spirit, the Father and the Son give themselves.⁶⁹

With this indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, brought about by grace, there is also a participation in the life of the Trinity, allowing one to know and love

⁶⁵ ST I, q. 43, a. 3, corp.

⁶⁶ ST I, q. 43, a. 3, ad 1.

⁶⁷ See Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 4, lec. 2, no. 577, commenting on the gift of living water that Jesus speaks about with the Samaritan woman in John 4:10: "The grace of the Holy Spirit is correctly called living water, because the grace of the Holy Spirit is given to man in such a way that the source itself of the grace is also given, that is, the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the grace is given by the Holy Spirit: 'The love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). For the Holy Spirit is the unfailing fountain from whom all gifts of grace flow: 'One and the same Spirit does all these things' (1 Cor 12:11). And so, if anyone has a gift of the Holy Spirit without having the Spirit, the water is not united with its source, and so is not living but dead: 'Faith without works is dead' (Jas 2:20)" (p. 215).

⁶⁸ ST I, q. 43, a. 3, corp.

⁶⁹ See Jeremy D. Wilkins, "Trinitarian Missions and the Order of Grace According to Thomas Aquinas," in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown*, ed. Kent Emery, Russell Friedman, and Andrea Speer (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 689–708, at 691–92.

God analogous to the way in which he knows and loves himself.⁷⁰ Wilkins continues:

This participation in the trinitarian life is also the perfection of the *imago*, which is dynamically ordered to its realization in the immanent operations of knowing and loving, and specifically in knowing and loving God. *Gratia gratum faciens* is a participation in the divine nature, and faith and love are participations in the processions of Word and Spirit.⁷¹

We see here that the invisible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are thus united, although distinct.⁷² In man's sanctification, both the Son and the Spirit are at work in leading man to the knowledge of the Father.⁷³ Aquinas explains the necessity of both missions for the salvation of man in his commentary on John 14:26:

⁷⁰ See also, *ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 4, corp.: "For as man in his intellectual powers participates in the Divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and in his power of will participates in the Divine love through the virtue of charity, so also in the nature of the soul does he participate in the Divine Nature, after the manner of a likeness, through a certain regeneration or re-creation." Cf. Wilkins, "Trinitarian Missions," 695: "The order of grace is not merely the provision of created gifts—these are used—but the constitution of a new interpersonal situation in which we come to enjoy, to know, to love the divine Persons and, in that way, to participate in the intimacy of their own eternal mutuality." More will be said on this point in the next section.

⁷¹ Wilkins, "Trinitarian Missions," 696–97.

⁷² See Emery, *Trinitarian Theology*, 387–92, esp. 391–92: "The missions are also inseparable from the perspective of the effect, and that in two capacities: because grace, the root of this effect, is attested in both missions, and because the knowledge and love in which the mission is evident are inseparable. Charity proceeds from faith, and that faith is dead which does not flower in charity. And here the exemplar function of the divine persons becomes very clear: in the same way that the divine Word is the 'Word breathing love,' so the kind of knowledge which the mission gives us is a knowledge filled in love. Without charity, knowledge would not even reflect the property of the Word, and would not allow us to recognize that the Son is emissary. From the standpoint of the donation of the divine persons, one can even pick out a certain priority of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is not a temporal priority, but a priority deriving from the nature of love: 'since the original dynamic which moves and is inclined toward being given is love, the donation of the Holy Spirit comes before the donation of the Son' (Aquinas, *I Sent.* d. 15, q. 4, a. 2, ad 2). In every respect, there is an absolute solidarity and simultaneity between the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one entailing the other."

⁷³ See Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 223–31.

Just as the effect of the mission of the Son was to lead us to the Father, so the effect of the mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son. Now the Son, once he is begotten Wisdom, is Truth itself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). And so the effect of this kind of mission [of the Spirit] is to make us sharers in the divine wisdom and knowers of the truth. The Son, since he is the Word, gives teaching to us; but the Holy Spirit enables us to grasp it.⁷⁴

Drawing on Jesus's words in John 6:45, Aquinas further elaborates on the role of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer as it relates to 14:26:

We read before that "Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" (6:45). Here he is expanding on this, because one does not learn without the Holy Spirit teaching. He is saying in effect: one who receives the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son knows the Father and the Son and comes to them. The Spirit makes us know all things by inspiring us from within, by directing us and lifting us up to spiritual things.⁷⁵

The way that the Holy Spirit makes us know the Father and the Son and lifts us up to spiritual things is through the gift of charity, allowing us to participate in the divine nature through experiential or affective knowledge.

Affective Knowledge through Connaturality

St. Thomas distinguishes between the two types of knowledge in commenting on John 17:25–26:

O righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you; and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Aquinas states that neither through speculative nor affective knowledge did the world know God completely. Thomas will grant that some Gentiles knew God speculatively in regard to the attributes that can be known by reason.⁷⁶ But this limited knowledge was mixed with many errors and it was not the saving knowledge that Jesus spoke of, namely, the knowledge of "God as the

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 14, no. 1958 (p. 87).

⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 14, no. 1959 (p. 87).

⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17, no. 2265.

Father of an only begotten and consubstantial Son."⁷⁷ Even further, the world did not have an affective knowledge of God "because it did not love him" and, therefore, did not know him "as a Father, through love."⁷⁸ The faithful, on the other hand, receive the two types of knowledge through Christ, the *radix et fons* of our saving knowledge of God.⁷⁹ Aquinas affirms that "insofar as men participate in the Word of God, to that extent do they know God."⁸⁰ Speculative knowledge comes from the external words of Christ's teaching.⁸¹ Affective knowledge, on the other hand, Thomas teaches, is "from within, through the Holy Spirit. Referring to this [Jesus] says, *and I will make it known* by giving them the Holy Spirit: 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will teach you all truth'" (16:3).⁸² This affective/experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit which comes from within allows us to know God by making us like God through grace.

In the *STI*, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2, St. Thomas notes that when one of the divine persons is sent to someone, the soul of the person is assimilated to the divine person by grace.⁸³ Further, because the Holy Spirit is love, the soul is assimilated to the Holy Spirit through the gift of charity. Likewise, since the Son is the Word "who breathes forth love" (*spirans amorem*), he is sent

according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love, as is said (John 6:45): *Everyone that hath heard from the Father and hath learned, cometh to Me*, and (Ps 38:4): *In my meditation a fire shall flame forth*. Thus Augustine plainly says (*De Trin.* iv, 20): *The Son is sent, whenever He is known and perceived by anyone*. Now perception implies a certain experimental knowledge [experimentalem quondam notitiam]; and this is properly called wisdom, as it were a sweet knowledge, according to Ecclus. 6:23: *The wisdom of doctrine is according to her name*.⁸⁴

Thus, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us through the gift of charity assimilates us and gives us experimental knowledge of himself along with that of the Son.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17, no. 2265 (p. 195).

⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17, no. 2265 (p. 196).

⁷⁹ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17 no. 2267.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17, no. 2267 (p. 196).

⁸¹ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17, no. 2269.

⁸² Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 17, no. 2269 (p. 197).

⁸³ *STI*, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2.

⁸⁴ *STI*, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2.

⁸⁵ See Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006), 162: "By the gift of grace, the saints are united to God by knowing God and loving him. When

This experimental or experiential knowledge leads to a certain connaturality (*connaturalitas*) with the divine persons.

Aquinas provides an example of the type of knowledge of God that leads to a connaturality with God through a parallel with the virtue of chastity.⁸⁶ One can come to speculative knowledge about chastity through studying what chastity consists of so as to be able to explain and teach it to others. Someone else, however, who is living in the habitude of chastity knows about chastity through a kind of connaturality with the virtue, which is an experiential knowledge from within. With the Holy Spirit's gift of the wisdom that comes to us through charity, a connaturality with God is produced in our soul which unites us to God.⁸⁷ This knowledge through connaturality is the eternal life that Jesus speaks about in John 17:3.

Conclusion

In the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit, which follows upon the visible mission of the Son, the Holy Spirit himself is given to the believer along with the gift of grace (*gratia gratum faciens*). The Holy Spirit dwelling in the soul of the believer leads him to the knowledge of the Son, who in turn leads to the knowledge of the Father, both of whom (Son and Father) abide in the soul of the just man. The Holy Spirit and the Son dwell within as being sent, but the Father abides not as one sent, since he is not from another.⁸⁸ The

the Son is sent on mission, the saints are 'assimilated' to the Son by the illumination of their intelligence (participation in the property of the Son, through an effect of grace appropriated to the Son) which enables them to know God. When the Holy Spirit is sent on mission, the saints are 'assimilated' to the Spirit through the ardor of charity (participation in the property of the Holy Spirit, by an effect appropriated to the Holy Spirit), which enables them to love God. The theological activity of knowledge of God and love of God, in the saints, 'imitates' or 'represents' the activity of God the Father who pronounces the Word and breathes the Spirit."

⁸⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

⁸⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2, corp. See also Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 277: "What is it that makes us radically connatural with God? It is sanctifying grace whereby we are made *consortes divinae naturae*. And what makes this radical connaturality pass into act; what makes it flower into the actuality of operation? Charity. We are made connatural to God through charity. Charity is not just any kind of love. It presupposes sanctifying grace, of which it is the property, and it lays hold on God as He is really present within us as a Gift, a Friend, an eternal life-companion. However, it wins to God immediately as God, in His very deity, in the very intimate and absolutely proper life with which He will beatify us. Charity loves Him in Himself and by Himself."

⁸⁸ See *ST* I, q. 43, a. 4.

action of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer leading him to the knowledge of the Son and the Father is essential for the gift of life, since eternal life is predicated upon this knowledge, according to John 17:3. This knowledge comes from a certain connaturality brought about by eating Christ, the “real food” (ἀληθὴς βρώσις; 6:55). In so doing, we are conformed to the Son of the Father as children of the same Father. And as the Son knows his Father, so we who are united to him (the Son), know *our* Father and thus have eternal life.

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