

## Thomas Aquinas on the Priesthood: Temple, Allegory, and the Humanities of Christ\*

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In this lecture, I will examine Aquinas's approach to the concept of priesthood and its place in the economy of salvation, drawing upon Aquinas's systematic presentation of Christ's priesthood and sacramental priesthood within the Church, as well as the figural representation of these incarnational and ecclesial realities within the liturgical world of the Mosaic covenant. Theologically considered, in the context of the New Law Aquinas's notion of priesthood in the Church begins with Christ, then extending to the members of the Church in Baptism, and in a special sense to those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. In the case of both Christ himself and the Church's membership, however, the concept of priesthood is fundamentally associated with human nature, both soteriologically and anthropologically considered: human persons have at once a need for a salvation that can come only from Christ and a corresponding need to give fitting worship to God that likewise finds its fulfillment in Christ alone. The concept of priesthood, concretized and perfected in the priesthood of Christ, provides for the actualization of these same dimensions of human nature.

Beginning with his treatment of Christ's priesthood in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae* (*ST*), in the first part of this essay I will explore the

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broader systematic context in which Aquinas's account of Christ's priesthood should be understood, focusing in particular on the necessity of *sacra doctrina* and the Incarnation for the salvation of human nature, and the specific capacity of human nature for sacrificial, and ultimately priestly, acts in relation to God. Following this, in the second section I will examine the figural role of Christ's priesthood under the Mosaic Law. Although the Church now lives in the full reality of what was only foreshadowed in the Old Law, Aquinas's description of the figurative sense of this law—which is surprisingly rich—gives us a picture of the full ecclesial implications of Christ's priesthood in relation to the people that Aquinas describes in his systematic treatment of Christ's priesthood in *ST* III. Perhaps because of the correspondence between its literal sense and the scope of the natural law, the figurative treatment of Christ's priestly role in relation to the Church that is found in these questions on the Old Law provides a profound account of the elevation of human nature in the context of Christ's offering. First in outward ritual actions and then within human nature itself, Christ's realization of what is held in figure under the Old Law's letter offers a powerful account of the personal and social implications of Christ's singular sacrifice, understood as an offering made first in his humanity, and subsequently in ours by participation.

Lastly, in my third and final section, I will return to priesthood within the Church as it is described in the *tertia pars*, exploring the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood in relation to the priesthood of Christ. In each of these three sections, the divinizing relationship between the assumed humanity of Christ and the humanity of those who participate in his body will remain a point of emphasis, contextualized accordingly in each section. Beginning from the heart of Aquinas's sapiential treatment of Christ's priesthood in relation to the reality of the Incarnation, I hope to show not only that these same principals are reflected in Aquinas's treatment of Old Testament figures, but that the figurative dimension of these previous epochs of salvation history in fact provide a living illustration of Christ's priestly relationship with human nature in the context of the Church—because Christ is a priest, something foreshadowed in the Old Law and in the law of nature itself is fulfilled, and the image of God is restored in the rational creature.

### Christ's Priesthood

In *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, Aquinas offers a general definition of the priesthood, in the context of his description of the priesthood of Jesus Christ: "The office proper to a priest is to be a mediator between God and the people."

For Aquinas, this takes the form of bestowing divine gifts on the people—in this sense, playing on the etymology of the Latin word *sacerdos*, a priest can be understood as a giver of sacred things (*sacra dans*), who bestows divine things on the people. In another sense, the priest offers up the prayers of the people to God, and makes satisfaction for their sins. Taking these definitions as his point of departure, Aquinas argues that the office of the priest is most fittingly attributed to Christ, because it is through Christ that we receive divine things. Referencing 2 Pet 1:4, Aquinas clarifies that the divine things in question are in fact a participatory share in the divine nature—perhaps surprisingly, for Aquinas it is the divinization of the human person that corresponds to the “divine things” given to the people of God through the priesthood of Christ. As a participatory reality, for Aquinas this share of the divine nature also corresponds to the reconciling function of the priesthood, precisely because it is *through* Christ that the Father reconciles all things to himself. (See Col 1:19–20).<sup>1</sup>

Although this definition of priesthood—a mediator between God and the people on whom he bestows holy things—can be applied more broadly, and in this context it is clear that Aquinas intends to frame the priestly identity of Christ within the wider ratio of salvation history and the redemption of the human person.<sup>2</sup> At the outset of the *tertia pars*, Aquinas offers a series of arguments for the fittingness of the Incarnation that reflect and build upon his arguments for the fittingness of divine revelation and salvation, more generally considered, that he articulates at the outset of the *ST*. Although God is neither compelled to redeem human nature nor to do so in any certain way, in *ST* I, q. 1, Aquinas argues that the revelation of a knowledge of God that surpasses all human science is

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] III, q. 22, a. 1.

<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between Christ's priesthood and the concept of mediation, Jonathan Kaltenbach has recently argued that the relationship between the priesthood of Christ and the concept of mediation in Aquinas's thought is best understood with reference to Aquinas's biblical commentaries. Kaltenbach argues further that the concept of mediation plays an essential structural role in the initial questions on Christ that are found at the outset of the *tertia pars* (“Christ the Priest in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas” [PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2017]). For broader context on the question of Christ's priestly mediation in Aquinas, see Gérard Remy, “Le Christ médiateur dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas,” *Revue thomiste* 93 (1993): 182–233; Remy, “Sacerdoce et médiation chez saint Thomas,” *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 101–18; Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Le sacerdoce du Christ dans la *Somme de théologie*,” *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 75–100; Matthew Levering, *Christ, Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 54–58.

necessary for human salvation. For Aquinas, it is the conditions of human nature itself that indicate the need for this revelation—although directed to God as end, human reason is unable to grasp God in himself. Despite the partial capacity of philosophy and other human sciences to know God under a certain aspect, these efforts are of their nature incomplete, and all too often marked with a degree of error. Aquinas therefore argues that, in addition to these human rational endeavors, the human person needs to be taught divine truths by means of God's own revelation.<sup>3</sup> This need for *sacra doctrina* or "teaching regarding holy things" is the *ratio*, Aquinas argues, that motivates the unfolding structure of the *ST* as an account of God, creation, and re-creation according to the order of reality. Building on his initial description of the human person's salvific need for *sacra doctrina* at the outset of the *Summa*, in *ST* I-II and II-II Aquinas describes in greater detail the nature and finality of the human person, and the divinization of the human person in grace. Following this, in the *tertia pars* Aquinas describes the means by which this divinization is accomplished. Building on the more general *ratio* of *sacra doctrina* itself, for Aquinas the Incarnation is the most fitting means by which the salvation of the human person may be accomplished. His argument for this in the first question of *ST* III builds again on the nature of the human person. Aquinas argues that, because of the epistemic character of the human person as not only rational but also hylomorphic, it is fitting that the invisible things of God—those holy things contained in the science of *sacra doctrina*—should be communicated and made known through visible things. Aquinas reminds us that this visible communication of the invisible things of God is in fact the original purpose of the created world, which reveals the transcendental goodness and truth of the divine nature through sensible signs.<sup>4</sup> Following this same pattern, Aquinas argues that, as a visible reality, the mystery of the Incarnation makes known the goodness, wisdom, justice, and power of God.<sup>5</sup> Following Dionysius, Aquinas argues that it was most fitting for God to join himself to a created human nature so that he might communicate his goodness in its highest form to creatures.<sup>6</sup> The incarnate Christ, therefore, is a single person, in which the eternal Word is united to a human soul and flesh; this personal union of human nature with the Word provides, therefore, a *ratio* for the redemption of other human persons in the order of grace.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *ST* I, q. 1, a. 1, corp.

<sup>4</sup> *ST* III, q. 1, sc. See also I, q. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *ST* III, q. 1, sc.

<sup>6</sup> *ST* III, q. 1, corp.

<sup>7</sup> *ST* III, q. 1, corp.

In Aquinas's broader account of divine revelation and the Incarnation, human nature and its relationship with—and need for—the divine play an important role. As a structural component of the *ST* as a whole, the *tertia pars* stands as a completion and a fulfillment of the exploration of *sacra doctrina* that Aquinas begins at the outset of this same text. The study of Christ which appears at the outset of the *ST* III is in fact the first of three planned divisions of this final section of the *Summa*: beginning with the mystery of the Incarnation, the *tertia pars* would then progress to consider the sacraments as Christological instruments of sanctification, finally concluding with a treatment of eschatology and the last things. Although Aquinas did not complete the final sections of this project before his death, his initial design of these closing sections of the *Summa* makes it clear that the structural orientation of the text remains focused on the salvation and divinization of human nature. In this sweeping account of the return of the creature to the Creator—of the image to the exemplar—Aquinas's treatment of the hypostatic union of Christ's divine and human natures stands not only as a participated exemplar of the life of grace for the Church *in via*, but as a foreshadowing of the consummation of all things in the goodness of God. In this Christological context, Christ's priesthood falls within a specific aspect of his broader treatment of the humanity that Christ assumes, and the consequences of the union.<sup>8</sup> After considering what is assumed essentially by Christ in taking on a full human nature, Aquinas goes on to consider the degree to which the human nature Christ assumed was perfected in its intrinsic capacities by this union (so-called "co-assumed"), and then the consequences of this union (in relation to God the Father and to us) and finally the historical activities of Christ during his earthly life. Aquinas's consideration of Christ's priesthood, which appears in question 22 of *ST* III, is situated within Aquinas's initial description of the nature of the hypostatic union and its consequences in the first section of the *tertia pars*. In this section, Aquinas first explores the implications of this assumption for the nature itself, drawing our attention to the way in which this assumed human nature is perfected in grace. Beginning with the grace of the hypostatic union itself, Aquinas explores the perfection of Christ's own humanity in grace, and then the grace by which his humanity is further perfected in his role as head of the Church, related to the graced human natures of the Church's members as a head is related to a body.<sup>9</sup> As "co-assumed" perfections, these graces perfect

<sup>8</sup> On the structural importance of Christ's priesthood in the *ST*, see Kaltenbach, "Christ the Priest," 67–106.

<sup>9</sup> *ST* III, q. 2; qq. 7–8.

the human nature assumed by the person of the Word in distinct ways, each of which identifies a specific aspect of the perfective consequences of the hypostatic union for Christ himself as the God-man.

Although these perfections speak of different aspects of the intrinsic perfection of the human nature assumed, it would be inaccurate to claim that these same perfections exhaust the whole of the Incarnation's teleology. Indeed, for Aquinas the Incarnation finds its completion in Christ's works on our behalf, as he makes satisfaction for both original sin and subsequent personal sins.<sup>10</sup> Following his treatment of the co-assumed perfections of Christ's human nature, therefore, Aquinas turns his attention to the consequences of the hypostatic union—it is here that Aquinas situates the priesthood of Christ. In his initial treatment of the Incarnation, it is clear that the human nature that Christ assumes is perfected and divinized in a superexcellent manner, and for Aquinas this superabundant perfection has consequences for the relationship between Christ and the Father. Considered in his divinity, as the eternal Word Christ already stands in a certain relation with the Father: as an equally divine person of the Trinity according to essence, the person of the Word proceeds eternally from the Father and is subsistently distinguished from the same according to the eternal pattern of the mutually opposed relations of paternity and filiation. As Father and Son, the first and second persons of the Trinity are distinguished by a form of relationality that stands outside of the created order entirely.<sup>11</sup> The arc of *sacra doctrina*, however, concerns the redemption of the Trinity's *image*, as found uniquely in created, rational creatures. Taking to himself the volitionally malleable—and therefore redeemable—instance of created rational nature that is unique to the materially subsistent human soul,<sup>12</sup> the person of the Word takes up a fitting instrument for the redemption of those creatures who, by the adoption of grace, will come to share a deepened similitude of nature with the Word by the working of grace.<sup>13</sup> What changes, as a result of the Incarnation, between the Father and the Son? Certainly not the eternal relations that distinguish the Father and Son as Trinitarian persons within the one God. As a consequence of the Incarnation, however,

<sup>10</sup> *ST* III, q. 1, aa. 1–4.

<sup>11</sup> See *ST* I, qq. 27–30.

<sup>12</sup> On the singular status of human nature as a materially subsistent instance of created rational nature, see *ST* I, qq. 75–76.

<sup>13</sup> Later in this essay, I discuss the concept of divine image in the case of the person of the Word and human nature, and the manner in which human nature is an image “toward” God.

the God-man stands in a new relation with the Father. For Aquinas, one of the ways of naming this relation is Christ's priesthood.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to question 22 of the *tertia pars*, which supplied the initial definition of priesthood that was invoked at the outset of this discussion, we find that Christ's humanity serves as a most fitting mediator between God and the people.<sup>15</sup> Although angels stand between God and human persons in the order of being, the incarnate Christ emerges as greater than the angels, not only according to his Godhead but in his humanity as well, which possesses the full measure of grace and glory.<sup>16</sup> In the context of the structure of the *tertia pars*, it is because of the perfection in grace of Christ's human nature (including both assumed and co-assumed perfections) that this same humanity is, by consequence, most fittingly related to the eternal Father as a priest. In Christ, the capacities of lawgiver, priest, and king concur in Christ, as a function of his exemplarity as the head of the body in grace and of all human persons in the order of excellence.<sup>17</sup>

For Aquinas, the exemplarity of Christ's priesthood stands as the fulfillment of a multitude of types present in human cultures, and most especially within the particular historicity of Judeo-Christian salvation history itself. Considered essentially, human nature has an intrinsic religious orientation for Aquinas under the auspices of the virtue of justice: as a potential part of justice, religion has to do with the right relation of the human person to God. Specifically, as a virtue religion represents the subjugation of the mind to God, by which we offer God fitting praise.<sup>18</sup> In the *secunda secundae*, Aquinas describes a connected matrix of both internal and external acts that comprise the proper expression of this virtue. Beginning with the interior acts of devotion and prayer, the external acts of religion function as visible signs of the interior ones, taking the form of bodily reverence, sacrifices, oblations, and first fruits, tithes, and vows.<sup>19</sup> In Aquinas's description of the consequences of the Incarnation in the *tertia pars*, an echo of this basic anthropological pattern emerges in his presentation of the new relation with the Father that results from the Incarnation. Beginning with the subjection

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<sup>14</sup> Aquinas also names Christ's subjugation, prayer, adoption, and predestination as consequences of the union of Christ's human nature with his divinity in the person of the Word (as assumed and co-assumed) for his relation with God the Father. See *ST* III, qq. 20–24.

<sup>15</sup> *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, corp.

<sup>16</sup> *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>17</sup> *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>18</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 81, aa. 1, 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> See *ST* II-II, qq. 81–88.

of Christ to the Father in his humanity, it follows that Christ also performs the second internal act of the virtue of religion—prayer—as subjected to the Father. His priesthood follows from this for Aquinas, broadly following the trajectory of the external acts of the virtue of religion, in which bodily acts of worship culminate in sacrifice.<sup>20</sup>

In relation to human nature considered essentially, therefore, the priesthood of Christ has an exemplary function that has the capacity to elevate and perfect all human persons and cultures that are drawn to him. For the Salamanican Dominican tradition, this aspect of Christ's priestly office was particularly generative—Francisco de Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, and Domingo Bañez all begin their descriptions of Christ's priesthood and the Eucharist using the virtue of religion, working to show that these theological themes are conceptually grounded in the human person's relation to God under natural law.<sup>21</sup>

### Christ as High Priest: Temple, Incarnation, and the Space of True Sacrifice

Within the more specific context of salvation history, Christ's priesthood also stands as an exemplar, fulfilling in truth the figures of priestly ministry

<sup>20</sup> See *ST* III, qq. 20–22. On the relationship between Christ's priesthood, as situated in the *tertia pars*, and the broader concept of sacrifice in Aquinas's thought, see Hannah Hemphill, "Sacrifice in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2019), 132–70. For the natural foundations of the concept of priesthood, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., "Le sacerdoce comme institution naturelle selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 33–57. See also Reginald Lynch, "Cajetan on Christ's Priestly Sacrifice: Ressourcement Thomism in the Sixteenth Century," in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Roger Nutt, Michael Dauphinais, and Andrew Hofer (Naples, FL: Ave Maria Press, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> See Francisco de Vitoria, *In II-II ST*, q. 85, a. 1, in *Comentarios a la Segunda secundae de Santo Tomás*, ed. Vincente Beltrán de Heredia, vol. 4 (Salamanca, 1934), 299; Dominigo de Soto, *De iustitia et iure*, bk. 9, q. 1, a. 1, in *De Iustitia et Iure Libri decem, de la Justicia y del Derecho en diez Libros, por el Maestro Domingo de Soto, O.P. Teólogo Real en Trento, Confesor del Emperador Carlos V, y catedrático de Teología en el convent de Dominicos y en la Universidad de Salamanca (1525–1560) Edición facsimilar de la hecha por D. de Soto en 1556, con su version castellana correspondiente*, trans. Marcelino González Ordóñez, O.P., Instituto de Estudios Políticos Sección de Teólogos Juristas (Madrid: 1968), 772; Domingo Bañez, *In III ST*, q. 83, a. 1:2, in *Comentarios Ineditos a la Tercera Parte de Santo Thomas*, ed. Vicente Beltrán de Heredia, vol. 2, *De sacramentis (QQ. 60–90; Addition. 1–24)* (Salamanca: Biblioteca de Teólogos Españoles, 1953), 447–48.

found under the Law of Moses.<sup>22</sup> Here again, a pattern of anthropological fulfillment emerges within the context of divine positive law, in which the priesthood of Christ is identified as a supernatural fulfillment of the religious teleology of the human person under natural law. In the specification of positive law, the specific ceremonial patterns within the natural teleology of the virtue of religion, personally and socially considered, emerge as a space within the created order for the right worship of God, to the exclusion of idolatry and other distelic expressions of the human religious impulse, even as these same ceremonial practices foreshadow the spiritual and supernatural fulfillment of this natural impulse in the priestly function of the humanity of Christ.

Some scholars have implied that the bulk of Aquinas's theology of the priesthood is found exclusively in question 22 of *ST* III, to the exclusion of other sections.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, the eminent scholar Jean-Pierre Torrell has minimized the importance of the figurative dimension of the Old Law for Aquinas's understanding of Christ's priesthood.<sup>24</sup> I would respectfully propose, however, that there are in fact many important conceptual resources here which should not be overlooked. What is described as figure in the context of the Old Law is a lived reality for the Church. Accordingly, in this context the figure serves not only as an anticipation of the reality, but as an indication of the form and scope of the reality itself, even as it exists in the present. In this vein, in his treatment of the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law, Aquinas identifies several important features of Christ as priest in relation to the members of the Church, and even human nature itself, that remain instructive for our understanding of these topics today.

<sup>22</sup> For the importance of a biblical account of Christ's priesthood that takes into account the New Testament's fulfillment of Old Testament figures for Aquinas's account of priesthood in *ST* III, q. 22, see Matthew Levering, "Christ the Priest: An Exploration of *Summa Theologiae* III, Question 22," *Thomist* 71, no. 3 (2007): 379–417 (as well as throughout Levering's *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*).

<sup>23</sup> See Jean-Pierre Torrell, "The Priesthood of Christ in the *Summa Theologiae*," in *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 126–58. This chapter originally appeared in French in *Revue thomiste* in 1999 (see note 3).

<sup>24</sup> Torrell articulates his own reasons for excluding other sections of the *Summa theologiae* as sources for Aquinas's theology of priesthood: "We find nothing on this subject in the *Prima Pars*, nor is there anything in the *Secunda pars*, with the exception of two allusions at the end of the *Prima Secundae*" ("Priesthood of Christ," 126). In a corresponding footnote, Torrell specifies that these "two allusions at the end of the *Prima Secundae*" are *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 4, and a. 5, ad 5, where Torrell acknowledges that "Thomas alludes to the priesthood of Christ in relation to the Levitical priesthood within the framework of the treatise on the Old Law" (126n1).

In question 102 of the *prima secundae*, Aquinas argues that Christ's priesthood is the fulfillment of the figurative sense of the ceremonial precepts of the Old Covenant.<sup>25</sup> Falling within his treatment of law more generally, Aquinas approaches the liturgical precepts of the Mosaic covenant as a species of divine positive law.<sup>26</sup> Taken in their literal sense, these ceremonial precepts have a proper function within the historical context in which they were originally given; as religious observances, these precepts aid in the fruitful exercise of the virtue of religion by clearly specifying external religious acts that both give honor to God and avoid the error of idolatry.<sup>27</sup> In their literal sense, they differ from the natural law only in the specificity that characterizes positive law—their letter alone does not provide the pattern for a supernatural teleology for human religious acts.<sup>28</sup> As a median point in the trajectory of salvation history, however, these same observances also foreshadow Christ's priesthood in their figurative sense. Following the exegesis of Venerable Bede and others of the medieval monastic tradition, Aquinas argues that the liturgical precepts of the Old Law are in fact mystical figures of both Christ and the Church.<sup>29</sup> Although Aquinas makes a distinction between letter and figure in this context, even within the outer observance of the Old Law's letter they are ultimately united as liturgical realities, with the letter's ritual already pointing in figure to the outward and visible observance of the New Law, fulfilled in and made possible by Christ's priesthood.

<sup>25</sup> See *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 2, corp.

<sup>26</sup> *ST* I-I, q. 95, aa. 2–3; and q. 93, a. 3, corp.

<sup>27</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 2, corp.

<sup>28</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 98, a. 5, corp.; q. 99, a. 2, ad 1 and ad 2; a. 3, ad 2; a. 4, corp.

<sup>29</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 2, corp. On Bede and medieval allegorical readings of the Old Testament and its liturgical precepts, see Connor O'Brien, *Bede's Temple: An Image and Its Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Arthur G. Holder, *Bede's Commentaries on the Tabernacle and the Temple* (PhD diss., Duke University, 1987); Scott Degregorio, "Bede and the Old Testament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott Degregorio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 127–41; Beryl Smalley, "William of Auvergne, John of La Rochelle and St. Thomas Aquinas on the Old Law," in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 11–71; Michael Hahn, "Augustine in the Teaching of Thomas: Aquinas's Reception and Use of Contra Faustum Manichaeum" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2018). See also Elsa Marmursztejn, "The Old Law, the New Law, and Christian Norms in Thirteenth-Century Scholastic Theology," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 228 (2011–2014): 509–39; Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*, 83–107; Levering, "Israel and the Shape of Thomas Aquinas's Soteriology," *Thomist*, 63, no. 1 (1999): 65–82; Randall Smith, "What the Old Law Reveals about the Natural Law According to Thomas Aquinas," *Thomist* 75, no. 1 (2011): 95–139.

For Aquinas, the sacrifices of the Old Law in particular signify the sacrifice of Christ; as imperfect representations of a perfect reality, their frequency and the comparative powerlessness in the face of sin reflect their status as figures of the priestly sacrifice of Christ. For Aquinas, the holocaust sacrifice in particular—in which the entirety of the offering is consumed—represents the most perfect form of sacrifice, serving as a type of Christ's self-offering on the cross. Additionally, however, this same consumptive offering foreshadows a broader anthropological principle that becomes a reality in the context of the Church's life as a participation in Christ's human nature: after the Incarnation, the supernatural perfection of charity emerges as a teleological possibility for the human person whose humanity has been sanctified by participating in Christ's body in grace. Understood figuratively, the holocaust offering represents the perfection not only of Christ's own sacrifice, but of the self-offering of those in whom the infused virtue of charity has come to perfect and direct all of their thoughts and actions; in this context, Aquinas mentions religious life as an example of a state of life within the Church that is specifically committed to this end. Using two other forms of sacrifice found under the Law of Moses—sin offerings and peace offerings—Aquinas sees a figure of the progressively more perfect offering of the Church in these partially consumed offerings. In these offerings, in which the thing offered is not entirely consumed, Aquinas sees the beginning of the fulfillment of a basic human obligation to give thanks to God according to a threefold pattern that recalls the teleological progression of the virtue of religion: beginning with an acknowledgement of the human person's dependence on the majesty of God, this pattern progresses to include the human debt to God that results from personal and collective sin; finally, in the most perfect form of sacrifice, the human person expresses gratitude to God for both present and future benefits received.<sup>30</sup> To understand Aquinas's full meaning, it is important to emphasize that, in this case, the figure of the Old Law is more than a simple historical type, waiting to be fulfilled in a later epoch; rather, the figure itself, even as uncovered within the Old Law's letter, is a space to be inhabited; this space comes into visible being as a living letter in Church, fully alive as the humanity of Christ in *caritas*.

As a foreshadowing of the New Law, in Aquinas's view the Old Law contains within it an implicit Christological structure that reveals itself in the specific liturgical ceremonies of the Old Law. In the progression from the movable tabernacle to the fixed temple in Jerusalem, following Bede and other medieval theologians, Aquinas sees a twofold allegory. In one

<sup>30</sup> ST I-II, q. 102, a. 3, ad 10.

sense, a progression from the Old Law to the New; in another, a distinction within the life of the Church itself between the fluctuation and change of the present age of the Church's life, and the stability of the Church's final eschatological state.<sup>31</sup> By emphasizing the unity between temple and tabernacle under the Old Law, Aquinas again underscores the ritual exclusion, found in the literal sense of the ceremonial precepts proper to each space, of those forms of improper worship that did not give fitting honor to God, according to the threefold perfection of sacrificial offerings outlined above. In this literal sense, pagan ceremonies—and even merely secular pursuits—are excluded from the ritual space that the tabernacle and temple mutually represent within the social fabric of the people of God. For Aquinas, taken again in their literal senses the unity of tabernacle and temple further represents a unified ritual space in which right sacrifice is offered to God alone, excluding not only according to physical space but also to ceremonial intent the multiplicity of imperfect and false sacrifices offered by the surrounding pagan religions. Under the Old Covenant, the unity of Abrahamic faith is mirrored in the unity and ritual exclusivity of this liturgical space. As a figure of the New Law, however, this ceremonial and creedal unity stands as a foreshadowing not so much of the physical liturgical space of Christian churches, as of the unity of authentic sacrifice and true worship that is found in the priesthood of Christ, as the fulfillment of Abrahamic faith. In the New Law, however, it is the spiritual life of grace that provides the “space” that, under the Old Law, was occupied by the physicality of the tabernacle and temple. As high priest and head of the Church, Christ exercises his priesthood within the ecclesial unity of the Church.<sup>32</sup> As an allegory of the Church, therefore, the temple space itself provides a further figurative image of the Church as a unified space of sacrifice. Divided between the holy of holies (found in the Western portion of the temple), the sanctuary (in the Eastern portion), and an outer court bordering both of these sections of temple, Aquinas identifies two spiritual readings. In the first sense, the distinction between sanctuary and the holy of holies represents the division between the physical and corporeal world, on the one side, and the world of spiritual substances, on the other. Following Augustine, Aquinas indicates that this division between corporeal and spiritual is mediated by a veil of visible signs. Following Bede again, Aquinas sees the veil shrouding the holy of holies as representing the elements of the material world, which yield to the world of spiritual things when approached as signs. As different spaces within the one unified temple,

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<sup>31</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 2.

<sup>32</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 3.

Aquinas argues that each of these spaces—corporeal and spiritual—offer different forms of worship. For Aquinas, the figurative significance of the temple as a liturgical space is in fact an allegory for the Christological structure of the Church as head and body, united as a worshipping whole under the one priesthood of Christ. Under the Old Law, the priests would enter the sanctuary of the temple on a daily basis, while the people would remain in the outer court. The veil which separated the corporal from the spiritual, however, was transgressed only once annually by the high priest; for Aquinas, the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies represents the sacrificial perfection of the human person. Following the pattern Aquinas has detailed earlier, this means progressing from the sacrificial obligations of the natural law and the subsequent recognition of the further debt of sin, to a sacrifice of thanksgiving.<sup>33</sup>

Turning to the Letter to the Hebrews, Aquinas offers another interpretation of the liturgical space of the Solomonic Temple, interpreting the division between the sanctuary and the holy of holies as a figure of the relationship between the Old Law and the New—while a multitude of priests offered a multitude of sacrifices under the Old Law, under the new dispensation Christ fulfills in truth what the high priest's entrance into the holy of holies represents in figure, bringing with him into this space of spiritual worship the members of his body who share, in the context of his priesthood, a spiritual life that is an anticipation of the life of heaven.<sup>34</sup> In this understanding, Christ's passage through the veil, which Hebrews describes, alters the relationship of the human person to the spiritual realities contained behind the veil. In the literal observance of these ceremonial precepts within the physical space of the Solomonic Temple, the veil served to differentiate the bodily nature of human existence and life from the possibility of a form of worship based not in bodily, but in spiritual realities. In the context of the Incarnation, the role of the veil itself shifts, revealing itself not as an obstacle to spiritual worship, but as an instrument *by which* true spiritual worship takes place.

Signs, by their nature, reposition material things to point beyond themselves toward unseen realities. In *ST* III, Aquinas will use an adapted version of Augustine's doctrine of signs to describe the sacramentality of the Incarnation's effects as a repositioning of the material in relation to the spiritual that begins with the humanity of Christ and extends to the humanity

<sup>33</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 4.

<sup>34</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 4. On Aquinas's account of priesthood in his commentary on Hebrews, see Gilles Berceville, O.P. "Le sacerdoce du Christ dans le commentaire de l'Épître aux Hébreux de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 143–58.

of those who share in his body. However, much of Aquinas's understanding of this Christological reality can be seen in figure in his spiritual interpretation of the liturgical space of the temple and its usage; in the case of the veil specifically, Aquinas argues that each of its four colors represents a different aspect of the sacramental transformation of the Church that results from the mediation of Christ as high priest. Beginning with the bodily aspect of human life, the first two of the veil's four colors signify purity of the flesh, the sufferings of saints; subsequently, the spiritual and immaterial dimensions of human teleology are sacramentally transformed, first in the love of both God and neighbor, and finally in the contemplation of heavenly things themselves.<sup>35</sup>

Recalling the first section of this essay, where we discussed the grammatical normativity of religion as a pattern for divinely oriented human action, the beatific end of the human person, and the necessity of *sacra doctrina*; in the context of the temple space, and the intermediary veil more specifically, we see a foreshadowing of the sacramental and divinizing implications of Christ's priesthood, which creates, within the sacramentality of the Incarnation, a space for the right worship of God under the headship of Christ, giving thanks for benefits already received, and for those expected in the life to come. It is in the space of Christ's humanities—his assumed human nature and ours, united to his by grace—that this new, sacramental reality emerges as the life of the Church.

As a Christo-ecclesial allegory, I have argued that Aquinas's figurative understanding of the physical space of the temple and its ceremonies provides a special image for understanding the role of Christ's priesthood in the contemporary context of the Church. But how are we to situate the members of the present-day Church in relation to the images of ecclesial space that Aquinas identifies in the temple? Aquinas has made it clear that the physicality of the temple and its special subdivisions has been definitively transferred to the life of grace; recall, however, that this same spatial organization of the temple was divided between clerical (itself subdivided between the high priest and priests at large), and lay, the clerical group occupying the inner spaces of the sanctuary and holy of holies, while the non-clerics remained outside in the temple court. To what extent is the original physicality of the spaces of the Temple of Solomon determinative for the polity of the Church in relation to Christ? In one reading, the people, precisely because of their non-clerical status, seem to be confined to an outer space of the temple that is far removed from the spiritual realities contained within

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<sup>35</sup> ST I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 4.

the holy of holies. While this physical division of space certainly governed the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law in their literal sense, it is not clear that Aquinas means for these divisions between the clerical and lay states of life to be translated into the figurative sense of these liturgical precepts. Although the temple and its different liturgical spaces continue to provide an allegorical image of the Church, we have already learned from Aquinas that the progressive perfection of sacrifices under the Old Law—from sin offerings and peace offerings to holocaust offerings—was representative of the progression of spiritual sacrifices in the context of grace. Recall that, in Aquinas's understanding, the figurative significance of the physical space of the temple was transferred to the spiritual life of grace.<sup>36</sup> The progression from imperfect to more perfect sacrifice will be therefore tied definitively to the figure of the high priest, who alone transgresses the threshold of the holy of holies, passing through the veil of material signs to worship God in spiritual realities.

### **Beyond the Veil: the Incarnational Humanity of the Church and the Life of Grace**

Within the context of the letter of the Old Law, we have already seen that the progressive perfection of the worship of God from within the human condition is figuratively shown to have its fulfillment in the priestly headship of Christ, whose passage beyond the veil yields the possibility of worshiping the one God in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23–24). Taking the liturgical space of the temple as an allegorical foreshadowing of the reality of the Church's life, we have seen that the structure of this liturgical space provides a figure of the relationship among the worship of God under the physicality of visible things, the spiritual worship of Christ as high priest, and the mediating signs that stand between these two realities, figured in the liturgical space of the temple and its multicolored veil.

Returning to Aquinas's description of the reality that fulfills these figures in *ST* III, the fittingness of both the Incarnation and, more broadly, *sacra doctrina* itself, outlines the *ratio* for the use of material and visible things as an intermediary space between material and immaterial realities.<sup>37</sup> For Aquinas, both the assumed and co-assumed perfections of Christ's humanity form a conjoined instrument of sanctification, of which the Church's sacraments are separated instrumental extensions that provide the means by which the

<sup>36</sup> See *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 3.

<sup>37</sup> *ST* I, q. 1, aa. 9–10; III, q. 1, a. 1, sc and corp.; a. 2, corp.

soteriologically necessary truth of *sacra doctrina* is communicated to the human person, not only as the material content of belief, but as the formal means by which the divine essence is made the final end and governing formality of deified human activity, beginning in Baptism and sanctifying grace with Trinitarian indwelling, and finding its rest in the supreme happiness of the beatific vision.<sup>38</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the life of the human person within the reality of sanctifying grace resembles a form of instrumentality, as their progressively deified humanity comes to resemble the elevation of both Christ's humanity and the material elements of the sacraments as instrumental causes of sanctification.<sup>39</sup> Because it implies a formal qualitative change in the essence of the soul and in the soul's end, in the case of the sanctified human person grace has the effect of amplifying the analogy of being itself, according to both essence and end.<sup>40</sup>

The image of the veil, therefore, that Aquinas invokes as a figure in the context of the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law, is fulfilled in the context of the Church in both the humanity of Christ and his sacraments, and in the humanity of the one who participates in Christ's body as a member of the Church. As we have seen, the imagery of this veil, as a feature of the liturgical space of the temple, forms an important image of Christ's priesthood and its sacramental context in the life of the Church. However, despite the importance that Aquinas attaches to the space of the temple as a figure of the Church, and, as I have argued here, the humanities of Christ, Aquinas also proposes a deeper figure within the context of the Old Testament for the fulfillment of human nature by the priesthood of Christ, using the concept of the altar itself. For Aquinas, it is the altar of sacrifice within the temple that forms a unitive principle for his understanding of the Christological fulfillment of these ceremonial figures. For Aquinas, the altar itself—as described in Exod 20:24–36—is a foreshadowing of the Incarnation and the priestly offering that follows from it. Although the altar of Solomon's Temple was made of bronze, as Exodus suggests, conceptually the temple's

<sup>38</sup> See *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 1, corp.; I, q. 43, a. 3, corp.; I-II, q. 3, a. 8, corp.; III, q. 69, aa. 1–8.

<sup>39</sup> See chapter three of my *The Cleansing of the Heart: The Sacraments as Instrumental Causes in the Thomistic Tradition* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> For Aquinas, the indwelling of the Trinity that takes place in sanctifying grace forms a new and deeper relation between the Creator and rational creatures, who are already related to God according to the common mode by which all created things participate in divine goodness (*ST* I, q. 43, a. 3, corp.). In grace, understood essentially as a habitual quality inhering in the essence of the soul, the finality of the beatified soul is made proportionate and connatural to the soul by sanctifying grace (*ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 2, corp.; q. 109, aa. 1–3).

altar is in fact rooted in liturgical types that predate the construction of the temple itself. Here we find that it is most preferable that an altar not be constructed of stones or located on a high place (a reference, no doubt, to pagan shrines of the time); rather, the altar should be made from earth itself and should not include ascending steps (of stone or another material). For Aquinas, the earthen altar—which was described under the previous covenant as the most perfect means of sacrifice—foreshadows the humanity of Christ. As true flesh assumed in the Incarnation by the eternal Word and hypostatically united to the divine nature, the comparative lowliness of a created human nature is made equal to the Father, and because of this union, no further steps or other means of ascent besides this assumed created nature itself are necessary to achieve this equality with the divine nature.<sup>41</sup> Here, we begin to see that, properly understood, Christ's sacrificial humanity is fittingly voiced in the plural: implicitly, what makes his humanity an altar in this context is that it forms the space in which a sacrifice is performed by Christ—not on his own behalf, but for others. Recall that, for Aquinas, although the priesthood of Christ is situated in his human nature, it is not the union itself as such (as human nature assumed and co-assumed), but rather as a consequence of this union that concerns the relationship between Christ's assumed humanity and the eternal Father. As a priest, the earth of Christ's humanity forms an altar of sacrifice—a space of true worship in the Spirit—in which our humanity comes to be included as well. Continuing his figurative commentary on the altar of the temple, Aquinas reminds us that, because the nature assumed by Christ is ours, the altar made from our humanity extends something of the coequality of the eternal Word with the Father to us.<sup>42</sup>

Although clearly not equal to the Father in essence, created human nature has the capacity to draw closer to the divine nature through participation. In the *prima pars*, Aquinas uses the language of image and similitude to explain this analogical relationship: the Father and his Son are definitionally related by similitude of nature; in the case of the eternal Son, he is the most perfect image of the Father because he proceeds from the Father according to a perfect similitude of species; although personally distinct, the Father and the Son share equally in the divine nature.<sup>43</sup> In the case of created human nature—both Christ's and our own—the image of divinity is said less perfectly. While the image of a king is found in his son by similitude of nature,

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<sup>41</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 7.

<sup>42</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 4, ad 7.

<sup>43</sup> *ST* I, q. 35, a. 1, corp.

a different nature may also serve as an image of the king, such as a coin that bears the visage of the same sovereign. It is in this second sense that human nature is named an image of God, as something that expresses imperfectly the divine nature.<sup>44</sup> In this context, however, Aquinas adds an important point of precision to the notion of image as it appears in created human nature—although the eternal Word is the perfect image of the Father by virtue of their mutual divinity, for a naturally subsisting human nature to image the same divinity, a teleological orientation of the same nature towards the divine nature must be infused within the rational creature's capacity for perfection in second act. This begins with the gift of habitual grace in the essence of the soul, and the divinization of the powers of intellect and will by the infused theological virtues.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, Aquinas describes the divine image in the coin of human nature as “towards the image,” precisely because, in the context of grace, human nature exhibits a movement toward perfection as an image of God.<sup>46</sup> In the case of Christ, this perfectibility is already brought to full act in the assumed and co-assumed dimensions of Christ's humanity, and in the consequences of this union. Christ's humanity is alive in grace in the fullest sense, and as a consequence of this, his priesthood is the perfected exemplar in which all other priests participate. As a more general description of the effects of grace on created human nature, the perfectibility of humanity as image—a coin bearing the visage of the king—serves to contextualize the more specific picture of humanity as an earthen altar, the perfection of which is formally contextualized by Christ's most perfect priestly sacrifice. As high priest, Christ perfects the holocaust offering *on the altar of our nature*. Recall that, for Aquinas, a priest is a mediator between God and the people who bestows divine things on the people, offering their prayers to God and atoning for their sins.<sup>47</sup> As formed from the earth, this altar also stands as both a supernatural fulfillment of what nature is inclined to according to the virtue of religion and a symbol of the new creation that is wrought in Christ. As the first Adam was formed from the clay of the earth, so too is the new Adam formed in his members through the sacrificial mediation of the incarnate Word.

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<sup>44</sup> *ST* I, q. 35, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>45</sup> See *ST* I-II, qq. 72, 110; qq. 1–26.

<sup>46</sup> *ST* I, q. 35, a. 2, ad 3. On the role of the grace of auxilium in this context, see *ST* I-II, qq. 109–13.

<sup>47</sup> *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, corp.

### Participating in the Priesthood of Christ: The Sacramental Priesthoods of Baptism and Orders

As one of three sacraments that confer both character and sacramental grace, Baptism is related to Christ's priesthood in both of its effects. By conferring its twofold effect, for Aquinas Baptism conforms its recipient to Christ's passion and resurrection—actions that he argues are intrinsically connected to the exercise of the priestly character of Christ's ministry.<sup>48</sup> In the case of sacramental character, however, baptismal character gives the power to participate in the Church's liturgy—most especially the Mass—and to receive the life of grace from this participation.<sup>49</sup> Understood in this way, the character of Baptism gives the believer access to the space of the temple in faith, in which their own humanity becomes an instrument of the priestly headship of Christ.

In the case of Holy Orders, we find that a different sacramental character configures its recipient in a different relationship with Christ as head and priest. As a sacrament, Holy Orders is one of two sacraments that perfect the social dimension of the human person. While marriage perfects the social order in a natural sense, the priesthood is related to the social whole of the Church. Aquinas argues that, speaking generally, an individual person can be perfected with respect to the common good by being given the office to rule over the community and by the ability to perform public acts. In the specific case of the ordained priesthood, in addition to exercising governance over the Church as a body, Aquinas believes that these priestly acts of sacrifice are inherently public in character, directed toward the mystical body of the Church as a whole. In support of this, he cites Heb 7:27, which describes priests as offering sacrifice not only for themselves, but for the people as well.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *ST* III, q. 66, a. 2, corp.

<sup>49</sup> See *ST* III, q. 63, a. 1, corp.; q. 69, a. 9, ad 1; a. 10, corp. For more on Aquinas's doctrine of sacramental character, see Roger Nutt, "Configuration to Christ the Priest: Aquinas on Sacramental Character," *Angelicum* 85 (2008): 697–713; John Donahue, "Sacramental Character: The State of the Question," *Thomist* 31, no. 4 (1967): 445–64; Stephen McCormack, "The Configuration of the Sacramental Character," *Thomist* 7, no. 4 (1944): 458–91; B. Thierry D'Argenlieu, "La doctrine du caractère sacramentel dans la Somme," *Revue thomiste* 12 (1929): 289–302. See also Peter Leithart, "Christ's Christened into Christ: Priesthood and Initiation in Augustine and Aquinas," *Studia Liturgica* 29, no. 1 (1999): 68–83; Martin Morard, "Sacerdoce du Christ et sacerdoce des chrétiens dans le commentaire des Psaumes de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 119–42; Gilles Emery, O.P., "Le sacerdoce spirituel des fidèles chez saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 211–43.

<sup>50</sup> *ST* III, q. 65, a. 1, corp.

Both Baptism and Holy Orders have a twofold effect, in the form of grace and character. The first and primary of these effects, sanctifying grace, of which so-called sacramental grace is a “mode” for the later Thomistic tradition, affects the supernatural perfectibility of human acts. In this regard, the sacrifice of charity best fulfills the type of the holocaust offering, as Aquinas indicated in his treatment of the figurative sense of the threefold sacrifices offered under the Old Law. The secondary sacramental effect, however, concerns the liturgy and liturgical action more specifically. As a subset of moral activity more generally conceived, sacramental character enables a distinct set of human actions that concern the Church’s liturgical life, by modifying the power of the intellect in an unchangeable manner, so that the person may act as an instrument of divine power, participating as an instrumental cause in the formality of the principal agent—the priesthood of Christ himself.<sup>51</sup> United essentially in species with the nature assumed by the Word, the human natures of both the baptized and ordained participate in this union and its effects according to the twofold modality of both grace and sacramental character.

### Conclusion: Contemporary Implications

In the preceding sections of this lecture, I have outlined a reading of Aquinas on the priesthood that takes its departure from the relationship of human nature to God, understood within the unfolding context of salvation history. Having first examined Aquinas’s teaching on the priesthood of Christ in *ST* III, our subsequent examination of the figurative sense of the Old Law has confirmed and amplified the intrinsic relationship between the priesthood of Christ and the soteriological perfection of human nature, where the nature Christ assumes becomes both the instrument and the exemplar for the sanctification of our human natures in the life of grace. In the figurative context of the Old Law, for Aquinas this happens progressively: first through a reconfiguration of outward, physical religious activities—most especially sacrifices—within the unified liturgical space of the tabernacle and temple; second in the identification between the liturgical space of the temple and human nature itself, where the “earth” of human nature becomes the most fitting space for the perfection of the holocaust sacrifice in the humanity of Christ. Although often presented within the context of his systematic theology, I hope that I have shown here that the conceptual roots

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<sup>51</sup> *ST* III, q. 63, aa. 5–6. Sacramental character, by its nature, is a participation in Christ’s priesthood (*ST* III, q. 65, a. 3, ad 3).

of Aquinas's theological approach to the priesthood as a consequence of the Incarnation are in fact accessible on both natural and biblical grounds. In this regard, I have not intended to invoke any of the too-common dichotomies between biblical and systematic methodologies in theological discourse that have been paradigmatic for many iterations of postliberal protestant and Ressourcement Catholic theologies during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My aim here has not been to distance Aquinas's theology of priesthood—or any other aspect of his theological synthesis—from his speculative or philosophical commitments, of course. However, I do believe that fresh readings of Aquinas can provide points of entry into his thought from certain modern—and now postmodern—perspectives. The danger of esotericism will always haunt an approach to Aquinas's account of nature and the human person that insists on what is often received as a narrow intellectual tribalism, as the necessary prolegomena to any future theological discourse.

Although modernity and its many postmodern declensions present a wide array of intellectual perspectives, not always compatible with each other, a turn toward subjectivity, perception, and anthropology characterizes many trends of thought within these broad categories, ranging from the rationalism of early modernity to twentieth-century phenomenology. Although direct engagements with the perspectives of Descartes, Heidegger, and others on philosophical grounds remain necessary, Aquinas's thought can also provide a wide array of conceptual grammars for other forms of engagement with these same perspectives.

At the outset, I began by remarking that, in his account of *sacra doctrina*, Aquinas identifies a human need—not entirely postlapsarian—for a divine pedagogy that is not only intellectually informative, but salvific and restorative as well. In the virtue of religion, a fundamental principle within human nature is uncovered that provides the means for orienting both the internal and external acts of the human person toward the one God in acts that reestablish the creature's relationship with the Creator in justice, and offer God fitting praise. These internal and external acts, comprised as they are of the interior immateriality of the rational intellect and the exterior reality of physical things, movements, and gestures, form the basis for reimagining the individual and social space of human nature in new ways. The pattern of the temple, according to its letter, offers a sacral reconfiguration of this space within the natural teleology of the human person that not only navigates around the pitfalls of disingenuous and distelic versions of human religiosity, but also begins the ultimate fulfillment of this same religious teleology by filling these spaces with the living faith of Abraham. In the context of grace,

this human space receives its consummating perfection in the religious activity of Christ's priesthood, no longer in figure but in reality. By finding—and learning how to form—our own humanity as the ground for this reality, we open the possibility of discovering the religious capacity of the human person within a Christological aesthetic that establishes, with increasing visibility, the Church in our own time. N&V