

In the Name of Jesus Christ: A Few Historical Perspectives on the Functioning of Authority in Biblical Interpretation

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IN HIS RECENT STUDY “Ecclesial Exegesis and Ecclesial Authority,” Matthew Levering explores the fascinating relationship between biblical interpretation and ecclesiology, that is, how perspectives on the Church and ecclesial authority affect biblical interpretation and vice versa. By comparing the exegetical models of two notable contemporary biblical scholars, Brevard Childs and Stephen Fowl, with that of a medieval one, Thomas Aquinas, he argues persuasively that the work of the last may serve in our time to show what it means to participate in ecclesially mediated “divine *doctrina*.” Levering observes that while both Childs and Fowl find much to admire in Aquinas’s approach to Scripture, both find him insufficiently critical, the former faulting his seemingly eisegetical employment of theological and philosophical authorities, and the latter criticizing his apparent oversight of alleged shortcomings in the institutional Church’s interpretation. Levering, by contrast, finds Aquinas exemplary both for his actual exegetical practice and his interpretation of ecclesial authority.¹ The causes of this disagreement are surely too complex for an adequate accounting here, but one matter is conspicuous, namely, the lack of a common understanding of the concept of author-

¹ Matthew Levering, “Ecclesial Exegesis and Ecclesial Authority: Childs, Fowl, and Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 407–67.

ity, particularly ecclesial authority. Whereas Childs and Fowl tend to be suspicious of its compatibility with divine revelation, Levering does not hesitate to declare its mediation of Christ's authority in the world.²

In a recent essay on ecclesial authority, Nicholas Lash draws attention to the interesting ambiguity of the concept of instruction, and describes the difference between instruction as education and instruction as command. Noting the importance of avoiding confusion of the two senses, he goes on to say that it is more important to avoid subordinating the former to the latter.³ This is well and good, but Lash's article seems to take for granted a narrow understanding of ecclesial authority, suggesting that it is merely an instrument of governance, separate from, if not opposed to, the Church's teaching activity.⁴

What follows is intended to complement Levering's inquiry by surveying the complex provenance and development of the concept of authority in the Church's exegetical tradition. This will be for the sake of showing that Aquinas's understanding of ecclesial mediation of sacred teaching is more easily clarified if explained by way of the Roman concept of *auctoritas*, as appropriated by the Church's exegetical tradition, than by the modern English term "authority." Further, this will allow us better to appreciate the Church's own understanding of her mediation of divine revelation, as expressed in *Dei Verbum*.

To see that the Latin and English terms are not always interchangeable we need look no further than the Vatican's official English translation of the aforesaid document. *Dei Verbum* § 10 describes the Church's authority in the interpretation of Scripture as follows:

² "A richer metaphysical account of the reality depicted in Scripture would avoid this clash of competing agents and do justice to how the Church both is and is not the kingdom, and thus how the visible Church does, and does not, embody and mediate Christ's authority in the world." Ibid., 428.

³ Nicholas Lash, "Teaching or Commanding: When Bishops Instruct the Faithful," *America*, December 13, 2010, 17–20.

⁴ "Nowhere in 'The Splendor of Truth' does John Paul II discuss disagreement in the church or the duty of episcopal authority to monitor and guide it . . . 'It is for ecclesiology,' said Robert Murray, S.J., an English Jesuit, 'that [the term] *magisterium* till about the mid-nineteenth century referred to the *activity* of authorized teaching in the Church. The use with a capital 'M' to denote episcopal and especially papal *authority* was developed mainly in the anti-Modernist documents.'" Ibid., 18–19.

But the task (*munus*) of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, (8) has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, (9) whose authority (*auctoritas*) is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.⁵

In this case the English translation's "authority" corresponds to the Latin *auctoritas*. But the two are not always equivalent. Elsewhere in the document's English version, "authority" appears four times, only once supplying for *auctoritas*.⁶ In two of the other three instances, it stands in for the Latin *magisterium*,⁷ and once it is gratuitous, that is, lacking any basis in the *editio typica*.⁸

It is no part of the present study's purpose to quarrel with these translations, which strike this author as fair enough. But their variability

⁵ "Munus autem authentice interpretandi verbum Dei scriptum vel traditum (15) soli vivo Ecclesiae Magisterio concreditum est (16), cuius auctoritas in nomine Iesu Christi exercetur. Quod quidem Magisterium non supra verbum Dei est, sed eidem ministrat, docens nonnisi quod traditum est, quatenus illud, ex divino mandato et Spiritu Sancto assistente, pie audit, sancte custodit et fideliter exponit, ac ea omnia ex hoc uno fidei deposito haurit quae tamquam divinitus revelata credenda proponit." *Dei Verbum* 10.

⁶ "Cum autem verbum Dei omnibus temporibus praesto esse debeat, Ecclesia materna sollicitudine curat, ut aptae ac rectae exarentur in varias linguas versiones, praesertim ex primigenis Sacrorum Librorum textibus. Quae si, data opportunitate et annuente Ecclesiae auctoritate, conficiantur communi etiam cum fratribus seiunctis nisu, ab omnibus christianis adhiberi poterunt." *Dei Verbum* 22.

⁷ "Ut autem Evangelium integrum et vivum iugiter in Ecclesia servaretur, Apostoli successores reliquerunt Episcopos, ipsis 'suum ipsorum locum magisterii tradentes'; "But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, 'handing over' to them 'the authority to teach in their own place.'" *Dei Verbum* 7; cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III, 3, 1 (PG 7, 848). "Patet igitur Sacram Traditionem, Sacram Scripturam et Ecclesiae Magisterium." "It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church." *Dei Verbum* 10.

⁸ "Ecclesia materna sollicitudine curat"; "the Church by her authority and with maternal concern." *Dei Verbum* 22.

on the matter at hand suggests that the equivalence of *auctoritas* and “authority” may be presumed only at the risk of misreading the above passage of *Dei Verbum* as well as other similar magisterial declarations. Often enough such equivalence is indeed taken for granted even by theologians taking a specific interest in the matter. Richard McBrien has observed that “authority and power are not the same thing,”⁹ only to conflate the two concepts in a subsequent discussion.¹⁰ And after noting the English term’s origin in the Latin *auctor* (author), he dedicates several pages to describing its basis in the Old and New Testaments, and in the writings of the early Church.¹¹ And yet, the notion that the *auctoritas* mentioned by *Dei Verbum* has a clear biblical basis runs up against the term’s near absence from the Vulgate and its striking rarity in the earliest Christian literature.

Roman and Early Christian Origins of the Term

Here something must be said about the concept’s background, not only for the Fathers of Vatican II, but also for early Christian Latin ones such as Tertullian, Ambrose, and Augustine. To begin with the Bible, while the term “authority” is commonplace in modern English translations of the New Testament, *auctoritas* appears in none of the Vulgate’s corresponding passages.¹² On one occasion where the NAB employs the term “authority,” the Latin equivalent is *sublimitas* (1 Tm 2:2), on another it is *imperium* (Ti 2:15), and on another, *to have authority* corresponds to the Vulgate’s *dominari*, to dominate (1 Tm 2:12). In all the other cases, the Vulgate counterpart is not *auctoritas*, but *postestas*, and this usually to translate the Greek ἐξουσία. However well the English “authority” may

⁹ Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), 817, 818–22. A similar discussion also appears in his “The Nature and Use of Power in the Church,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (1982): 38–49 (40–42).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 818.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 818–22.

¹² The NAB New Testament employs “authority” fifty-seven times, usually as an equivalent for the Greek ἐξουσία, generally defined as ability/capability/power. A typical example is the NAB’s translation of Mk 11:27–28: “They returned once more to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple area, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders approached him and said to him, ‘By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them?’” Where the NAB uses “authority” to render ἐξουσία/ἐξουσίαν, the Vulgate employs *potestate/potestatem*, not *auctoritas*.

render various terms of the Hebrew and Greek originals of the biblical texts, neither Jerome nor any other Latin translator of the same texts saw fit to use the term *auctoritas* to render any of them.¹³ As for nonbiblical literature, though commonplace in Church documents since the late Middle Ages, *auctoritas* is virtually absent from the Latin texts of the Church's earliest councils and entered into the Church's lexicon only gradually, first mainly in reference to Christ or the Scriptures, later in reference also to the Church.¹⁴

¹³ The term's sole appearance in the Vulgate is in 1 Kgs 21:7, where Jezebel mocks her husband Ahab for failing to take hold of Naboth's vineyard: "A ruler over Israel of great authority (*grandis auctoritatis*) you are indeed!" His wife Jezebel said to him, "Get up. Eat and be cheerful. I will obtain the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for you." For a concise account of the production of the Vulgate, see *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, ed. R. Weber (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), xxxiii–xxxvii.

¹⁴ From the Latin texts of the Council of Nicaea (325), it is virtually absent in any of its forms (making only one passing appearance, with no bearing on the Church's teaching authority): "Hoc autem omnibus aliis concessum est, nam in Meletii persona non placuit propter insitam eius insaniam et morum procacitatem atque temeritatem, quo nulla potestas auctoritatis concedatur homini praevalenti ad easdem insolentias reppedere." "Concilium Nicaenum I," a. 325, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, curantibus J. Alberigo, J. A. Dossetti, P. P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi, consultante H. Jedin (1973), 5–18 (18). About one generation later (345–48), at the western end of the Mediterranean, in the decrees of a council at Carthage, it appeared once in connection with the prohibition of re-baptism (against the Donatists): "Discussus est titulus necessarius rebaptizationis in quo plus schismatis rabies delitescere et adhibita moderatione legis uigor et auctoritas custodita est," *Concilia Africae 345–525, Concilium Carthaginense a. 345–348* (ed. Munier, 1974, CCSL 149, 4). The term appears nowhere in the Latin texts of the First Council of Constantinople (381), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 24–35. In the Latin version of the decrees of the Council of Ephesus (431) the term appears four times, once in reference to the traditions of the Holy Fathers, the other three in connection with Christ: "Haec sunt sanctorum patrum traditiones, haec divinarum scripturarum praecepta; sic aliquis et quae sunt misericordiae divinae et quae sunt auctoritatis, deifice loquitur; haec meditare, in his esto, ut tuus profectus manifestus sit omnibus, Paulus ad omnes dicit." *Ibid.*, 49. "Unitum ergo carni Verbum Dei secundum subsistentiam confitentes, unum adoramus Filium et dominum Iesum Christum, non seorsum ponentes et determinantes hominem et Deum velut invicem sibi dignitatis et auctoritatis unitate coniunctos (hoc enim novitas vocis est et aliud nihil) nec item Christum specialiter nominantes Deum Verbum quod ex Deo est, nec alterum similiter Christum specialiter qui de muliere natus est, sed unum solummodo Christum Dei Patris Verbum cum propria carne cognoscimus" 51; "Unus igitur est Christus Filius et dominus, non velut coniunctionem quamlibet, ut in unitate dignitatis et auctoritatis, hominis habentis ad Deum; non enim potest unire naturas sola dignitatis aequalitas" 52; "Si quis in uno Christo dividit substantias post unionem,

For the provenance of the notion in the West, we must look elsewhere. Political philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—notably Theodore Mommsen,¹⁵ Max Weber,¹⁶ Carl Schmitt,¹⁷ Hannah Arendt,¹⁸ and more recently Giorgio Agamben¹⁹—have noticed that the concept is specifically Roman, and that in antiquity it had no precise counterpart in Greek, as it has none in modern Western languages. This is not to say that it is untranslatable, but that translating it in any given context requires choosing from among several possibilities. No one

sola eas societate coniungens ea quae secundum dignitatem est vel etiam auctoritatem aut potestatem, et non magis conventu ad unitatem naturalem, a(nathema)s(it)” 59. In the decrees of Chalcedon (451), the term makes three appearances, once in reference to the Gospels (*evangelicas auctoritates*) and the other two times in reference to the bishops: “Sed in hanc insipientiam cadunt qui cum ad cognoscendam veritatem aliquo inpediuntur obscuro, non ad propheticas voces, non ad apostolicas litteras nec ad evangelicas auctoritates, sed ad semet ipsos recurrunt et ideo magistri erroris existunt, quia veritatis discipuli non fuerunt” *ibid.*, 77; “De quo si fideliter atque utiliter dolet et quam recte mota sit episcopalis auctoritas, vel sero cognoscit vel si ad satisfactionis plenitudinem omnia quae ab eo male sunt sensa, viva voce et praesenti subscriptione damnaverit, non erit reprehensibilis erga correctum quantumque miseratio, quia dominus noster verus et bonus pastor qui animam suam posuit pro ovibus suis et qui venit animas hominum salvare, non perdere, imitatores nos suae vult esse pietatis, ut peccantes quidem iustitia coerceat, conversos autem misericordia non repellat” 82; “Confitentibus autem decrevimus, ut habeat auctoritatem eiusdem loci episcopus misericordiam humanitatem que largiri” 94. In the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the term appears 13 times, in reference to the Old and New Testaments, the Church, the apostolic see, bishops and prelates generally, and the Council and its decrees *ibid.*, 230–71; cf. 234 (2x), 237, 238, 241, 249, 250, 253, 254, 262, 263, 270 (2x). In the decrees of the Council of Trent, *auctoritas* appears forty times, usually in conjunction with the term “apostolic,” and then often in connection with the Holy See’s apostolic authority (e.g., “interveni-ente etiam auctoritate sanctae sedis apostolicae, apostolica auctoritate confirmatis, auctoritate apostolica”). In the documents of Vatican II, the term is ubiquitous (it appears twenty-one times in *Lumen Gentium*, thirty-one times in *Gaudium et Spes*, etc.).

¹⁵ T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, 3 vols. (1871; reprint, Graz: Akademischer Druck, 1969).

¹⁶ Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

¹⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated as *Political Theology* by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, “What Is Authority,” in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1961).

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

English term can render it accurately in every situation.²⁰ Considerable attention has been given to the influence and posterity of its titular form, as it was conferred upon the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. In addition to the title *princeps* (first citizen of Rome), he held that of *auctoritas principis* to designate his supreme moral authority, and this in addition to the powers designated by the terms *potestas* and *imperium*. Agamben has noticed that in its first instance the title belonged to the fathers (*patres*) of the Senate,²¹ and has drawn attention to its distinctness from juridical or political power, *potestas*, and military power, *imperium*. In times of crisis, such as the fall of the Republic,²² civil war, or the threat of invasion, the normal functioning of juridical institutions is suspended and replaced by a state of exception. Whereas *potestas* belongs to a function circumscribed by law, *auctoritas* attaches to a person and is not bound by law. Further, whereas the public office conferring *potestas* is of limited duration (in the Roman republic normally one year), *auctoritas* is enduring. As Richard Heinze has put it:

Every magistracy is a pre-established form, which the individual enters into and which constitutes the source of his power; *auctoritas*, on the other hand, springs from the person, as something that is constituted through him, lives only in him, and disappears with him.²³

In short, whereas *potestas* is legally conferred by an office, *auctoritas* is embodied by a person, and makes its presence felt precisely when the normal functioning of offices and legal institutions is suspended, as in times of crisis.

In its various forms the term *auctoritas* is commonplace in the literature of the Medieval Latin West. On the face of it, one could suppose that these writers, living in a pre-Reformation, precritical, medi-

²⁰ Ibid., 75.

²¹ Ibid., 77.

²² Historians have variously proposed the appointment of Julius Caesar as perpetual dictator in 44 BC, the defeat of Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, and the Roman Senate's grant of extraordinary powers to Octavian under the first settlement and his adopting the title Augustus in 27 BC, as the defining events ending the Republic.

²³ Richard Heinze, *Auctoritas*, 1925, 356, cited by Agamben, *State of Exception*, 82.

eval Catholic world were more fond of authority than we are, living as we do in a society that has made it a dictum to “question authority.” But medieval writers themselves leave little doubt that the *auctoritas* of their vocabulary is quite different from the “authority” of ours. Thomas Aquinas’s reflections on the conditions for waging just war on tyrants, both those who have usurped power and those who have become tyrannical after acquiring it legitimately, serve as a warning against taking for granted that he would have disagreed with the modern concern to “question authority.”²⁴

As appropriated by early Christian writers, *auctoritas* soon had theological senses and was used particularly to designate God’s authorship of creation. So for example, Tertullian asks Marcion rhetorically, “Tell me, Marcion, does your god base the authority (*auctoritatem*) of his law on the work of the Creator?”²⁵ Christian writers eventually extended the scope of the term to include prophets and other biblical authors, normally in connection with revelation. So, for example, Gregory the Great describes the prophet Ezekiel:

Since those to whom the prophet was sent were of such depravity and obstinacy, who would not see that the person of the prophet should be despised by men so perverse. But behold authority (*auctoritas*) is attributed to the person, as it continues: *And you will say to them, Thus says the Lord* (Ezek 2:4).²⁶

Gregory is concerned to point out that Ezekiel’s *auctoritas* derives from his status as a prophet. Shortly afterward in the same homily, he notes that anyone who lives in God has dwelling within the *auctoritas* of the divine Word:

²⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 40 (quaestio “De bello”), and *De regimine principum*.

²⁵ “Dic mihi, Marcion, de opere creatoris deus tuus legi suae adstruit auctoritatem?” Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, V, ed. E. Kroymann (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), CCSL 1, 718.

²⁶ “Cum uero tantae prauitatis tantae que obstinationis sint hi ad quos propheta mittitur, quis iam non uideat, quia persona prophetae a tam peruersis hominibus despici ualeat? Sed ecce auctoritas personae tribuitur, cum subditur: *Et dices ad eos: Haec dicit Dominus Deus*.” Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* I, hom. 9, ed. M. Adriaen (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), CCSL 142, 127.

And because all of us who live in God are instruments (*organa*) of truth, often it speaks through others to me, and often through me to others, so the authority (*auctoritas*) of the good Word should be in us, so that a superior may freely speak rightly, and a subordinate may humbly not refuse to bring forth good things.²⁷

So understood, *auctoritas* is divine in origin, but participable by the recipients of divine revelation, by believers.

But it was Augustine more than anyone else who provided a theoretical framework to explain the functioning of *auctoritas* in matters of faith. As he put it, "What we understand we owe to reason, what we believe to authority; what we opine, to error."²⁸ Medieval biblical commentators made this a stock expression. Augustine was less interested in the status *auctoritas* confers on an *auctor* than he was in its epistemological function, its bearing on what we know and how we know it. In his perspective, it belongs to the sphere beyond reason. Whereas the Romans viewed *auctoritas* as most clearly manifest in those states of exception wherein the functioning of legal institutions was suspended, Augustine understood it to allow us to know and think where reason is suspended, in those matters accessible by faith alone.

Medieval Studies of *Auctoritas* and Authorship

Alistair Minnis has noticed that medieval literature is a world governed by a continuous, if not homogeneous, theory of authorship, which he defines as a literary theory based on the two distinct but inextricably linked concepts of *auctor* and *auctoritas*.²⁹ During the second half of

²⁷ "Et quia omnes qui in Deo uiuimus organa ueritatis sumus, ut saepe per alium mihi, saepe uero aliis loquatur per me, sic nobis boni Verbi inesse auctoritas debet, ut et is qui praeest dicat recta libere, et is qui subest inferre bona humiliter non recuset" (CCSL 142, 129).

²⁸ "Quod intellegimus igitur, debemus rationi, quod credimus, auctoritati, quod opinamur, errori. Sed intellegens omnis etiam credit, credit omnis et qui opinatur; non omnis qui credit intellegit; nullus qui opinatur intellegit." Augustine of Hippo, *De utilitate credendi* 11, ed. J. Zycha (1891), CSEL 25.1, 32.

²⁹ A. J. Minnis has observed that the concept of *auctor* was inseparable from that of *auctoritas*: "The writings of an auctor contained, or possessed, auctoritas in the abstract sense of the term, with its strong connotations of veracity and sagacity." *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 10.

the thirteenth century, biblical commentators paid unprecedented attention to the problem of explaining the relation between divine and human authorial roles. The interest they took in the human authors of the books on which they commented was keen—the prologues to their commentaries are preoccupied with them. These prologues also contain the commentators' most explicit and elaborate methodological considerations, as well as the introduction of the various analytical techniques to be applied elsewhere in the commentaries.³⁰ Originating in the study of profane literature, these introductions to the author and his work, or *accessus*, became a standard feature of biblical commentaries in the latter part of the eleventh century. Eventually they were simplified according to an established pattern including the examination of the author's intention and mode of exposition, as well as the biblical book's title (*intentio*, *modus agendi*, and *titulus*). Subsequently, twelfth-century masters, notably Peter the Chanter and Stephen Langton, structured the *accessus* around an introductory biblical verse, generally taken from some book other than the one at hand.

With the development of university exegesis during the first half of the thirteenth century, commentators adopted another framework for the prologue, explaining a given book in terms of Aristotle's four causes. Discussion of the author's intention, or of the book's purpose, was considered under the heading of its final cause, its mode of exposition under that of its formal cause, and its title or subject matter under that of its material cause.

Not surprisingly, the matter of *auctoritas* normally appears in connection with the efficient cause, the *auctores*, as authorship was understood to be twofold—the primary efficient cause was the divine author, and the secondary efficient cause the human one. In the prologue to his commentary on Isaiah, Albert the Great connects the prophet's *auctoritas* directly to divine revelation:

For such a prophecy Isaiah is therefore to be commended. And

³⁰ See my *The Biblical Interpretation of William of Alton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26–40; Gilbert Dahan, “Les Prologues des Commentaires Bibliques,” in *Les prologues médiévaux* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 427–28; A. Sulavik, “Principia and Introitus in Thirteenth Century Christian Biblical Exegesis with Related Texts,” *La Bibbia del XIII Secolo*, Millennio Medievale (Firenze: Galuzzo, 2004), 269–87.

indeed the revelation of this dignity is understood, because not by a fallible human spirit, nor by a mendacious demonic spirit, nor by vain mathematical conjectures has it been accepted, but inspired by the Spirit of truth itself, 2 Pt 1:21: "Not by human will has prophecy ever come, but the holy men of God spoke inspired by the Holy Spirit." And so appears the authority of revelation (*auctoritas revelationis*), and as Augustine says in his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, "The authority of Scripture is greater than all perceptiveness of human wits" (*De Gen. ad lit.* I, 37).³¹

Albert continues:

So therefore in the aforesaid theme, the author (*auctor*) is commended by his name, by the congruity of his name and the (book's) matter, by the authority (*auctoritatis*) of revelation, by the quality of his vision, by the piety of his intention, by the usefulness of his work, and by the fidelity and firmness of these.³²

But the matter could also come up in connection with a given book's formal cause, that is, its mode of proceeding, or *modus agendi* (sometimes *modus procedendi*, very much like what modern scholars call its literary form), as we see in the prologue to the commentary on John's Gospel by William of Alton, a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas. The text is worth presenting at some length:

An understanding servant is acceptable to the king. These words are written in Proverbs xiv (35), in which principally the scribe

³¹ "A tali igitur prophetia Isaias commendatur. Et idcirco revelationis istius dignitas intelligitur, quia non spiritu humano deceptibili nec spiritu mendacii daemoniaca nec coniecturis vanis mathematicis est accepta, sed ab ipsa spiritu veritatis inspirata (2 Pt 1:21): 'Non uoluntate humana allata est aliquando prophetia, sed spiritu sancto inspirati locuti sunt sancti dei homines.' Sic ergo patet auctoritas revelationis et, sicut dicit Augustinus, *Super Genesim ad litteram*, 'maior est huius scripturae auctoritas quam omnis humani ingenii perspicacitas' (*De Gen. ad lit.*, I, 37)." Albert the Great, *Postilla super Isaiam.*, prol. (ed. Ascendorff, *Opera*, t. xix, 3a).

³² "Sic ergo in preinducto themate commendatur auctor a nomine, a nominis cum materia congruitate, a revelationis auctoritate, a visionis qualitate, ab intentionis pietate simul et operis utilitate et a dictorum fidelitate sive firmitate." Ibid., 4b.

of this Gospel is commended, and consequently the Gospel itself, since the commendation of an author redounds upon his work . . . What is noted secondarily in these words is the four-fold cause of this work. The material, by the saying *to the king*, because this book is about Christ, who is the king of kings with respect to either of nature that is in him . . . It is objected, Ecclesiasticus 3 (22): *Do not inquire about lofty things*³³; because in Proverbs (25, 27): *The searcher of majesty will be overthrown from glory*. Response: Majesty is not to be searched in a spirit of elation or curiosity or ill will, as with the heretics, but such searching is good when done in a spirit of piety for the declaration of the faith, 1 Corinthians 2 (10): *The Spirit searches even the depths of God*³⁴. The formal: *understanding*, incomparably understanding the divine nature, to extol the human nature and the existence of both in Christ. First it is about the divine nature; afterwards it is about the human. It deals with both sublimely, indeed with certitude, not however with the certitude of demonstration, which evacuates faith, since it compels assent whether one like it or not, but with the certitude of authority (*certitudine auctoritatis*). Augustine: “What we believe we owe to authority . . .” Therefore this scripture proceeds by the mode of narrative, not reasoning. This certainty, though modest in other sciences, whose discoverers are men capable of lying, is greatest in this one, which the Holy Spirit inspired. Augustine, *On Genesis*: “The authority of this scripture is greater than the perspicacity of all human genius.”³⁵

³³ Sir 3:22: “altiora te ne scrutaveris et fortiora te ne exquisieris sed quae praecepit tibi Deus” (ed. R. Weber, Stuttgart, 2007 = W)

³⁴ 1 Cor 2:10: “Spiritus enim omnia scrutatur etiam profunda Dei” (W).

³⁵ “*Acceptus est regi minister intelligens*. Hec uerba scripta sunt Prou. xv, in quibus principaliter huius euangelii scriba commendatur, et per consequens ipsum euangelium, cum auctoris commendatio redundet in opus . . . Secundario notatur in hiis uerbis quadruplex causa huius operis. Materialis, per hoc quod dicit: *Regi*, quia de Christo qui est rex regum agitur in hoc libro quantum ad utrumque naturam que est in eo . . . Obicitur, Eccli. iii: *Altiora te ne quesieris*; quia Prouer.: *Perscrutator maiestatis opprimetur a gloria*. Responsio: Non est maiestas perscrutanda spiritu elationis uel spiritu curiositatis uel spiritu malignitatis ut heretici, set spiritu pietatis ad assertionem fidei bonum est, i Cor. ii: Spiritus scrutatur etiam profunda Dei. Formalis: *Intelligens*, intelligendo enim diuinam naturam sine comparatione, extollere humanam et utramque esse in Christo.

For William, the Gospel's formal cause, or mode of proceeding, is John's incomparable understanding and extolling of Christ's divine and human natures. About these natures John teaches with certitude, not of demonstration, but of authority (*certitudine auctoritatis*).

If the framework of this scrutiny is Aristotle's efficient cause, its broader methodological implications appear in William's analysis of the author's form or *modus agendi*. In the background here is the larger thirteenth-century consideration of the question of whether theology is a science. Alisdair Minnis has drawn attention to the stimulus this controversy provided to exegetes' analyses of the stylistic complexities of biblical texts.³⁶ While a complete account of this history lies beyond our purposes, we will note that Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), one of the earliest and most important thinkers to take up the question, described a variety of biblical modes of exposition and set them in marked contrast to the scientific mode. He effectively separated biblical exegesis from science by distinguishing quite sharply between human science and divine science. Whereas the former, on his view, appeals to the *intellectus*, or faculty of intellection, the latter appeals to the *affectus*, that is, the mind's faculty of desire. And whereas the *intellectus* operates by division, definition and ratiocination, the *affectus* functions by precept, example, exhortation, revelation and oration. The Bible, as he would have it, is not a scientific work because it operates by stimulating pious affections and by treating of realities having to do with salvation:

Prius agit de diuina, postea de humana, de utrumque autem agit sublimiter, ut patet certitudinaliter; non tamen certitudine demonstrationis, que fidem euacuat, cum hominem uelit nolit ad asscientium agat, set certitudine auctoritatis, Augustinus: 'Quod credimus debemus auctoritati.' Et ideo hec scriptura procedit per modum narrationis, non ratiocinationis. Hec autem certitudo, licet in aliis scientiis sit modica, quarum inuentores sunt homines qui mentiri possunt, in hac autem est maxima quam Spiritus sanctus inspirauit, Augustinus, *Super Gen.*: 'Maior est huius scripture auctoritas quam omnis humani ingenii perspicacitas.'" William of Alton, *Postilla super Iohannem*, Prologus (MS Saint-Omer 260, f. 110ra–va); cf. Augustine, *De Gen. ad lit.*, ii (ed. J. Zycha, 1894, CSEL 28.1, 39). Worth noting here is that William parts with the Latin commentatorial tradition—including Albert, Bonaventure, and Thomas—which had followed Augustine in holding that, whereas the first three Gospels were primarily concerned with Christ's humanity, this one is mainly concerned with his divinity.

³⁶ Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 119–33. The present discussion is largely indebted to this work. On the emergence of explicit reflections on the scientific character of theology during the thirteenth century, see the capital study of Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Théologie comme science au xiii^e siècle*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1957).

It is to be said that the mode of science that is by way of the comprehension of truth by human reason differs from the mode of science that is by the affect (*affectum*) of piety by divine tradition. The first mode must be definitive: divisive, collective; and this must be the mode of human sciences, because the apprehension of truth by human reason is explained by division, definitions and reasonings. The second mode must be by precepts, examples, exhortations, revelation and oration, because these modes belong to the affect of piety (*affectui pietatis*), and this mode is in sacred scripture.³⁷

The following won by this view was considerable. Among others, the Dominicans Richard Fichacre and Robert Kilwardby, and the Franciscans Robert Grosseteste and William of Middleton largely adopted it, though generally substituting the term *aspectus* for *intellectus*. Despite the significant differences between their conclusions, all emphasized the primacy of the *affectus*.³⁸ And yet, some of the writers who used the terminology of *aspectus* and *affectus* were capable of viewing theology as a science. Bonaventure employed this language throughout his works, but in his *Breviloquium* affirmed the scientific character of theology:

The foregoing shows that theology, though admittedly broad and varied in matter, is nevertheless a single science. Its subject, as the One by whom all things have been made, is God; as the One through whom all things receive their being, is Christ; as that for the sake of which all things are done, is the work of restoration;

³⁷ "Dicendum quod alius est modus scientiae, qui est secundum comprehensionem veritatis per humanam rationem; alius est modus scientiae secundum affectum pietatis per divinam traditionem. Primus modus definitivus debet esse: divisivus, et talis modus debet esse in humanis scientiis, quia apprehensio veritatis secundum humanam rationem explicatur per divisiones, definitiones et ratiocinationes. Secundus modus debet esse praeceptivus, exemplicativus, exhortativus, revelativus, orativus, quia ii modi competunt affectui pietatis; et hic modus est in sacra scriptura." Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica*, Tractatus introductorius, q. 1, cap. iv, a. 3 (ed. Quaracchi, *Opera omnia*, t. iv, 1948, i, 10). This text has been presented and discussed by Chenu, *La Théologie comme science*, 40–41. For a discussion of its date and authenticity, see *ibid.*, 38.

³⁸ Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 120–27; Chenu, *La Théologie comme science*, 37–57.

as that around which all things revolve, is the unique bond of love linking heaven and earth; as that with which the whole content of the canonical books is concerned, is the body of faith as such; as that with which the whole content of the commentaries is concerned, is the body of faith as intelligible, for according to Augustine's work *De utilitate credendi*: "What we believe we owe to authority, what we understand, to reason."³⁹

Though less frequently, Aquinas also appealed to the *affectus/aspectus* distinction, and famously argued for the scientific character of theology, effectively submitting the realm of *auctoritas* to rational inquiry.⁴⁰ William of Alton, too, made abundant use of the distinction, even if his own view of the scientific character of theology must on the presently available evidence remain a matter of speculation. Worth noting here is that the commentators of the period generally engaged in a rigorous reflection on biblical modes of exposition, substantially the same endeavor as that enjoined upon interpreters in *Dei Verbum* 12:

The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.

Medieval writers described authorial modes even in their commentaries on nonbiblical writings. In his proemium to his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, Thomas Aquinas follows Augustine in naming two modes of discussing the Trinity, by authorities and by rational arguments (*rationes*), and points out that whereas Ambrose and Hillary

³⁹ "Ex his patet quod licet theologia sit de tot et tam variis est tamen scientia una cuius subiectum ut a quo omnia est Deus ut per quod omnia Christus ut ad quod omnia opus reparationis ut circa quod omnia unicum caritatis vinculum quo caelestia et terrestria connectuntur ut de quo omnia in libris canonicis comprehensa credibile ut credibile ut de quo omnia in libris expositorum credibile ut intelligibile secundum Augustinum, *De utilitate credendi*, quia 'quod credimus debemus auctoritati quod intelligimus rationi.'" Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* I, 1 (Opera, Quaracchi, t. v, 20a).

⁴⁰ For a few examples, see Thomas's *In I Sent.*, prol. a. 3, qa 2; *De Ver.*, q. 14, ad 3; *ST I*, q. 1, a. 2.

proceeded by way of the former, Boethius employed the latter.⁴¹ Subsequently, he cites the aforementioned remark of Augustine to point out that Boethius's argumentative mode of proceeding leads to the certitude of truth, whereas the same cannot be said of mere appeal to authority:

Third, he treats of the formal cause when he says: "arranged according to a reasoned plan," and he indicates the mode of treatment under three headings. First, since he proceeds by argumentation, he therefore says, "arranged according to a reasoned plan." For a question discussed even over a long period according to probable reasons but still with doubt is, as it were, without form, not yet laying claim to the certitude of truth; and hence it is said to possess form when reasonable proof is added, through which certitude regarding the truth may be attained. In this it provides for understanding, because "what we believe, we owe to authority, but what we understand, to reason," as Augustine says.⁴²

On view in the excerpt above is the analogical character of *auctoritas*. The merely human authority Thomas has in mind here arises from probable arguments. Unlike reasonable proofs, such reasons are incapable of leading to certitude. We shall see that neither Thomas nor his contemporaries doubted that statements supported by *auctoritas* of another sort could indeed engender certitude.

⁴¹ "Modus autem de Trinitate tractandi duplex est, ut dicit Augustinus in I *de Trinitate*, scilicet per auctoritates et per rationes, quem utrumque modum Augustinus complexus est, ut ipsemet dicit. Quidam vero sanctorum patrum, ut Ambrosius et Hilarius, alterum tantum modum prosecuti sunt, scilicet per auctoritates. Boethius vero elegit prosequi per alium modum, scilicet per rationes, praesupponens hoc quod ab aliis per auctoritates fuerat prosecutum." Thomas Aquinas, *In Boethii De Trinitate* proem., 9; cf. Augustine, *De trin.* I.

⁴² "Tertio (proemium) tangit causam formalem in hoc quod dicit: *formatam rationibus*, et tangit modum agendi quantum ad tria. Primo quantum ad hoc quod argumentando processit; unde dicit: *formatam rationibus*. Quaestio namque quamdiu probabilibus rationibus sub dubio exagitur, quasi informis est, nondum ad certitudinem veritatis pertingens, et ideo formata dicitur esse, quando ad eam ratio additur, per quam certitudo de veritate habetur. Et in hoc providit intelligentiae, quia *quod credimus, debemus auctoritati, quod intelligimus, rationi*, ut Augustinus dicit." Thomas Aquinas, *In Boethii De Trinitate* I, 5.

A Few Kinds of Authoritative Sources

On the rare occasions when late medieval biblical commentators refer to authoritative Christian figures collectively, they generally call them *sancti*, rather than *patres*.⁴³ The collective reference to *auctoritates* is considerably broader, often including even profane writers, especially on matters of philosophy.⁴⁴

Profane Writers

Commonplace in medieval biblical commentaries, references to non-Christian authors are normally appeals to figures whose authority is delimited to a specific field, such as Josephus on the history of the Old Testament,⁴⁵ or Aristotle on philosophy.⁴⁶ Even if one may wonder about their real weight in such cases, it is clear that their qualification as *auctoritates* had dramatic implications for the manner in which they were cited.⁴⁷ What follows is an example from William of Alton's commentary on Ecclesiastes:

Therefore it says ^{7,8}CALUMNY, which is, of course, the imposi-

⁴³ A case in point: "Vnde Augustinus, Ieronimus et alii sancti." William of Alton, *Super Ecl.* 12, 12, mss. Basel, Univ. Bibl. B III 20, f. 112vb; Madrid, Bibl. Nac. 493, f. 165r.

⁴⁴ On the meanings of *sancti*, *magister*, and *auctoritas* and the principle of *concordia auctoritatum* for the interpretation of authoritative texts in theology and law, see Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas* (Chicago: Regnery, 1964), 126-155.

⁴⁵ E.g., "BETH: EDIFICAVIT IN GIRO MEO, id est obsessio Caldeorum uel Romanorum uallauit me ne pateret fuga; ET CIRVMDEDIT ME FELLE, quasi dicat: in ista obsidione potatus sum aqua putrida que per fel intelligitur, Iere. ix: CIBABO POPULUM HUNC ABSCINTHIO; ET LABORE, corporis, Caldeis resistendo et etiam Romanis, ut narrat Iosephus." William of Alton, *Super Threnos* 3, 5 (ed. cit., 261); cf. Flavius Iosephus, *The Jewish War* (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, Loeb Classical Library 203, 210, 487).

⁴⁶ E.g., "DICIT EI IHESVS: MVLLIER CREDE MICH, quia discentem oportet credere, secundum Philosophum." William of Alton, *Super Io.* 4, 21, ms. Saint-Omer, Bibl. mun. 260, f. 121b; cf. Aristotle, *De sophisticis elenchis* ii (165a37; trans. Boethius, *Aristoteles Latinus*, vi.1, ed. B. Dod, Bruxelles-Leiden, 1975, 7; rev. William of Moerbeke, *Aristoteles Latinus*, vi.3, ed. cit., 78).

⁴⁷ Ceslas Spicq has observed that it became common in the schools of the twelfth century for profane authors to be considered *auctoritates*, albeit inferior ones; *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse latine au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Vrin, 1944), 77.

tion of a false accusation, *DISTURBS THE WISE*, specifically, the reformed. To the contrary, Seneca says: “No disturbance falls upon the wise.” And Proverbs 12 (21) says: *Whatsoever shall befall the just man shall not make him sad*. Response: These authorities (*auctoritates*) speak of the perfect wise man, whereas this passage speaks of the imperfect one.⁴⁸

Even if William provides no definition of *auctoritas*, his mention of it here is telling. A problem has been created by Seneca’s remark that the wise man cannot be perturbed, an assertion apparently at odds with the biblical text. Though a pagan, Seneca is an *auctoritas* on the matter at hand, wisdom, with the consequence that his sayings on the matter must be interpreted according to the principle of *concordia auctoritatum*. Put simply, his remarks must be in basic agreement with those of all other authorities on the same matter. In university interpretation, questions of this sort were normally approached with the aid of the tools of dialectics, and this for the sake of grasping the various authors’ intentions. The previous solution rests upon a distinction between two different senses of *sapientem*—whereas Seneca was talking about the perfect wise man, Solomon had in mind the imperfect one.

Sancti

It has been said that when referring to authorities, medieval theologians submitted them to a “reverential exposition” (*expositio reverentialis*), leading them around by a “wax nose.”⁴⁹ Examination of their methods

⁴⁸ “Dicit ergo CALVMPNIA, que scilicet est falsi criminis impositio, CONTVRBAT SAPIENTEM, scilicet correctum. Contra, Seneca: ‘Perturbatio non cadit in sapientem,’ Prouer. xii: *Non contristabit iustum quicquid ei acciderit* (Pr 12, 21). Responsio: Ille auctoritates loquuntur de sapiente perfecto. Hic autem loquitur de imperfecto.” William of Alton, *Super Ecl.* 7, 8 (MSS Basel, Univ. Bibl. B III 20, f. 104va; Madrid, Bibl. Nac. 493, f. 150r). Cf. Bonaventure, *In Ecl.* 7, 8; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* xi, 85.

⁴⁹ On the exegetical principle of *exponere reverenter*, with particular reference to Thomas Aquinas, see Chenu, *Toward*, 144–149. For a lucid criticism of his account, see Giles Berceville, “L’autorité des Pères selon Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 91 (2007): 129–43, esp. 138–41. In connection with an authority’s “wax nose,” Chenu refers to Alan of Lille, “Auctoritas cereum habet nasum, id est, diversum potest deflecti sensum,” *De fide catholica*, i, 30 (PL 210, 333). See also Joseph de Ghellinck, *Le mouvement théologique du xii^e siècle*, 2nd ed. (Brug-

for citing authoritative texts tells a different story. It was not typical of them to get around discrepancies between authorities by veiling them in anonymity.⁵⁰ Nor did they presume to substitute their own words for those of a given author in attempting to express what the author “wished to say.” If the reverential exposition is understood as a method by which the meanings of authoritative sources are subordinated to the systematic requirements of homogenous thought constructions, then we may say that these commentators avoided the practice. More typical is William of Alton’s exposition of Jesus’s encounter with Nichodemus, where we find him interested in the term *spiritus*. According to Chrysostom, Jesus’s statement “The wind blows where it wills” (*Spiritus ubi uult spirat* in the Vulgate of Jn 3:8) refers to the motion of the wind directly and to God’s action metaphorically. For Augustine, it is a direct reference to the action of the Holy Spirit. The disagreement is lost on none of William’s contemporaries. Hugh of St. Cher,⁵¹ Albert the Great,⁵² and Thomas Aquinas⁵³ mention both views and present them as alternatives. Hugh and Thomas discreetly refrain from connecting the latter interpretation with Augustine. Bonaventure explicitly opposes the two⁵⁴ and William follows suit, saying without hesitation that Augustine contradicts Chrysostom:

^{3,8}THE WIND (*SPIRITUS*) BLOWS (*SPIRAT*) WHERE IT WILLS AND

es: Éditions De Tempel, 1948), 233–35; Jacques-Guy Bougerol, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Bonaventure* (Tournai: Desclée, 1961), 58–59. In his consideration of a few of the vexed questions concerning Thomas Aquinas’s interpretation of Aristotle, Jean-Pierre Torrell proposes that Thomas submitted the philosopher to an *expositio reverentialis*, which he explains as follows: “A ce point précis Thomas se sent autorisé à se substituer à lui pour le prolonger et lui faire dire des choses à quoi il n’avait même pu penser. La reconstitution historiquement exacte de la pensée d’Aristote ne l’intéresse pas pour elle-même.” *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2002), 348–49. Without passing judgment on the accuracy of this remark, I note that nothing of the sort can be said of William’s treatment of authoritative texts.

⁵⁰ For an overview of the usage of the Fathers in medieval exegesis, see Gilbert Dahan, “Les Pères dans l’exégèse médiévale,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 91 (2007): 109–26.

⁵¹ Hugh of St. Cher, *Postille*, in Io. 3:8 (ed. Venetiis, t. vi, 296va).

⁵² Albert the Great, *In Io. 3:8* (ed. Borgnet, t. xxiv, 122a–b).

⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Io. 3:8* (ed. Parma, t. x, 346a–b).

⁵⁴ Bonaventure, *In Io. com. 3:8* (*Opera*, t. vi, 281b).

YOU HEAR ITS VOICE. Chrysostom relates this to the wind, which is said to “blow where it wills because its gusts are naturally unhindered. Its sound is called its voice (*vox*).” Nevertheless, Augustine contradicts this exposition, saying “The wind (*spiritus*) blows (*spirat*) where it wills because it has in its power the heart of anyone it illuminates.”⁵⁵

When he deems it necessary, William shows no hesitation in setting aside the position of an *auctoritas*. In his comments on Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:20), he mentions Chrysostom’s contention that the mountain to which she referred—“Our fathers adored on this mountain”—was the same as the one on which Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac. Here, too, Hugh of St. Cher,⁵⁶ Albert the Great,⁵⁷ and Aquinas⁵⁸ also mention the interpretation. Presenting it as one of several alternatives, they leave it unchallenged. Bonaventure leaves it unmentioned. William calls it false, despite the support of no less an *auctoritas* than Chrysostom:

^{4,20}*OUR FATHERS*, namely, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *WORKED ON THIS MOUNTAIN*. According to some, with whom Chrysostom would appear to agree, the woman pointed to the mountain on which Abraham intended to sacrifice his son. But this is false, because that was Mount Moria, as Genesis 22 (2) makes clear.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ “*SPIRITUS UBI UULT SPIRAT*, Crisostomus exponit de uento qui dicitur spirare ubi uult, quia habet a natura alationem non prohibitam; uox eius dicitur sonus. Augustinus tamen huic expositioni contradicit: *SPIRITUS UBI UULT SPIRAT*, quia habet in potestate cuius cor illustret.” William of Alton, *Super Io.* 3, 8 (MS Saint-Omer, Bibl. mun. 260, f. 117va). Cf. Chrysostom, *In Io. hom.* xxvi (PG 59, 155); Augustine, *In Io. evang.* tract. xii (ed. R. Willems, 1954, Turnhout: Brepols, CCSL 36, 124).

⁵⁶ Hugh of St. Cher, *Postille*, in *Io.* 4, 20 (ed. Venetiis, t. vi, 306va).

⁵⁷ Albert the Great, *In Io.* 4, 20 (ed. Borgnet, t. xxiv, 168b).

⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In Io.* 4, 35 (ed. Parma, t. x, 366a).

⁵⁹ “*PATRES NOSTRI*, scilicet Habraham, Ysaac et Iacob, *IN MONTE HOC ADORA<VERVNT>*, secundum aliquos, quibus uidetur consentire Crisostomus, mulier ostendit montem in quo Habraham uoluit immolare filium. Set hoc falsum est, quia iste fuit mons Moria, ut patet Gen. xxii (Gn 22:14).” William of Alton, *Super Io.* 4, 20 (MS Saint Omer 260, f. 121rb); cf. Chrysostom, *In Io. hom.* xxxii (PG 59, 186).

Chrysostom's authority affords him no pious exposition. To the contrary, he is flatly contradicted. Obviously, there can be no question here, either for William or any of his contemporaries, of *auctoritas* understood as a law in itself that had to be accepted.⁶⁰

All the same, authoritative texts constituted a body of knowledge the recourse to which was integral to thirteenth-century pedagogy. It remains for us, then, to further consider their methods for citing them. Medieval commentators were not unprincipled in this respect. When commenting on John the Evangelist's remark (Jn 11:2) that Lazarus's sister Mary was the one who anointed Jesus's feet (Jn 12:3), William of Alton lays down a clear rule and demonstrates its application. In question here is whether this Mary is to be identified with the unnamed woman who wiped Jesus's head with perfume in Matthew's Gospel (26:7), and further, with the unnamed sinful woman who washed Jesus's feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and then anointed them with oil in Luke's Gospel (7:37–38).⁶¹ William presents the views of four authorities, no two of whom agree. Then he sorts through all of this by appealing to still another authority, the Church:

^{11,2}*IT WAS MARY WHO ANOINTED THE LORD WITH OINTMENT AND WIPED HIS FEET WITH HER HAIR, below chapter 12 (3) and Matthew 26 (7), WHOSE BROTHER LAZARUS WAS SICK.* It is asked

⁶⁰ Such is the understanding of *auctoritas*, which Chenu contrasts with the sayings of masters (*dicta magistrali*), which could be set aside without scruple. *Toward*, 136.

⁶¹ The conflation of the three figures stands as another example of liturgical influence upon biblical exegesis. Before William's time and during it, Mary Magdalene was identified with the "sinner" of Lk 7:36–50 and with the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Lk 10:38–42 and Jn 11 in preaching and the liturgy of her feast day. See Nicole Bériou, "La Madeleine dans les sermons parisiens du xiii^e siècle," in *La Madeleine (viii^e au xiii^e siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome [1992], 269–84. Translated as *Modern Questions about Medieval Sermons: Essays on Marriage, Death, History and Sanctity*, ed. N. Bériou and D. d'Avray (Spoleto: Centro italiano di Studi sull'Alto medioevo, 1994), 323–99. There is an abundant literature on the development of medieval devotion to Mary Magdalene. In addition to the other collected essays in *La Madeleine*, see Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en occident des origines à la fin du moyen-âge*, 2 vols., *Cahiers d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 3 (Paris: Librairie Clavreuil, 1959; Katherine Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalene: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). For a brief overview with extensive bibliography, see P.-M. Guillaume, "Marie-Madeleine," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 10 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980): 559–75.

whether this would be she who figures in Matthew 26 (7) and Luke 7 (37). Chrysostom, “First it is necessary to say that this was neither the prostitute of Matthew 26 nor the one of Luke 7. They were full of wickedness, but this one is honorable and devoted.” Therefore, according to him, there were three women. Commenting on Matthew, Jerome says, “Let no one think them to be the same who poured oil on his head and on his feet. The former washed with her tears and wiped with her tresses and is manifestly called a prostitute. Of the latter, nothing of the sort has been written. And so, according to Jerome, there were two women. Also, the one who appears in Luke 7 is called Magdalene, from the village of Magdalo. This one is from Bethany. To the contrary, the *Glossa*: “This sinner anointed . . .” etc., and nearly the same is said in the *Glossa* on Matthew 26 and the *Glossa* on Luke 7, “Mary the sister” etc. Augustine seems to hesitate, saying “Behold, the sister of Lazarus (if, indeed, it was she who anointed the Lord’s feet with ointment, and wiped with her hair what she had washed with her tears).” Response: It is to be said that the saints are quite capable of disagreeing on matters pertaining to fact, but not on those pertaining to faith. Nevertheless, the Church holds that they were the same, and that what Jerome and Chrysostom say to the effect that they are not the same is to be understood with respect to the identity of status, because she was changed from one status to another.⁶²

⁶² “*MARIA AVTEM ERAT QVE VNIXIT DOMINVM VNGVENT<O> EXTER<SIT> PEDES EIVS CAP<ILLIS> <SVIS>*, infra xii (12, 3) et Mt. xxvi, *CVIVS FRATER LAZARVS INFIRM-ABATVR*. Queritur utrum ista sit illa de qua Mt. xxvi (26, 7) et Luc. vii (7, 37). Crisostomus, ‘Primum quidem illud necessarium est dicere quoniam non hec fuit meretrix que in Mt. xxvi, neque in Luc. vii. Ille enim plene mali Hec studiosa et honesta.’ Ergo secundum istum fuerunt tres. Ieronimus supra Mt. dicit: ‘Nemo putes easdem esse que super capud effundit unguentum et que super pedes. Illa enim et lacrimis lauit et crine tersit et manifeste meretrix appellatur. De hac autem nichil tale scriptum est.’ Et ita secundum Ieronimum sunt due. Item, ista de qua Luc. vii dicitur Magdalena a Magdala castro. Hec de Bethania. Contra, *Glossa*: ‘Hec peccatrix iunxit’ etc. Et fere idem, Mt. xxvi in *Glossa* et in *Glossa* super Luc. vii: *Maria soror* etc. Augustinus uidetur dubitare dicens: ‘Ecce ipsa soror Lazari, si tamen ipsa est que pedes Domini <unxit unguento> et tersit capillis.’ Responsio, Dicendum quod sancti in talibus que pertinent ad factum bene possunt dissentire, set in hiis que pertinent ad fidem non. Ecclesia tamen tenet quod eadem fuit et

In a stroke, William gainsays Chrysostom and Jerome, and settles a question left open by no less an authority than Augustine.⁶³ Hardly reckless, he has limited their authority according to a principle: the inerrancy of the *sancti* encompasses matters of faith, not questions of fact. Over and against them, he invokes the authority of the Church (*Ecclesia tamen tenet*). The interpretation he calls the Church's appears in the *Glossa ordinaria*, the main source of which, in the event, is Bede.⁶⁴ To be sure, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas arrive at the same conclusion, though with greater discretion.⁶⁵ Thomas leaves the impression of preferring Augustine's interpretation, though he refrains from resolving the matter explicitly and provides no general rule here for interpreting the *sancti*.⁶⁶ In none of the above cases do we find any of these

quod dicunt Ieronimus et Crisostomus non esse illam, intelligendum est quantum ad ydemptitatem status, quia mutata fuit in alterum statum." William of Alton, *Super Io.* 11, 2 (MS Saint-Omer, Bibl. mun. 260, f. 143ra).

⁶³ First he quotes Chrysostom as asserting that each of the three narratives concerns a different event and a different woman. Next, he cites Jerome to the effect that the events described by John and Luke are the same, yet different from the one described by Matthew. Then he mentions the further complication that the woman mentioned by Luke is commonly said to be (*dicitur*) Mary Magdalene. Despite the difficulty this presents for identifying her with the Mary whom John says is from Bethany, William finds three glosses from the *Glossa ordinaria* asserting that all three Gospel accounts concern the same woman, though not necessarily the same event. Finally, he quotes Augustine as tentatively identifying the Mary of John's narrative with the sinful woman of Luke's and suggesting that there were two anointings. Augustine says nothing here of Matthew's account.

⁶⁴ *Homiliarum euangelii libri II*, II, 4 (ed. D. Hurst, 1955, Turnhout: Brepols, CCSL 122, 209–10).

⁶⁵ "Et hanc sententiam tota tenet occidentalis Ecclesia." Albert the Great, *In Io.* 11, 2 (ed. Borgnet, t. xxiv, 436a). For once less discursive than William, Bonaventure leaves unmentioned the interpretations of Jerome and Augustine and contradicts only Chrysostom; in discussing the possibility of disagreements, he refers to the authors in question as *expositores* (Bonaventure, *In Io. com.* 2, 2; *Opera*, t. vi, 272a). As well as the figures William names, Albert and Thomas include Origen, Ambrose, and Gregory; yet passing over their other differences, both classify these authors according to a single criterion—whether they identify Mary of Bethany with the sinner of Luke's Gospel. Bonaventure, Albert, and Thomas all leave unmentioned the question of identifying Mary of Bethany with the woman of Matthew's version, and only Albert brings up the question of her identification with Mary Magdalene. As does William, Albert invokes the Church's authority to settle the question. Cf. Beryl Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools c. 1100–c. 1280* (London: Hambledon, 1985), 210.

⁶⁶ "Secundum ergo opinionem Augustini manifestum est quod peccatrix illa de qua dicitur in Luca, est Maria ista." Thomas Aquinas, *Super Io.* 11, 2 (ed. Parma, t. x,

masters attempting to homogenize the thought of his predecessors.

In the closing comment of the preceding excerpt we find a fine example of a reverential exposition. William brings two of the *sancti* around to his own determination without trying to “bend” the thought of either—immediately preceding his conclusion is an unambiguous acknowledgment that neither Jerome nor Chrysostom agrees with it. His reconciliation rests on the retrieval of an element of each one’s interpretation that can be squared with his own. He allows that they are correct in holding that the two biblical narratives concerned two different women, insofar as they concerned one woman in two different states, as a sinner and as a penitent. His attempt to synthesize the two interpretations rests on a distinction, not a forcing of the texts. Whatever one may make of his solution, it cannot be dismissed as a retouching or re-dressing of sources. Betraying little interest in cosmetics, it is a perfectly transparent exercise in dialectic.

For one of Thomas’s most extensive theoretical reflections on ecclesial authority and the related matter of disagreement with the visible Church, we turn to his treatment of heresy in the *Summa theologiae* (ST) II-II. Here, he limits the authority of the saints by referring to that of the Church, unambiguously identifying the pope as its principal holder:

489a). Elsewhere, it is not at all uncommon to find Thomas invoking the Church’s opinion as authoritative. What follows are a few examples drawn only from his biblical commentaries: “Manifestum est autem ex praemissis quod apud Iob et amicos eius eadem erat opinio de Daemonibus quam nunc ecclesia catholica tenet, ut scilicet ex angelica dignitate per peccatum corruerint.” *Super Iob* 40, 10 (ed. Leoni-na, t. xxvi, 215b); “Item error quorundam dicentium, Ioseph ex alia coniuge filios genuisse, et hos vocari fratres Domini, quod ecclesia non tenet.” *Super Io.* 2, 12 (ed. Parma, t. x, 336a). The following two examples concern the dating of Jesus’s baptism: “Sed ista opinio non videtur vera pro tanto, quia non concordat opinioni ecclesiae: tenet enim ecclesia, quod tria miracula sint facta in die epiphaniae, scilicet de adoratione magorum, de baptismo et de conversione aquae in vinum.” *Super Mt.* 4, 12 (ed. Parma, t. x, 42a–b); “Sed Ecclesia tenet contrarium. Credimus enim quod eodem die quo Dominus baptizatus est, revoluti anno, factum fuerit miraculum de vino; et postea revoluti anno, prope Pascha, Joannes fuerit decollatus; et quod ab isto Paschate circa quod Joannes fuit decollatus” *Super Io.* 2, 2 (ed. Parma, t. x, 336a). For the last reference I am indebted to G. Berceville, “Les commentaires évangéliques de Thomas d’Aquin et Hugues de Saint-Cher,” in *Hugues de Saint-Cher, bibliste et théologien*, ed. L.-J. Bataillon, Gilbert Dahan, P.-M. Gy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 173–96, 189, n. 23.

“By no means should we accuse of heresy those who, however false and perverse their opinion may be, defend it without obstinate fervor, and seek the truth with careful anxiety, ready to mend their opinion, when they have found the truth,” because, to wit, they do not make a choice in contradiction to the doctrine of the Church. Accordingly, certain doctors seem to have differed either in matters the holding of which in this or that way is of no consequence, so far as faith is concerned, or even in matters of faith, which were not as yet defined by the Church; although if anyone were obstinately to deny them after they had been defined by the authority of the universal Church (*auctoritate universalis Ecclesiae*), he would be deemed a heretic. This authority (*auctoritas*) resides chiefly in the Sovereign Pontiff. For we read [Decret. xxiv, qu. 1]: “Whenever a question of faith is in dispute, I think, that all our brethren and fellow bishops ought to refer the matter to none other than Peter, that is, to the authority of his name (*sui nominis auctoritatem*), against whose authority (*auctoritatem*) neither Jerome nor Augustine nor any of the holy doctors defended their opinion.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ “Ad tertium dicendum quod, sicut Augustinus dicit, et habetur in decretis, XXIV, qu. III, si qui sententiam suam, quamvis falsam atque perversam, nulla pertinaci animositate defendunt, quaerunt autem cauta sollicitudine veritatem, corrigi parati cum invenerint, nequaquam sunt inter haereticos deputandi, quia scilicet non habent electionem contradicentem Ecclesiae doctrinae. Sic ergo aliqui doctores dissensisse videntur vel circa ea quorum nihil interest ad fidem utrum sic vel aliter teneatur; vel etiam in quibusdam ad fidem pertinentibus quae nondum erant per Ecclesiam determinata. Postquam autem essent auctoritate universalis Ecclesiae determinata, si quis tali ordinationi pertinaciter repugnaret, haereticus censeretur. Quae quidem auctoritas principaliter residet in summo pontifice. Dicitur enim XXIV, qu. I, quoties fidei ratio ventilatur, arbitror omnes fratres nostros et coepiscopos non nisi ad Petrum, idest sui nominis auctoritatem, referre debere. Contra cuius auctoritatem nec Hieronymus nec Augustinus nec aliquis sacrorum doctorum suam sententiam defendit. Unde dicit Hieronymus, haec est fides, Papa beatissime, quam in Catholica didicimus Ecclesia. In qua si minus perite aut parum caute forte aliquid positum est, emendari cupimus a te, qui Petri fidem et sedem tenes. Si autem haec nostra confessio apostolatus tui iudicio comprobatur, quicumque me culpae voluerit, se imperitum vel malevolum, vel etiam non Catholicum sed haereticum, comprobabit.” *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 2, ad 3 (cf. Augustine, *De trin.* I, 10; Gratian, *Decretum*, P. II, causa xxiv, q. 1, can. 12).

Late medieval commentators' reception of *auctoritates* was uncritical neither with respect to the authenticity of the various works travelling under a given authority's name, nor with respect to their content. After repeatedly citing the *De spiritu et anima* as Augustine's in his *Scriptum* on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and up to the thirteenth disputed question *De veritate*, Thomas Aquinas rejected its authenticity—and so its authority—in the fifteenth (*De ver.* q. 15, a. 1, ad 1). More telling is his blunt contradiction of Augustine's assertion, important enough, that the humanity of Christ is more closely united to the Son than the Son to the Father:

Because what is urged in the argument “to the contrary” rests upon what is false—namely, that the union of the Incarnation is greater than the unity of the divine persons in essence—it must be said to the authority of Augustine (*dicendum est ad auctoritatem Augustini*) that the human nature is not more in the Son of God than the Son of God in the Father, but much less. But the man in some respects is more in the Son than the Son in the Father, namely, inasmuch as the same supposit is signified when I say “man,” meaning Christ, and when I say “Son of God”; whereas it is not the same supposit of Father and Son.⁶⁸

Thomas follows his reproof with an attempt to save something of Augustine's remark, noting that there is, in fact, a greater verbal unity between the humanity of Christ and the Son than between the Son and the Father, insofar as the terms “man” and “Son of God” refer to the same *supposit*, whereas the same cannot be said of the terms “Father” and “Son.” However reverent, Thomas's show of dialectic is by no means dishonest, as it involves no attempt to misrepresent or obscure Augustine's intention.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ “Quia vero id quod in contrarium obiicitur falsum supponit, scilicet quod maior sit unio incarnationis quam unitas personarum divinarum in essentia, dicendum est ad auctoritatem Augustini quod humana natura non est magis in filio Dei quam filius Dei in patre sed multo minus, sed ipse homo, quantum ad aliquid, est magis in filio quam filius in patre; inquantum scilicet idem supponitur in hoc quod dico homo, prout sumitur pro Christo, et in hoc quod dico, filius Dei; non autem idem est suppositum patris et filii.” (*ST III*, q. 2, a. 9, ad 4; cf. Augustine, *De trin.* I, 10).

⁶⁹ Albert the Great put forward a similar qualification of John Damascene's authority:

However pedantic such usage of authoritative citations may appear to the modern reader, it was considered an indication of mastery in the medieval university. Requiring arduous labor and considerable editorial ability, *compilatio* of the sort these exegetes engaged in was an enterprise highly regarded in its own right. Presupposing a thorough command of the biblical text and its entire commentorial tradition, it was intended to result in compositions surpassing the originals in complexity as well as organization, and this for the sake of classroom instruction of future preachers. In his exposition of John 7:15, William of Alton attributes mastery of just this sort to the greatest *auctoritas* of them all, Jesus Christ:

^{7,15} *AND THE JEWS WERE AMAZED*, Mt. 13: *All were amazed at his teaching; Saying: HOW HAS HE BECOME LEARNED WITHOUT HAVING STUDIED?* They knew that he knew letters because in his teaching he adduced authorities (*auctoritates*).⁷⁰

From his knowledge of authorities, Jesus shows himself learned, but neither William nor any of his contemporaries imagined that the Lord's *auctoritas* derived from learning. They understood it as nothing less than God's own knowledge. In the prologue to his commentary on John's Gospel, Thomas Aquinas presents John the Evangelist as the perfect contemplative, whose authority derives from his participation in God's self-knowledge.

I saw the Lord seated on a lofty and elevated throne, and all the land was filled with his majesty, and the train of his garment filled

"To the authority of Damascene, it is to be said that it is not only by reason or thought that the (divine) Persons are distinguished, because this would be Sabellianism. Hence, this *auctoritas* is to be understood cautiously." "Ad auctoritatem autem Damasceni dicendum, quod non sola ratione vel cogitatione personae distinguuntur: quia hoc esset Sabellianum. Unde caute intelligenda est auctoritas, scilicet, ut rationem vocet relationem personalem quae realiter persona est, et cogitationem intellectum distinguentem personas per huiusmodi relationes personales." Albert the Great, *In I Sent.* d. 1, a. 14, ad 1 (ed. Borgnet, t. xxv, 33b).

⁷⁰ "ET MIRABANTVR IVDEI, Mt. xiii: *Mirabantur omnes in doctrina eius; DICENTES: QVOMODO HIC LITTERAS SCIT, CVM NON DIDICERIT?* Sciuerunt quod sciuit litteras, quia auctoritates docendo adduxit." William of Alton, *Super Io.* 7, 15 (MS Saint-Omer 260, f. 131vb).

the temple (Is 6:1). These are the words of a contemplative, and if taken as if put forward from the mouth of John, they pertain well enough to the declaration of this Gospel . . . However, in John's contemplation of the Incarnate Word, a fourfold height is designated, namely, of authority (*auctoritatis*), hence he says: *I saw the Lord*; of eternity, hence he says: *seated*; of dignity or nobility of nature, hence he says: *on a lofty throne*; and of incomprehensible truth, as he says: *elevated*. By these four ways the ancient philosophers attained to the knowledge of God. Some attained to the knowledge of God through authority (*auctoritatem*), and this way is the most efficacious . . . And so, since the whole course of nature proceeds and is directed to an end in an orderly way, we must posit something higher which directs and governs them as Lord, and this is God. This authority (*auctoritas*) in governing is shown to be in the Word of God, when he says: *Lord* . . . So therefore the contemplation of John was high with respect to authority (*auctoritatem*), eternity, dignity, and the incomprehensibility of the Word, which he hands on to us in his Gospel.⁷¹

⁷¹ "*Vidi Dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et eleuatum et plena erat domus a maiestate eius et ea que sub ipso erant replebant templum.* Ys. vi (1). Verba proposita uerba sunt contemplantis, et si accipiantur quasi ex ore Iohannis euangeliste, prolata satis pertinent ad declarationem huius Euangelii . . . In hac autem contemplatione Iohannis circa Verbum incarnatum quadruplex altitudo designatur, scilicet auctoritatis, unde dicit: *Dominum*; eternitatis, cum dicit *sedentem*; dignitatis seu nobilitatis nature, cum dicit: *super solium excelsum*; et incomprehensibilis ueritatis, cum dicit: *et eleuatum*. Istis enim quatuor modis philosophi antiqui ad Dei contemplationem peruenerunt. Quidam enim per auctoritatem Dei in ipsius cognitionem deuenerunt, et hec est efficacissima uia . . . Et ideo cum totus cursus nature ordinate in finem procedat et dirigatur, de necessitate oportet nos ponere aliquid altius quod dirigat ista et sicut dominus gubernet: et hic est Deus. Et hec gubernandi auctoritas in Verbo Dei ostenditur cum dicit: *Dominum* . . . Sic ergo contemplatio Iohannis alta fuit et quantum ad auctoritatem et quantum ad eternitatem et quantum ad dignitatem et quantum ad incomprehensibilitatem Verbi, quam nobis in suo Euangelio tradit." Thomas Aquinas, *Lectura super Ioannem*, proemium (cf. ed. Marietti, 1952, no. 1–6.) With slight modifications, the English translation is that of James Weisheipl and Fabian Larcher, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, part 1 (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980). The Latin text is from a provisional recension drawn from the known manuscript witnesses to an exemplar at Paris.

Contemplating the Word of God, the source of all authority, the Evangelist partakes of it, and thus hands it on to us by his own words. In this perspective, authority enables communication and it itself communicated, drawing its beneficiaries into the life of God.

Conclusion

In the opening question of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas takes up the question of whether theology is argumentative, and entertains an objection to the effect that arguments must proceed either by reason or by authority. The objector has pointed out that reason is inadequate to the science's end, God, and that arguments from authority are unfitting because they are weak and therefore incapable of leading to certitude. At the outset of a lengthy reply, Thomas defends the use of theological argumentation from authority by grounding the said authority in revelation, and by making a remarkable declaration about revelation's recipients—they have an authority (*auctoritas*) that must (*oportet*) be believed. He goes on to say that whereas arguments proceeding from human authority (*super ratione humana*) are the weakest of all (*infirmissimus*), those proceeding from divine authority are the strongest (*efficacissimus*), while those proceeding from the doctors of the Church are employed as probable (*probabiliter*). He adds that even the philosophers may be cited as *auctoritates*, insofar as they were able to know the truth by natural reason.⁷²

⁷² "Ad secundum dicendum quod argumentari ex auctoritate est maxime proprium huius doctrinae, eo quod principia huius doctrinae per revelationem habentur, et sic oportet quod credatur auctoritati eorum quibus revelatio facta est. Nec hoc derogat dignitati huius doctrinae, nam licet locus ab auctoritate quae fundatur super ratione humana, sit infirmissimus; locus tamen ab auctoritate quae fundatur super revelatione divina, est efficacissimus. Utitur tamen sacra doctrina etiam ratione humana, non quidem ad probandum fidem, quia per hoc tolleretur meritum fidei; sed ad manifestandum aliqua alia quae traduntur in hac doctrina. Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat, oportet quod naturalis ratio subserviat fidei; sicut et naturalis inclinatio voluntatis obsequitur caritati. Unde et apostolus dicit, II ad Cor. X, in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi. Et inde est quod etiam auctoritatibus philosophorum sacra doctrina utitur, ubi per rationem naturalem veritatem cognoscere potuerunt; sicut Paulus, actuum XVII, inducit verbum Arati, dicens, sicut et quidam poetarum vestrorum dixerunt, genus Dei sumus. Sed tamen sacra doctrina huiusmodi auctoritatibus utitur quasi extraneis argumentis, et probabilibus. Auctoritatibus autem canonicae Scripturae utitur proprie,

At work here and in the preceding excerpts is an unambiguously theological notion of ecclesial authority that emerged from a purely human, non-Christian concept. It is an idea incomparably broader and richer than the notions Childs, Fowl, Lash, or most contemporary Christians, Catholic or Protestant, seem to have in mind in their discussions of the matter. Explicitly connected to revelation, authority of this kind is divine in origin. It is also communicable to and participable by those living in faith, the members of the Church. To be sure, neither Thomas nor any of his contemporaries doubted the universal Church to be its primary participant, whose hierarchical structure they took as given, and left unquestioned. They understood ecclesial *auctoritas* to mediate divine revelation, not to obscure it. Apart from the Cathars and a few other marginal groups, few Christians at the time thought otherwise.

It hardly needs to be said that this has not been the case among Christians for a long time. It has been the purpose of this brief historical sketch neither to oppose the general Western tendency to “question authority,” nor to provide a concise definition of *auctoritas*. By these selections, however, we have endeavored to shed light on a concept crucial to understanding what the Church says about her task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, confided to her own living teaching office, “whose authority (*auctoritas*) is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (*Dei Verbum* 10). 

ex necessitate argumentando. Auctoritatibus autem aliorum doctorum Ecclesiae, quasi arguendo ex propriis, sed probabiliter. Innititur enim fides nostra revelationi apostolis et prophetis factae, qui canonicos libros scripserunt, non autem revelationi, si qua fuit aliis doctoribus facta. Unde dicit Augustinus, in epistola ad Hieronymum, solis eis Scripturarum libris qui canonici appellantur, didici hunc honorem deferre, ut nullum auctorem eorum in scribendo errasse aliquid firmissime credam. Alios autem ita lego, ut, quantalibet sanctitate doctrinaque praepolleant, non ideo verum putem, quod ipsi ita senserunt vel scripserunt.” *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.