

The Spiritual Pedagogy of the *Summa theologiae*

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THE *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE* was developed as a direct result of Thomas's teaching at Santa Sabina: after trying to teach from the *Sentences* for a year, he abandoned this enterprise and began his own summary of theology, with its own proper order. It is possible that the material of the *prima pars* from question 45 onward represents classroom material. Jean-Pierre Torrell points out that only in the light of this historical context can the pedagogical concerns of the *Summa theologiae* be properly understood.¹

"Propositum nostrae intentionis in hoc opere est," writes Aquinas in the prologue to the *Summa*, "ea quae ad Christianam religionem pertinent, eo modo tradere, secundum quod congruit ad eruditionem incipientium."² The key phrase in this passage is *eo modo tradere*. The original Blackfriars translation rendered *tradere* as "to treat of," which suggests the production of a treatise. But the more obvious translation is "to hand over, to pass on, to transmit," which aligns the phrase with the theological understanding of "tradition."³ This makes a huge difference: Our intention in this work, writes Aquinas, is to transmit whatever belongs to the Christian religion in a way suited to the education of beginners.

Sacra Doctrina: Quid est?

A growing body of scholars has been reexamining the meaning and role of the phrase *sacra doctrina* in Aquinas's theology.⁴ *Sacra doctrina* emerges

¹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 211–12.

² Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, prologue.

³ Roy Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Boston: St. Paul, 1986), 1046.

⁴ Marc Johnson provides an excellent bibliography of these studies in an early footnote to his article "God's Knowledge in our Frail Minds: the Thomistic

from these studies as a complex reality that holds together an objective dimension, namely the content that is taught, and an active dimension, namely the various practices and tasks of the teacher who transmits the teaching.⁵ Johnson's recent studies on *sacra doctrina* as wisdom have profoundly developed our understanding of the objective dimension of *sacra doctrina* as "God's knowledge in our frail minds." I propose here to explore the complementary aspect of *sacra doctrina* in its active dimension, as the pedagogical praxis of the wise teacher transmitting what he or she has received from God. This entails being attentive to the rhetorical clues embedded in the text of the *Summa*.

The Methods of *sacra doctrina*

God uses a variety of methods to teach humanity, and because of this, so will *sacra doctrina*. In question 1 of the *prima pars*, Aquinas notes two key methods, argumentation and metaphor, both of which have scriptural warrant.⁶ These two basic methods account for a range of concrete methods used by God in scriptures, all of which represent God's *manuductio* of human beings in Revelation. Medieval pedagogy recognized five kinds of *manuductio*: sensible examples, less universal propositions which students could judge from what they already knew, similitudes, opposites, trust in a teacher's authority.⁷ All of these are present in the scriptures, and all, therefore, can be used in the enterprise of *sacra doctrina*. Thus, in article 8, Aquinas shows how argumentation is used to proceed from a more basic proposition (Christ's resurrection) to a more remote one (our bodily resurrection); the response to objection two in the same article is careful to sort out the kinds of authority and their pedagogical status; articles 9 and 10 outline the usefulness of metaphor in providing similitudes and opposites. Aquinas points out that God can also use things to signify other things, the supreme kind of sensible example, which finds its ultimate expression in the Incarnate meaning of Christ's conception, birth, life, ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and exaltation at God's right hand.

Model of Theology," *Angelicum* 76 (1999): 28. To his list I would add Eugene Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), of interest for its understanding of the scriptural and Christological character of *sacra doctrina*, and Jean-Marc Laporte's recent article "Christ in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*: Peripheral or Pervasive?," *The Thomist* 67 (April 2003): 221–48.

⁵ Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel* (Paris : Cerf, 1996), 2–11.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8 and a. 9.

⁷ Marie I. George, "Mind-Forming and *Manuductio* in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 57 (1993): 205 ff.

Thus we can expect to find in the *Summa theologiae* not just causal explanations, but also examples, comparisons, oppositions, images, proportional relationships, analogies, and more. Many of these are signaled in the text by some form of the term *convenientia*, fittingness or appropriateness. Gilbert Narcisse's masterful study has shown that these arguments from fittingness are not merely descriptive, but are ways of expressing the aesthetic-dramatic intelligibility of the relations between certain mysteries.⁸ They express the *rationes Dei* embodied in historical events, or incarnate meanings (especially in Christ). As Aquinas points out in articles 9 and 10, while such forms of "argumentation" may be weak when they are rooted in human wisdom, as part of God's *manuductio* in divine revelation they are supremely effective. They correspond to the concrete intelligibility whereby things, in God's wisdom, explain other things.

In his work on the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas Hibbs has shown that the pedagogy of that work is determined by the interplay between dialectic and narrative, and that certain progressions in the text, while logically incomprehensible, make perfect sense as narrative progressions or dramatic reversals borrowed from the Scriptures: "What makes the notion of narrative legitimate, indeed inescapable, is not a diminished appreciation or deconstruction of the metaphysics of the *Contra Gentiles*, but a proper understanding of it. Thomas's peculiar appropriation of the neo-Platonic motif of the *exitus-reditus* highlights the contingency of creation, in its origin and its endurance . . . as an unfolding of divine providence, creation is a sort of narration . . . a setting forth, an exposition, a telling or relating. . . . [Scripture, in addition,] is a narrative that divides and organizes the whole of time in relation to its transcendental beginning and end."⁹ Thus the overall logic of the *Summa contra Gentiles* is narrative in the strong sense, not abandoning logic or causal explanation, but combining it within the "divine comedic" framework of the biblical narrative as a whole.¹⁰ Because of this, "progress in the reading of the text . . . is possible only on the condition of docility to its pedagogy. . . . [Without] the active participation of the reader 'all that is before us is indeed nothing but a book.'"¹¹ This is highlighted, for the *Summa theologiae*, by Ofilada who sees that the *exitus-reditus* scheme is "a pedagogical manner of comprehending the

⁸ Gilbert Narcisse, *Les raisons de Dieu: arguments de convenance et esthétique théologique selon saint Thomas d'Aquin et Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1997).

⁹ Thomas S. Hibbs, *Dialectic and Narrative in Aquinas: An Interpretation of the Summa contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 7.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

Christian life. . . . The very pattern or structure of his theology, and the way he comprehends it, is for St. Thomas the same pattern or path of the Christian life,"¹² which is to participate in the patterns of salvation history.

Thus, the text of the *Summa theologiae* is not only *materially* a spiritual theology (as shown by Torrell).¹³ It is also a spiritual theology in its *form*, as a spiritual pedagogy, or a series of "spiritual exercises" designed to engage the student and lead him or her to an encounter with divine truth in Christ.¹⁴

The Structure and Dynamic of the *Summa*: A Rhetorical Approach

To speak of pedagogy is to evoke a discourse that seeks to have an effect on those it addresses; it is also to evoke techniques of ordering and presenting materials that are intended to make the material not only intelligible, but also easier to appropriate. We have already seen, under the umbrella of *manuductio*, five such techniques. The medieval pedagogue had other such tools, which he found in such sources as Aristotle's *On Memory and Remembering* and Cicero's *On the Orator*. The various techniques for *inventio* (finding the most appropriate argument), *dispositio* (how to order the arguments according to a plan), and *elocutio* (the set of literary and stylistic techniques related to the writing of a discourse) all contributed to the composition of a meaningful text. The art of rhetoric which governed the use of these techniques by the teacher also structured the reception of material by the student: to the techniques for teaching, there corresponded techniques for remembering and training the memory, as Mary Carruthers has recently shown.¹⁵ All of these techniques were understood

¹² Mina Ofilada, "The Role of the Teacher as a Condescending Mediator," *Angelicum* 77 (2000): 383.

¹³ The term "spiritual theology," which I will continue to use throughout this article, is an anachronism, since for St. Thomas all theology is a spiritual enterprise. Nevertheless, our contemporary situation is such that we need to be reminded of this fact, since for us, theology is often distinguished according to the pair dogmatic-spiritual, a distinction that continues despite the renewal of theology in the *ressourcement* and after Vatican II.

¹⁴ At least three authors use the term "exercise" to describe Thomas' pedagogy: see Gilles Emery, "Le traité de saint Thomas sur la Trinité dans la Somme contre les gentils," *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 5–40, and David Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974); to these two published works we add the soon to be published work of Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).

¹⁵ The work of Mary Carruthers is of great assistance for understanding the role of rhetoric in medieval thinking and writing. Cf. especially *The Book of Memory*.

by medieval thinkers within the context of moral psychology and epistemology: Aquinas's treatment of the parts of prudence in the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae* makes this amply clear.¹⁶ To grasp the pedagogy of the *Summa* as spiritual, we must be attentive precisely to these rhetorical elements, and remember that they seek to affect memory, understanding, and judgment as activities of the person.

The two most elementary forms used by Aquinas are the prologue and the article (which is in reality a *quaestio disputata*). The prologue signals the *divisio textus* of what is to follow. The *divisio*, as Carruthers has shown, is given so that the student can create the memory structures within which the *res* will be remembered; as it announces the plan of what is to follow, it also suggests links to be made between the elements of the *divisio*. Each question of the *Summa* has its prologue. Generally, these few lines of introductory text simply enumerate the list of articles. On rare occasions, however, they express the logical sequence between one or two particular articles in the series: "Des exemples de ce genre invitent le lecteur à s'efforcer de repérer par lui-même la logique de la série entière des articles et, éventuellement, l'importance respective de ces articles."¹⁷ Other prologues look back on what has already been studied in order to announce what lies ahead. From the various levels of prologue, then, we can discern not only the structure of what is to come, but also the effect Aquinas wants to achieve in the student. The prologues also govern the grouping of interpretive units: they delimit the beginning and end of sets of questions and order questions to each other; they set doctrines and notions in relation to each other, thereby affecting the meaning of these very doctrines and notions. By being attentive to these prologues, we interpret the text more faithfully, and we overcome groupings and structures imposed by later editors and commentators.

The article has many stylized features which commentators have studied closely.¹⁸ At this point, it is important to notice one particular feature which editors and translators often camouflage in their rendering of the text of the *Summa*, namely the title of the article. This is the short phrase which usually begins *videtur quod* and proposes a position opposite to that

¹⁶ ST, I-II, q. 49, a. 1

¹⁷ Albert Patfoort, *La Somme de saint Thomas et la logique du dessein de Dieu* (Saint-Maur: Parole et Silence, 1998), 18.

¹⁸ Consult, for example, the classic study of F. Blanché, "Le vocabulaire de l'argumentation et la structure de l'article dans les ouvrages de saint Thomas," *Revue de Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 14 (1925): 167–87. Also, Marie-Joseph Nicolas: Introduction to Thomas Aquinas, *Somme Théologique*, 58–60 and Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A. M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964).

announced in the prologue of the question, where as we have seen the list of articles is given. There is sometimes an important shift between the way an article is first announced in the prologue and then introduced in its title. Fr. Patfoort proposes a number of examples, of which we need retain only one: the prologue to question 103 of the *prima pars* announces that article 2 of the question will ask “quis sit finis gubernationis mundus.” The title of article 2, however, states “Videtur quod finis gubernationis mundi non sit aliquid extra mundum existens.”¹⁹ This strategy signals an important shift in perspective that leads the reader forward from an initial stance. The shift may be the result of new insights reached in the articles that have gone before within the same question, or it may introduce a perspective relevant to the appropriate solution of the problem at hand. In any case, the title of the article is often an important rhetorical indicator of Aquinas’s pedagogical objective.

Another important pedagogical feature of the article, one that is often missed when one is not aware of the importance of memory in medieval pedagogy, is the *sed contra*. It has often been noted that the *sed contra* signals the basis for Thomas’s *respondeo* in any given article, even on those rare occasions where he limits or corrects the position outlined in the *sed contra*. But the *sed contra*, properly understood, does much more: it is a metonymic device, where the “part” that is cited calls the student to retrieve from trained memory the “whole” of the *res*, whether the source be Augustine, Aristotle, the Scriptures, or some other authority. The *res* that is retrieved from memory functions as an enriching interpretive context for the *respondeo*, as Eugene Rogers has shown in his *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God*; the act of retrieving also structures previously known material into the framework of *sacra doctrina* promoted by the *Summa*, thereby transforming the student’s knowledge of and orientation to the *res*. What was previously known according to the order of a *catena* or *florilegium* is now possessed according to the *ordo doctrinae*.

The importance, for Thomas, of refuting error translates into two pedagogical strategies. The first is the choice of the disputed question form as a basic literary unit. The second, and more significant, is the consideration of historical errors and heresies as a *means* of illuminating orthodox teaching.²⁰ What is at stake here is *not* the mere refutation of error, “mais plus

¹⁹ Patfoort, *La Somme*, 20.

²⁰ A profound study of the importance Aquinas attached to the refutation of error in the work of the theologian can be found in the third and fourth chapters of René-Antoine Gauthier, Thomas d’Aquin, *Somme contre les Gentils*, “Introduction” (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1993). Gilles Emery, starting from Gauthier’s

profondément la tentative d'en saisir le motif, le mouvement et les arguments internes, afin de pouvoir la comprendre et l'affronter sur son terrain, et par suite mieux manifester la vérité de la foi catholique."²¹ Thus, the refutation of error forms the basis of a pedagogical exercise which corresponds to Thomas's insight that historical heresies and errors remain live spiritual options for believing Christians.²² The truth is better possessed when it includes the knowledge of where those who are in error go awry. A great example of this technique is found in article one of question 27 of the *prima pars*: the *respondeo* begins the explanation of the notion of processions in God by first listing the errors of Arius and Sabellius; it then analyzes their positions according to the fundamental error of understanding they both commit—both understand procession on the analogy of an external act—before explaining the proper analogy, which is from an act that terminates within the agent. The *tertia pars*, with its concern for the Incarnation, is another important locus of this pedagogical strategy, which is particularly useful when core doctrines are at stake.

Aquinas also makes use of two kinds of textual references, the *analepsis* and the *prolepsis*. An *analepsis* is an appeal to what has already been said, a "backward look" in order to create a link, either narrative or causal, with the material at hand. A *prolepsis* appeals to something which will be explained later, but which is necessary in some way to the understanding of the material being considered. Both of these techniques depend on the memory structures created by the student; Aquinas is signaling the student that particular elements in the structure must be retrieved, and that a link must be created between the present material and the elements pointed to. An example of *prolepsis* can be found in the first question of the *prima pars*, where the text appeals to the relation between grace and nature, which relation is only explained at the end of the *prima secundae*. The *prolepsis* is more than a shortcut: it often will call to the reader's mind the lived reality—Christ encountered in the scriptures or the sacraments, the rhythm of daily worship and prayer, a key image from the liturgy or the spiritual tradition—that forms the basis of an orthodox response to

insights, has recently produced a series of excellent articles studying Aquinas's use of heresies and errors in his Trinitarian theology. See Gilles Emery, "Le photinisme et ses précurseurs chez saint Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 371–98 and Gilles Emery, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'Orient chrétien," *Nova et Vetera* 74 (1999): 19–36 but especially Emery, "Le Traité de saint Thomas sur la Trinité dans la somme contre les Gentils," *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 5–40.

²¹ Emery, "Le Traité de saint Thomas," 17.

²² I am very grateful to Gilles Emery, OP, for his help in clarifying this point, which was confirmed in a conversation with him at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

the problem at hand, but which will be explained fully in its proper place in the *ordo disciplinae*.²³ A classic example of *analepsis* can be found in the *tertia pars*, at article 7 of question 2: Aquinas sends the student to question 13 of the *prima pars*, where the basic solution to the relation between God and the creature was first outlined; this solution becomes the template according to which the student grasps the intelligibility of the relation between the Word and his human nature in the Incarnation. Such textual crossovers, both backward and forward, indicate an interpretive strategy to be followed by the student.

Closely related to this technique of textual crossover is that of repetition. Aquinas repeats key terms or ideas in different sections of the text. There are both continuities and discontinuities in the repetition, such that the full meaning of the term or idea only emerges at the very end, once the student has successfully “navigated” the process by which the meaning emerges. The notion of “verbum” is developed in this way in the text of the *Summa*. There can also be repetition of key analytical tools, for example the use of the pair knowledge–will: it first serves as a major distinction within God’s operations; it then becomes the basis of the analogy by which processions can be understood to occur in God; it then serves to sort out the various operations involved in human choice; then, it serves as the principle of distinction between the theological virtues and, immediately after, the cardinal virtues; it distinguishes the two major sets of perfections in the incarnate Christ; finally, it serves as the basis for sorting the fruits of the various sacraments. Along the way, it has helped define the nature of beatitude. Each repetition slightly modifies the use that is made of the pair, such that its full analytical capacity is known only at the end of the *Summa*.

At least on two explicit occasions, Aquinas presents his material in a strictly narrative fashion, following the order of a particular biblical account. The first such occasion is found in the presentation of the doctrine of creation, in the questions concerning the six days of creation. The second is in the second part of the Christology in the *tertia pars*. In the first case, that of the doctrine of creation, Aquinas distinguishes between three works of God, namely *creatio* properly speaking, the work of *distinctio*, and the work of *ornatio*. These three works are related to each other narratively, according to the biblical account of the six days of creation. The causal links between them are thus *dramatic and temporal*, as opposed to strictly logical. At these points, Aquinas is bringing to light the concrete intelligibility of the Scriptures. We must therefore be atten-

²³ Patfoort, *La Somme*, 16.

tive to the narrative elements in the text, not only in these two explicit cases, but in cases where, as we shall see, the narrative element is more structural than material.

The last major rhetorical element we must discuss is connected to the use of arguments from *convenientia*. Lonergan has written that it is crucial for theologians to have a good grasp of the notion of *convenientia*, because “appropriateness [*convenientia*] implies intelligibility in the proper sense and yet an intelligibility that is in no way necessary”; by means of arguments from *convenientia*, “a theologian can both inquire into the appropriate reasons for things and understand them without in any way infringing upon God’s sovereign freedom and the gratuitousness of the supernatural order.”²⁴ Narcisse has shown the epistemological, metaphysical, and theological import of these aesthetic-dramatic arguments. By their very nature, these arguments are also rhetorical strategies. Emery²⁵ has shown the link between these arguments and what, in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas calls the use of credible and probable reasons to console the faithful and develop their faith.²⁶ They appeal to religious sensibility, to memory and feeling, and make use of these mechanisms to trigger understanding.

We can see this at work in question 1 of the *tertia pars*, where Aquinas probes the fittingness of the Incarnation. The second article of this question takes up a particular aspect of the fittingness of the Incarnation, namely its suitability for redeeming us. Rooting his response in the third chapter of the Gospel of John, Aquinas states in the *sed contra* that whatever saves us is *de facto* necessary for our salvation. But this necessity, he goes on to show in the *respondeo*, is of a particular kind. The Incarnation is not necessary for our restoration in an absolute sense, since God could have chosen any of a myriad of ways to save us. It is necessary “quod melius et convenientius pervenitur ad finem.” Aquinas then offers ten reasons for this, five from the perspective of our progress in the good and five from the perspective of our withdrawal from evil. Without going into the particulars of these reasons, what emerges is that in each case, the Incarnation is more suited to our restoration; it is more appropriate, or bears greater fruit. In some cases, the reasons bring forward material from earlier in the *Summa*. The series of reasons from the perspective of our progress in the good follows an interesting sequence: certainty of faith, greater hope,

²⁴ Bernard Lonergan, “The Purpose of the Incarnation,” trans. Michael Shields (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute, 1997), 20.

²⁵ Emery, “Le Traité,” 7.

²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *God*, vol. 1 of *Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), ch. 9, no. 54.

deeper love, Christ as model to imitate, Incarnation as the greatest participation of humanity in divinity. This is the sequence of treatises from the beginning of the *secunda secundae* to the present treatise on the Incarnation. Each reason of fittingness appeals to the fulfillment of material previously considered, and gathers it up in the “climax” of the Incarnation, thereby transforming it and bringing it to its fullness of meaning.

Let us proceed now to show how some of these rhetorical and narrative strategies are at work in one section of the *Summa*, and how attentiveness to them can lead to important theological insights into the meaning of the text.

A Test Case: God in the *prima pars*

Until recently, the typical understanding of what constitutes the treatment of God in the *Summa* proposed that there are two treatises, *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino*. These two treatises were thought to stand on their own, to be self-sufficient; they were understood to roughly correspond to what can be known about God by human reason unaided, and what is known about God from revelation. Generations of students of Aquinas (myself included, as recently as 1986) studied the treatise *de Deo uno* in philosophy and *de Deo trino* in theology. In addition, the consideration of God properly speaking was thought to end at question 43, since question 44 begins the questions on creation. Scholars interested in a more theologically responsible interpretation of Aquinas, however, have proposed that there is only one continuous treatment of God that incorporates both the traditional *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino*. Various reasons are proffered to support this stance. Could a careful look at the rhetorical clues in the text shed any light on this debate?

An initial reading of the various prologues in the *prima pars* allows us to disengage the general construction of the argument. The structure can be presented as in the following table:

consideratio Dei tripartita erit (Ia)
[secundum quod in se est (QQ2–43)]
“quae ad essentiam divinam pertinent” (QQ2–26)
an Deus sit (Q2)
quomodo sit, vel potius quomodo non sit (QQ3–13)
quomodo non sit (QQ3–11)
de simplicitate ipsius (Q3)
de perfectione ipsius (QQ4–6)
de infinitate ejus (QQ7–8)
de immutabilitate (QQ9–10)
de unitate (Q11)

- quomodo a nobis cognoscatur (Q12)
- quomodo nominetur (Q13)
- quae ad operationem ipsius pertinent (QQ14–26)
 - quae manet in operante (QQ14–24)
 - de scientia Dei (QQ14–18)
 - de voluntas Dei (QQ19–21)
 - simul intellectum et voluntatem (QQ22–24)
 - quae procedit in exteriorem effectum:
 - de divina potentia (Q25)
 - de divina Beatitudine (Q26)
- quae pertinent ad distinctione Personarum (QQ27–43)
 - de processione divinarum Personarum (Q27)
 - de relationibus originis (Q28)
 - de Personis divinis (QQ29–43)
 - in communi (Q29–32)
 - de singulis Personis (QQ33–38)
 - de Persona Patris (Q33)
 - de Persona Filii (QQ34–35)
 - de Verbo (Q34)
 - de Imagine (Q35)
 - de Persona Spiritus Sancti (QQ36–38)
 - dicitur Sanctus (Q36)
 - dicitur Amor (Q37)
 - dicitur Donum Dei (Q38)
 - de Personis in comparatione ad. . . . (QQ39–43)
 - essentiam (Q39)
 - proprietates (Q40)
 - actus notionales (Q41)
 - invicem (QQ42–43)
- [secundum quod est principium rerum et finis earum: de proces-
sione creaturam a Deo (QQ44–119)]
 - de productione creaturam (QQ44–46)
 - de distinctione creaturam (QQ47–102)
 - de distinctione rerum in communi (Q47)
 - de distinctione boni et mali (QQ48–49)
 - de distinctione spiritualis et corporalis creaturae (QQ50–102)
 - de creatura pure spirituali, angelus nominatur (QQ50–64)
 - de creatura pure corporali (QQ65–74)
 - de creature composita ex corporali et spirituali, quae est
homo (QQ75–102)
 - de conservatione et gubernatione creaturam (QQ103–119)

The chart above shows clearly how the various prologues organize the material into units. A number of general observations can be made from this picture of the rhetorical structure of the *prima pars*.

We begin with the prologue to question 2, which provides many of the basic indications for the structure of the *prima pars*. Remember that the prologue signals the *divisio textus* which the student is expected to perform, and that this *divisio* creates an ordered structure in memory whereby elements are distinguished and related. The initial distinction the prologue to question 2 makes is between “Dei cognitionem, quod in se est” and “quod est principium rerum et finis earum.”²⁷ This is the basic division that governs the whole *Summa* even as it signals its unity: like the patristic authors before him, Aquinas is concerned with God, whether his consideration centers on God in God’s very self, or on God revealed in the *magnalia Dei*. There is a sense in which the whole *Summa* is one consideration of God, and the threefold division of the whole—of God, of human beings in their movement toward God, and of Christ as the concrete way into God—is inscribed within this more fundamental unity. We shall see more of the pedagogical implications of this later in this essay. The *prima pars*, still according to the prologue, is one long consideration of God, articulated in three moments: “consideratio autem de Deo tripartita erit.” What are these three moments? They are “ea quae ad essentiam divinam pertinent”; “ea quae pertinent ad distinctionem Personarum”; and finally “ea quae pertinent ad processum creaturarum ab ipso.”²⁸ Once again, the distinction is inscribed in a more fundamental unity.

The pedagogical continuity between these three moments is supplied by the prologues that correspond to the beginning of each moment. If we finish our study of the prologue to question 2, we see that the matter to be treated between questions 2 and 26 falls under the notion of God’s essence: God’s existence, God’s manner of existence and God’s operations are all considerations falling within this category. This is important, because, of course, God’s essence, or nature, is one part of the conciliar definition of the Trinity: Nature is what there is one of in God and two of in the Incarnate Word. We have already begun the consideration of God as defined by Nicaea. This consideration, as both Pieper and Burrell have shown, is mainly “therapeutic,” that is, it seeks to correct, by means of the *via negativa*, mistaken notions of God’s existence, God’s unity, and God’s operations, as well as establish the basis for Aquinas’s use of analogy as a form of theological understanding.²⁹ Thus, question 2 itself does not begin with “whether God exists,” but rather with “whether the statement

²⁷ I, q. 2, prologue.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The reader will find an excellent discussion of these matters in David Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*. We will revisit the pedagogy of the *via negativa* later in this essay.

‘God exists’ is self-evident.” This is the properly biblical starting point: “The fool says in his heart, ‘there is no God.’”

The prologue to question 27, at first glance, does not seem to give us much help. Notice, however, that the very first sentence juxtaposes again the unity of essence and the Trinity of Persons: Nature is what there is one of in God (and two of in Christ); Person is what there are three of in God (and one of in Christ). The text of the first article depends on the theology of the names of God first discussed in question 13; Aquinas’s *respondeo* makes no sense unless the student already possesses a properly analogical understanding of knowing and willing in God. The prologue to question 14 has already introduced the two crucial distinctions Aquinas uses here. First, that between two kinds of operations, “*quae manet in operante*” and “*quae procedit in exteriorem effectum*.” Second, within those operations that remain in the operator, there is a further distinction between intellect and will.³⁰ Intellect and will are first discussed within the questions on the divine operations, which form part of the consideration of the divine essence, beginning at question 14 (on the intellect alone), then at question 19 (on the will alone), and finally at question 22 (on the intellect and will taken together). The pair now reappears in question 27, within the consideration on the divine Persons, specifically as part of the psychological analogy for understanding how there can be processions in God. The material on intellect and will does not enter directly into the analogy (or at least most of it does not), but it is the necessary background information for understanding the analogy precisely as an analogy, that is, for grasping that talk of intellect and will in God is different from talk of intellect and will in us. There is thus an important continuity in difference between the first and second moments of the tripartite consideration of God.

The prologue to question 14 also introduces the distinction between operations that remain in God, and operations that terminate in effects outside of God. It further specifies this distinction as one between God’s intellect and will, on the one hand, and God’s power, on the other. The *divisio* here creates a structure by which the student distinguishes and relates two elements under the one heading of operations. The consideration of Persons in God depends on and enriches the discussion of operations that terminate in God; it climaxes at question 43 with a consideration of the missions of the Son and Spirit, which reintroduces the question of operations that terminate outside of God. The prologue to question 44 reintroduces the notion of procession, this time applying it to creatures:

³⁰ *ST*, I, q. 14, prologue.

“Post considerationem divinarum Personarum, considerandum restat de processione creaturarum a Deo.” The relation between the consideration of Persons in God and the consideration of the procession of creatures out of God is mapped onto the relation between God’s intellect and will on the one hand, and God’s power on the other. The consideration of the procession of creatures, then, depends on and enriches the consideration of God’s power in the first moment of the tripartite consideration of God. This link has already been prepared by Aquinas’s discussion of the name *Verbum* as it is applied to the Second Person. Article three of question 34 asks whether the name *Verbum* implies a relation to creatures. The answer is that since God’s Word is expressive of God’s unrestricted act of understanding, by which the Father understands both himself and all things in himself, then that one Word is expressive, not only of the Father, but of all creatures; and since God’s knowledge is both cognitive and operative with respect to creatures, as Aquinas has already shown in question 14, article 8, then the Word is both expressive and operative of creatures. The Word is thus at the centre of a continuous movement from the consideration of God’s nature through the consideration of the Persons to the consideration of creatures.

We have, then, not three treatises, but one consideration of God that takes up the entire *prima pars*. What more can we learn about this consideration? The treatment of God in question 2 culminates in the third article, “*utrum Deus sit*.” Much has been written on the five proofs, and whether they are an attempt to really prove God’s existence, or whether they are an attempt to find *rationes* to understand what it means to say God. We shall not enter into this debate, but rather concentrate on the *sed contra*. Thomas quotes the book of Exodus, chapter 3, verse 13: God says “*Ego sum qui sum*.”³¹ It has been brought out very often recently that Thomas’s choice of biblical authorities is never accidental.³² What is the import of this quotation? In the past, scholars suggested that Thomas understood it according to a Greek metaphysical framework, as a philosophical proclamation of God as the source of Being, as Being itself. But this argument is to be found only in the third of the five proofs in the *respondeo*. Some interpreters, conscious of this difference, explain that the five proofs are reducible to the third, but is this enough? Such a reading imposes one meaning to the scriptural phrase, reducing it to “*Ego sum*: ‘*qui sum*’,” reading article 3 of question 2 from the perspective of question 13, article 11, “*utrum hoc nomen Qui est sit maxime nomen Dei proprium*.”

³¹ *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3, *sed contra*.

³² See, for example, Torrell, *St. Thomas Aquinas*; also Rogers, *Sacra Doctrina*.

Let us first place this article in the context of its question. The first article asks whether God's existence is evident. The answer is no, since fools can deny it. While the proposition "God exists" is self-evident in itself, it is not evident to us. What have we learned by the end of article 1? That the question is not whether God exists, since this proposition is self-evident; rather the question is how to come to understand God's existence. And this is a question of moving from foolishness to wisdom. The second article establishes what kinds of arguments might move us from foolishness to wisdom in this case: Because we cannot know God's essence, we can only know God from God's effects, that is, creation, grace and revelation. It is this strategy which is implemented in the third article. But why repeat the exercise five times, especially when later in question 13, only one of the five will be commented on? It is precisely this rhetorical use of repetition which gives us the clue: the five ways repeat the same pattern of thought, the same intellectual progression from dependent realities to an independent reality.³³ Aquinas is proposing that we understand God's existence, in light of God's revelation to Moses, as that of One who is absolutely not dependent on created things or values, as one who is free in this sense. This is, in fact, a rather sophisticated grasp of the text of Exodus, where God's Name is a kind of reflexive word play: "I am who I am"; "I will be who I will be"; "I cause to be what I cause to be" are all possible translations. But what of the eleventh article of question 13? If question 2, article 3, does not restrict the meaning of the scriptural phrase to a single (Greek) metaphysical interpretation, why should this later article do just that? We must notice first that question 13, article 11 comes *after* the metaphysical enterprise that begins with question 3; the understanding of the reader has been changed by then, and new considerations have been brought in, specifically question 8, "de existentia Dei in rebus." God's proper existence in things has not yet been determined in question 2. Further, a close reading of question 13, article 11 reveals an interesting nuance in the reply to the first objection. The objection states that God's name is incommunicable, but that *Qui est* is communicable and thus inappropriate. In the reply, Aquinas takes up the metaphysical interpretation whereby *Qui est* signifies Being itself. But then, he suggests that the Tetragrammaton is the most appropriate name for God, "quod est impositum ad significandam ipsam Dei substantiam incommunicabilem, et, ut sic liceat loqui, singularem." The Tetragrammaton, of

³³ One is reminded of the technique of giving points for meditation in the Spiritual Exercises of Hildegard or of St. Ignatius Loyola. The points enter into the same matter from different perspectives, inviting the person who is praying to repeat the same journey by different paths.

which the biblical phrase “Ego sum qui sum” is a rendering which emphasizes precisely God’s incommunicability and singularity, God’s independence or ungraspableness, is offered here as more appropriate than the metaphysical *Qui est*, thus preserving a wider perspective. The third article of question 2, then, must not be interpreted in a restricted sense, but as a kind of prelude to the strategy of the next eight questions, where Aquinas will systematically cut any links by which reason might “bind” God to created beings.

Indeed, beginning with question 3, Aquinas’s exercise of the negative way keeps intensifying, but with an interesting variation in pattern. The pattern of movement from general to particular leads back to a consideration of creatures at the end of each question: In each case, Aquinas seeks to establish what is the proper understanding of God’s relation to creatures relative to the particular aspect examined in the question. Thus, the last article of question 3 establishes, against three key errors regarding God’s simplicity, how God can be the being of things. The last article of question, on God’s perfection, establishes how precisely creatures can be said to resemble God. The last article of question 6, on God’s goodness, establishes how things are good in relation to the divine goodness. Question 8 in its entirety examines, in light of the infinity of God established in question 7, how an infinite God can relate to finite creatures. Question 10 establishes the proper relations between God’s eternity, the angelic aevum, and created time. Question 11 finishes on the consideration of how God’s unity relates to the unity of created things. We see here that even within what is ostensibly a consideration of God in himself, Aquinas has not abandoned the consideration of creatures. The basic notions which will serve to explicitate the doctrine of creation in the third moment of the consideration of God are introduced in the first moment. There is here another kind of continuity in difference: Aquinas establishes the proper basic relations between God and creatures here, and will bring them to explicit fruition in the third moment of the *prima pars*.

Even this rapid survey of structural and rhetorical elements has given a whole new perspective on the question of what constitutes the consideration of God in the *prima pars*, exposing continuities that lead to an undoing of the perspective that there are two treatises on God and a separate treatise on creation. In addition, we have seen a more developmental relationship between the various elements and teachings of the *prima pars*, such that earlier notions are not to be understood only in themselves, but as preparatory to later developments. We have not exhausted the possibilities of the text, certainly, but perhaps we have shown some of the usefulness of a perspective that takes into account the rhetorical clues

in the text. Most importantly, we have highlighted the careful *manuductio* by which Aquinas seeks to move students from foolishness to wisdom through a structured series of exercises.

The Structure and Dynamic of the *Summa*

Let us turn now to the question of the structure and dynamic of the *Summa* as a whole. Are there rhetorical clues in the text that can further our knowledge of its spiritual pedagogy? We begin, again, by disengaging the basic rhetorical structure of the “argument” from the relevant prologues.

sacra doctrina: an sit; quid sit; quomodo sit (IaQ1)
 ad huius doctrinae expositionem intendentes (IaQQ2–119; IIa; IIa)
 de Deo (IaQQ2–119)
 quod in se est (QQ2–43)
 ea quae ad essentiam divinam pertinent (QQ2–26)
 ea quae pertinent ad distinctionem Personarum (QQ27–43)
 ea quae pertinent ad processum creaturarum a Deo (QQ44–119)
 de motu rationalis creaturae in Deum (IIa)
 de ultimo fine humanae vitae (IaIIae, QQ1–5)
 de humanis actibus considerare (IaIIae, QQ6–114; IIaIIae)
 in universali (IaIIae, QQ6–114)
 in particulari (IIaIIae)
 de Christo, qui, secundum quod homo, via est nobis tendendi in
 Deum (IIIa)
 de ipso Salvatore (IIIaQQ1–59)
 de Incarnationis mysterio (QQ1–26)
 de his quae per ipsum Salvatorem nostrum sunt acta et passa
 (QQ27–59)
 de sacramentis eius, quibus salutem consequimur
 de fine immortalis vitae, ad quem per ipsum resurgendo perven-
 imus

The structure clearly brings out the tripartite division of the *Summa*, as we would expect. It also sets out clearly some other interesting factors. As Jean-Marc Laporte has recently shown, the structure has two poles determined by the two basic data of Christian revelation according to the Letter to the Hebrews and the Gospel of John: God and Christ.³⁴ But God is the first principle and most universal datum of revelation, while Christ is the most particular and concrete. The whole *Summa*, in this light, is one long progression to understanding Christ. Everything that goes before the *IIIa pars* is at the service of the understanding of this one

³⁴ Jean-Marc Laporte, “Christ in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*: Peripheral or Pervasive?,” *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 221–48.

particular contingent fact, that God became human, and that this has particular consequences for our salvation. Even more, within this progression from universal to particular, Thomas has managed to preserve a certain historical order of revelation: first God, then creation, then governance of creatures, then the Law, then grace.

A careful reading of the prelude to question 2 leads to a further insight: The *ad huius doctrinae expositionem intendentes*, which sets out the tripartite division, is preceded by the statement “*principalis intentio huius sacrae doctrinae est Dei cognitionem tradere, et non solum secundum quod in se est, sed etiam secundum quod est principium rerum et finis earum, et specialiter rationalis creaturae. . .*” This suggests a slightly different tripartite division, more like this:

de Deo (the whole *Summa* from IaQ2 onward)
 in se (IaQ2–43)
 quod est principium rerum (IaQ44–119)
 quod est finis earum (IIa and IIIa)
 de motu rationalis creaturae in Deum (IIa)
 de Christo, qui, secundum quod homo, via est nobis tendendi in
 Deum (IIIa)

In this scheme, the whole *Summa* treats only of God, and under three aspects: *in se*, as *principium rerum*, and as *finis earum*; this final consideration is twofold, in general and in particular, that is, in Christ. The point here is not to deny the obvious, but rather to highlight an important connection between the text of the *Summa* and other medieval texts of theological and spiritual formation. It was a medieval commonplace to think of progress in the knowledge of God as occurring in three moments of contemplation of God’s resemblance: first, in the consideration of the *vestigiae Dei* in creatures; then in the *imago Dei* (or *imago ad imaginem*) in human beings, that is in their spiritual nature; then in the *Imago*, that is, in Christ. Some authors also added a fourth moment, the consideration of God in God’s self.³⁵

This three- or fourfold consideration of God was taken from the writings of Augustine, particularly the *de Trinitate*. Augustine also distinguishes between the image of God in us from our spiritual nature, and the image of God in us as reformed by grace. St. Anselm in the *Monologion* uses this doctrine of image and resemblance to develop his doctrine of the Word as Archetype of created beings and their unity in Being. Hugh of St. Victor, betraying a more Dionysian influence, structures the degrees of resemblance of creatures to God in a hierarchy of progress into God. This

³⁵ “Image et ressemblance,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*.

journey back to God is, for him, a *manuductio* that leads to our own growing in resemblance to God, our deification.

It is St. Bonaventure, however, in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, who proposes the most systematic account of the progress into God via the consideration of creatures. There, he proposes a sixfold process: first, the consideration of the vestiges of God in the distinction and ordered multiplicity of beings; second, the consideration of the vestiges of God in the origin, development and end of beings; third, the consideration of the image of God in the spiritual nature of the human soul; fourth, the consideration of the image of God in the soul reformed by grace; fifth, the consideration of the unity of God through God's primary name, which is Being; finally, sixth, the consideration of God as Triune through God's name of Good. These six steps of the *itinerarium mentis* lead to a mystical encounter with Christ, God and human, who has been the way but is now the resting place. This account, as a narrative of progress in the Christian spiritual life, is one possible systematization of the elements inherited from St. Augustine and preserved by medieval theologians. Is it possible that Aquinas's use of these same elements is also a narrative of progress into God?

Aquinas himself makes some explicit comments about this tradition in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, at the beginning of book two, in the first four chapters, where he introduces the consideration of creatures. In the first chapter, Thomas establishes that meditating on the things God has made leads us to a deeper knowledge of God, since consideration of the effect can help us understand the nature of the cause. Then, in the second chapter, "That the consideration of creatures is useful to the edification of faith," he offers four reasons in support of this enterprise. The first three continue the argument of chapter one: We grow in admiration for the divine wisdom, since the work produced by the maker's art resembles that art itself; we grow in awe of the divine power, which awakens reverence for God in our hearts; and, our hearts are inflamed with love of God's goodness. The fourth reason is different: the consideration of creatures establishes us in a certain resemblance of the divine perfection. Specifically, the result of this consideration, in the light of divine revelation, is a certain resemblance in us to the divine wisdom.³⁶ We can see, then, in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, that Thomas knows the tradition of the consideration of creatures as a way into God, both by knowing God in creatures and by growing in resemblance to God.

³⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Creation*, vol. 2 of *Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. James F. Anderson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), ch. 2.

But what about the *Summa theologiae*? Let us take a closer look at the major prologues. The prologue to the *secunda pars* offers some important clues: “Quia, sicut Damascenus dicit, homo factus ad imaginem Dei dicitur, secundum quod per imaginem significatur intellectuale et arbitrio liberum et per se potestativum; postquam praedictum est de exemplari, scilicet de Deo, et de his quae processerunt ex divinae potestate secundum eius voluntatem; restat ut consideremus de eius imagine, idest de homine. . . .” The prologue understands the two particular terms “God—human beings” as a function of the pair of general terms “exemplar—image,” where God is to the human being as exemplar is to image. The term “image” is particularly important here, as can be gathered from its triple repetition. This notion is relational, in the sense that an image necessarily implies an exemplar. This means that although we are no longer considering the exemplar itself, nevertheless, insofar as we are considering human beings under the formality of “image,” we continue to enrich our grasp of the exemplar. We are seeing the exemplar in the image.

We should also note Aquinas’s use of *ad imaginem*: Human beings are made “to the image” of God. The prologue here is summarizing the content of question 93 of the *prima pars*, whose title reads: “Deinde considerandum est de fine sive termino productionis hominis, prout dicitur factus ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei.” It is here that Aquinas first introduces the distinctions and terms that will become important with the *reditus* that begins in the *secunda pars*. There is an image of God in us, but it is not a perfect image, since the likeness between God and ourselves is not one of equality. Only the First-Born possesses such equality, and can be properly termed *Imago Dei*. We are *imago ad imaginem*, which signifies our approaching to God’s likeness as from a distance. The image is found in every one insofar as we all possess a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; it is in some in a more developed way insofar as they habitually know and love God, which is the conformity of grace; finally, it is in the blessed in heaven, who know and love God perfectly by the likeness of glory. The image, which is according to the Persons of the Trinity—this is what makes the psychological analogy possible—is thus best differentiated into image and similitude. The *imago* is in us according to nature; the *similitudo* is the expression and perfection of the image in grace and glory. *Similitudo*, writes Aquinas, belongs in a particular way to love of virtue, for there is no virtue without love of virtue. *Similitudo* in this particular sense is thus linked to habit and virtue, which are considered in their concrete particulars in the *secunda secundae*, under the conformity of grace established by the theological virtues. We thus have a progression, from the *prima*

pars to the *secunda secundae*, from exemplar, to *imago ad imaginem*, to *similitudo* under grace.

The notion of exemplar goes back to question 44, article 3, where Thomas had already established that God is the primary exemplary cause of all things. In the *corpus* of this article, he makes explicit reference to the way in which the work of art reveals the nature of the artisan. God is then the exemplar in two ways: first, as exemplary cause of all creatures; second, as the one whom human knowing and choosing imitate. This means, if we reverse the order, that creation reveals God in two ways: first, in the showing forth of the divine wisdom in all things; second, in human beings in particular, as knowing and choosing creatures. Our sequence, then, is now God as exemplar, God considered in the vestiges, God considered in the *imago ad imaginem*, and God considered in the *similitudo* which is brought about by the gift of grace.

What about the third element of the medieval pedagogy, the consideration of God in the *Imago Dei*, that is, in Christ Incarnate? Can we deem Aquinas's Christology in the *tertia pars* a consideration of the *Imago Dei* in the explicit sense? The first item of importance, as we proceed to answer this question, is found not in the *tertia pars*, but in the *prima pars*, at question 35. Aquinas is considering the Second Person of the Trinity *in se*, and has just finished the consideration of the Second Person as *Verbum* of the Father. He now turns to the Second Person as . . . *Imago Patri*! He establishes that to be the image of the Father is proper to the Son, and then proceeds to distinguish, in the response to the third objection, between two ways of being in God's image: "Uno modo, in re eiusdem naturae secundum speciem: ut imago regis invenitur in filio suo. Alio modo, in re alterius naturae: sicut imago regis invenitur in denario. Primo autem modo, Filius est imago Patris: secundo autem modo dicitur homo imago Dei. Et ideo ad designandam in homine imperfectionem imaginis, homo non dicitur solum imago, sed ad imaginem. . . ." This important text contrasts the Son and human beings according to the more general pair of terms *imago* and *imago ad imaginem*. This would seem to lead us toward the same kind of relationship between the second and third elements that we saw in the more general tradition.

If we turn now to the beginning of the *tertia pars*, we come to the question of the fittingness of the Incarnation. The *sed contra* to the first article sets the tone: It was most fitting that God should become incarnate, since as John Damascene says, it is by the mystery of the Incarnation that God's goodness, wisdom, justice, and power are most completely revealed. Aquinas picks up this theme in the *corpus*, showing that the Incarnation is the highest communication of God's goodness to a creature, and

therefore a most fitting expression of God's nature.³⁷ This is, of course, exactly the language we saw in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. The Incarnation, compared to the other expressions of God's nature, is the most fitting and most complete.

The link between the *imago* and the *imago ad imaginem* is made even more explicit by the prologue to the *tertia pars* and its analepsis to the *secunda pars*. Aquinas recalls what has gone before, namely the consideration of beatitude and the vices and virtues. But this consideration had a very specific culmination, namely the particular states of life within which we can live the vices and virtues. And the highest and most perfect of these states of life was given to be the mixed life of contemplation and action, where by preaching and ministering to the faithful, one shares with others what one has received, thus participating in the communication of the good *by following Christ and imitating him*.³⁸ The practice of the virtues *in via* finds its most perfect expression in the imitation of Christ; it is then reasonable to continue the consideration of theology in the *tertia pars* by considering the exemplar we are seeking to follow, Christ Incarnate.

We have, then, a threefold progression of elements: God is known in all creatures (*vestigiae Dei*); God is known in human beings (*imago ad imaginem* and *similitudo*); God is known in Christ (*Imago* and Incarnate). Aquinas's use of the tradition is, of course, marked by his realism. He abandons the Augustinianism of his predecessors, who saw creatures as mere symbols of God, in favor of the affirmation of the autonomous existence of creatures in relation to God. This leads to a *reversal of the order* of progression as we see it, for example, in the *Itinerarium Mentis* of Bonaventure. As Gilles Emery has noted with respect to the *Summa contra Gentiles*, the doctrine of the image and of resemblance is not, as in the tradition, a point of departure, but rather a point of arrival.³⁹ Rather than proceeding from creatures and, by moving away from them reaching God, Aquinas begins with God and moves toward the various ways in which creatures resemble God: as *vestigiae Dei*, as *imago ad imaginem*, as *similitudo*, and in the Incarnation of the *Imago*, Jesus the Christ. Since our knowing, as embodied creatures, is bound to experience, our consideration of God is enriched by this consideration of creatures. We know God most concretely and fully—and are therefore most in God's image—when we have traveled the whole path of the *Summa*. This is the import of the prologue to question 2 of the *Ia pars*, where the consideration of

³⁷ *ST*, III, q. 1, a. 1.

³⁸ See, for example, II–II, q. 187, a. 3, ad 1; II–II, q. 188, a. 7.

³⁹ Emery, "Le Traité," 22.

creatures is understood as the consideration of God as first principle of things and as final end especially of rational creatures.

We have, then, a narrative structure whose climax is the consideration of Christ whom we seek to imitate and who is our most perfect way into God. But in order to know Christ (and therefore have our most intimate encounter with God), we must first have knowledge of how human beings reach God in general (and therefore encounter God as final end). And in order to properly know God as final end, we must first know him as first principle through a consideration of the production of creatures. Finally, in order to know him as first principle, we must have some knowledge of him in himself.⁴⁰ We participate most in divine wisdom when we have traveled the entire path of the *Summa*, such that we know God in se, then as first principle, then as final end, then in Christ. Thus, the consideration of Christ is seen to be the climax of a narrative of progress into God whereby the student of theology is transformed by divine wisdom and is thus enabled to preach and hear confessions as one of the wise who participate in *sacra doctrina*.

Conclusion: Reading the *Summa* as a Spiritual Pedagogy

Aquinas's decision to abandon the teaching of the *Sentences* in the context of the experimental *studium* at Santa Sabina, along with the related decision to begin reorganizing the material of theology in a *Summa theologiae*, points to a clear commitment to pedagogy. This is confirmed by the overall prologue of the *Summa* itself, which states clearly that the purpose of the work is to "unrude beginners," to bring them into the horizon of Catholic culture and learning. Reading the *Summa* means being actively engaged by the *manuductio* of *sacra doctrina*, participating actively in the pedagogical process by which God leads us to salvation.

A study of the practice of *sacra doctrina* in the text of the *Summa* has confirmed this notion and has deepened our understanding of the

⁴⁰ Henk Schoot has noted this same narrative structure, and has shown its relation to the Word quite clearly: "... all human naming of divinity is tied to the Word Incarnate in that both consist of a union between God and humanity. These unions are ordered hierarchically. In fact, these unions that are analyzed as mixed relations are capable of providing us with an elucidating overall structure of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. Aquinas adduces the model of a mixed relation in discussing the names of God, in discussing the Trinitarian missions, in discussing creation, in discussing grace, in discussing the hypostatic union and in discussing the sacrament of the Eucharist." Schoot unfortunately focuses only on the activity of naming God, which is, for our own purposes, a mechanism within the pedagogy. See Henk J. M. Schoot, *Christ the "Name" of God: Thomas Aquinas on Naming Christ* (Leuven: Thomas Instituut; Peeters, 1993), 197.

pedagogical dimension of the text. *Sacra doctrina* is the human participation—in all its facets of preaching, teaching, forming others through the sacraments and pastoral care—in God’s revealing activity, which revealing activity is ordered to our salvation. Without God’s *doctrina*, we could not learn the end to which we are ordered; without knowledge of that end, we could not achieve it. This *sacra doctrina* is anchored in the person of the Word, God’s Wisdom Incarnate. The Word is not merely the content of *sacra doctrina* but also its structuring principle.

There is a need, in light of this, to understand better the dynamic nature of the structure, and to capture the way in which the structure “works” on the student, that is, the way in which the structure promotes a process of learning and transformation. In order to bring out this pedagogical dimension of the text, such that we can overcome our modern tendency to think of a work of theology as a content divorced from its form or purpose, we have explained some of the rhetorical devices that were available to masters of theology in the thirteenth century and which are at work in the *Summa*. The pedagogy is embodied in this rhetorical dimension of the text, by which the content is structured into a dynamic series of “spiritual exercises.” This approach to reading the text was used for a “test case,” the doctrine of God in the *prima pars*. The “test reading” showed the rich possibilities of bringing to light the pedagogy of the text for the understanding of Aquinas’s theology.

Finally, a preliminary reading of the various major prologues of the *Summa* has shown the links between its pedagogy and the common narrative of personal spiritual development which Aquinas shared with his contemporaries. It has also shown Aquinas’s freedom in restructuring that narrative according to his own theological and spiritual commitments. One of these key commitments is to the humanity of Christ, which leads Aquinas to place Christology at the climax of the spiritual pedagogy. **N V**