

Saint Thomas Aquinas Exegete of the Hexameron: Bible and Philosophy¹

SERGE-THOMAS BONINO, O.P.

Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum)
Rome, Italy

“BY FAITH WE UNDERSTAND that the universe was formed by the word of God” (Heb 11:3). Thus opens the “hymn to faith,” of chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews, with a reference to the fundamental work of creation. The verse highlights the relationship of radical dependence that the whole of reality—“universe, eons”—has with the Word of God. The Word of God is an “effective” Word that gives existence, but also an “exemplary” Word, because by participating in the Divine Ideas, whose *Logos* or Word is the Place par excellence, creatures “objectify” divine Wisdom² as much as possible. A formally philosophical approach to the topic of creation is certainly possible. It is even necessary, since creation, as the radical ontological dependence of all things on subsisting Being itself, constitutes the keystone of the entire metaphysical structure and its ultimate explanatory principle. Nevertheless, the full, integral, meaning of creation is revealed only to faith in the light of the Word of God. The book of creation therefore reveals its full meaning only in relation to the book of Scriptures which records the Word of God, the very one that presides over creation. Hence the decisive place of Sacred Scripture in the theological teaching of St. Thomas on creation. It is particularly evident in questions 65–74 of the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*

¹ Translation by John Martin Ruiz, O.P., of “Saint Thomas d’Aquin exégète de l’*Hexaëmeron*: Bible et philosophie.”

² See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Heb* 11, lec. 2 (Marietti no. 564). See also Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Études Thomasiennes* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2018), 597–601.

[ST].³ Here, Aquinas, who undertakes as a theologian to account for the creation of the corporeal world, makes his own the patristic literary genre of commentary on the Hexaemeron, that is, of the first story of creation in Genesis (1:1–2: 4).⁴ He makes this literary genre of commentary on the Hexaemeron his own while adapting it to the formal requirements of Scholasticism.

According to the general prologue of question 44 of the *prima pars*, the procession of creatures from God (the theme that constitutes the third moment of the “consideration of God” that is the subject of the *prima pars*⁵) comprises three aspects: the production of creatures, their distinction, and, finally, their conservation and government.⁶ Among the Fathers of the Church, the “distinction of creatures” corresponds to the second phase of the divine work of the six days: after the initial creation, signified by verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1, the result of which still presents itself under a certain confusion or indistinction (indistinction, whose nature itself remains rather confused), it is the separating action of God that structures what is created by “distinguishing” day from night, the waters above from the waters below,

³ The role of Scripture is also decisive in qq. 44–46 of the *prima pars*, devoted to creation in general. For example, since the question of the temporal beginning of the world (q. 46) is philosophically undecidable and the duration of the universe is the sole sovereign will of God, only Scripture can reveal to us that the created world actually had a beginning.

⁴ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, qq. 65–74; French trans. with notes and appendices by Henri-Dominique Gardeil in *L'œuvre des six jours* (Paris: Desclée, 1960); Latin text and English trans. with introduction, notes, appendices, and glossary in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 10, *Cosmogony* (I, qq. 65–74), ed. William A. Wallace (London: Blackfriars, 1967). Concerning patristic commentary on the Hexaemeron as a literary genre, see: F. E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912); E. Mangelot, “Hexaméron. Les diverses interprétations du récit,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 6 (Paris: 1920), cols. 2335–39; Yves Congar, “Le thème de Dieu-Créateur dans les explications de l’Hexaëmeron dans la tradition chrétienne,” in *L’Homme devant Dieu: Mélanges H. de Lubac*, vol. 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1963), 189–222; J. Pépin, “Exégèse de *In Principio* et théorie de l’*Exameron*,” in *Ambrosius episcopus* (Milan: Pubblicazioni dell’Università del Sacro Cuore, 1976), 427–82; P. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); P.-M. Hombert, *La Création chez les Pères de l’Eglise* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2015), 71–77.

⁵ See ST I, q. 2, prol.

⁶ See ST I, q. 44 prol.: “Post considerationem divinarum personarum, considerandum restat de processione creaturarum a Deo. Erit autem haec consideratio tripartite, ut primo consideretur de productione creaturarum; secundo, de earum distinctione; tertio, de conservatione et gubernatione.”

and so on. St. Thomas knows this meaning of the term, but in him the study of the distinction of creatures takes on a different, broader, and frankly metaphysical meaning.

On the one hand, it refers to the fundamental reflection on the origin and meaning of the diversity, and thus the multiplicity of creatures; and, on the other hand, it refers to the presentation, from a formally theological point of view,⁷ of the main types of creatures in connection with their institution or original establishment by creative action: angels (qq. 50–64), the cosmos (qq. 65–74), and man (qq. 75–102). The commentary on the Hexaemeron is the form taken by the theological view on the cosmos as such.

These ten questions of *ST* have a precedent in his commentary on distinctions 12–15 of book II of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (the *Scriptum*), a place that invited theologians of the thirteenth century to examine the work of the six days, and they present several common themes with question 4 of the *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, devoted to the creation of formless matter. They have often been neglected, because of the undeniable outdated nature of the scientific knowledge they use. Yet they contain a rich teaching, always valid in its broad outlines, on the Word of God, on the principles that govern its interpretation in the Church, and on the right relationship between exegesis

⁷ In the prologue that opens the section devoted to the human creature, St. Thomas points out that the theologian takes a very specific look at human nature. He considers it from the point of view of the soul more than from the point of view of the body, and he considers the body only insofar as it relates to the soul, which has a direct relationship with God, the formal object of theology. See *ST* I, q. 75, prol.: “Post considerationem creaturae spiritualis et corporalis, considerandum est de homine, qui ex spirituali et corporali substantia componitur. . . . Naturam autem hominis considerare pertinet ad theologum ex parte animae, non autem ex parte corporis, nisi secundum habitudinem quam habet corpus ad animam.” A similar observation applies to the study of bodily creatures. They are only considered by the theologian in their relationship to God see *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, proem. (ed. Mandonnet, 299): “In parte praecedenti determinavit Magister de natura pure corporali, quantum pertinet ad theologi considerationem, scilicet secundum quod a Deo in operibus sex dierum primitus instituta est” (all Latin from *In sent.* is from the Mandonnet-Moos ed.). G. Lafont believes that the theological study of the cosmos in the *prima pars* is somehow absorbed by the perspective of theological anthropology (*Structures et méthode dans la “Somme théologique” de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. [Paris: Cerf, 1996], 164–65). It is clear that in Christian theology man occupies a privileged place in the cosmos, but it seems to me that the reduction of the theological view of the cosmos to an annex of anthropology betrays the options of an anthropocentric theology that had its hour of glory in the middle of the twentieth century but whose limits have since become apparent.

and philosophy.⁸ It is this teaching that this study proposes to explain somewhat.

First, taking note of the fact that, according to Aquinas, the Hexaemeron is properly speaking a prophecy, we will draw, from the teaching of St. Thomas on prophecy, some principles of interpretation of the text of Genesis. Secondly, we shall examine the way in which St. Thomas conceives of the relationship between exegesis and philosophy, with “philosophy” being understood in the broad sense of the thirteenth century as the body of rational knowledge, which in some way includes our current “sciences.”

Interpreting Prophecy

The Hexaemeron as a Prophecy

In the debate raging in the middle of the thirteenth century on the possibility of an eternal created universe, St. Thomas holds, as we know, a middle ground position. He holds that creation as such, that is to say, as a radical ontological dependence of creatures on the *Ipsium Esse subsistens*, is a truth accessible (at least by right) to reason,⁹ but the complete integral concept, that is, the theological concept of creation, which includes, among other things, the idea of a temporal beginning (that is to say, the impossibility of going back to infinity in the past) is an article of faith, which is of itself indemonstrable.¹⁰ Now, in support of this last thesis, St.

⁸ The commentary on the Hexaemeron had already been the occasion for St. Augustine to develop a fundamental reflection on the exegetical method. See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* [*Gn. litt.*] 1.18.37–21.41 (all Latin from *Gn. Litt.* is from *Bibliothèque augustinienne* vol. 48). Saint Thomas is very much inspired by it and he takes up the essential themes. On St. Augustine, see R. J. Teske, “Récits de la Genèse sur la création,” in *Encyclopédie Saint Augustin: La Méditerranée et l’Europe, IVe–XXIe siècle*, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald and M.-A. Vannier (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 1220–24.

⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *In II sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2 (17): “Quod creationem esse non tantum fides tenet, sed etiam ratio demonstrat”; see also F. Moreno Narvaez, *Demostrabilidad racional de la creación según santo Tomás de Aquino* (Rome: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. in Urbe, 1960).

¹⁰ On the conflict over the eternity of the world in the thirteenth century, see among others: *The Eternity of the World in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas and his Contemporaries* ed. J. B. M. Wiskink (Leiden: Brill, 1990); R. C. Dales, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); *Thomas d’Aquin et la controverse sur L’Éternité du monde: Traités sur L’Éternité du monde de Bonaventure, Thomas d’Aquin, Peckham, Boèce de Dacie, Henri de Gand et Guillaume d’Ockham*, trans. C. Michon with notes, in collaboration with O. Boulnois and N. Dupré La Tour (Paris: G. F. Flammarion, 2004); W. E. Carroll, “Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle, the Eternity of the World, and the Doctrine of Creation,” in *Tomás de Aquino comentador de*

Thomas invokes, in the *sed contra* of article 2 of question 46, an authority drawn from the *Homilies on Ezekiel* of St. Gregory the Great, which explicitly presents the beginning of *Genesis* as a prophecy of Moses, that is, as a revelation.¹¹ The same authority of St. Gregory the Great is cited in the “treatise” on prophecy of *ST II-II* to establish, precisely, that the object of prophetic revelation is not limited to future contingents, even though they constitute its privileged object.¹² We are therefore invited to understand the Thomasian exegesis of the Hexaemeron in light of his theology of prophecy (its essence, its object, its species, its modalities, etc.). As participation (occasional, not habitual) in the very light of divine knowledge, prophecy extends to everything that is knowable by means of this light.¹³

Aristóteles, ed. H. Velázquez Fernandez (Mexico City: Panamerican University Press, 2010), 13–42. The debate on the possibility of an eternal created world was, in the thirteenth century, the place par excellence for reflection on the problem we now call “faith and science.”

¹¹ See *ST I*, q. 46, a. 2, sc: “Fidei articuli demonstrative probari non possunt, quia fides de non apparentibus est, ut dicitur ad Hebr. XI. Sed Deum esse creatorem mundi, sic quod mundus incoeperit esse, est articulus fidei, dicimus enim, credo in unum Deum et cetera. Et iterum, Gregorius dicit, in Homil. I in Ezech., quod Moyses prophetizavit de praeterito, dicens in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram; in quo novitas mundi traditur. Ergo novitas mundi habetur tantum per revelationem.” See also *In II sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5 (33): “Tertia positio est dicentium, quod omne quod est praeter Deum, incepit esse; sed tamen Deus potuit res ab aeterno produxisse; ita quod mundum incepisse non potuit demonstrari, sed per revelationem divinam esse habitum et creditum. Et haec positio innititur auctoritati Gregorii, qui dicit quod quaedam prophetia est de praeterito, sicut Moyses prophetizavit cum dixit Genes. 1: ‘In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram.’ Et huic positioni consentio: quia non credo, quod a nobis sumi ratio demonstrativa ad hoc; sicut nec ad Trinitatem, quamvis Trinitatem non esse sit impossibile; et hoc ostendit debilitas rationum quae ad hoc inducuntur pro demonstrationibus, quae omnes a philosophis tenentibus aeternitatem mundi positae sunt et solutae: et ideo potius in derisionem quam in confirmationem fidei vertuntur si quis talibus rationibus innixus contra philosophos novitatem mundi probare intenderet.” Cf. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 1.1.

¹² See *ST II-II*, q. 171, a. 3: “Sed contra est quod Gregorius dicit, super Ezech., quod prophetia quaedam est de futuro, sicut id quod dicitur Isaiae VII, ‘Ecce, virgo concipiet et pariet filium’; quaedam de praeterito, sicut id quod dicitur Gen. I, ‘In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram’; quaedam de praesenti, sicut id quod dicitur I ad Cor. XIV, ‘Si omnes prophetent, intret autem quis infidelis, occulta cordis eius manifesta fiunt.’ Non ergo est prophetia solum de contingentibus futuris.”

¹³ See *ST II-II*, q. 171, a. 3: “Manifestatio quae fit per aliquod lumen, ad omnia illa se extendere potest quae illi lumini subiiciuntur, sicut visio corporalis se extendit ad omnes colores, et cognitio naturalis animae se extendit ad omnia illa quae subduntur lumini intellectus agentis. Cognitio autem prophetica est per lumen divinum, quo possunt omnia cognosci, tam divina quam humana, tam spiritualia

Even our past, just like our future, is always present in the eternity of the divine knowledge.¹⁴ The Hexaemeron is therefore a prophecy or revelation about the beginning of the world, more precisely about “the institution of nature,” that is, the establishment, destined to last, of nature and its structures. It is based on a “prophetic” participation of Moses, the prophet par excellence,¹⁵ in the divine knowledge. This prophecy is first of all a subjective noetic experience of Moses (*revelatio*), which was then objectified and transmitted in the Genesis account (*annuntiatio*).

The Hexaemeron Calls for an Adherence of Faith

The creation account in Genesis, like all Sacred Scripture, participates in the certainty proper to the knowledge of God, the first author of Scripture, who communicated to Moses, through the gift of prophecy, a participation in his knowledge. Therefore, the teaching of the Hexaemeron calls for an adherence of faith. This is the very first principle that guides its reader and its exegete: according to the expression of St. Augustine taken up by St. Thomas, it is necessary to hold without hesitation (*inconcusse*) the truth expressed in Scripture.¹⁶ The authority of the Word of God prevails over all mere human considerations: it precedes (and gives rise to) all interpretation. Thus, on several occasions in his Hexaemeron, St. Thomas establishes, in the *sed contra*, the truth, whose understanding he then seeks, by the simple formula “sed in contrarium sufficit auctoritas Scripturae.”¹⁷ For example, when Genesis refers to the (rather problematic) existence of waters above the (no less problematic) firmament, St. Thomas states the following: “As Augustine says in Book II of the *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, the authority of this Scripture is greater than the capacity of any human genius.” Therefore, “in whatever way and by whatever nature these waters are, we do not doubt for a moment that they are there.”¹⁸ The same princi-

quam corporalia. Et ideo revelatio prophetica ad omnia huiusmodi se extendit.”

¹⁴ See *ST* I, q. 14, a. 13.

¹⁵ On the place of Moses among the prophets, see Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 14, and *ST* II-II, q. 174, a. 4. See also A. Wohlman, *Thomas d'Aquin et Maïmonide: Un dialogue exemplaire* (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 294–304.

¹⁶ See *ST* I, q. 68, a. 1: “Sicut Augustinus docet, in huiusmodi quaestionibus duo sunt observanda. Primo quidem, ut veritas Scripturae inconcusse teneatur.” On the absolute necessity to hold the truth of Scripture in the exegesis of the Hexaemeron, see also Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, sc 4: “Praeterea, quod Scriptura sacra dicit fuisse aliquando, non est dicendum non fuisse; quia ut Augustinus dicit, contra Scripturam sacram nemo Christianus sentit” (all Latin from *De potentia* is from the Marietti edition, 8th ed.).

¹⁷ See *ST* I, q. 69, a. 1, sc; q. 70, a. 1, sc; a. 2, sc; q. 71, a. 1, sc.

¹⁸ *ST* I, q. 68, a. 2: “Sicut dicit Augustinus, II super Gen. ad Litt., ‘Maior est Scrip-

ple applies to the existence of a formless matter, implied by Genesis 1:2, in whatever way one would then need to interpret it.¹⁹

The Hexaemeron Calls for Interpretation

That said, even if he requires a subjective adherence of faith to the entire scriptural data, Aquinas does not put all the teachings of Scripture on the same objective level. At the school of St. Augustine, again,²⁰ he distinguishes between what concerns the very substance of faith (first and foremost: the very mystery of God who reveals himself, the first and formal object of faith) and what is related to faith only indirectly, by accident, by the mere fact of being included in Scripture, which, being inspired, cannot contain any error.²¹ The faithful must always adhere to the *veritas Scripturae*, otherwise they risk falling into heresy, even when it is only about the indirect object of faith,²² but, as the diversity of patristic exegesis testifies, there are in

turae huius auctoritas quam omnis humani ingenii capacitas. Unde quomodo et quales aquae ibi sint, eas tamen ibi esse, minime dubitamus. Quales autem sint illae aquae, non eodem modo ab omnibus assignatur.” Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2.5.9: “Quoquo modo autem et qualeslibet aquae ibi sint, esse eas ibi minime dubitemus: maior est quippe Scripturae huius auctoritas, quam omnis humani ingenii capacitas.” We find the same reference to Saint Augustine in *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2, arg. 7 (305); d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 1; *Quodlibet* VII, q. 6, a. 1, arg. 4.

¹⁹ See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, sc 4: “Scriptura autem divina dicit, terram aliquando fuisse inanem et vacuum. Ergo non est dicendum quin aliquando fuerit inanis et vacua. Hoc autem pertinet ad informitatem materiae, quocumque modo exponatur. Ergo aliquando substantia materiae praecessit formationem; alias nunquam informis fuisset.”

²⁰ Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 1.1.1: “In Libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet quae ibi aeterna intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura praenuntientur, quae agenda praecipiantur vel admoneantur. In narratione ergo rerum factarum quaeritur utrum omnia secundum figurarum tantummodo intellectum accipiantur, an etiam secundum fidem rerum gestarum asserenda et defendenda sint.”

²¹ On the distinction between the direct and indirect object of faith, see: *In III sent.*, d. 24, a. 1, q. 1; q. 2, ad 4 and ad 5; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 8, ad 2.

²² See Thomas Aquinas, *Super 1 Cor* 11, lec. 4 (Marietti no. 627): “Pertinet autem aliquid ad disciplinam fidei dupliciter. Uno modo directe, sicut articuli fidei, qui per se credendi proponuntur. Unde error circa hos secundum se facit haereticum, si pertinacia adsit. Non possunt autem a tali errore propter simplicitatem aliquam excusari, praecipue quantum ad ea, de quibus Ecclesia solemnizat, et quae communiter versantur in ore fidelium, sicut mysterium Trinitatis, nativitatis Christi, et alia huiusmodi. Quaedam vero indirecte pertinent ad fidei disciplinam, inquantum scilicet ipsa non proponuntur, ut propter se credenda, sed ex negatione eorum sequitur aliquid contrarium fidei: sicut si negetur Isaac fuisse filium Abrahae, sequitur aliquid contrarium fidei, scilicet sacram Scripturam continere aliquid falsi. Ex talibus autem non iudicatur aliquis haereticus, nisi adeo pertinaciter perse-

the latter case several ways of doing justice to the *veritas Scripturae*:

In things that are a matter of faith, we must distinguish between them. Some are indeed the very substance of faith, such as that God is Triune and One and things of that sort. In this area, it is not permitted to have a different opinion. . . . Other things belong to faith only by accident, that is to say, insofar as they are transmitted in Scripture, whose faith presumes that it was promulgated under the dictation of the Holy Spirit. Those who are not required to know the Scriptures can safely ignore these things, for example the many stories, and on these things the saints [Fathers] had various ideas, explaining Scripture differently. . . . Thus, concerning the beginning of the world, there is something that belongs to the substance of faith, namely, that the world has begun when it was created, which all the saints [Fathers] affirm in unison. In what way and according to what order it was made belongs to faith only by accident, insofar as it is transmitted by Scripture. The Saints [Fathers], while safeguarding the truth of Scripture by different explanations, introduced different commentaries.²³

Without going into all the complexity of St. Thomas's teaching on the different meanings of Scripture,²⁴ let us simply recall that, for him, the

veret, quod ab errore non recedat, etiam viso quid ex hoc sequatur."

²³ *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2: "Quae ad fidem pertinent, dupliciter distinguuntur. Quaedam enim sunt per se substantia fidei, ut Deum esse trinum et unum, et huiusmodi: in quibus nulli licet aliter opinari; unde Apostolus ad Gal. 1, dicit, quod si angelus Dei aliter evangelizaverit quam ipse docuerat, anathema sit. Quaedam vero per accidens tantum, in quantum scilicet in Scriptura traduntur, quam fides supponit Spiritu sancto dictante promulgatam esse: quae quidem ignorari sine periculo possunt ab his qui Scripturas scire non tenentur, sicut multa historialia: et in his etiam sancti diversa senserunt, Scripturam divinam diversimode exponentes. Sic ergo circa mundi principium aliquid est quod ad substantiam fidei pertinet, scilicet mundum incepisse creatum, et hoc omnes sancti concorditer dicunt. Quo autem modo et ordine factus sit, non pertinet ad fidem nisi per accidens, in quantum in Scriptura traditur, cuius veritatem diversa expositione sancti salvantes, diversa tradiderunt." The legitimate diversity of interpretations does not preclude their ranking. See *ST I*, q. 73, a. 2, ad 3: "Est ergo conveniens expositio, ut dicatur Deus requievisse, quia nos requiescere facit. Sed non est haec sola ponenda, sed alia expositio est principalior et prior."

²⁴ On the senses of Scripture according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, see, e.g.: M. Aillet, *Lire la Bible avec s. Thomas: Le passage de la littera à la res dans la Somme théologique* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires 1993); T. Prügl, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*,

first and fundamental meaning, the one that supports the whole edifice of interpretation, is the literal meaning. The literal meaning is the one that the author wanted to express and communicate through the text. Note, however, that this literal meaning does not necessarily coincide with the letter of the text understood “literally” in a very superficial way. For example, to understand the six days of Genesis as six days of twenty-four hours seems more in conformity with the letter of the text “as to the surface [*quantum ad superficiem*]”; but St. Thomas prefers, in the *Scriptum*, the Augustinian thesis according to which the sacred author wanted to signify six aspects of a single creative act.²⁵ Superficial literality can even be misleading and lead to error.²⁶ Interpretation is therefore required to determine the literal meaning.²⁷ To this end, St. Thomas resorts to literary

ed. R. Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 386–415; I. M. Manresa Lamarca, *La exégesis en el Espíritu según santo Tomás de Aquino* (Toledo, Spain: San Ildefonso, 2018).

²⁵ See: *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2: “Haec quidem positio est communior, et magis consona videtur litterae quantum ad superficiem; sed prior [=Augustini] est rationabilior, et magis ab irrisione infidelium sacram Scripturam defendens.” See also *In II sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 4, ad 1: “Alii vero dicunt, quod prius tempore fuit opus creationis, et postea per aliquod intervallum temporis formata est lux, et tunc dies primo inceptit; unde dicunt creationis opus ante omnem diem fuisse. Et hoc quidem magis consonat litterae Genesis secundum suum sensum planum; statim enim posita creatione, tenebras super faciem abyssi commemorat, et postmodum de lucis productione dicit.”

²⁶ See *In II sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1: “In hoc nihil auctoritati Scripturae derogatur, si diversimode exponatur, dummodo hoc firmiter teneatur quod sacra Scriptura nihil falsum contineat. Constat tamen in Scriptura sacra multa metaphorice tradita, quae secundum planam superficiem litterae intelligi non valent.” See also *ST I*, q. 68, a. 3: “Aliquis, considerando superficie tenus litteram Genesis, posset talem imaginationem concipere . . .”

²⁷ Saint Thomas does not exclude a plurality in the literal sense itself, whether it is related to Moses or must be attributed to God himself. See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1: “Aliud est, ne aliquis ita Scripturam ad unum sensum cogere velit, quod alios sensus qui in se veritatem continent, et possunt, salva circumstantia litterae, Scripturae aptari, penitus excludantur; hoc enim ad dignitatem divinae Scripturae pertinet, ut sub una littera multos sensus contineat, ut sic et diversis intellectibus hominum conveniat, ut unusquisque miretur se in divina Scriptura posse invenire veritatem quam mente conceperit; et per hoc etiam contra infideles facilius defendatur, dum si aliquid, quod quisque ex sacra Scriptura velit intelligere, falsum apparuerit, ad alium eius sensum possit haberi recursus. Unde non est incredibile, Moysi et aliis sacrae Scripturae auctoribus hoc divinitus esse concessum, ut diversa vera, quae homines possent intelligere, ipsi cognoscerent, et ea sub una serie litterae designarent, ut sic quilibet eorum sit sensus auctoris. Unde si etiam aliqua vera ab expositoribus sacrae Scripturae litterae aptentur, quae auctor non intelligit, non est

criticism:²⁸ the context (*circumstantia litterae*) sets the limits within which the pluralism of interpretations can be deployed. Indeed, to be legitimate, an interpretation must be compatible with the logical coherence of the entire text.²⁹ The interpreter must also take into account the consistency in the use of a term throughout the entire Scripture (*consuetudo Scripturae*), considered as a single work.³⁰ Finally, and this is the point on which I would like to dwell more deeply, the exegete must take into consideration the specific nature of a prophetic text.

dubium quin spiritus sanctus intellexerit, qui est principalis auctor divinae Scripturae. Unde omnis veritas quae, salva litterae circumstantia, potest divinae Scripturae aptari, est eius sensus.”

²⁸ There are also some observations of textual criticism; see *ST I*, q. 73, a. 1, ad 2: “Et ideo consummatio operum, secundum nostram translationem, attribuitur diei septimae. Sed secundum aliam translationem, attribuitur diei sextae. Et utrumque potest stare.”

²⁹ The context (*circumstantia litterae*) may allow several interpretations. See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1: “Ne aliquis ita Scripturam ad unum sensum cogere velit, quod alios sensus qui in se veritatem continent, et possunt, salva circumstantia litterae, Scripturae aptari, penitus excludantur”; *Ibid.* (apropos of the interpretation of the formlessness of matter which pits St. Augustine against other Fathers): “Quia ergo neutrum a veritate fidei discordat, et utrumque sensum circumstantia litterae patitur; utrumque sustinentes ad utrasque rationes respondeamus.” But it also excludes some of them; see ad 5: “Alii dicunt, quod nomine firmamenti intelligitur caelum aereum nobis vicinum. . . . Et huic etiam expositioni concordat Rabbi Moyses. Sed hanc non videtur pati litterae circumstantia. Nam postea subditur in littera, quod fecit Deus duo luminaria magna, et stellas; et posuit eas in firmamento caeli.” Saint Thomas also rejects, as incompatible with the literal meaning, an interpretation that makes little sense of the cosmic and material dimension of the creative act, and in fact contradicts the logic of the text; see *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: “Quidam namque dixerunt, aquas illas esse spirituales naturas, quod imponitur Origeni. Sed hoc quidem non videtur ad litteram posse intelligi, cum spiritualibus naturis situs non competat; ut sic inter eas et inferiores aquas corporeas dividat firmamentum, ut Scriptura tradit.” On the importance of considering the literary context, see Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 1.19.38.

³⁰ See, apropos of the “spirit/wind” that hovers over the waters: *ST I*, q. 66, a. 1, ad 2 in cont. (“Spiritus domini in Scriptura non nisi pro Spiritu sancto consuevit poni. Qui aquis superferri dicitur, non corporaliter, sed sicut voluntas artificis superferretur materiae quam vult formare”) q. 74, a. 3, ad 4 (“Rabbi Moyses per spiritum domini intelligit aerem vel ventum, sicut et Plato intellexit. Et dicit quod dicitur spiritus domini, secundum quod Scriptura consuevit ubique flatum ventorum Deo attribuere. Sed secundum sanctos, per spiritum domini intelligitur spiritus sanctus”); *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 2 (“Sed quia, ut dicit Basilius in Hexaemeron, non est consuetudo sacrae Scripturae, ut per spiritum domini aer intelligatur. . .”).

The Condescension of Moses

The prophetic charism, as St. Thomas describes it in question 12 of *De veritate* or in *ST* II-II, qq. 171–74, has two distinct acts: vision (*visio*) and proclamation (*denuntiatio*).³¹ Vision or revelation is the cognitive act by which the prophet personally comes into possession of the truth that God communicates to him. Proclamation is the activity by which the same prophet transmits to others the knowledge he has received. Although second to the vision itself, proclamation is intrinsically part of the prophetic charism. Now, this prophetic proclamation has modalities which the exegete must take into account in order to interpret correctly the text that objectifies it. The most decisive modality is the adaptation of the message to the public to whom it is addressed,³² an adaptation which in a way reduplicates that by which God himself, in instructing the prophet, addresses to him in “the language of the tribe.” The resulting exegetical principle has not escaped either the Fathers of the Church or St. Thomas Aquinas, who frequently use the theme of “the condescension of Moses” when interpreting the Hexaemeron. Addressing a people who are both “rough,” that is, culturally poor, and spiritually inclined to idolatry, Moses must adapt his discourse of revelation.³³ All these principles must be taken into account for the correct interpretation of the text.

First of all, whatever the state of his personal knowledge, Moses adapts

³¹ See: *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 9 (“Prophetia habet duo actus: unum principalem, scilicet visionem; alium secundarium, scilicet denuntiationem”); a. 13 (“Est autem duplex actus prophetiae, scilicet visio et denuntiatio”); *ST* II-II, q. 171, a. 1 (“Prophetia primo et principaliter consistit in cognitione, quia videlicet cognoscunt quaedam quae sunt procul remota ab hominum cognitione. . . . Sed quia, ut dicitur I ad Cor. XII, ‘Unicuique datur manifestatio spiritus ad utilitatem’; et infra, XIV, dicitur, ‘Ad aedificationem Ecclesiae quaerite ut abundetis’, inde est quod prophetia secundario consistit in locutione, prout prophetae ea quae divinitus edocti cognoscunt, ad aedificationem aliorum annuntiant”); *Super Isa* 1 (“Prophetia addit supra visionem actum exterioris denuntiationis, et visio erit materialis respectu prophetie” [Leonine ed., vol. 28]).

³² See *ST* II-II, q. 174, a. 3, ad 3 (“[Denuntiatio] fit secundum dispositionem eorum quibus denuntiatur id quod prophetae revelatum est”); *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 13, ad 5 in cont. (“[Denuntiatio] fit secundum dispositionem eorum quibus denuntiatur”).

³³ The theme is common among the theologians of the thirteenth century. See, for example, Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 13, a. 1, q. 1, ad 2: “Quia Scriptura tradebatur genti rudi, quae versabatur circa sensibilia; ideo primo in operibus sex dierum conditionem sensibilibium insinuat” (Quaracchi ed.). However, continues Bonaventure, Moses, as a good teacher, does not neglect to lay stepping stones for the most advanced: “Nihilominus tamen praebens viam per haec sensibilia ad intelligenda spiritualia; hoc enim fecit ad illa insinuanda. . . . Et sic patet, qualiter processus Scripturae, quamvis videatur esse vulgaris, tamen est sufficiens et rationalis.”

his discourse to the common cultural and “scientific” representations of a “rough” people whose cognitive activity does not yet transcend the order of sensible knowledge. As we know, for St. Thomas, the progress of humanity as a whole is comparable to that of the individual: at the initial stage, sensible knowledge prevails, an obligatory point of departure for all human knowledge; and then one rises to the properly intellectual knowledge, which finally reaches its perfection in metaphysical knowledge.³⁴ Therefore, Moses keeps to the description of sensible realities, and among them the most visible and palpable. This is why the Hexaemeron says nothing explicit, for example, about the creation of angels, a silence that the Fathers did not fail to question.³⁵ As for prime matter, a principle perceptible only

³⁴ The “history of fundamental philosophy,” that is, the progress of human knowledge, is set out in several texts in the Thomasian corpus, the parallel of which is illuminating: *Summa contra gentiles* II, ch. 37 (nos. 1129–30) (dated ca. 1261–1262); *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5 (ca. 1265–1266); *ST I*, q. 44, a. 2 (ca. 1266–1268); *Sententia super Physicam*, In VIII phys., lec. 2 (ca. 1268–1269); *De substantiis separatis*, ch. 9 (after 1271). See: J. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 196–201; R. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), ch. 8 (“The Progress of Philosophical Reason towards Creation”); G. Dahan, “*Ex imperfecto ad perfectum*: Le progrès de la de la pensée humaine chez les théologiens du XIIIe siècle,” in: *Progrès, réaction, décadence dans l’Occident médiéval* (Geneva: Droz, 2003), 171–84.

³⁵ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 11.19: “In the passage where the Holy Scriptures speak of the creation of the world, they do not clearly say whether the angels were created or in what order [Ubi de mundi constitutione sacrae litterae loquuntur, non evidenter dicitur utrum vel quo ordine creati sint angeli]” (Latin from vol. 35 of *Bibliothèque augustinienne*; translation mine). In *ST I*, q. 67, a. 4 (see also *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 18, ad 4), Saint Thomas reports Saint Augustine’s opinion that the creation of the angels is signified in encrypted form by the creation of “heaven” (Gen 1:1) and their formation through the original production of light. Then he points out the opinion of the Fathers who believe that Moses deliberately omitted to speak of the production of the angels, either because the angels were created before the corporeal world, whose creation is recorded in Genesis (Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 16.38), or in condescension for the people (John Chrysostom): “Chrysostomus autem assignat aliam rationem. Quia Moyses loquebatur rudi populo, qui nihil nisi corporalia poterat capere; quem etiam ab idololatria revocare volebat. Assumpsissent autem idololatriae occasionem, si propositae fuissent eis aliquae substantiae supra omnes corporeas creaturas, eas enim reputassent deos, cum etiam proni essent ad hoc quod solem et lunam et stellas colerent tanquam deos; quod eis inhietur Deut. IV.” Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homelias in Genesin* 2.2: “And see with what condescension [Moses] speaks to us; he says nothing of the invisible Virtues, he does not express himself in this way: In the beginning God created angels and arch-angels. It is not suddenly and without preparation that he transmits his doctrine to us. As he spoke to Jews, to men immersed in material things, unable to perceive a point of the intellectual world, it is through the objects that strike the senses that he

to the intellect, Moses speaks of it metaphorically and hastens to multiply the images in order to prevent us from attaching ourselves to any of them in an exclusive and therefore erroneous way:

Moses could only speak of prime matter to an ignorant people under the images of things he knew. He therefore speaks of it in multiple figures (not only calling it “earth” or “water”) so that prime matter does not seem to be either earth or water. However, it has a similarity to the earth insofar as it stands in forms and to water insofar as it is likely to be informed by different forms.³⁶

Moreover, concerning the sensible world itself, Moses speaks “according to their appearance.” He avoids mentioning realities too far removed from immediate knowledge: he speaks of the earth and water, but not of the air and fire, which are more subtle elements and whose existence he merely suggests to the most educated.³⁷ He says nothing about minerals, because they are buried underground.³⁸ He brings no divine approval on

brings them to the knowledge of the supreme Craftsman, through the creatures that he manifests to them the Creator, in order to summon upon Him alone the worship and to prevent them from stopping at the creatures themselves. And yet, despite these wise precautions, they have divinized matter, they have prostrated themselves before the most vile animals” (*PG* 53, col. 29; translation mine).

³⁶ *ST* I, q. 66, a. 1, ad 1: “Non enim poterat Moyses rudi populo primam materiam exprimere, nisi sub similitudine rerum eis notarum. Unde et sub multiplici similitudine eam exprimit, non vocans eam tantum aquam vel tantum terram, ne videatur secundum rei veritatem materia prima esse vel terra vel aqua. Habet tamen similitudinem cum terra, inquantum subsidet formis; et cum aqua, inquantum est apta formari diversis formis.”

³⁷ See: *ST* I, q. 66, a. 1, ad 2 in cont. (“Aerem autem et ignem non nominat, quia non est ita manifestum rudibus, quibus Moyses loquebatur, huiusmodi esse corpora, sicut manifestum est de terra et aqua”); q. 68, a. 3 (“Moyses rudi populo loquebatur, quorum imbecillitati condescendens, illa solum eis proposuit, quae manifeste sensui apparent. . . . Et ideo Moyses de aqua et terra mentionem facit expressam, aerem autem non expresse nominat, ne rudibus quoddam ignotum proponeret. Ut tamen capacibus veritatem exprimeret, dat locum intelligendi aerem . . . ”); q. 74, a. 1, ad 2 (“Ignis et aer, quia non distinguuntur a vulgo, inter partes mundi non sunt expresse nominata a Moysse”); *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 2 (“ . . . et praecipue quia aquam et terram sensui manifestum est corpora esse, aer vero et ignis non ita sunt simplicibus manifesta, quibus etiam instruendis Scriptura tradebatur”).

³⁸ See *ST* I, q. 69, a. 2: “Moyses ea tantum proposuit quae in manifesto apparent, sicut iam dictum est. Corpora autem mineralia habent generationem occultam in visceribus terrae. Et iterum, non habent manifestam distinctionem a terra, sed quaedam terrae species videntur. Et ideo de eis mentionem non fecit.”

the second day for the distinction of waters above from the waters below, because the latter completely escapes the people.³⁹ He mentions the obvious movement of the stars but says nothing about the movement of the spheres which, however, according to the cosmology of Aristotle, bear them, because the latter, whose knowledge results from rational deduction alone, remains imperceptible to the senses.⁴⁰

All these pedagogical adaptations also have, in the final analysis, a moral and religious aim: to prevent or even to remove the idolatry to which the Hebrew people are supposed to be so prompt. For example, by mentioning the lights, the sun, and the moon only on the fourth day, Moses rejects the temptation to grant them a superior status to other creatures or even a divine status.⁴¹

But, between Moses and St. Thomas, the cultural context has evolved. St. Thomas is not speaking to an ignorant people but to a cultured elite, trained in Aristotelian philosophy and who thinks to be henceforth in possession of a rational knowledge of nature. What consequence does this entail? How does the exegesis of the Hexaemeron take into account a "philosophy" that too intends to tell the truth about the cosmos?

³⁹ See *ST I*, q. 74, a. 3, ad 3: "In opere secundae diei non ponitur 'Videt Deus quod esset bonum' . . . quia distinctio quae ponitur secunda die, est de his quae non sunt manifesta populo, ideo huiusmodi approbatione Scriptura non utitur."

⁴⁰ See *ST I*, q. 70, a. 1, ad 3: "Secundum Ptolomaeum, luminaria non sunt fixa in sphaeris, sed habent motum seorsum a motu sphaerarum. . . . Sed secundum opinionem Aristotelis, stellae fixae sunt in orbibus, et non moventur nisi motu orbium, secundum rei veritatem. Tamen motus luminarium sensu percipitur, non autem motus sphaerarum. Moyses autem, rudi populo condescendens, secutus est quae sensibilibiter apparent, ut dictum est. Si autem sit aliud firmamentum quod factum est secunda die, ab eo in quo posita sunt sidera, secundum distinctionem naturae, licet sensus non discernat, quem Moyses sequitur, ut dictum est; cessat obiectio."

⁴¹ See *ST I*, q. 70, a. 1, ad 1 ("Ideo tamen non fit mentio a principio de eis, sed solum quarta die, ut Chrysostomus dicit, ut per hoc removeat populum ab idololatria, ostendens luminaria non esse deos, ex quo nec a principio fuerunt"); ad 4 ("Sicut dicit Basilus, praemittitur productio plantarum luminaribus, ad excludendam idololatriam"); a. 2 ("Creatura aliqua corporalis potest dici esse facta vel propter actum proprium, vel propter aliam creaturam, vel propter totum universum, vel propter gloriam Dei. Sed Moyses, ut populum ab idololatria revocaret, illam solam causam tetigit, secundum quod sunt facta ad utilitatem hominum. Unde dicitur Deut. IV, 'Ne forte, elevatis oculis ad caelum, videas solem et lunam et omnia astra caeli, et errore deceptus adores ea et colas, quae creavit dominus Deus in ministerium cunctis gentibus'").

Exegesis and Philosophy

Autonomy of Philosophy: Against Theologism

In the final analysis, all truth comes from God who is subsisting truth, and therefore according to the principle of causality of the maximum, source, and model of all created truth. But communication to men of a participation in this divine truth can be done either through the heavy mediation of the work of human reason or in a more direct way by revelation, through prophecy.⁴² Prophecy is essentially about supernatural truths that are of themselves inaccessible to human reason left to itself. It also includes, for reasons which keep recurring in St. Thomas, truths of a natural order which are theoretically accessible to reason but which in fact benefit from being confirmed by revelation.⁴³ Prophecy does not, however, involve the whole realm of natural truths. In fact, there are many rational truths which are not the subject of any revelation and are therefore not found in Scripture, because they have no necessary and immediate connection with the salvific purposes of *sacra doctrina*.⁴⁴ They are part of a philosophy that is autonomous from faith. Yet they are precious for a correct interpretation of revelation, precisely because theology needs as interlocutor an epistemologically autonomous philosophy.⁴⁵

But, at the time of St. Thomas, this model of collaboration in differentiation was not self-evident. Affirming the autonomy of philosophy implied a distance from the widely held view that all authentic science was contained, at least implicitly, in Sacred Scripture, the “complete book.” This was the opinion, for example, of the Franciscan Roger Bacon (†1294), who, in a letter to Pope Clement IV (1265–1268), wrote the following:

⁴² See Serge-Thomas Bonino, “La théologie de la vérité dans la *Lectura super Ioannem* de saint Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Études thomasiennes*, 23–49.

⁴³ See P. Synave, “La révélation des vérités divines naturelles d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Mélanges Mandonnet*, vol. 1 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1930), 327–70.

⁴⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibet* VII, q. 6, a. 1: “*Sacra Scriptura ad hoc divinitus est ordinata ut per eam nobis veritas manifestetur necessaria ad salutem.*”

⁴⁵ See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §77: “Theology needs philosophy as interlocutor in order to confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims. It was not by accident that the Fathers of the Church and the medieval theologians had recourse to non-Christian philosophers for this explanatory function.” See also §75: “The demand for a valid autonomy of thought should be respected even when theological discourse makes use of philosophical concepts and arguments. Indeed, to argue according to rigorous rational criteria is to guarantee that the results attained are universally valid.”

Perfect wisdom is one, it is contained in Scripture and must be explained by canon law and philosophy, and I include civil law and all human wisdom. For it is necessary that all useful, necessary, and worthy wisdom of the sons of God, which has God as its author, be exposed in Sacred Scripture. This brings together, as in the fist, what is explained more broadly, as in the extended hand, by canon law and philosophy. Thus, in Sacred Scripture, all truth is contained as in a source that goes forth in many streams in canon law and philosophy. And it is concentrated as in the root, what is found in canon law and philosophy as elegant branches, bright leaves, beautiful flowers and abundant fruits.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Roger Bacon, *Lettre à Clement IV*, no. 12 (Latin text ed. E. Bettoni with notes [Milan, 1964]; French trans. in *Philosophes médiévaux: Anthologie de textes philosophiques (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)*, ed. R. Imbach and M.-H. Méléard (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1986), 131–48, at 139. For Roger Bacon, all sciences, starting with philosophy, are oriented toward theology, which is also understood as an explanation of Scripture. See Roger Bacon, *Compendium studii theologiae* I, prol., no. 16: “Although the study of theologians had to deal mainly with the sacred text, it must be known . . . that, however, for fifty years, theologians have been mainly concerned with *quaestiones*. It is obvious to everyone by seeing the treatises, the summas and horseloads composed by many (Quamvis autem principalis occupatio studii theologorum deberet esse circa textum sacrum, sciendum est . . . tamen a quinquaginta annis theologi principaliter occupati sunt circa questiones, quod patet omnibus per tractatus et summas et honera equorum a multis composita)” (English and Latin in Bacon, *A Compendium of the Study of Philosophy*, ed. Thomas S. Maloney [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], 48). The sciences therefore have meaning only if they are integrated into theology: “Philosophy is dead and useless, and even harmful and reprehensible, unless theology deems it worthy to use it” (no. 10 [p. 137]). This conception of the organization of knowledge, all oriented toward and unified by theology, is inseparable in Bacon’s work from the Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination. It states that all true knowledge presupposes a special action, an illumination, of God-Truth with regard to the human intellect. This Augustinian theory of divine illumination is combined in Bacon with the original Avicennian theory of illumination by a separate agent Intellect, identified with God. It is essential for Bacon that all philosophy comes directly from God through illumination. Theological knowledge and secular knowledge have the same immediate origin. Does he not explain, according to a pattern reminiscent of traditionalism, that philosophy was originally revealed to patriarchs and prophets? It is of them that the ancient philosophers are the heirs. See P. Vignaux, *Philosophie au Moyen Âge*, ed. R. Imbach (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 168–73. However, this reduction of philosophy to theology can also be understood, through a kind of dialectical inversion, as a reduction of theology to philosophy. On the difference between the Baconian reduction and the Bonaventurian reduction, see C. Bérubé, “La réduction des sciences à la théologie selon Roger Bacon et St. Bonaventure,” in *San Bonaventura*

There is only one perfect wisdom: that which derives from divine illumination and is contained in Scripture. Philosophy is part of it. St. Thomas Aquinas rejected this *reductio artium ad theologiam*. A little-known text from the *De veritate* is very revealing on this subject. Aquinas rejects the idea that says prophecy is the communication by God of a perfect knowledge but which remains of a natural order. It is aimed specifically at Muslim and Jewish thinkers for whom the figure of the prophet, Moses or Mohammed, is first and foremost that of a legislator par excellence. The prophet assumes the figure of Plato's philosopher-king, and prophecy has the primary function of founding politics. Prophecy is therefore necessary for the formation of the natural order of the city.

Humankind cannot be preserved without life in society. Indeed, a man alone is not sufficient for the necessities of life; therefore man is "by nature a political animal," as stated in Book VII of the *Ethics*. However, society cannot be maintained without justice and the rule of justice is prophecy. Human nature has therefore been given the opportunity to achieve prophecy in a natural way.⁴⁷

To which St. Thomas responds with a clear distinction between the common good of the civil society, which falls under the natural order, and the supernatural order, ordained to eternal life:

The society of men as it is ordained for this purpose, which is eternal life, can only be preserved by the justice of faith, whose principle is prophecy. Therefore, it is said in Proverbs 27: "If prophecy is lacking, the people will scatter." But since this end is supernatural, the justice ordered for this end and the prophecy that is its principle will also be supernatural. On the other hand, the justice by which human society is governed in order for the good of the City [*in ordine ad*

maestro di vita francescana e di sapienza cristiana: Atti del Congresso internazionale per il VII Centenario di san Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, ed. A. Pompei, vol. 3 (Rome: Pontificia facoltà teologica san Bonaventura, 1976), 19–39.

⁴⁷ *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 3, arg. 11: "Divina providentia rebus in esse productis tribuit ut in se habeant ea sine quibus conservari non possunt; sicut in humano corpore posuit membra quibus sumitur et decoquitur cibus, sine quo mortalis vita non conservatur. Sed humanum genus non potest sine societate conservari: unus enim homo non sufficit sibi in necessariis ad vitam, unde homo naturaliter est animal politicum, ut dicitur VIII Ethic. Societas autem conservari non potest sine iustitia; iustitiae vero regula est prophetia. Ergo naturae humanae est inditum ut ad prophetiam naturaliter homo pervenire possit."

bonum civile], can be obtained as much as it is necessary by means of the principles of natural law implanted in man [*sufficienter potest haberi per principia iuris naturalis homini indita*] and, in this case, it is not necessary that there be a natural prophecy.⁴⁸

Sacred Scripture, which collects and transmits the prophetic revelation ordained to eternal life, and philosophy (which includes the “sciences”), the result of the exercise of natural reason, are therefore two areas that must be distinguished, especially if we also want to unite them.

Exegesis before Philosophy

When he addresses “the institution of nature” with the Hexaemeron, that is to say, the establishment by God’s creative work of the structures that define nature and its laws, the exegetical theologian necessarily encounters philosophical questions, some of which today would be called “scientific.” According to Aquinas, many of these questions are not directly related to revelation. He did not neglect them, however, and even showed interest in them when he encountered them, as he explained the Hexaemeron. Thus he pauses at length on the nature of light,⁴⁹ or on the disputed question of the possible animation of celestial bodies.⁵⁰

When the exegete encounters a philosophical question which, on the philosophical level, remains open and so belongs to the realm of simple opinion, which is generally manifested by the existence of a plurality of positions among philosophers, he is invited to adopt a certain pluralism, at least when revelation is not engaged (as is the case in the question of the eternity of the world). He must try to explain the biblical text according to the various philosophical hypotheses.⁵¹ If he has a preference for one of

⁴⁸ *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 3, ad 11: “Societas hominum secundum quod ordinatur ad finem vitae aeternae, non potest conservari nisi per iustitiam fidei, cuius principium est prophetia; unde dicitur Proverb. XXVII, 18: ‘Cum defecerit prophetia, dissipabitur populus.’ Sed cum hic finis sit supernaturalis, et iustitia ad hunc finem ordinata, et prophetia, quae est eius principium, erit supernaturalis. Iustitia vero per quam gubernatur societas humana in ordine ad bonum civile, sufficienter potest haberi per principia iuris naturalis homini indita; et sic non oportet prophetiam esse naturalem.”

⁴⁹ See *ST I*, q. 67, aa. 2 and 3. There is no scriptural reference in these two articles.

⁵⁰ *ST I*, q. 70, a. 3: “Circa istam quaestionem apud philosophos fuit diversa opinio. [...] Similiter etiam apud doctores fidei, fuit circa hoc diversa opinio. [...] Sic igitur patet quod corpora caelestia non sunt animata eo modo quo plantae et animalia, sed aequivoce. Unde inter ponentes ea esse animata, et ponentes ea inanimata, parva vel nulla differentia invenitur in re, sed in voce tantum.”

⁵¹ See *ST I*, q. 68, a. 1 (on the nature of the star-bearing firmament): “Hoc quod

them, he must avoid tying it to the authority of the Word of God as if it were a revealed truth.⁵² In truth, noting the distinction between philosophy and revelation, Aquinas, invites the theologian as theologian to keep a prudent distance from the various philosophical theories: unless there is evidence to the contrary, he must neither affirm them as if they were truths of faith nor deny them as if they were contrary to faith. Indeed,

It is very harmful to affirm or deny as if they belonged to sacred doctrine things that do not belong to the doctrine of piety. . . . It seems to me more certain, apropos the things that philosophers commonly think and which do not contradict our faith, not to affirm them as dogmas of faith, even if sometimes they are introduced under the name of philosophers, and not to deny them as contrary to faith, so as to not to give the wise of this world the opportunity to despise the doctrine of faith.⁵³

legitur firmamentum secunda die factum, dupliciter intelligi potest. Uno modo, de firmamento in quo sunt sidera. Et secundum hoc, oportet nos diversimode exponere secundum diversas opiniones hominum de firmamento." See also q. 70, a. 1, ad 1 (apropos the time of the creation of the lights, incorruptible bodies): "Secundum Augustinum, nulla difficultas ex hoc oritur. Non enim ponit successionem temporis in istis operibus, et ideo non oportet dicere quod materia luminarium fuerit sub alia forma. Secundum etiam eos qui ponunt caelestia corpora ex natura quatuor elementorum, nulla difficultas accidit, quia potest dici quod sunt formata ex praeiacenti materia, sicut animalia et plantae. Sed secundum eos qui ponunt corpora caelestia esse alterius naturae ab elementis et incorruptibilia per naturam, oportet dicere quod substantia luminarium a principio fuit creata; sed prius erat informis, et nunc formatur; non quidem forma substantiali, sed per collationem determinatae virtutis."

⁵² See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1: "Duo sunt vitanda [. . .] aliud est, ne quidquid verum aliquis esse crediderit, statim velit asserere, hoc ad veritatem fidei pertinere; quia, ut Augustinus dicit: 'Obest, si ad ipsam doctrinae pietatis formam pertinere arbitretur falsum, scilicet quod credit, et pertinacius affirmare audeat quod ignorat.'"

⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *Responsio de 43 Arcutulis*, prol.: "Hoc tamen in principio protestans, quod plures horum articulorum ad fidei doctrinam non pertinent sed magis ad philosophorum dogmata. Multum autem nocet talia que ad pietatis doctrinam non pertinent vel asserere vel negare quasi pertinentia ad sacram doctrinam. . . . Unde michi videtur tutius esse ut huiusmodi que philosophi communiter senserunt et nostre fidei non repugnant neque sic esse asserenda ut dogmata fidei, etsi aliquando sub nomine philosophorum introducantur, neque sic esse neganda tamquam fidei contraria, ne sapientibus huius mundi contempnendi doctrinam fidei occasio prebeatur" (Leonine ed., vol 42, p. 327; translation mine). In this expert report requested by the Master of the Order of Preachers, Saint Thomas is very careful not to make theological judgments on matters that are exclusively philosophical.

If, on the other hand, philosophy has reached certainty in its own order, the theologian must take it into account in his exegesis, at least in a negative way: he must never propose an interpretation of the sacred text that would directly contradict a philosophical thesis regarded as certain.

Although divine Scripture may be expounded in various ways, no one should attach himself to an interpretation so exclusively that, if it is established by a certain reason that it is false, he dares to affirm that it is the meaning of Scripture, so that Scripture may not be derided by unbelievers and the way of salvation should not be closed to them.⁵⁴

According to the principle of the unity of truth, which has its source in God himself, subsisting Truth, the interpretation of the sacred text that communicates the divine truth must be compatible with certain scientific knowledge (*certa ratio*). Transgressing this principle would lead to two harmful consequences against which St. Thomas, following Augustine, warns. The first would be to expose the truth of Scripture to slander,⁵⁵ in the sense that statements contrary to the truth would be falsely attributed to it, which would reflect on its first author, the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ The second consequence follows from the first: to give Scripture a teaching clearly opposed to scientific certainties would lead to the *irrisio infidelium*, that is to say, would provoke the mockery of unbelievers, with the dreadful effect, contrary to the evangelizing mission of the Church, of closing to them the path of salvation.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *ST I*, q. 68, a. 1: "Sicut Augustinus docet, in huiusmodi quaestionibus duo sunt observanda. . . . Secundo, cum Scriptura divina multipliciter exponi possit, quod nulli expositioni aliquis ita praecise inhaereat quod, si certa ratione constiterit hoc esse falsum, quod aliquis sensum Scripturae esse asserere praesumat, ne Scriptura ex hoc ab infidelibus derideatur, et ne eis via credendi praecludatur." Cf. *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5 ("Sed haec expositio in hoc videtur deficere, quod asserit quaedam per Scripturam sacram intelligi, quorum contraria satis evidentibus rationibus probantur"), and *ST I*, q. 68, a. 3 ("Sed quia ista positio per veras rationes falsa deprehenditur, non est dicendum hunc esse intellectum Scripturae").

⁵⁵ See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: "Et ideo aliter videtur dicendum ad hoc quod Scripturae veritas ab omni calumnia defendatur . . ."

⁵⁶ See *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, corp.: "Ne aliquis id quod patet esse falsum, dicat in verbis Scripturae, quae creationem rerum docet, debere intelligi; Scripturae enim divinae a spiritu sancto traditae non potest falsum subesse, sicut nec fidei, quae per eam docetur."

⁵⁷ The theme of the *irrisio infidelium* in the context of the interpretation of Genesis comes from St. Augustine. See Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 1.19.39: "Turpe est autem nimis

Still following in the footsteps of St. Augustine, St. Thomas rejects another strategy to reconcile exegesis and philosophy at a lower cost, which consists in exempting the work from the beginning from the requirements of philosophy under the pretext of its miraculous character in order to justify the points that are scientifically difficult in the Hexaemeron, such as the presence of water above the firmament. Now, St. Augustine wrote that the exegete of Genesis seeks to “know how God constituted the nature of things, not what he likes to do in them or from them to miraculously manifest his power.”⁵⁸ An appeal to divine omnipotence cannot be a substitute for philosophical explanation. In the same vein, St. Thomas denounces the unjustified use of a kind of “Planck’s Wall” which would make the ordinary laws of nature not apply in the beginning. On the contrary, creation establishes nature, that is a structure whose laws remain stable:

The Scriptures at the beginning of Genesis is a reminder of the institution of nature, which continues thereafter. Therefore, we should not pretend that something was done then that ceased thereafter.⁵⁹

et perniciosum ac maxime cavendum, ut christianum de his rebus quasi secundum christianas litteras loquentem ita delirare audiat, ut, quemadmodum dicitur, toto caelo errare conspiciens risum tenere vix possit. Et non tam molestum est, quod errans homo deridetur, sed quod auctores nostri ab eis, qui foris sunt, talia sensisse creduntur, et cum magno eorum exitio, de quorum salute satagimus, tamquam indocti reprehenduntur atque respuuntur.” It is very present in the Thomasian commentaries on the Hexaemeron: *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2 (“Haec quidem positio est communior, et magis consona videtur litterae quantum ad superficiem; sed prior est rationabilior, et magis ab irrisione infidelium sacram Scripturam defendens; quod valde observandum docet Augustinus super Genes. ad Litt. libro 1, cap. 19, ut sic Scripturae exponantur, quod ab infidelibus non irrideantur”); *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1 (“Ab infidelibus veritas fidei irridetur, cum ab aliquo simplici et fideli tamquam ad fidem pertinens proponitur aliquid quod certissimis documentis falsum esse ostenditur, ut etiam dicit I super Genes. ad litteram”); *ST I*, q. 46, a. 2 (debate on the eternity of the world). In other contexts, the need to avoid the *irrisio infidelium* is used to justify the discipline of the arcane or the difficulty of the Scriptures; see *Quodlibet VII*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 2. On the theme of the *irrisio infidelium*, see V. Serverat, “Irrisio infidelium: Encore sur Raimond Lulle et Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 90 (1990): 436–48.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2.1.2: “Nunc enim quemadmodum Deus instituerit naturas rerum, secundum Scripturas eius nos convenit quaerere; non quid in eis vel ex eis ad miraculum potentiae suae velit operari.”

⁵⁹ *ST I*, q. 67, a. 4, ad 2: “Quia Scriptura in principio Genesis commemorat institutionem naturae, quae postmodum perseverat, unde non debet dici quod aliquid tunc factum fuerit, quod postmodum esse desierit.” Cf.: *In II sent.*, d. 13, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3

The Contrast with St. Bonaventure

The importance that St. Thomas gives in biblical exegesis to the criterion of non-contradiction with philosophy is clearly evident from the contrast with St. Bonaventure on how to evaluate the Augustinian exegesis of the Hexaemeron. The medieval exegesis of the Hexaemeron is meant to be an extension of the authoritative patristic exegesis.⁶⁰ However, sometimes the Fathers disagree on the interpretation of one aspect or another of the Hexaemeron. St. Thomas reports several of these discrepancies and generally tries to mitigate them.⁶¹

("Et ideo oportet quod semper illuminet corpora sibi directe opposita . . . nisi ponatur hoc virtute divina fieri, et quasi miraculose; et hoc non convenit ponere in prima institutione naturae, ut Augustinus dicit"); d. 14, q. 1, a. 1 (347): ("Alii vero dicunt, aquas de natura huius elementi quod apud nos est, super caelos virtute divina contineri. Sed hoc removet Augustinus ubi supra, quia in operibus sex dierum, quibus natura instituta est, non quaeritur quid Deus facere possit sua virtute, sed quid rerum natura patiatur"); d. 18, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 5; *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: ("Nec est sufficiens responsio, quod omnipotentia Dei aquas illas contra earum naturam supra caelum sustinet; quia nunc quaeritur qualiter Deus instituerit naturas rerum, non quod ex eis aliquod miraculum potentiae suae velit operari, ut Augustinus in eodem libro dicit"); ad 14 ("Nihil cogit nos dicere, nec Scripturae Genesis auctoritas, nec aliqua ratio, quod alio modo in illo rerum principio materia formis elementaribus subesset quam modo"); q. 6, a. 1, arg. 9; *ST I*, q. 68, a. 2, ad 1 ("Quibusdam videtur ratio illa solvenda per hoc, quod aquae, quamvis sint naturaliter graves, virtute tamen divina super caelos continentur. Sed hanc solutionem Augustinus excludit, II Lib. super Gen. ad Litt., dicens quod nunc quemadmodum Deus instituit naturas rerum convenit quaerere; non quid in eis ad miraculum suae potentiae velit operari").

⁶⁰ In his work of interpreting the Word of God, the exegete is part of a tradition which, according to the epistemology of Catholic theology, has the value of authority and which gives a central place to the Fathers of the Church. In his commentary on the Hexaemeron, St. Thomas therefore constantly refers to the Fathers of the Church, both in terms of the principles of the method to be implemented and in terms of the concrete interpretations of the text. The authority of the Fathers is of course totally subordinated to that of Scripture itself.

⁶¹ Without ever renouncing a certain concordism, St. Thomas points out, for example, the difference between Basil and John Chrysostom on the uniqueness or plurality of the heavens, which he strives to reduce to a simple difference of expression. See *ST I*, q. 68, a. 4: "Circa hoc videtur esse quaedam diversitas inter Basilium et Chrysostomum. Dicit enim Chrysostomus non esse nisi unum caelum; et quod pluraliter dicitur, 'caeli caelorum,' hoc est propter proprietatem linguae Hebraeae, in qua consuetum est ut caelum solum pluraliter significetur; sicut sunt etiam multa nomina in latino quae singulari carent. Basilius autem, et Damascenus sequens eum, dicunt plures esse caelos. Sed haec diversitas magis est in voce quam in re." He also points out the difference between Strabo and Bede, on the one hand, and Basil on the other, on the reasons that suggest the (debatable) existence of an empyrean heaven, the abode of the blessed. See *ST I*, q. 66, a. 3:

But there is a more fundamental difference between the general exegesis of the Hexaemeron by St. Augustine and that of the other Fathers of the Church. The heart of the dispute concerns the meaning to be given to the six days of creation that structure the Genesis account.⁶² For St. Augustine, creation was simultaneous and the six days are in fact only a pedagogical explanation of the different aspects of the unique moment of creation. On the other hand, for most other Fathers, the six days correspond to six time periods.⁶³ St. Thomas, of course, strives to minimize the differences

“Caelum empyreum non invenitur positum nisi per auctoritates Strabi et Bedae, et iterum per auctoritatem Basilii. In cuius positione quantum ad aliquid conveniunt, scilicet quantum ad hoc quod sit locus beatorum. Dicit enim Strabus, et etiam Beda, quod statim factum angelis est repletum. Basilium etiam dicit, in II Hexaem., sicut damnati in tenebras ultimas abiguntur ita remuneratio pro dignis operibus restauratur in ea luce quae est extra mundum, ubi beati quietis domicilium sortientur. Differunt tamen quantum ad rationem ponendi. Nam Strabus et Beda ponunt caelum empyreum ea ratione, quia firmamentum, per quod caelum siderum intelligunt, non in principio sed secunda die dicitur factum. Basilium vero ea ratione ponit, ne videatur simpliciter Deus opus suum a tenebris inchoasse; quod Manichaei calumniantur, Deum veteris testamenti Deum tenebrarum nominantes. Hae autem rationes non sunt multum cogentes.”

⁶² Other differences between St. Augustine and the other Fathers were added to this central dispute. For example, on the question of whether the creation of formless matter preceded chronologically its formation in creatures. But, as St. Thomas observes, the definition of formless matter is not the same for St. Augustine and for others. See *ST I*, q. 66, a. 1: “Circa hoc sunt diversae opiniones sanctorum. Augustinus enim vult quod informitas materiae corporalis non praecesserit tempore formationem ipsius, sed solum origine vel ordine naturae. Alii vero, ut Basilium, Ambrosius et Chrysostomus, volunt quod informitas materiae tempore praecesserit formationem. Et quamvis hae opiniones videantur esse contrariae, tamen parum ab invicem differunt, aliter enim accipit informitatem materiae Augustinus quam alii.” See also *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1. There are still other points of detail on which St. Augustine goes at it alone. He believes, for example, that on the third day, the plants were created in matter in power and not in act. See *ST I*, q. 69, a. 2: “Sed tamen circa productionem plantarum, aliter opinatur Augustinus ab aliis. Alii enim expositores dicunt quod plantae productae sunt actu in suis speciebus in hac tertia die, secundum quod superficies litterae sonat. Augustinus autem, V Sup. Gen. ad Litt., dicit quod causaliter tunc dictum est produxisse terram herbam et lignum, idest producendi accepisse virtutem.”

⁶³ See *ST I*, q. 74, a. 2: “In hac quaestione Augustinus ab aliis expositoribus dissentit. Augustinus enim vult, et super Gen. ad Litt., et XI de Civ. Dei, et ad Orosium, quod omnes qui dicuntur septem dies, sunt unus dies septemplex rebus praesentatus. Alii vero expositores sentiunt quod fuerunt septem dies diversi, et non unus tantum.” See also q. 69, a. 1: “Hic oportet aliter dicere secundum expositionem Augustini, et aliorum sanctorum Augustinus enim in omnibus his operibus non ponit durationis ordinem, sed solum originis et naturae. . . . Sed secundum alios

in order to reconcile the Fathers according to the traditional principle of *diversi non adversi*.⁶⁴ The difference, he says, is not about doctrinal background (things are produced into existence by way of creation) that engages faith and requires unity, but only about how to explain the letter of Genesis.⁶⁵ In any case, even if he is perhaps more reserved in *ST*, in the *Scriptum* St. Thomas did not hide his preference for the Augustinian interpretation on the grounds that it was more rational and better able to defend Scripture from the mockery of unbelievers.⁶⁶

Now, on the same question, St. Bonaventure adopts a diametrically opposed position.⁶⁷ The Seraphic Doctor understands very well the stakes of the choice between the two exegeses: nothing less than the correct way of articulating faith and reason, exegesis and philosophy.

On this issue, some Fathers followed the theological path, drawing reason towards the things of faith. But others, among whom the principal was Saint Augustine, have followed more of the philosophical path that poses things that seem more in tune with reason. He therefore drew the interpretation of Scripture in the sense of confirming and certifying reason.⁶⁸

sanctos, in his operibus etiam ordo durationis attenditur, ponunt enim quod, informitas materiae tempore praecessit formationem, et una formatio aliam.”

⁶⁴ See Henri de Lubac, “À propos de la formule: ‘diversi, sed non adversi,’” *Recherches de science religieuse* 40 (1952): 27–40.

⁶⁵ See *ST* I, q. 74, a. 2: “Hae autem duae opiniones, si referantur ad expositionem litterae Genesis, magnam diversitatem habent. . . . Sed si istae duae opiniones referantur ad modum productionis rerum, non invenitur magna differentia. . . . Ut igitur neutri sententiae praeiudicetur, utriusque rationibus respondendum est.”

⁶⁶ See *In II sent.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 2: “Haec quidem positio [=aliorum sanctorum] est communior, et magis consona videtur litterae quantum ad superficiem; sed prior [=i.e. Augustini] est rationabilior, et magis ab irrisione infidelium sacram Scripturam defendens.” George Zammit (“Principles of Hexaemeron interpretation according to St. Thomas,” *Melita Theologica* 2, no. 1 [1949]: 5–16) believes, on the basis of the evolution between the *Scriptum* and *ST*, that, in the end, St. Thomas did not adopt the position of St. Augustine. But the stated and explicit objective of Zammit’s article, which is to show that St. Thomas meets all the requirements of the decree of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, including the defense of the “literal historical sense” of the first chapters of Genesis, urge him to accentuate somewhat the interest of St. Thomas for “literal historical” exegeses.

⁶⁷ On the stakes of the difference between St. Bonaventure and St. Albert and St. Thomas on this point, see Gilles Emery, *La Trinité créatrice, Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses précurseurs, Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 235–37.

⁶⁸ Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: “Circa hanc quaestionem diversae fuerunt

This is followed by a brief presentation on the Augustinian thesis, at the end of which Bonaventure acknowledges: "This position was very rational and quite subtle."⁶⁹ Then comes the Parthian arrow:

Yet the meaning of Scripture seems forced to fit that position. It is therefore safer and more meritorious to submit our intellect and reason completely to Scripture than to force Scripture in one way or another. That is why the other doctors, in common, and those who preceded Augustine and those who followed him, understood and held what the text and the letter of the Sacred Scripture of Genesis seem to indicate [*sonare*].⁷⁰

Rather than St. Augustine's overly philosophical exegesis, Bonaventure therefore prefers a pious exegesis, more literal, and made more reliable by the broad consensus of the Fathers on its subject. "Even if this position seems less rational than the other, it is not irrational to hold it," says Bonaventure, who then distinguishes two regimens of reason: reason can rely on itself or accept itself only as a "captive" of faith, wholly devoted to its service. One of the possible applications of the theme of *reductio artium ad theologiam*, especially the Franciscan doctor's critique of separate reason and the project of an autonomous philosophy, is easily recognized. Only reason "captive" in obedience to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), not closing itself to the higher light, can perceive the rationality of the more literal interpretation: "Even if reason does not perceive the correctness of this position inso-

Sanctorum opiniones. Quidam enim Sancti in hac quaestione magis secuti sunt viam theologicam, trahentes rationem ad ea quae sunt fidei. Quidam vero, inter quos praecipuus fuit Augustinus, magis secuti sunt viam philosophicam, quae illa ponit, quae magis videntur rationi consona: unde et intellectum Scripturae traxit ad rationis confirmationem et attestationem."

⁶⁹ Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: "Unde cum videatur rationabilius, a summa potentia omnia produci simul, et mora temporis interiacentis nullius videatur esse utilitatis vel necessitatis; posuit, omnia simul esse producta, suam positionem confirmans per auctoritates sacrae Scripturae, et exponens illud quod videtur sibi contraire, videlicet de dierum distinctione, ostendens, quod illi dies non fuerunt dies materiales, sed potius spirituales, qui omnes simul potuerunt esse.—Et haec positio multum fuit rationabilis et valde subtilis."

⁷⁰ Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: "Verumtamen, quia ad hanc positionem videtur intellectus Scripturae distrahi, et securius est et magis meritorium, intellectum nostrum et rationem omnino Scripturae supponere, quam ipsam aliquo modo distrahere: ideo communiter alii doctores, et qui praecesserunt Augustinum, et qui secuti sunt, sic intellexerunt et posuerunt, sicut textus et littera sacrae Scripturae Genesis sonare videtur."

far as it relies on its own consideration, it perceives it when it is a prisoner under the light of faith.”⁷¹

Conclusion

Without ever questioning the fundamental unity of Christian wisdom, St. Thomas Aquinas is more attentive than Roger Bacon or St. Bonaventure to its organic character of unity in diversity, and he insists on the epistemological distinction between biblical revelation and philosophical rationality, whose autonomy he enshrines. For this reason, the principles of biblical exegesis that St. Thomas applies in his reading of the Hexaemeron will subsequently play an important role when Catholic exegesis of Genesis at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is confronted with the full force of secularization, that is to say, on the one hand, the rise of “independent” biblical criticism, and on the other hand, the new scientific worldview. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Pierre Benoit, and many others were able to benefit from the Thomasian treatise on prophecy, as well as from principles established in the questions we have just studied, in order to develop the principles of Catholic exegesis.⁷² In this context, it was above all a question

⁷¹ Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 12, a. 1, q. 2: “Hanc positionem, etsi minus videatur rationabilis quam alia, non tamen est irrationabile sustinere. Quamvis enim ratio non percipiat huius positionis congruitatem, prout considerationi suae innitur, percipit tamen, prout sub lumine fidei captivatur.” But Bonaventure here grants the Augustinian interpretation by presenting it as the anagogical meaning of the text: “Ratio autem anagogica est, ut in illa dierum distinctione intelligatur perfectio cognitionis in angelica natura beatificata, secundum quod plane ostendit Augustinus super Genesim ad litteram quasi per totum, quod ideo vocat ad litteram, quia expositionem istam, quam alii reputabant anagogicam, dixit Legislatorem intendisse ad litteram.” While emphasizing the prudence shown by St. Augustine, who makes no categorical statements, Bonaventure insists here on the motivations, ultimately extrinsic, apologetic, that led Augustine to present this interpretation: “Nihil tamen ibi asserendo dicit, sed protestatur ipse, modo inquisitorio se ibi procedere. Et sicut patet ex eius intentione ibidem magis volebat intellectum ex Scriptura elicere, ex quo Scriptura non posset a viris philosophicis derideri, nec propter hoc aliquis, naturali philosophia imbutus, a fidei veritate retardari, sicut ipse aliquando fuerat retardatus, magis, inquam, quam intellectum principalem exponere quem ibi habuit Legislator: et magis intendit ostendere, quid congruum fuerit vel tunc esse potuerit, quam quid factum fuerit. Et in duodecimo Confessionum ostendit, quod una et eadem Scriptura multipliciter potest intelligi, et in omnibus sensibus vere, quorum nullus Spiritum sanctum latuit, ex cuius inspiratione Scriptura edita fuit. Et in hoc manifeste ostendit, quod aliis non contradicit.”

⁷² See, for example, the “Renseignements techniques” of Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit in Thomas Aquinas, *Somme théologique, La prophétie, 2a-2ae, Questions 171–178*, trans. Paul Synave, O.P., and Pierre Benoit, O.P., 2nd ed. updated by

of going beyond hasty concordisms to better distinguish between what was revelation and what was “science,” historical or physical. This is now a given. Today, it is a somewhat different challenge that St. Thomas can help us meet. It is a question of overcoming the dualism that has been introduced into Christian theology, under the guise of an anthropological turning point, by the massive absorption of the Kantian separation between the realm of nature and the realm of human subjectivity, which has condemned nature and the cosmos to theological insignificance.⁷³ The Thomasian exegesis of the Hexaemeron then comes as a timely reminder that, with respect for epistemological distinctions, the Word of God still has something to say about nature and the cosmos. Moreover, the meta-

Jean-Pierre Torrell (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des jeunes, 2005 [original ed. 1947]).

- ⁷³ This marginalization of creation finds an exemplary expression in Rudolf Bultmann: “Only statements about God that express the existential relationship between man and God are legitimate. Illegitimate are the statements that speak of God’s action as a cosmic event. The affirmation of God as creator cannot be understood as a theoretical statement about God, grasped in a general sense as *creator mundi*. This assertion can only be a personal confession signifying that I understand myself as a creature that owes its existence to God” (*Jésus: Mythologie et démythologisation* [Paris: Seuil, 1968; originally 1926], 232; English translation mine). In the perspective of modern philosophies of subjectivity, nature is not only marginalized but also often perceived as the “other” of the mind, of subjectivity, sometimes its enemy. In any case, it is only an insignificant framework (since meaning appears only with man), an amorphous material at man’s disposal. It is up to man to inject meaning into a nature that has no meaning, to “rationalize” it through technology, to thus confer on it a “value.” And, since the body is the nature within us, the ultimate stage in this process is the transformation of the human body according to the projects of subjectivity alone (transhumanism). In this context, theology, when it has become subservient to the philosophies of subjectivity, has tended to neglect the doctrine of creation (often under the biblical pretext of the primacy of the covenant over creation) and to abandon the corporeal world to the sole gaze of “science” to reduce faith to a relationship of subjectivity to Subjectivity. See Joseph Ratzinger, “Transmission de la foi et sources de la foi,” *La Documentation Catholique* 80 (1983): 260–67, at 266: “From time to time, there is a fear that too much emphasis on this aspect of faith [creation] may compromise Christology. Considering some presentations of neo-Scholastic theology, this fear may seem justified. Today, however, it is the opposite fear that seems justified to me. The marginalization of the doctrine of creation reduces the notion of God and, consequently, Christology. The religious phenomenon can no longer be explained outside the psychological and sociological space; the material world is confined to the field of physics and technology. But it is only if being, including matter, is conceived of as having come out of God’s hands, that God is also really our Savior and our Life, the true Life” (translation mine).

physical perspective of the theology of St. Thomas, capable of embracing the order of nature as well as that of subjectivity, and of illuminating them both with the Word of God properly understood, is a prime resource for an integral theology of nature as a created reality. N.V