

Reordering Thomistic Josephology: Sanctifying Grace in Christ, Saint Joseph, and Us

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The eternal Word's Hypostatic Union with human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary leads us to consider the dignity, holiness, and veneration of the Mother of God. The dignity, holiness, and veneration of Saint Joseph, united to Our Lady through their marriage bond, can also be seen in terms of his particular connection with the Hypostatic Union.¹ Tradition certainly

¹ For twentieth-century Thomistic Josephology, the authors are especially indebted to the works of Boniface Llamera, O.P., and James J. Davis, O.P. For the former, see Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, trans. Sister Mary Elizabeth, O.P. (London: B. Herder, 1962), which is a translation of much of *Teología de San José* (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1953), which came after Llamera's Angelicum doctoral dissertation directed by Francisco Muñiz, O.P., and publicly defended on June 20, 1942. Llamera's *Teología de San José* includes the Latin text, with a Spanish translation, of the first treatise on St. Joseph, the lengthy *Summa de donis Sancti Ioseph* by the Dominican Isidore de Isolano of Bologna (1522) on 363–653, although Sister Mary Elizabeth's translation does not include Isidore's text. The latter, Davis, gave *Teología de San José* a positive review in *The Thomist* 18, no. 3 (1955): 424–28. Davis himself was to become a leading Thomistic Josephologist for his invaluable dissertation, which was published as *A Thomistic Josephology*, *Theologica Montis Regii* 51 (Montréal: Center of Research, St. Joseph's Oratory, 1967), after publications of chapters in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 9, no. 2 (1961), through 14, no. 2 (1966). Both treat St. Joseph's holiness immediately after dignity, and veneration is treated last. For St. Thomas's sense of dignity, see more recently Lawrence Dewan, "Some Notes on St. Thomas's Use of *Dignitas*," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 11 (2013): 663–72. For St. Thomas on the holiness of deification, see Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015). For St. Thomas on veneration of saints, with special attention to relics, see Anton ten Klooster, "Due honor to their relics': Thomas Aquinas as Teacher and

conveyed Saint Joseph's unique relation to the Incarnation. According to Saint John Chrysostom's preaching on Matthew 1, for example, Saint Joseph "ministers to the whole dispensation" (διακονεῖται τῇ οἰκονομίᾳ πάσῃ), a pregnant phrase that Pope Francis recently highlighted in his apostolic letter *Patris Corde*.² Many theologians since the seventeenth century have spoken of Joseph in "the hypostatic union's order," a phrase often shortened to "hypostatic order."³ Establishing right thinking on the hypostatic order became the key for ascertaining Saint Joseph's unique place in providence. One of the most influential Josephologists of the twentieth century, Boniface Llamera, writes: "The most significant question in the entire theology of St. Joseph is: 'Can the holy Patriarch be included in the order of the hypostatic union?'"⁴ Llamera answered affirmatively, though with several important distinctions as we will see.

While preserving many benefits of Llamera's distinctions, we seek in this essay to resituate our understanding of Saint Joseph's holiness in divine providence and our veneration of him within a Thomistic devotion to the saints. First, we restate from the work of modern Josephology how Saint Joseph holds a unique place vis-à-vis the Hypostatic Union. Theologians became indebted to Juan de Cartagena and Francisco Suárez in their language of a "hypostatic union's order." In formulating the concept of this order, these early modern theologians explicitly separated the Hypostatic Union's order from the order of sanctifying grace, a significant act that has not received sufficient attention for its detriment to the theology of grace.⁵ Second, we argue that Saint Joseph's relationship to

Object of Veneration," *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 37 (2019): 1–17, at 3–5.

² Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, Apostolic Letter on the 150th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Saint Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church (December 8, 2020), §1. See St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 5.3 (*Patrologia Graeca* [PG], 57:58).

³ The word *hypostasis*, not found in Aristotle's thinking for "particular substance" or "subject," came to be understood as that in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. The term, as particular substance or subject, may be used for a rock, a tree, a squirrel, Joseph, or each of the persons of the Blessed Trinity. A person is a rational *hypostasis*. Cyril of Alexandria coined the phrase "union according to the hypostasis," or Hypostatic Union, during the Nestorian controversy to underscore that Christ is only one *hypostasis*, who is the eternal Word. For St. Thomas, who identifies *hypostasis* as a synonym of *suppositum*, see *Summa theologiae* [ST] III, q. 2, aa. 3–4. The union of the eternal Word with human nature took place in his own *hypostasis* or person.

⁴ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 90.

⁵ Lively debates in scholarship pertain to the controversies of the orders of nature

the Hypostatic Union must be seen not as separate from, but intimately related to the co-assumed perfection of Christ's habitual sanctifying grace. The habitual grace necessary for Christ's soul, different from the grace of union, is his capital grace for the salvation of the Mother of God, Saint Joseph, and all the saints in Christ's body. Third, we review how our veneration of the Mother of God, Saint Joseph, and all the saints comes as a consequence of the Hypostatic Union. Saint Thomas gives a scale of adoration in *Summa theologiae* [ST] III, q. 25, that includes not only latria for Christ, but also different kinds of worship, *secundum quid*, extending to hyperdulia for the Mother of God and veneration of holy relics—all as consequences of the Hypostatic Union. In our conclusion, we answer an objection and emphasize the significance of our proposal for the theology of grace.

By discarding talk of "the hypostatic order" but keeping several important distinctions made about Saint Joseph's intimate relationship to the Word incarnate, second only to that of the Virgin Mother of God, we wish to promote devotion to Saint Joseph from a Thomistic perspective, one that emphasizes an appreciation for the order of sanctifying grace and what God does for all the saints through the Holy Spirit's mission in Christ's capital grace.

Modern Josephology: Saint Joseph's Unique Place vis-à-vis the Hypostatic Union

Contemporaries Juan de Cartagena and Francisco Suárez introduced the teaching on the "hypostatic union's order" as fundamentally different from the order of the grace that makes one pleasing to God, commonly called sanctifying grace.⁶ They include Saint Joseph in this hypostatic order, placing him after the Savior's human nature and the Virgin Mary.

De Cartagena writes:

Although the ministry of the apostolate in the order of sanctifying grace [*in ordine gratiae gratum facientis*], if I may speak in the custom of theologians, holds the supreme position of dignity in the Church, according to the words of St. Paul (1 Cor 12): "And God indeed has placed some in the Church, first apostles . . .," neverthe-

and grace. Cognizant of that, we want to draw attention to the early modern shift of defining a "hypostatic order," inclusive of St. Joseph, separate from the order of sanctifying grace.

⁶ Juan de Cartagena died a Franciscan in 1617 or 1618 (sources vary on the year), and the famed Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez died in 1617. Llamera seems to give chronological primacy to Juan de Cartagena's witness.

less, in the order of grace of the hypostatic union [*in ordine tamen gratiae unionis hypostaticae*], much more perfect than the former, Christ's humanity united with the Person of the Word holds first place, the Virgin Mother of the Word is in second place, and St. Joseph is third.⁷

De Cartagena continues some lines later:

Since therefore Saint Joseph occupies the lowest place in this most excellent order of the hypostatic union [*in hoc excellentissimo unionis hypostaticae ordine*], and the lowest of the highest exceeds the highest of the lowest, as the lowest of the seraphim exceeds the highest of the cherubim, it is a consequence that not only Joseph's ministry far supersedes the ministry of the apostles, but also the corresponding grace supersedes the grace of the apostles.⁸

Similarly, Suárez writes on *ST* III, q. 29, on the espousal of the Mother of God, in this way:

Certain offices [*ministeria*] belong to the order of sanctifying grace [*ad ordinem gratiae gratum facientis*], and in this order, as I understand it, the apostles ranked highest, and needed more graces freely given and gifts of wisdom than others did. But there are offices (*ministeria*) that belong to the order of the hypostatic union [*atingunt ordinem unionis hypostaticae*] which is in its kind more perfect, as I said when speaking of the dignity of the Mother of God. Now, in this order, though in the lowest place, I find the office [*ministerium*] of St. Joseph.⁹

It would be difficult to overestimate Suárez's influence on the subsequent theology of Saint Joseph. Francis Filas writes: "Among modern authors who have written on Saint Joseph's holiness the treatment is strikingly similar and at times almost identical. The reason for this similarity is probably the same as existed with regard to Saint Joseph's dignity—the

⁷ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 98; the Latin text is not in the English translation, but it can be found in Llamera, *Teología de San José*, 123n13.

⁸ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 98; the Latin text is not in the English translation, but it can be found in Llamera, *Teología de San José*, 124n13.

⁹ Francisco Suárez, S. J., *Commentaria ac Disputationes in Tertiam Partem D. Thomae*, q. 29, a. 2, disp. 8, sect. 1, no. 10 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 19, p. 125); trans. Davis, *Thomistic Josephology*, 187 (trans. altered).

existence of a common theological source, Francis Suarez.”¹⁰ Thomist after Thomist follows Suárez’s lead in this respect.

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, for example, writes: “St. Joseph’s mission is evidently higher than the order of nature—even of angelic nature. But is it simply of the order of grace, as were that of St. John the Baptist who prepared the way of salvation, and that the apostles had in the Church for the sanctification of souls, and that more particular mission of the founders of religious orders?”¹¹ Garrigou-Lagrange continues: “If we examine the question carefully we shall see that Saint Joseph’s mission surpassed the order of grace. It borders, by its term, on the hypostatic order, which is constituted by the mystery of the Incarnation.”¹² To support this position, Garrigou-Lagrange cites various authorities, including Suárez’s commentary on *ST* III, q. 29.¹³

Llamera continues this interpretation, and invokes Cardinal Cajetan

¹⁰ Francis L. Filas, S.J., *Joseph Most Just: Theological Questions about St. Joseph* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1956), 41. See Gregory F. LaNave’s forthcoming “The Holiness of St. Joseph,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, 27 (2020): 3–13, at 5n9, for this observation.

¹¹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, trans. Bernard J. Kelly, C.S.Sp. (Dublin: Golden Eagle, 1948), 326. LaNave writes: “Here we come to what the commentators, following Suarez, call Joseph’s belonging to the ‘order of the hypostatic union.’ We need not, for our purposes, address the discussion of the matter, but it is worth noting that it is for this reason that commentators commonly speak of Joseph as exceeding in dignity all of those who belong to the *prophetic* order or the *apostolic* order, and even all of the angels. For example, commenting on the superiority of Joseph to John the Baptist (and confronting the difficulty posed by Matt 11:11, ‘I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist’), Boniface Llamera says, ‘The ministry of St. Joseph . . . is raised to the order of the hypostatic union because it is proximately ordained to the execution of the Incarnation. It is necessarily bound to this order by divine disposition, in such wise that no other saint was more united to Christ than he. The ministry of the Baptist, on the other hand, is simply of the order of grace. It is not immediately ordained to Christ, but to the salvation of souls through Christ’ (*Saint Joseph*, 157)” (“The Holiness of St. Joseph,” 11n23).

¹² Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 326.

¹³ Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the Saviour*, 327. Another significant authority in this respect appears on 326–27: Giacomo Sinibaldi, titular Bishop of Tiberias and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Studies, author of *La Grandezza di San Giuseppe* (Rome: Biblioteca del Messaggero del cuore di Maria, 1927). On 328, Garrigou-Lagrange quotes Sinibaldi that St. Joseph’s mission “pertains by its term to the hypostatic order, not through intrinsic physical and immediate cooperation, but through extrinsic moral and mediate (through Mary) co-operation, which is, however, really and truly co-operation.”

as a precursor for the development by de Cartagena and Suárez. In his commentary on the opening article of the *tertia pars*, Cajetan says this: “The love [*amor*] of the Supreme Goodness for his creature is so most excellent that he has not been satisfied with communicating himself with it according to the natural order of the creature [*secundum naturalem ordinem creaturae*], by creating the universe, nor has he been satisfied with communicating himself to the creature according to the order of grace [*secundum ordinem gratiae*], by elevating it to the sharing of divine nature.” Cajetan continues: “He has willed to raise it to that one [*ad id unum*] which was lacking, one which creatures could neither suspect nor conceive, namely, to the divine personality; and this is the third and highest mode [*modum*] of his communication.” Cajetan then states the significance: “In this last manner, God gives to his creature, not a greater likeness, not some created gift of the natural or supernatural order, but his own Person according to his proper subsistence which he has in himself, in such a way that the created nature and God constitute one Person, and the creature, man, is in reality the Incarnate Word, which is God.”¹⁴ Cajetan continues to use Aquinas’s language of the order of nature and the order of grace, and seems to suggest an “order” in the Incarnation for the third and highest levels of God communicating himself—but he does not explicitly call it an order wherein we find Christ’s humanity, the Mother of God, and Saint Joseph.

In light of Cajetan and other authorities, especially following developments seen in de Cartagena and Suárez, Llamera investigates the best way of speaking of Saint Joseph’s cooperation in the hypostatic order. He distinguishes a double consideration:

- I. St. Joseph cooperated in the constitution of the hypostatic order in a true and singular manner, extrinsically, morally, and mediately.
- II. The cooperation of St. Joseph in the conservation of the hypostatic union was direct, immediate and necessary.¹⁵

Llamera distinguishes first: “*in fieri*, or the constitution of the order of the hypostatic union,” and then “*in facto esse*, or the conservation of the same [*mismo*].”¹⁶ Llamera finds that the greater difficulty regards the former.

¹⁴ Tommaso de Vio Cajetan’s comments on *ST* III, q. 1, a. 1, are found in vol. 11, pp. 8–9, of the Leonine edition; trans. Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 92 (trans. altered).

¹⁵ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 105; Llamera, *Teología de San José*, 131.

¹⁶ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 105 (trans. altered). The published English translation substitutes “order” for *mismo*. No one, and not even Christ’s death, could separate the Hypostatic Union. It seems puzzling that Llamera would in the second

For Llamera, when it comes to *constituting* the Hypostatic Union's order, this work is, in the final analysis, possible to God alone as he unites a human nature to himself in the person of the Word. In the work of conceiving and generating Christ's *body*, while it is primarily the work of the Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary cooperates in this work of the conception and generation of Christ's body. In doing so, Mary herself contributes to the mystery of the Hypostatic Union. In this way of thinking, her spiritual and bodily roles in relating to the mystery of the Hypostatic Union fall within the "hypostatic order."

How does Saint Joseph enter into the hypostatic order according to this strain of Thomistic Josephology? The first distinction is between pertaining intrinsically or extrinsically. According to Llamera, "to belong intrinsically to the hypostatic union is to concur in a proper and immediate manner in the constitution of the substance of the Incarnation or physical cooperation in it."¹⁷ The Blessed Virgin Mary pertains *intrinsically* to the Incarnation. Belonging *extrinsically* to the order of the Hypostatic Union, Llamera continues, involves "the placing of some singular act relative to its constitution, in such a way that this act is, by divine disposition, necessary for the execution of the union."¹⁸ Llamera is careful to specify this extrinsic sort of belonging: such terminology refers not to absolutely any sort of contribution; if it did, all of the patriarchs, the prophets, and the rest of those involved in the happenings of the Old Testament would belong extrinsically to this same order (and Llamera admits that, in fact, they do, though only broadly speaking). Instead, external belonging to the hypostatic order "is rather a unique act having a very special relation to the hypostatic union."¹⁹ Thus, according to Llamera, as opposed to Mary's intrinsic participation, Saint Joseph belongs *extrinsically* to the hypostatic order.

Another distinction is between *physical* and *moral* participation.²⁰ To participate *physically*, in this distinction, one must contribute some of the matter involved in the Incarnation. Participating *morally* requires a free

statement of the double conclusion speak of the conservation of the Hypostatic Union. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] §626, quoting St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 3.27 (PG, 94: 1098A).

¹⁷ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 93.

¹⁸ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 93.

¹⁹ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 94.

²⁰ This way of distinguishing is found in Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 102–13. Llamera writes, for example, that Joseph's cooperation in the constitution of the Hypostatic Union "was not physical" (109). The term "physical" here has the sense of materiality, but we can recall that "physical" in the Thomistic tradition can mean the motion of potency to act.

act of the will. In this case, Mary participated in the hypostatic order both physically and morally, whereas Joseph participated only morally. Finally, one can distinguish between *immediate* and *mediate* participation. Mary participates *immediately*, and Joseph *mediately*.

The Blessed Virgin Mary's cooperation, then, in the constitution of the hypostatic order was moral, physical, immediate, and intrinsic. That is to say, she freely gave her consent at the Annunciation ("fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum"); she included in this consent the very matter of her body, from which would be formed the body of God enfleshed; and she did all of this not as the principal cause but as a knowing and willing *instrumental* cause, thus serving as a *passive* principle of the Incarnation. With respect to the hypostatic order's constitution, Joseph's participation is moral, mediate, and extrinsic. We will examine these modes of participation.

First is Saint Joseph's *moral* participation in the Hypostatic Union's order. The decisions of Saint Joseph play a significant role in God's plan for the constitution of the Incarnation. Saint Joseph's involvement in the hypostatic order depends primarily upon his relation to Mary as her true spouse. By virtue of the divine plan, it was necessary that Christ should be born within the marriage of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. Saint Joseph's consent was necessary for the existence of the marriage. In this way, he exercised a certain influence over the Virgin Mary's divine maternity and, through it, over the establishment of the Hypostatic Union. Through Saint Joseph's consent to the marriage, the working of the Holy Spirit was concealed until the proper time, and Mary was enabled to remain a virgin while yet married. Llamera supports the position of Joseph Bover, who observes that "The Blessed Virgin could not have preserved her virginity, being married, unless St. Joseph consented to it and relinquished his strict rights."²¹ In freely complying and assenting to enter into marriage with the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, by this act of moral cooperation, played an influential and meritorious role in the realization of the Incarnation for our salvation.

Second, Saint Joseph participated in the hypostatic order *mediately*, by virtue of his relation to Mary. Because of his relation to the Blessed Virgin as truly her spouse, Saint Joseph also exercised a certain influence regarding Christ, the legitimate fruit of their marriage. An early text from Saint Thomas Aquinas is helpful for understanding the composition of the Holy Family. Studying the marriage of the Mother of God and Saint Joseph in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard,

²¹ P. Joseph Bover, *De cultu S. Ioseph amplificando* (Barcelona: Eugenes Subirana, 1928), 32 (trans. Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 105).

Saint Thomas considers the objection that, since the child raised within the marriage (i.e., Jesus) was not the effect of a marital act, the marriage thus lacked the good of offspring with the result that the marriage was not complete. Saint Thomas responds: “A child is not called the good of marriage only because he is generated through marriage, but also inasmuch as he is accepted and educated in marriage; and in this way the good of this marriage was a child, but not in the first way.”²² Human generation alone does not constitute a child as a good of marriage; he must also be welcomed into the family, nurtured, and educated, and all of these things were preeminently true of the Lord Jesus in the family of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. Their marriage was complete, though not consummated by a conjugal act.

Finally, Saint Joseph’s participation in the constitution of the hypostatic order was *extrinsic*. We should immediately dispel any sense of arbitrariness from the present use of the term “extrinsic.” It is true that Saint Joseph was not involved in the constitution of Jesus’s conception in any physical or immediate way, so his cooperation was not intrinsic. However, Saint Joseph’s special paternity in relation to Christ was ordained by God. It is far from a chance occurrence. De Cartagena points out that “without [Joseph’s] marriage, the honor of the Mother and the Son would have been imperiled.”²³ Saint Joseph plays a necessary role in establishing the conditions in which Mary is both virgin and mother in a marital bond and in which Christ is the offspring of a true family.

Thus far, we have shown Llamera’s analysis of Saint Joseph’s role in the *constitution* of the Hypostatic Union. In the case of Joseph’s role in *conserving* the hypostatic order, Llamera says it is direct, immediate, and necessary. Showing his participation in the *conservation* of the order is a straightforward task for this Thomistic Josephology; it is abundantly clear in the Gospels. Saint Joseph clearly fulfills his duty to protect and provide for the Christ Child and Our Lady, as is seen, for example, in Joseph’s taking Mary into his own home at the behest of the angel, his conducting

²² St. Thomas Aquinas, *In IV sent. d. 30, q. 2, a. 2, ad 4*, trans. from *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Book IV, Distinctions 26–42*, ed. Aquinas Institute, trans. Beth Mortensen (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2017).

²³ Juan de Cartagena, *De Despons. B.V.*, homily 7 (trans. Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 110). Llamera’s great debt to Juan continues, such as in what Llamera calls “a beautiful comparison” by de Cartagena: “As the Holy Spirit, in the heavenly Trinity, is the third Person by reason of origin, so in the earthly trinity of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph the holy Patriarch holds the third place in order of dignity; and as the Holy Spirit is the fount of love and life, so St. Joseph, nourishing the Child Jesus, is presented to us, in a certain sense, as the principle of His life” (trans. on 112).

his pregnant wife safely to Bethlehem, his guidance of the Holy Family in the flight to Egypt, his fulfilling of the law in presenting Jesus in the temple, and his diligent search for Christ when Our Lord stayed behind in the temple during their Passover trip to Jerusalem.

Saint Thomas writes in *ST* III, q. 24, a. 4: “Eternal predestination covers not only that which is to be accomplished in time, but also the mode and order in which it is to be accomplished in time.”²⁴ The Incarnation was not established by the divine plan merely in some abstract way, with gaps left to be filled in at random when the time came. God planned, from all eternity, the time, mode, and order by which his Son would come into the world. That plan included, specifically and from all eternity, Joseph of Nazareth. Garrigou-Lagrange comments on the scope of this plan established by divine providence: “It was established from eternity that the Word of God made flesh would be marvelously born of Mary, who was ever Virgin and also united to Joseph the just by the power of a true marriage.”²⁵ By virtue of the place allotted to him by providence—that he should be the true spouse of the Virgin Mary and lawfully exercise fatherhood over the Incarnate Word—and by his free cooperation with that plan, Saint Joseph plays a necessary role in the constitution and conservation of the Hypostatic Union, according to this Thomistic Josephology. As a result, as Llamera puts it, “by his consent and with his whole life and all his works, *St. Joseph came closer to Christ than all other men*, so that he can be included in the order of the hypostatic union.”²⁶

While preserving the benefits of several of these distinctions of Joseph’s proximity to the Hypostatic Union, we want to put aside the notion inherited from de Cartagena and Suárez that there exists an order of the Hypostatic Union, inclusive of Christ’s humanity, the Mother of God, and Saint Joseph, separate from the order of sanctifying grace. To understand the importance of doing so, we need to consider the Hypostatic Union and Christ’s sanctifying grace as capital grace.

²⁴ *ST* III, q. 24, a. 4 (*ST* is quoted from the translation of the Fathers of the English Province in the common domain, and may be altered at times).

²⁵ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., “De Praestantia Sancti Ioseph Inter Omnes Sanctos,” *Angelicum* 5, no. 2 (1928): 206: “Statutum enim erat ab aeterno Verbum Dei caro factum mirabiliter nasciturum ex Maria semper Virgine ac Ioseph iusto vi matrimonii veri coniuncta.”

²⁶ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 101–2 (emphasis added).

The Hypostatic Union and Christ's Capital Grace for the Mother of God, Saint Joseph, and All the Saints

Contrary to the established view of the earlier Thomistic Josephologists discussed above, we argue that Saint Joseph's relation to the Hypostatic Union must not be separated from the order of sanctifying grace. It is in fact the sanctifying grace in Christ's humanity that establishes the holiness of every saint, most prominently the Mother of God and Saint Joseph. Christ's habitual grace is also the capital grace that overflows from the incarnate Lord and sanctifies all the holy ones of the new and old covenants. Dominic Legge's excellent work on the Incarnation shows that Suárez's understanding of the Hypostatic Union sidelines Christ's habitual sanctifying grace. Legge himself does not address Saint Joseph and the "hypostatic order," but we can apply his work to our present inquiry.

In *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Legge identifies a novel approach of Jesuit theologians in the first century of their society's existence, an approach that altered what Dominican commentators had continued from Saint Thomas in defending Christ's habitual grace from the errors of Blessed Duns Scotus. Legge writes:

In the early seventeenth century, Francisco Suarez offered the definitive formulation of this new approach: "The humanity of Christ, or Christ as man, formally, by virtue of the grace of union itself, was absolutely and simply holy and pleasing to God." Suarez held that, while habitual grace did in fact flow from the hypostatic union, this was neither necessary nor the true basis for Christ's human sanctity. "God could have assumed a human nature without habitual grace, although he could not assume it without making it pleasing to him."²⁷

Legge continues to quote Suárez and then shows the historical consequence of this new approach:

"Christ would not need any created grace in order to be holy and pleasing to God, even as man. . . . Because of the sanctification [of Christ's soul and body by the grace of union], habitual grace was not necessary to Christ." From this point forward, both non-Dominicans and Dominicans alike largely repeat Suarez's formulation.²⁸

²⁷ Dominic Legge, O.P., *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139, quoting Suárez, *Commentaria ac Disputationes in Tertiam Partem D. Thomae*, q. 7, a. 1, disp. 18, no. 1, no. 5 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 17).

²⁸ Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 139, quoting Suárez, *Commentaria ac*

Aquinas says explicitly that, as we confess Christ to be God incarnate, we must also say that Christ himself is within the order of grace. One place this claim appears is during Saint Thomas's discussion of Christ's vision of God during his life on earth. Within that question, an objection argues that "the rational power of the soul such as the soul of Christ is below the intellective power of an angel, as is plain from Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, chap. 4. Therefore, the soul of Christ does not see the Word more perfectly than the angels."²⁹ Rather than introducing the idea of a hypostatic order to explain what we call the "beatific vision" in Christ's soul from the moment of his conception,³⁰ Aquinas refers to the order of grace:

The vision of the divine essence exceeds the natural potency of any creature, as was said in the *prima pars*. And therefore the degrees thereof depend rather on the order of grace [*secundum ordinem gratiae*] in which Christ is most excellent, than on the order of nature [*secundum naturae*], according to which the angelic nature is preferred to the human.³¹

Again, Christ is most excellent in the order of grace. Should we say that this is sanctifying grace?

Sanctifying grace has the most intimate connections with the grace of the Hypostatic Union, and both are found in Christ himself. In the last article of *ST* III, q. 6, on the order of the Son of God's assumption of human nature, Aquinas teaches that Christ's habitual grace was not the medium of the assumption, but rather an effect following upon the union. The grace of union (*gratia unionis*) "is the personal being [*esse personale*] that is given freely from above to the human nature in the person of the Word, and is the term of the assumption."³² In other words, the grace of union is nothing less than the eternal uncreated being of the hypostasis of the Son. The habitual grace [*gratia habitualis*] of Christ pertains "to the spiritual holiness of the man in an effect following the union, according to

Disputationes in Tertiam Partem D. Thomae, q. 7, a. 1, disp. 18, sec. 1, no. 3. Legge says that John of St. Thomas did not follow this position, and his *Cursus Theologicus* on the *tertia pars*, which has it, was added by a student after John's death.

²⁹ *ST* III, q. 10, a. 4, obj. 2.

³⁰ St. Thomas never uses the phrase *visio beatifica*. He uses *visio beatificans* 5 times, *visio beata* or *visio beatorum* 38 times, and *visio Dei* 241 times. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., "La vision de Dieu 'per essentiam' selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," in his *Recherches Thomasiennes* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 177–97, at 177.

³¹ *ST* III, q. 10, a. 4, ad 2.

³² *ST* III, q. 6, a. 6.

John 1: 'We saw his glory . . . as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' By this we are given to understand that because this man, as a result of the union, is the only-begotten of the Father, he is full of grace and truth."³³

Consider this point in light of what Aquinas says in *ST* I, q. 43, about the invisible divine missions: "The divine person is fittingly sent in the sense that he exists newly in anyone, and he is given as possessed by anyone. *Neither of these exists except according to sanctifying grace.*"³⁴ As Legge has shown, for Saint Thomas, Christ's "habitual grace," which is his "sanctifying grace," sanctifies his own humanity, *pace* Garrigou-Lagrance and some recent interpreters.³⁵ Working from Saint Thomas's texts, Legge insists that "Christ is made 'formally holy' by the same grace by which he justifies others, namely, his fullness of habitual grace."³⁶

Aquinas gives three reasons in logical order for the necessity of Christ's habitual grace: the first is in relation to God; the second concerns Christ's soul itself; and the third is in relation to us.³⁷ First, Aquinas considers the union of Christ's soul with the Word of God: "For the nearer any recip-

³³ *ST* III, q. 6, a. 6.

³⁴ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 3 (emphasis added).

³⁵ Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 140n36: "The assertion that 'St Thomas never calls Christ's habitual grace "sanctifying grace," because Christ's sanctification comes from the grace of union,' Ocariz, Mateo Seco, and Riestra, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 181, citing Garrigou-Lagrance, *De Christo Salvatore* at 182, is likewise incorrect. We have found at least two instances where Aquinas speaks of Christ as receiving sanctifying grace. See, e.g., *STh* III, q. 34, a.1; *In Ioan.* c. 3, lect. 6 (no. 543)." Garrigou-Lagrance believes that Christ received sanctifying grace, but he sees this as other than the grace immediately sanctifying Christ's humanity by the Hypostatic Union. See ch. 11, "The Sanctity of Jesus," in Garrigou-Lagrance, *Our Saviour and His Love for Us*, trans. A. Bouchard (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1998 [repr.]), 125–42: "The sanctity of Jesus, like the grace of union with the Word, is not only substantial, but it is uncreated" (135); "His soul lives in a special order, the order of the hypostatic union, the order of personal and substantial life of God, wherein He is placed by the grace of His union with the Word" (136); "From His substantial and uncreated sanctity our Lord derived created sanctifying grace, and this He received in its fullness" (137). For Garrigou-Lagrance's lengthy argument that "Christ's human nature is formally sanctified by the substantial and increate grace of union," see his *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa*, trans. Bede Rose, O.S.B. (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1950), 248–57 (quote at 257).

³⁶ Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 141. See *ST* III, q. 8, a. 5 ad 2–3; q. 34, a. 3. Also, Legge writes: "Just as the Word is eternally the Word who breathes forth Love, so the Word in Christ's humanity breathes forth Love to that humanity, namely, the Holy Spirit himself with habitual grace and the gift of charity" (152)

³⁷ See *ST* III, q. 7, a. 1.

ient is to an inflowing cause, the more does it partake of its influence.” Second, Aquinas speaks of the dignity of Christ’s soul, “whose operations were to attain so closely to God by knowledge and love, to which it is necessary [*neceſſe*] for human nature to be raised by grace.” Third, Aquinas turns to Christ’s relation to the human race. Christ, as man, is the “mediator of God and men” (1 Tim 2:5). Therefore, “it behooved [*oportebat*] him to have grace that would redound into others, in accordance with ‘And of his fullness we have all received grace for grace’ (John 1:16).”³⁸

Our grace, the grace that makes any of us holy and pleasing to God, is nothing less than a participation in Christ’s own habitual grace, which is the Holy Spirit’s invisible mission for the sanctification of humanity, first Christ our Savior’s and then ours for our salvation. This grace is Aquinas’s subject in *ST* III, q. 8. It is the same grace of Christ’s soul as was treated just prior in question 7, but now understood as the formality of his headship over all. This mystery can be reckoned in terms of our being branches on Christ the True Vine (see John 15:1–17). The Holy Spirit is Lord and Giver of Life, and it is by being in Christ that we receive his Spirit. Another of Legge’s works is helpful here. In his study of the Holy Spirit at Christ’s conception, Legge writes:

Christ as man receives “the whole Spirit,” without measure, from the first instant of his conception, and he is therefore holy in his humanity in a unique way. The hypostatic union is the cause of this, but only indirectly; more directly, the principle of Christ’s habitual grace is the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the incarnate Son, both as God and as man, gives the Holy Spirit to the world; this is an aspect of

³⁸ In Domingo Bañez’s dispute with Melchior Cano’s moral theory of sacramental grace, we see the importance of defending Aquinas’s account of the Hypostatic Union for grace. Reginald Lynch, O.P., writes: “Both Cano and Aquinas make reference to Christology in the context of sacramental causality. Aquinas’ understanding of Christic instrumentality is rooted in the instrumentality of the Incarnation itself: when considered in reference to human sanctification, the implications of the hypostatic union unfold, displaying the unified instrumental motion of Christ’s humanity and by extension the sacraments, working towards the finality of grace as instrumental causes under the principal agency of divine causality. By contrast, Cano makes no direct reference to the hypostatic union in the context of sacramental causality; rather than incorporating a sense of instrumentality drawn from this union into his sacramental doctrine, Cano insists on opposing the merits of Christ to physical causality” (*The Cleansing of the Heart: The Sacraments as Instrumental Causes in the Thomistic Tradition* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017], 186).

Christ's capital grace. As man, therefore, Christ is conceived as the fount of the Holy Spirit for the whole world.³⁹

In light of this, return to the question at hand. Saint Joseph's proximity to the Hypostatic Union should not be understood according to the method of de Cartagena and Suárez, wherein he is found in a hypostatic order separate from the order of sanctifying grace. Saint Joseph's participation lies within the order of sanctifying grace, in which order we find all the saints. Within this order, and eclipsed only by the very Mother of God, Saint Joseph received a singular participation in Christ's own sanctifying grace. We must not think little of sanctifying grace.⁴⁰ For Saint Thomas, "the good of grace in one is worth more than the good of nature in the whole universe."⁴¹ Christ was born of the Virgin, suffered, died, and rose so that our nature might be re-created in the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit and so share in the divine nature. Saint Thomas's account of deification provides endless riches for thinking about what the Blessed Trinity does for our holiness.⁴² Commenting on Ephesians 3:20, Aquinas praises the profound mystery in this way: "For the human mind and will could never imagine, understand or ask that God become man, and that man become God and a sharer in the divine nature. But he has done this in us by his power, and it was accomplished in the Incarnation of his Son."⁴³

We must stress this point: all sanctifying grace is in reference to the

³⁹ Dominic Legge, "Incarnate *De Spiritu Sancto*: Aquinas on the Holy Spirit and Christ's Conception," *The Thomist* 84, no. 2 (2020): 173–205, at 204. Among the notes Legge gives to support his position is this: "Because Christ in a certain way infuses the effect of grace in all rational creatures, he is therefore in a certain manner the principle of all graces according to his humanity, as God is the principle of all being" (*De Verit.*, q. 29, a. 5)" (204n100).

⁴⁰ While Suárez is different from Bl. Duns Scotus, both denigrate sanctifying grace's place in how God saves us through the Incarnation. Legge elucidates the significance: "For both Scotus and Suarez, the hypostatic union has no necessary connection to habitual grace, nor does habitual grace have a necessary connection to whether Christ is pleasing to God. The point of difference between them is principally whether, given the hypostatic union, Christ's humanity is necessarily pleasing to God (Scotus says no, Suarez says yes), but for both of them, Christ's habitual grace is a separate matter. For both, Christ the God-man could be endowed with habitual grace or not, as God wills, without fundamentally changing the shape of the salvation wrought through the incarnation" (*Trinitarian Christology*, 141–42.).

⁴¹ *ST* I-II, q. 113, a. 9, ad 2.

⁴² For the most complete overview, see Spezzano, *Glory of God's Grace*.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Super Eph* 3, lec. 5 (no. 185), trans. Davis, *Thomistic Josephology*. Spezzano cites this passage to conclude her chapter on Aquinas and Bonaventure in

Hypostatic Union. The Hypostatic Union, in a sense, establishes the order of grace for those both before and after the Incarnation. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct, but inseparable. This is the mystery of Christ in us and of us in Christ. Colossians also speaks of Christ as “head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18; cf. Eph 1:22). When applying the order, perfection, and power of a head to Christ, Aquinas speaks of the first order in this way: “On account of his nearness to God his grace is the highest and first, though not in time, since all have received grace on account of his grace, according to Romans 8:29.”⁴⁴

Fittingly, in *Redemptoris Custos*, Saint John Paul II quotes Saint Thomas’s treatment of capital grace for the Redeemer’s mission of sanctification: “The communion of life between Joseph and Jesus leads us to consider once again the mystery of the Incarnation, precisely in reference to the humanity of Jesus as the efficacious instrument of his divinity for the purpose of sanctifying man.”⁴⁵ The Pope then quotes Saint Thomas: “By virtue of his divinity, Christ’s human actions were salvific for us, causing grace within us, either by merit or by a certain efficacy.”⁴⁶ How wonderful it is to consider Saint Joseph precisely within the beauty and power of what Christ’s capital grace does for the saints.

Honoring the Mother of God, Saint Joseph, and All the Saints as Consequences of the Hypostatic Union

If, while maintaining his privileged relationship to the Hypostatic Union, we do away with a separate hypostatic order that positions Saint Joseph above the order of sanctifying grace, what would our honor of him look like and how might that affect our honor of all the saints?

Llamera discusses the honor due to Saint Joseph through comparison to the hyperdulia that Saint Thomas shows should be rendered to the Mother of God in *ST* III, q. 25, a. 5, which asks whether adoration is to be shown to Christ’s mother. About the Virgin Mary’s hyperdulia beyond the cult of dulia given to saints, Llamera writes: “The divine maternity is a dignity of a specifically superior order, because it belongs to the order of the hypostatic union, transcending, intrinsically and physically, the order of creation.”⁴⁷ About veneration due to Saint Joseph, Llamera writes that

The Oxford Handbook of Deification, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁴ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Person and Mission of St. Joseph in the Life of Christ and the Church (August 15, 1989), §27.

⁴⁶ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1.

⁴⁷ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 299–300.

“this cult must be at least that of supreme dulia, since St. Joseph is truly included in the order of the hypostatic union, not physically nor intrinsically, it is true, but morally and extrinsically.”⁴⁸ Both Llamera and James Davis consider the rightness of granting Saint Joseph the honor called protodulia. Concluding from a treatment of dulia in *ST* II-II, q. 103, a. 4, ad 2, Davis even writes: “It might be argued that perhaps Saint Thomas would grant even the title hyperdulia to Saint Joseph, since he does not seem to reserve it exclusively to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is to be noted, in any case, that he includes it within dulia.”⁴⁹ Davis is right to underscore that Saint Thomas understands hyperdulia as “the highest species of dulia commonly taken.”⁵⁰

In *ST* III, q. 25, we find Saint Thomas’s reasoning for why all of the saints should be honored. On account of the Holy Spirit given to the saints due to Christ’s capital grace, the honor of the saints falls among the consequences of the Hypostatic Union. The teaching found in question 25 is clearly of interest for our argument about Saint Joseph, but before turning to that particular argument, we should consider what Saint Thomas’s *Summa* means by consequences of the union. Consideration of the consequences of the union leads us in turn to Saint Thomas’s preceding topic in the *Summa*, those things that were co-assumed in the Hypostatic Union.

In a recent essay, Simon Gaine explains the Scholastic development of distinguishing the “co-assumed” and the “consequences” of the union, something which appears in Saint Albert the Great’s work.⁵¹ In his *De Incarnatione*, Saint Albert distinguishes the consequences between the “ends” and the “effects,” with the “ends” being Christ’s Passion and resurrection.⁵² According to Gaine’s analysis, Aquinas removed the “ends” from this consideration and saw the consequences of the union to be “more or less as the union’s effects.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Llamera, *Saint Joseph*, 302.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Thomistic Josephology*, 303.

⁵⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 103, a. 4, ad 2.

⁵¹ Simon Francis Gaine, O.P., “Must an Incarnate Divine Person Enjoy the Beatific Vision?,” in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Roger W. Nutt, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Michael A. Dauphinais (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2021), 126–38, at 136. In the Franciscan *Summa Halensis*, the “co-assumed” appear as defects only, but Aquinas in his treatment considers them as both perfections and defects in the qualities of the nature assumed. At 136nn30–31, Gaine notes Alexander of Hales et al., *Summa theologica* III, tr. 1, q. 4, tit. 1, d. 3, and St. Albert the Great, *Commentarii in III sent.*, d. 6.

⁵² At 136n32, Gaine notes St. Albert, *De Incarnatione*, tr. 4, proem; tr. 6, q. 1.

⁵³ Gaine, “Must an Incarnate Divine Person Enjoy the Beatific Vision?” 136.

Aquinas teaches the consequences of the union, “more or less as the union’s effects,” in three divisions: concerning Christ himself (*ST* III, qq. 16–19), concerning his relation to the Father (*ST* III, qq. 20–24), and concerning his relation to us (*ST* III, qq. 25–26). The last question, before Saint Thomas begins to treat the things that God incarnate suffered and did (*ST* III, qq. 27–59), is on Christ as our mediator (q. 26). Our attention is on question 25 of the *tertia pars*, on adoration. The effect of the Hypostatic Union for us is adoration, which we can connect with Saint Thomas’s questions on religion and its acts (including adoration in *ST* II-II, q. 84) and its opposed vices when treating the virtue of justice in *ST* II-II, qq. 81–100.

Scanning the articles that comprise *ST* III, q. 25, we discover a descending scale of adoration emerge as effects or consequences of the Hypostatic Union. The topics of each article are as follows:

Article 1: Whether the divinity and humanity of Christ are adored with the same adoration.

Article. 2: Whether Christ’s flesh is adored with latria.

Article 3: Whether the adoration of latria is given to Christ’s image.

Article 4: Whether the adoration of latria is given to Christ’s Cross.

Article 5: Whether the Mother of God is adored with latria.

Article 6: Whether in no way adoration is to be given to the relics of saints.

Between Saint Thomas’s reasoning in article 5 and his reasoning in article 6 lies where we find Thomistic devotion to the saints in the *Summa*’s pedagogy. In order to appreciate that, we need to spend more time thinking about the less-known article 6. There Saint Thomas teaches:

Now it is manifest that we should show honor to the saints of God, as being members of Christ, the children and friends of God, and our intercessors. Wherefore in memory of them we ought to honor any relics of theirs in a fitting manner: principally their bodies, which were temples, and organs of the Holy Spirit dwelling and operating in them, and are destined to be likened to the body of Christ by the glory of the Resurrection. Hence God himself fittingly honors such relics by working miracles at their presence.

Saint Thomas has a remarkable theology of the saints, because all of them share in the divine life.⁵⁴ His theology, and ours if we strive to be his faithful students, can be called *ad mentem Dei cum sanctis*.⁵⁵ Notice in article 6 Saint Thomas's keen attention to both the Son and the Holy Spirit in this consequence of the Hypostatic Union, which itself must always be seen from the work of both the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity's dispensation for our salvation. As members of Christ, the holy ones have the Holy Spirit dwelling and working in them. Our veneration of relics respects what the saints were during their lives on earth. Also, after the resurrection, they will be conformed to the body of Christ in glory. In his reply to the article's second objection, Saint Thomas continues to show reasons for veneration of relics: on account of their souls, which now enjoy God, and on account of God, who made the saints his ministers.⁵⁶

Keep in mind that this article concerning the honor shown to relics concludes a spectrum of adoration that flows from the Hypostatic Union.⁵⁷ Our veneration reaches even to saints' relics. Granted they are not given the adoration of *latria*, but neither is the Mother of God. The saints enjoyed the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit through sanctifying grace, a share in Christ's capital grace, and the bodies of the saints will be raised in glory on the last day. The point is clear: even our veneration of saints' relics is due to the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit that we find in the Hypostatic Union and through that union to Christ's body, the Church, one with him.

Therefore, to return to this article's main argument, our honor of Saint

⁵⁴ For a path-breaking study about select saints, see Innocent Smith, O.P., "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Early Christian Virgin Martyrs," *Archivum Fratrum Praedictorum*, n.s. 4 (2019): 5–36.

⁵⁵ For arguments for *ad mentem Dei cum sanctis* as a more apt expression of Thomistic theology than *ad mentem Thomae* (or *ad mentem patrum*), see Andrew Hofer, O.P. "Conclusion: Reading Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers together for the Renewal of Theology," in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Roger Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2019), 303–30, at 307–10, and "St. Thomas Aquinas on St. Benedict," *American Benedictine Review* 71, no. 4 (2020): 410–34, at 417–19.

⁵⁶ *ST* III, q. 25, a. 6, ad 2: "We worship that insensible body, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the soul, which was once united thereto, and now enjoys God; and for God's sake, whose ministers the saints were." For a recent discussion of a. 6, see ten Klooster, "Due honor to their relics," 3–5.

⁵⁷ For a recent study on St. Thomas with a focus on *ST* III, q. 25, see John Sehorn, "Worshipping the Incarnate God: Thomas Aquinas on *Latria* and the Icon of Christ," in Dauphinais, Hofer, and Nutt, *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, 221–43.

Joseph and all the saints, even small parts of the dead bodies of the saints, comes as a consequence of the Hypostatic Union. The entire “cult of saints,” from the hyperdulia deserved by the Mother of God to our veneration of relics, is a consequence of the Hypostatic Union in a way that can remind us of how the entire life of grace flows from the co-assumed perfection of Christ’s sanctifying grace, which is the capital grace for all the saints. By locating Saint Joseph’s veneration within the adoration that is a consequence of the union for all saints, as well as locating Saint Joseph’s holiness as coming from Christ’s capital grace, which is Christ’s sanctifying grace for all, we have a great appreciation not only for Saint Joseph but for the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification for all the saints. The mission of the Holy Spirit accompanies the mission of the Son so that creation may return to God, who has given us this *oikonomia* or *dispensatio*. The Hypostatic Union, with its missions of the Son becoming human and the Holy Spirit sanctifying humanity, gives us not only the consequence to venerate the Mother of God and Saint Joseph in unique ways, but also the reason to venerate all the saints.

Before leaving the consequences of the union, we want to point to a comment made by Saint John Paul II in *Redemptoris Custos*. The Pope emphasizes that Saint Joseph’s fatherhood “fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family. *This is a consequence of the hypostatic union: humanity taken up into the unity of the Divine Person of the Word-Son, Jesus Christ.*” The Pope continues: “Together with human nature, all that is human, and especially the family—as the first dimension of man’s existence in the world—is also taken up in Christ.” Pope John Paul II concludes this thought: “Within this context, Joseph’s human fatherhood was also ‘taken up’ in the mystery of Christ’s Incarnation.”⁵⁸ While not adhering strictly to the *Summa*’s pedagogy, Saint John Paul shows that the Word takes up what is human, and in a special way the family, by becoming flesh. Granted, this “consequence of the union” is not a matter of the consequence of adoration, but simply the structure of the eternal Son becoming man. The Son enters a human family, and in that family as husband and father is Saint Joseph. In Pope Francis’s lovely turn of phrase, Joseph loves Jesus “with a father’s heart.”⁵⁹ We can honor him with a unique veneration due to the Hypostatic Union, and we should keep in mind that the veneration of all the saints is a consequence of that union.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, §21 (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ See the opening of Pope Francis’s *Patris Corde*.

Conclusion:

We have a significant concern that the focus on the “hypostatic union’s order”—pertaining to Christ’s sacred humanity, the Mother of God, and Saint Joseph—as something separate from a lower order of sanctifying grace occludes the grandeur of sanctifying grace. Such a focus separates Christ’s humanity, the Mother of God, and Saint Joseph from the Church and detracts from the unity of our salvation in Christ. Juan de Cartagena and Francisco Suárez explicitly made the Hypostatic Union’s order a different order from the order of sanctifying grace, but sanctifying grace filled Christ’s soul as what necessarily followed from the uncreated grace of union, which is the *esse personale*, the hypostasis of the Son assuming human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, betrothed to Saint Joseph. While we may rightly keep the benefits of distinctions we find in the work of such Josephologists as Llamera and Davis concerning how Saint Joseph participates in the dispensation, or economy of salvation, in the Hypostatic Union, such distinctions should be seen as ways in which Saint Joseph receives *sanctifying grace in view of the Hypostatic Union*. All sanctifying grace bears a set of relations to the Hypostatic Union. We see this in terms of Christ’s habitual grace, the co-assumed perfection of Christ’s soul that is the capital grace for all the saints throughout all of time, and in kinds of adoration owed as a consequence of the Hypostatic Union.

Before closing, we want to consider one objection, one that was of concern to de Cartagena, Suárez, and many Thomistic theologians who follow them. How does Saint Joseph’s grace compare to the grace of the apostles, who are said to hold first place in the Church?⁶⁰

According to Saint Thomas, the apostles are ranked higher than all other saints after Christ’s humanity and the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁶¹ From Aquinas’s comments on Romans 8:23, we read:

To the man Christ there was given the most excellent grace, because he was chosen in order that his nature might be assumed into the

⁶⁰ Another question could be asked about a Thomistic comparison between St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist. For St. Thomas on St. John the Baptist as a measure of spiritual greatness, see John Baptist Ku, O.P., “St. Thomas Aquinas’s Appeal to Saint John the Baptist as a Benchmark of Spiritual Greatness,” *Nova et Vetera* (English), forthcoming. Ku gives a close textual study, and does not address a hypothetical comparison between Joseph and John the Baptist.

⁶¹ For Aquinas on the mission, dignity, and authority of the apostles, see ch. 2 in Jonah Mary Teller, O.P., “A Thomistic Study of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle” (STL thesis, Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, Dominican House of Studies, Washington, DC, 2021).

unity of a divine person; and after him the Blessed Mary had the greatest plenitude of grace, because she was chosen to be the mother of Christ. Among the rest, however, the apostles were chosen for the greater dignity, namely, to receive immediately from Christ himself and to hand on to others [*aliis tradere*] the things that pertain to salvation. . . . And so God bestowed on them a more abundant grace in preference to the rest.⁶²

A similar passage occurs in the Ephesians commentary, where Saint Thomas writes that it is temerarious to compare any saint to the apostles.⁶³ Based on these comments, a reader of this article could object that Saint Thomas understands the apostles to be higher than Saint Joseph in the Church.

As we saw above, the solution for de Cartagena and Suárez is to posit an order of the Hypostatic Union separate from the order of sanctifying grace. For these early modern theologians, the apostles are highest in the order of the Church's grace, but we find Christ's humanity, Our Lady, and Saint Joseph in an altogether different order. James Davis follows Boniface Llamera and others in continuing this idea: "St. Joseph does not belong to the ecclesiastical grades, for he is above that order, being in the order of the hypostatic union."⁶⁴

But as we have seen for Saint Thomas, even Christ's humanity should be seen within the order of sanctifying grace. Rather than Christ's humanity, Our Lady, and Saint Joseph being in an order separate from sanctifying grace, Christ's humanity is so "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) that his personal sanctifying grace is the capital grace for all, most wondrously seen in the Mother of God and, after her, Saint Joseph. The apostles are not the highest persons in the order of sanctifying grace, but they are the highest in terms of a class of saints—above martyrs and virgins, for example—due to the Holy Spirit's sanctification at work in them in their own proximity to Christ for their authority and dignity in divine providence.

Saint Thomas, like so many others before the fifteenth century, simply did not consider the ramifications of the exceptional place that Saint Joseph enjoys in providence after his spouse, the Virgin Mary, on account

⁶² *Super Rom* 8, lec. 5 (no. 678), trans. Davis, *Thomistic Josephology*, 105 (trans. altered); cf. *Super Eph* 1, lec. 3 (no. 23).

⁶³ *Super Eph* 1, lec. 3 (no. 23); trans. Davis, *Thomistic Josephology*, 107.

⁶⁴ Davis, *Thomistic Josephology*, 114. Davis concludes his comparison between Joseph and the apostles (220–31) in this way: "It seems to be most unjust to St. Thomas to say that he taught that the Apostles are the greatest in dignity or holiness immediately after Mary" (231).

of the Hypostatic Union. Rather than thinking of Saint Joseph, Saint Thomas when forbidding the temerity of comparing a saint to the apostles, may have had in mind something that we see in a certain thirteenth-century Franciscan devotion. Some thought that Saint Francis took Lucifer's place in heaven above other saints.⁶⁵ We think that had Saint Thomas lived to see the Church's magisterial teaching on Saint Joseph, he would have recognized Saint Joseph's grace as even more lavish than the grace of the apostles. He certainly would not have wanted to separate Saint Joseph from the order of sanctifying grace, which is how all the saints in all times and places are united for their salvation to the Hypostatic Union of the eternal Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph's spouse. Saint Joseph's holiness came from the Hypostatic Union's way of communicating sanctifying grace for all the saints, and he had an extraordinarily privileged position in providence in relation to that union. That union of God and man in Christ Jesus continues through his capital grace to be an overflowing fountain of grace for us wayfarers feebly struggling towards that blest communion where the saints in glory shine.⁶⁶

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⁶⁵ See *The Assisi Compilation (1244–1260)*: “This was Lucifer’s seat, and Blessed Francis will sit on it in his place [Ista sedes fuit Luciferi, et loco eius sedebit in ea beatus Franciscus]” (franciscantradition.org/francis-of-assisi-early-documents/the-founder/the-assisi-compilation/1259-fa-ed-2-page-168).

⁶⁶ The authors thank Basil Cole, O.P., and Reginald M. Lynch, O.P., for their assistance.