

The Christ Who Meets Us in the Sacraments: The Influence of St. Ambrose on the *tertia pars* of St. Thomas's *Summa theologiae*

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Introduction

The recent increased interest in St. Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church has produced a number of excellent studies of the Angelic Doctor's understanding of the authority of the Fathers and his use of them.¹ In this article, I hope to contribute to the ongoing study of Aquinas and the Fathers by examining how Thomas employs St. Ambrose in the *tertia pars* of his *Summa theologiae* [ST]. Thomas's use of Ambrose has received little detailed

¹ A recent collection of essays dedicated to the memory of Leo Elders constitutes a significant contribution: Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen, eds., *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas: Historical and Systematical Perspectives*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études: Sciences religieuses 189 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021). See also Leo Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers in His Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018); Elders, "Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church," in *Theological Innovation and the Shaping of Tradition: The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West from the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1996), as well as Elders's numerous articles; Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Roger Nutt, eds., *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2019); Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering, eds., *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007); Gilles Berceville, "L'autorité des Pères selon Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 91, no. 1 (2007): 129–44.

attention. One of Leo Elders's last contributions to the study of Aquinas and the Fathers provided an overview of Ambrose's presence in Thomas's writings.² I hope to expand upon Elders's work of cataloging and describing Thomas's numerous citations of Ambrose—Thomas names Ambrose over eleven hundred times in his writings³—by making a particular argument about Thomas's Christological and sacramental use of Ambrose. While Elders gives an excellent summary of where Ambrose appears in Thomas's corpus, he does not connect Thomas's use of Ambrose in his treatises on Christ and the Eucharist. I argue that Thomas's citations of Ambrose in the *tertia pars* help him develop an understanding of the Incarnation that supports his sacramental realism, especially emphasizing contact with Christ in the Eucharist.⁴

Much recent reflection on the Eucharist has sought to deemphasize the substantial presence of Christ and emphasize his presence in other ways. Michael C. McGuckian, for example, argues that the Western emphasis on Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament has damaged the understanding of participation in the heavenly liturgy and obscured other ways in which Christ is present, such as in the bishop presiding and the proclamation of the word. He claims that "those other presences surpass the presence in the elements in their personal quality, their dynamic force and their effect on our

² Leo Elders, "La présence de saint Ambroise dans les écrits de Thomas d'Aquin," *Nova et Vetera* 94 (2019): 77–102.

³ Andrew Hofer, O.P., review of *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers in His Works* by Leo Elders, *The Thomist* 83, no. 1 (2019): 133.

⁴ In *Summa theologiae* [ST] III, q. 79, a. 1, resp., Thomas quotes both Ambrose and John Chrysostom. Chrysostom says, "When we desire it, He lets us feel Him, and eat Him, and embrace Him." Joseph Wawrykow expresses some hesitation regarding this citation, since the accidents of Christ's body are present, not according to their own mode, but according to substance (ST III, q. 76, a. 4, ad 1). As Wawrykow notes, however, "What matters here—and Aquinas quotes John without reservation, without my quibble—is the intimacy of the encounter that the Eucharist provides: one is eating him, embracing Christ" ("The Greek Fathers in the Eucharistic Theology of Thomas Aquinas," in Dauphinais, Hofer, and Nutt, *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, 289). For comments on Wawrykow's quibble, see Alexis Torrance, review of *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers* edited by Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Roger Nutt, *The Thomist* 81, no. 1 (2021): 158. Except where otherwise indicated, all English translations of the *Summa* will come from *Summa theologiae*, vols. 13–20 in *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, O.P., eds. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). Latin citations will be drawn from the texts at corpus Thomisticum.org.

spirits and are not to be undervalued.”⁵ Looking at Thomas and Ambrose, we will see that Christ’s substantial presence in the Eucharist is preeminently personal, dynamic, and efficacious for our spirits. Colman O’Neill’s masterful work of sacramental realism, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, provides an entrée into such a study. The title derives from Ambrose. In his work *A Defense of the Prophet David to Theodosius Augustus*, Ambrose reflects on Psalm 51. Suddenly, in the middle of confessing his sins, David foresees the cleansing sacrament of baptism. In prophetic wonder, he cries out, “face-to-face you have shown yourself to me, Christ; I have discovered you in your sacraments.”⁶ Even prior to their institution, David prophetically glimpses what the sacraments of the Old Law prefigure. In this vision, David sees “no longer in shadow, nor in figure, nor in type,” but meets Christ in his sacraments.⁷ For Ambrose, the sacraments are real encounters with Christ. As O’Neill puts it, “Christ, who was worshipped from afar, comes near and touches the believer; and at his touch power goes out from him.”⁸ For

⁵ Michael C. McGuckian, S.J., “The Eucharist in the West,” *New Blackfriars* 88 (2007): 148. Gilles Emery, O.P., has shown how contemporary emphasis on the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church need not conflict with, but actually flows from, the emphasis on the real substantial presence of Christ; see Emery, “Le fruit ecclésial de l’Eucharistie chez S. Thomas d’Aquin,” *Nova et Vetera* 72 (1997): 25–40. Therese C. Scarpelli translated the article, which appeared in English as “The Ecclesial Fruit of the Eucharist in St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 2, no. 1 (2004): 43–60.

⁶ Ambrose, *De apologia prophetae David* 12.54: “Faciam ad faciam te mihi, Christi, demonstrasti; in tuis te invenio sacramentis.” Latin citations of Ambrose are taken from the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* volumes. This new English translation comes from Brian P. Dunkle, S.J., trans., *St. Ambrose: Treatises on Noah and David*, The Fathers of the Church 140 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 138. As Dunkle notes in his introduction, Ambrose understood David as the prophetic author of the Psalms, whose poetry “reveals the coming of the Word in Christ” (17) so that the life of David “guides the audience to Christ and to the virtues of courage and repentance” (18). While Thomas knew some of Ambrose’s treatises on the patriarchs (see Elders, “La présence,” 78), he does not appear to have known this work or this passage. For a study of Ambrose’s use of the patriarchs in his preaching, see Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005); Colish, “Classicism and Catechesis in the Patriarch Treatises of Ambrose of Milan,” *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 61, no. 1 (2006): 9–42.

⁷ *Apol. David* 12.54. Ambrose frequently speaks of the Christian sacraments as older than and prefigured in the ceremonies and historical events of the Jewish people. For a thorough study, see Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan’s Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 198–99, 214–19, 257–59.

⁸ Colman E. O’Neill, O.P., *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, rev. ed. (New York: Alba House, 1991), 74.

Thomas, too, one meets Christ in the sacraments.⁹ While all the sacraments apply the merits of his Passion,¹⁰ the Eucharist is the locus par excellence for meeting Christ, since the whole Christ is there contained.¹¹ The encounter is both personal and powerful.

While the language of meeting or encountering Christ in the sacraments may seem to echo modern phenomenological philosophy, Thomas grounds the encounter in a realism of the Incarnation.¹² His treatment of the encounter with Christ in the sacraments flows from his treatment of the Incarnation.¹³ Guy-Thomas Bedouelle summed up O'Neill's approach, which reflects Thomas's, as simply stressing, again and again, "that sacramental realism implies that the Church draws its life from the dynamism of the Incarnation itself."¹⁴ I argue that Thomas, in drawing his sacramental realism from the Incarnation, employs Ambrose as a key authority. First, I examine Thomas's knowledge and use of Ambrose's works. Second, I study how Thomas appeals to Ambrose in explaining Christ's assumption of a full human nature as a profound encounter. Third, I show how Ambrose supports the fittingness and truth of the Incarnation in Thomas's treatment of the mysteries of Christ's life.¹⁵ Fourth, I argue that, building on the reality of the Incarnation, Thomas turns to Ambrose regularly in his treatment of

⁹ ST III, q. 60, a. 6, ad 3: The sacraments of the new law "flow from Christ Himself, and have a certain likeness to Him."

¹⁰ ST III, q. 61, a. 1, ad 3: "Christ's Passion is a sufficient cause of man's salvation. But it does not follow that the sacraments are not also necessary for that purpose: because they obtain their effect through the power of Christ's Passion; and Christ's Passion is, so to say, applied to man through the sacraments."

¹¹ ST III, q. 76, a. 1, resp.: "It is absolutely necessary to confess according to Catholic faith that the entire Christ is in this sacrament."

¹² It is interesting to note that Edward Schillebeeckx concludes his influential work on Christ and the sacraments with the citation of Ambrose that gave O'Neill's work its title; see Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 222. For a substantial analysis of Schillebeeckx's work, with particular attention to the influence of contemporary philosophers, see William J. Hill, "Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God," in *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, New York June 22–25, 1964* (Washington, DC: Catholic Theological Society of America, 1964).

¹³ ST III, q. 60, prol.: "After considering those things that concern the mystery of the incarnate Word, we must now consider the sacraments of the Church which derive their efficacy from the Word incarnate Himself."

¹⁴ Guy-Thomas Bedouelle, O.P., preface to O'Neill, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, v.

¹⁵ Jean-Pierre Torrell comments that Augustine and Ambrose serve as the primary sources for Thomas's treatment of the mysteries of Christ's life in ST III, qq. 27–59; see Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 262–64.

the Eucharist to support the form, matter, change, real presence, and effects of the sacrament. Through all of this, Ambrose focuses the attention on the person of Christ who comes to the Church through the sacraments.¹⁶

Aquinas on Ambrose: Knowledge, Sources, and Authority

Thomas discusses the authority of the Fathers in the first question of his *Summa theologiae*. Since *sacra doctrina* argues from authority, Thomas must distinguish between the authority of revelation and the authority of the Fathers.¹⁷ While he understands theology to use the divinely revealed authority of Scripture as definitive (*ex necessitate argumentando*), the authority of the *doctores* is only probably (*sed probabiliter*).¹⁸ This does not mean that the Fathers are merely decorative.¹⁹ The Fathers, however, help Thomas anchor his “doctrinal elaborations in the solid foundation of the most authentic tradition of the Church and of showing the underlying unity of all authentic Christian thought.”²⁰ Thomas does not undertake a historical study of the Fathers. Rather, he studies the mysteries of the faith revealed in Scripture with the Fathers.²¹ While, in some sense, the theology of Thomas could

¹⁶ My argument about Thomas’s use of Ambrose in connecting the Eucharistic presence of Christ with the Incarnation parallels many of Kenneth J. Howell’s observations about John Chrysostom’s preaching; see “The Eucharist and the Life of Christ in the Preaching of John Chrysostom,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 19, no. 3 (2021): 791–824. As Howell argues, Chrysostom understood that, through the Eucharist, “the believer of his time is able to experience Jesus Christ in his humanity in the same way that Christ was present on earth” (797). Reception of the Eucharist “is the fulfillment of the Incarnation” (803).

¹⁷ Thomas does not use the term “Fathers of the Church.” Instead, he uses various titles—such as *sancti doctores*—to designate authorities. For overviews of these titles, see Elders, “Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church,” 338–39; Juan Jose de Miguel, “Los padres de la iglesia en la criteriología teológica de Santo Tomás de Aquino,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 130–32.

¹⁸ *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2. For a discussion of the authority of the Fathers for Thomas, see Elders, “Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church,” 339–42.

¹⁹ In examining Thomas’s use of John Chrysostom, Dunkle notes the “relatively decorative” nature of some citations, following Ignaz Backes’s classification of some patristic citations as decorative for Thomas. Dunkle also points to the limits of such classification, as outlined by Elders. See Brian Dunkle, “Thomas Aquinas’s Use of John Chrysostom in the *Catena Aurea* and the *Tertia Pars*,” in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, 158 and note 39; Backes, *Die Christologie des hl. Thomas v. Aquin und die griechischen Kirchenväter* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1931), 56–66; Elders, “Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church,” 345–46.

²⁰ Elders, “Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church,” 345.

²¹ Elders, “Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church,” 345.

be called *ad mentem patrum*,²² Andrew Hofer's phrase *ad mentem Dei cum sanctis* more accurately captures Thomas's focus on the object of *sacra doctrina*.²³

In his use of the Fathers, Thomas demonstrates an awareness of the particular strengths of each. Especially in the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas assigns particular Fathers to "fields in which they have a special competence."²⁴ Thomas's use of Ambrose shows his sensitivity to areas where the bishop's contributions are particularly helpful in shedding light on the mysteries of the faith. He lists Ambrose among the *sancti*,²⁵ *doctores*,²⁶ *antiqui doctores*,²⁷ *sancti pontifices*,²⁸ and *expositores sacrae scripturae*,²⁹ and places his opinions among the *opinionones sanctorum*.³⁰ The appellation *expositores sacrae scripturae* is particularly important for Thomas. In an early sermon, Thomas claimed that, among the *doctores*, Ambrose "was best at allegorizing [Sacred Scripture]."³¹ Ambrose was not well cited by medieval exegetes.³² The exception was Ambrose's commentary on the Gospel of Luke.³³ This commentary serves as Thomas's principal source for his *Catena* on Luke, which references Ambrose over five hundred times.³⁴ But Thomas also cites Ambrose's commentary in the *Summa*. In the *tertia pars*, Thomas has frequent recourse to this work, especially in his treatise on the mysteries of Christ's life (qq.

²² Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.

²³ Hofer, "Conclusion: Reading Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers Together for the Renewal of Theology," in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, 307–11.

²⁴ Elders, "Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church," 346.

²⁵ *ST* III, q. 21, a. 4, ad 1.

²⁶ *ST* III, q. 27, a. 4, ad 2.

²⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

²⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 185, a. 6, ad 2.

²⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 69, a. 2, resp. I am indebted to de Miguel for cataloging the different titles that Thomas applies to the different Fathers in "Los padres de la iglesia," 131–32.

³⁰ *ST* I, q. 66, a. 1, resp.

³¹ *Sermo puer Iesus III* in *Thomas Aquinas: Academic Sermons*, trans. Mark-Robin Hoogland (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 100. As Ezra Sullivan notes, Thomas explains the necessity to "open our ears" to many teachers because "a single person cannot be an expert in every field. Rather, God lavishes diverse graces upon different people" (Sullivan, "The Church Fathers' Influence on Aquinas's Account of *Habitus*," in Roszak and Vijgen, *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas*, 181).

³² Since the commentaries of Ambrosiaster were incorrectly attributed to Ambrose, he was, however, mistakenly considered a commentator on the Pauline epistles.

³³ See Gilbert Dahan, "Les Pères dans l'exégèse médiévale de la Bible," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 91, no. 1 (2007): 114–19.

³⁴ Elders, "La présence de saint Ambroise," 102.

27–59), but also in his treatises on the Incarnation (qq. 1–26) and on the sacraments (qq. 60–90).

The question of Thomas's knowledge of and access to the writings of Ambrose is a complicated one. Thomas may have gained temporary access to his major works.³⁵ He does cite roughly twenty of Ambrose's writings. The most important of these, for the current study, include his commentary on Luke, *De sacramentis*, *De mysteriis*, and *De fide ad Gratianum Augustinum*. It is unlikely, however, that Thomas possessed manuscripts of most of these works. Rather, he seems to have collected passages contained in other sources. Much of *De sacramentis*, for instance, likely came to Thomas through Lombard or Abelard.³⁶ Thomas's access to *De fide* has a more interesting history. In recovering the acts of the Third Council of Constantinople, he found Pope Agatho's Epistle I, which contained passages from Augustine and Ambrose. With this expanded access to Ambrose's *De fide*, Thomas was able to use "Ambrose as a champion source," as Corey Barnes puts it, in his treatment of the wills of Christ in *ST* III, q. 18.³⁷ The complicated history of Ambrose's textual reception means that Thomas also sometimes falsely attributes passages from other sources to Ambrose. In addition to the Pauline commentaries of Ambrosiaster, the most important misappropriations for this study involve questions on the Eucharist and on penance. Following Lombard, Aquinas attributes some comments on Hebrews about sacrifice to Ambrose. The passages actually come from John Chrysostom.³⁸ Another

³⁵ Elders notes that certain theologians such as Albert and Thomas made the effort "to see the works of the Fathers with their own eyes and did not hesitate to travel to different monasteries to consult rare manuscripts." He therefore suggests that "at some time during his life Aquinas himself read the main works of the Latin Fathers, although he may not always have had them to hand while writing or dictating his treatises or *summae*. He could rely on his fabulous memory, though, for references" ("Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church," 343). Whether this would have included these works of Ambrose is unclear.

³⁶ Thomas Humphries, "'These Words are Spirit and Life': Thomas' Use of Augustine on the Eucharist in *Summa Theologiae*, III, 73–83," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 78, no. 1 (2011): 62–64.

³⁷ Corey L. Barnes, *Christ's Two Wills in Scholastic Thought: The Christology of Aquinas and Its Historical Contexts* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012), 176. For the importance of these works of Ambrose for Thomas on the question of Christ's two wills, see especially 7, 126–28, 132–35, 174–76.

³⁸ *ST* III, q. 83, a. 1, resp., ad 1. See Bruce D. Marshall, "The Whole Mystery of Our Salvation: Saint Thomas Aquinas on the Eucharist as Sacrifice," in *Rediscovering Aquinas and the Sacraments: Studies in Sacramental Theology*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2009), 48. For a discussion of how these passages came to be attributed to Ambrose through Gratian, see Wawrykow, "The Greek Fathers

passage offering a definition of penance comes from a pseudo-Augustinian work.³⁹ The majority of Thomas's most important citations of Ambrose in the *tertia pars*, however, are authentic.

As Elders points out, it is difficult to articulate with precision the influence of Ambrose on Thomas because citations of the bishop are sprinkled throughout Thomas's writings.⁴⁰ That being said, Thomas clearly considers Ambrose a special authority on certain topics. While Thomas appeals to Ambrose for such topics as virginity and modesty,⁴¹ religious life,⁴² the mysteries of Christ's life, and his knowledge and will, the bishop's principal contributions come in the treatment of the cardinal virtues⁴³ and the Eucharist.⁴⁴ Ambrose's authority is most crucial in Thomas's treatment of the Eucharist. Appeals to Ambrose build on Thomas's earlier citations to show the Eucharist as the Christ who comes to meet and save us.

Ambrose on the Mystery of the Incarnation in the *tertia pars*

In his treatment of the Incarnation, Thomas appeals to Ambrose in order to affirm the full humanity and full divinity of Christ. In the first question

in the Eucharistic Theology of Thomas Aquinas," 286n41, 290 with notes 54–55, 299n88. As Wawrykow points out, Thomas invokes the Greek Fathers especially for the unique presence in the Eucharist, the change, "and most notable, to portray the encounter with the eucharistic Christ in striking fashion, to make clear the immediacy and poignancy of the encounter and the spiritual benefits of fruitful reception" (285–86). There is something ironically fitting about Ambrose, who is accused of plagiarizing Greek writers, having such passages falsely attributed to *him* since Thomas also uses Ambrose to emphasize precisely these points. For Ambrose's potential knowledge of Eastern mystagogical sermons, see Edward J. Yarnold, "Did St. Ambrose Know the Mystagogic Catecheses of St. Cyril of Jerusalem?," *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975): 184–89.

³⁹ *ST* III, q. 89, a. 2, obj. 2. Interestingly, neither Lombard nor Gratian has this definition. Thomas also uniquely attributes it to Ambrose rather than Augustine, as most other medieval commentators do; see Jürgen Vijgen, "The Patristic Sources of Thomas' Treatise on Penance," in Roszak and Vijgen, *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas*, 413–14.

⁴⁰ Elders, "La présence de saint Ambroise," 78.

⁴¹ See, Elders, "Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church," 362.

⁴² For Thomas's use of Ambrose in his writings on religious life, see Andrew Hofer, O.P., "Aquinas's Use of Patristic Sources in His Theology of Religious Life," in Roszak and Vijgen, *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas*, 298, 306–307, 309–11, 313.

⁴³ For a treatment of Ambrose's theological understanding of virtue, see J. Warren Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Smith, *Ambrose, Augustine, and the Pursuit of Greatness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁴⁴ See Elders, "La présence de saint Ambroise," 102.

on Christ's knowledge, Ambrose furnishes the *sed contra* authority showing that the reality of the Incarnation means Christ must have human knowledge. Thomas quotes Ambrose's *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento*: "God assumed the perfection of human nature in the flesh; He took upon Himself the sense of man, but not the swollen sense of the flesh."⁴⁵ The perfection of human nature requires human knowledge. Thomas appeals to Ambrose to show that Jesus's full humanity means his possession of human knowledge and even a certain advance or growth in wisdom.⁴⁶ As the great opponent of the Arians, however, Ambrose also supports Christ's full divinity. When discussing whether Christ is a creature, Thomas again turns to Ambrose in the *sed contra*. Ambrose asks, "Was Christ made by a word? Was Christ created by a command? . . . How can there be a creature in God?"⁴⁷ In these crucial questions, Thomas draws on Ambrose to uphold the reality of Christ's divine and human natures.

Ambrose's greatest contribution in Thomas's treatment of the Incarnation, however, involves the union with and effects upon humanity that follow from the affirmation of his full humanity and divinity. Ambrose helps Thomas show the identification with *us* that Christ assumes. In the question on the defects of the soul that Christ assumed, he quotes Ambrose on Christ's sorrow. In the *sed contra*, Ambrose says that "as man He had sorrow; for He bore my sorrow. I call it sorrow, fearlessly, since I preach the cross."⁴⁸ Ambrose, and Thomas with him, grasps the personal, salvific import of the theologically orthodox articulation of the Incarnation. His affirmation is deeply personal and experiential precisely because metaphysically and ontologically exact.

Thomas greatly appreciates Ambrose's way of formulating Christ's assumption of the human will and passions as *my* or *mine*. Hence, Ambrose serves as a key source for Thomas's articulation of Christ's two wills and two operations in qq. 18–19. Ambrose's *De fide* and Augustine's *Contra*

⁴⁵ ST III, q. 9, a. 1, sc.

⁴⁶ ST III, q. 12, a. 2, sc. Thomas again appeals to *De Incarnationis*. For a treatment of Thomas's adoption but modification of Ambrose and John Damascene on the question of Christ's advance in wisdom, see Kevin Madigan, "Did Jesus 'Progress in Wisdom'? Thomas Aquinas on Luke 2:52 in Ancient and High-Medieval Context," *Traditio* 52 (1997): 179–200. For another treatment of the complexity of Thomas on this question, see Simon Francis Gaine, O.P., "Christ's Acquired Knowledge according to Thomas Aquinas: How Aquinas's Philosophy Helped and Hindered His Account," *New Blackfriars* 96 (2005): 255–68.

⁴⁷ ST III, q. 16, a. 8, sc.

⁴⁸ ST III, q. 15, a. 6, sc.

Maximinum episcopum Arianorum—a work influenced by *De fide*⁴⁹—help distinguish the human and divine wills.⁵⁰ Thomas found these two works in Pope Agatho's letter with the conciliar acts of Constantinople III. He sees in this pairing of the anti-Arian works of Ambrose and Augustine the well-balanced Christology harkened back to in the Council that tackled questions relating to Christ's wills.⁵¹ In the *sed contra* of q. 18, a. 1, Thomas quotes both *De fide* and Ambrose's commentary on Luke. In order to understand Christ's prayer in the garden, he cites Ambrose's interpretation: "As He assumed my will, He assumed my sorrow"; and on Luke 22:24 he says: "His will, He refers to the Man—the Father's, to the Godhead. For the will of man is temporal, and the will of the Godhead eternal."⁵² Combined with his references to Constantinople III in the corpus of the article, the appeal to Ambrose establishes that Christ's assumption of a perfect human nature means that he shares all that we have, including a human will.⁵³

Ambrose plays a similar role in the following article (q. 18, a. 2). The *sed contra* again quotes *De fide*: "Mine is the will which He calls His own; because as Man He assumed my sorrow."⁵⁴ In the rest of the *sed contra* and in the corpus, Thomas reasons that this assumption of our nature and will means the assumption of all that naturally pertains to human nature. Since sorrow belongs to the sense appetite, this means that Christ has a will of sensuality (*voluntas sensualitatis*). Article 1 of question 19 extends the treatment of Christ's two wills to the question of two operations. Again, Ambrose's authority supports the two operations of Christ.⁵⁵ The affirmation of Christ's two operations is necessary to safeguard the integrity of Christ's two natures.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ See Barnes, *Christ's Two Wills*, 128; Brian E. Daley, S.J., "The Giant's Twin Substances: Ambrose and the Christology of Augustine's *Contra sermonem Arianorum*," in *Augustine: Presbyter factus sum*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, Earl C. Muller, and Roland J. Teske (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 477–95.

⁵⁰ Barnes, *Christ's Two Wills*, 7.

⁵¹ See Barnes *Christ's Two Wills*, 176: "That Ambrose and Augustine defend Christ's human will in works countering the Arians testifies to their well-balanced Christologies, aware of the dangers greeting all who stray too far in emphasizing Christ's humanity or divinity. Such a balanced Christology finds an eager inheritor in Thomas Aquinas, who happily follows Agatho in calling Ambrose and Augustine to aid."

⁵² *ST* III, q. 18, a. 1, sc.

⁵³ In *ST* III, q. 21, a. 4, ad 1, Thomas makes a passing reference to Ambrose, listing him among authorities who attribute Christ's prayer in the garden to his natural human will.

⁵⁴ *ST* III, q. 18, a. 2, sc. The citation matches exactly the text of Ambrose, *De fide* 2.7.

⁵⁵ *ST* III, q. 19, a. 1, sc. Thomas accurately reflects the text of *De fide* 2.8.

⁵⁶ *ST* III, q. 19, a. 1, resp.

In these articles, Ambrose provides the *sed contra* authority that supports the full implications of Christ's assumption of human nature for his human will. But Ambrose also provides a sort of rhetorical appeal by teasing this out in terms of "my will" and "my sorrow." Christ comes to meet us bearing a fully human will, bearing our sorrow.

Ambrose and the Mysteries of Christ's Life

Ambrose appears regularly in Thomas's treatise on the mysteries of Christ's life. Thomas often enlists Ambrose to support the fittingness of various episodes in Christ's life, such as the virgin birth,⁵⁷ birth from an espoused virgin,⁵⁸ the manner of the angelic appearance,⁵⁹ the order of the Annunciation,⁶⁰ taking his body from a woman,⁶¹ the presentation in the temple,⁶² his baptism,⁶³ his temptation,⁶⁴ and women being witnesses of resurrection.⁶⁵ He is also called on to resolve apparent problems or contradictions in the Scriptures such as the genealogy of Jesus⁶⁶ and the order of his resurrection appearances.⁶⁷ Ambrose assists Thomas in fleshing out the life of the fully divine and fully human Christ. With the bishop's help, Thomas shows the truth and realism of the Incarnation. In using Ambrose to demonstrate the fittingness of Christ taking his body from a woman, Thomas articulates several key insights. This birth shows the truth of the Incarnation, according to Ambrose, who says, "you will find [in Christ] many things according to nature and many beyond nature. According to the condition of nature, he was in the womb . . . but it was above the condition of nature that a virgin should conceive and a virgin give birth so that you might believe that he was God who was renewing nature; and that he was

⁵⁷ ST III, q. 28, a. 2, obj. 1, ad 1, and ad 2. The first objection and its reply cite *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 2:35. The ad 2 references the Ambrosian hymn *Intende qui regis Israel*.

⁵⁸ ST III, q. 29, a. 1; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 1:26–27. Thomas names Ambrose six times in the corpus and also cites him in the ad 2 and ad 3.

⁵⁹ ST III, q. 30, a. 3, ad 3; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 1:11.

⁶⁰ ST III, q. 30, a. 4, ad 2, ad 3; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 1:34; cf. *Hexameron* 5.20.65.

⁶¹ ST III, q. 31, a. 4, resp; Ambrose, *De Incarn.* 6.54.

⁶² ST III, q. 36, a. 3, ad 5; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 2:25.

⁶³ ST III, q. 39, a. 1, resp; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 3:21.

⁶⁴ ST III, q. 41, a. 2, resp., ad 2; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 4:1.

⁶⁵ ST III, q. 55, a. 1, ad 3; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 24:22.

⁶⁶ ST III, q. 31, a. 2, ad 3; a. 3, ad 2 and ad 5; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 3:25; *Exp. Luc.* 3:23.

⁶⁷ ST III, q. 55, a. 3, ad 4; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 24:49.

man who according to nature, was being born of man.”⁶⁸ Thomas appreciates Ambrose’s idea that the mysteries of Christ involve something both natural and supernatural. He references the same passage a few questions later.⁶⁹ This principle echoes Ambrose’s previous assistance regarding Christ’s human and divine wills. The Christ we encounter in the events of his earthly life is surrounded by and contains both the natural and the supernatural.

And this is salvific. Picking up the implications of Christ assuming “my will/sorrow,” Thomas employs Ambrose here to indicate that when Christ comes in two natures, he comes to renew our nature. Ambrose appears throughout this treatise to show the soteriological import of the way that Christ comes to us. In *ST* III, q. 40, Thomas articulates an important principle: “Christ’s action is our instruction.”⁷⁰ The question concerns Christ withdrawing from the crowds to pray. Thomas cites Ambrose, who explains that Christ instructs us in virtue by his example.⁷¹ Thomas quoted a more expanded version of Ambrose’s reflection in his question on Christ’s prayer.⁷² In coming to us in order to renew our nature, Christ teaches us by his example how to live like him, a life both natural and supernatural.

Christ’s leading by example directs us to the sacraments. When discussing the fittingness of Christ’s baptism, Thomas looks to Ambrose twice. Christ was baptized to cleanse the water, but also to set us an example. For, Ambrose says, “this is justice, that what you wish another to do, you first do yourself, and encourage others by your example.”⁷³ As Ambrose sees Christ’s life instructing and leading to the sacraments, so Thomas’s treatment of the mysteries of Christ’s life flows into his treatment of the sacraments.

Ambrose and the Sacraments

At first glance, Ambrose’s role in Thomas’s treatment of baptism seems significant. Thomas refers repeatedly to a citation allegedly from a commentary of

⁶⁸ *ST* III, q. 31, a. 4, resp. (trans. mine).

⁶⁹ *ST* III, q. 33, a. 4, resp.

⁷⁰ *ST* III, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3. For a treatment of Thomas’s understanding of all of Christ’s actions as instructive, see Richard Schenk, O.P., “*Omnis Christi Actio Nostra Est Instructio*”: The Deeds and Sayings of Jesus as Revelation in the View of Thomas Aquinas,” in *La doctrine de la revelation divine de Saint Thomas d’Aquin: Actes du Symposium sur la pensée de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, ed. Leo Elders (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas, 1990), 104–31.

⁷¹ *ST* III, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3. The quotation is taken from Ambrose’s commentary on Luke 6:12.

⁷² *ST* III, q. 21, a. 1, ad 1.

⁷³ *ST* III, q. 39, a. 1, resp. (trans. mine); Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 3:21.

Ambrose on Rom 11:29.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the attribution is spurious. This restricts Ambrose's influence to the questions of baptism in the name of Christ,⁷⁵ baptismal anointings,⁷⁶ and most interestingly, salvation by baptism of desire.⁷⁷ Ambrose's most significant contribution to Thomas's sacramental theology comes instead in his treatment of the Eucharist.

In his treatise on the Eucharist (*ST* III, qq. 73–83), Thomas appeals to Ambrose about twenty times. As Thomas Humphries has shown, Thomas uses Ambrose and Augustine as “dueling authorities” in these questions.⁷⁸ In Thomas's day, the nature of Augustine's view of the Eucharist—figurative or realist—was hotly debated and often contrasted with Ambrose's realism. Thomas, therefore, intentionally constructs his treatise on the Eucharist as a sort of disputation between the two authorities.⁷⁹ Through this approach, he reveals them to be mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. Or, in Humphries happy phrasing, Thomas presents the dueling authorities “not as two swordsmen fighting to the death, but two banjos on a front porch calling each other to develop a particular melody.”⁸⁰ The form of a *summa*, with its debate-like questions, facilitates this melodious back and forth. Humphries's observations capture well Thomas's use of Ambrose. Ambrose provides the Angelic Doctor with firm support, emphasizing the reality of Christ in the Eucharist. Paralleling and building on Ambrose's authority in establishing the reality of the Incarnation, Thomas now uses Ambrose to help show how the Christ who came among us at the Incarnation and in his earthly life comes to us now in the Eucharist.

De sacramentis serves as Thomas's most important Ambrosian source on the Eucharist, although he occasionally cites *De mysteriis*.⁸¹ Both these

⁷⁴ *ST* III, q. 68, a. 5, sc; a. 6, sc and ad 1; q. 69, a. 2, sc.

⁷⁵ *ST* III, q. 66, a. 6, obj. 2, obj. 3 and ad 2.

⁷⁶ *ST* III, q. 66, a. 10, ad 2.

⁷⁷ *ST* III, q. 68, a. 2, resp. Thomas cites a brief, but moving passage from Ambrose's *De obitu Valentiniani*: “I lost him whom I was to regenerate: but he did not lose the grace he prayed for [quem regeneraturus eram amisi, veruntamen ille gratiam quam poposcit, non amisit].”

⁷⁸ Humphries, “These Words are Spirit and Life,” 63.

⁷⁹ For the role of Ambrose and Augustine in these controversies, see James F. McCue, “The Doctrine of Transubstantiation from Berengar through Trent: The Point at Issue,” *Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 3 (1968): 385–430.

⁸⁰ Humphries, “These Words are Spirit and Life,” 63.

⁸¹ Both In both *ST* III, q. 74, a. 8, resp., and q. 75, a. 3, obj. 2, Thomas cite a passage from *De mysteriis* 9 that he attributes to *De officiis*. *ST* III, q. 75, a. 4, resp., cites a passage from *De myst.* 4 that Thomas thought came from *De sacr.* The *sed contra* of q. 76, a. 1, presents an apparent problem: Thomas attributes to Ambrose's *De officiis* the following: “in illo sacramento Christus est.” This citation serves as the only authority Thomas cites

works consist of mystagogical sermons for the newly baptized.⁸² In them, Ambrose directs the newly baptized to develop a spiritual sight that allows them to see in and through the sacramental rites the spiritual realities that they encounter. Ambrose responds directly to the confusion and uncertainty the new initiates may experience through the encounter with what appear to be common water or bread and wine.⁸³ One must develop the eyes of the heart to see the reality.⁸⁴ These mystagogical sermons represent Ambrose's attempt to train the spiritual eyes of his newly baptized. He does so as a master expositor of Sacred Scripture and a master rhetor.⁸⁵ Thomas employs Ambrose's scriptural and rhetorical skill to help us see Christ coming to meet us in the Eucharist.

In Thomas's treatment of the Eucharist, Ambrose appears as an authority on the matter,⁸⁶ the change,⁸⁷ Christ's presence in sacrament,⁸⁸ the

in his crucial article about the whole Christ contained under this sacrament. In his discussion of Ambrose in Thomas's treatise on the Eucharist, Elders does not mention this citation, suggesting he considers it incorrectly attributed (see, "La présence de saint Ambroise," 96–98). The passage is authentic and actually comes from *De myst.* 9.58: "in illo sacramento Christus est, quia corpus est Christi."

⁸² For studies of Ambrose's catechetical and mystagogical preaching, see Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method*, throughout; Humberto S. Medeiros, "The *De Mysteriis* and *De Sacramentis* of St. Ambrose," PhD diss. (Catholic University of America, 1952); Gérard Nauroy, "Deux lectures de la liturgie du baptême chez Ambroise de Milan: Du témoignage brut à son élaboration littéraire," in *Littérature, rites et liturgies*, ed. Emmanuel Godo (Paris: Imago, 2002), 13–39; Christine Mohrmann, "Le style oral du *De sacramentis* de saint Ambroise," *Vigilae Christianae* 6 (1952): 168–77. The authenticity of *De sacramentis*, while long doubted, is now generally accepted. See, Mohrmann, "Observations sur le 'De Sacramentis' et le 'De Mysteriis' de saint Ambroise," in *Ambrosius Episcopus*, vol. 1, ed. Giuseppe Lazzati (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1976), 103–7; Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method*, 20–29. For a study of the centrality of the Eucharist specifically, see Raymond Johanny, *L'Eucharistie, centre de l'histoire du salut chez saint Ambroise de Milan* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1968).

⁸³ Georgia Frank, "'Taste and see': The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century," *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 619–43.

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *De sacr.* 3.2.

⁸⁵ For an example of Ambrose's scriptural explanation of the sacramental rites, see a pair of articles by Jean Daniélou on the use of the Song of Songs: "The Canticle, A Song of Sacraments," *Orate Fratres* 3 (1951): 97–103; "The Canticle, A Song of Sacraments (II)," *Orate Fratres* 4 (1951): 161–65. For a treatment of Ambrose's rhetorical approach, see Brian P. Dunkle, *Enchantment and Creed in the Hymns of Ambrose of Milan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 74–84.

⁸⁶ *ST III*, q. 74, a. 6, resp. and ad 1; a. 8, resp.

⁸⁷ *ST III*, q. 75, a. 1, sc.; a. 2, sc.; a. 3, obj. 2; a. 4, resp.; a. 7, obj. 3; a. 8, sc.

⁸⁸ *ST III*, q. 76, a. 1, sc.

accidents,⁸⁹ the form,⁹⁰ the effects,⁹¹ and daily reception.⁹² Ambrose serves as the *sed contra* authority in one of the central articles of the treatise: q. 76, a. 1. The brevity of the citation is matched only by its clarity: “Christ is in this sacrament.”⁹³ As Thomas will explain in the first line of the corpus, “it is absolutely necessary to confess according to Catholic faith that the entire Christ is in this sacrament [quod totus Christus sit in hoc sacramento].”⁹⁴ Ambrose provides the succinct affirmation of the Church’s teaching on the real presence. The whole Christ comes to us in this sacrament.

In the previous discussion of the change, Ambrose’s authority emphasized that Christ truly comes to us through the change of the elements.⁹⁵ In the first article, Ambrose, paired with Hilary, provides the *sed contra*: “As the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s true Son so is it Christ’s true flesh which we take, and His true blood which we drink.”⁹⁶ This important citation highlights several key ways in which Thomas uses Ambrose. The bishop both affirms the real presence of Christ and indicates the way in which he comes to us: as food and drink. Thomas turns to Ambrose several times to support these insights.

In q. 75, a. 2, Ambrose again appears in the *sed contra*, affirming that, after the consecration, the elements “are to be believed to be nothing else than the body and blood of Christ.”⁹⁷ An objection in the following article uses him again to affirm a real change.⁹⁸ Thomas is discussing whether the substances of bread and wine are annihilated by the consecration. Ambrose’s objection allows him to reemphasize the conversion of the substance of bread into that of Christ’s body in his reply. Ambrose makes another appearance in the succeeding article to show how such a change is possible. His answer

⁸⁹ *ST* III, q. 77, a. 6, obj. 1.

⁹⁰ *ST* III, q. 78, a. 1, sc and ad 4; a. 2, obj. 2; a. 4, sc. In q. 83, a. 4, obj. 1, Thomas briefly refers to Ambrose’s understanding of the words of consecration as deriving from Christ himself.

⁹¹ *ST* III, q. 79, a. 1, resp.; a. 4, resp.

⁹² *ST* III, q. 80, a. 10, resp.

⁹³ *ST* III, q. 76, a. 1, sc.

⁹⁴ *ST* III, q. 76, a. 1, resp.

⁹⁵ Humphries notes the pattern of citations from Ambrose and Augustine in this question: “When Thomas asks about the real presence, Augustine is cited as the authority behind the objecting arguments, while Ambrose is cited as the contrary authority. Instead of choosing one over the other, Thomas reconciles them in his responses” (“These Words are Spirit and Life,” 64–65).

⁹⁶ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 1, sc.

⁹⁷ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 2, sc. Thomas appears to take this citation, which does not exactly match a passage from Ambrose, from Gratian. It may reflect *De sacr.* 4.4 or *De myst.* 9.54 (see Humphries, “These Words are Spirit and Life,” 75n41).

⁹⁸ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 3, obj. 2.

harkens back to Thomas's use of Ambrose in explaining Christ's birth.⁹⁹ In the corpus, Thomas explains how the Eucharistic change is beyond nature. He looks first to Ambrose: "It is clear that a Virgin begot beyond the order of nature: and what we make is the body from the Virgin. Why, then, do you look for nature's order in Christ's body, since the Lord Jesus was Himself brought forth of a Virgin beyond nature?"¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Incarnation, as illumined by Ambrose, furnishes the basis for understanding how Christ comes to us in the Eucharist. Only the power of God makes possible such a unique encounter in the sacrament.

As Ambrose stresses the necessity of God's power, he likewise expresses how that power operates through the word of Christ. Christ comes to us in the Eucharist through the power of his own word. As a brief citation in one objection puts it, the sacrament "is made by the words of Christ."¹⁰¹ Thomas had cited Ambrose in question 16, affirming that Christ is not a creature because he was not *created* by a word, but *creates* by his word.¹⁰² In Thomas's treatment of the Eucharist, Ambrose shows the efficacy of the words of Christ with respect to the Eucharist.¹⁰³ Thus in question 78, on the form of the sacrament, Thomas turns to Ambrose several times. The *sed contra* of the first article contains one of his longest citations of Ambrose: "The consecration is accomplished by the words and expressions of the Lord Jesus. Because, by all the other words spoken, praise is rendered to God, prayer is put up for the people, for kings, and others; but when the time comes for perfecting the sacrament, the priest uses no longer his own words, but the words of Christ. Therefore, it is Christ's words that perfect this sacrament."¹⁰⁴ Thomas's corpus expands the ideas contained in the *sed contra* citation. He emphasizes that only God can cause such a change. This means that Christ speaks through the person of the priest uttering his words. Through his words spoken by a priest, Christ comes and makes himself present.

In q. 78, a. 4, Ambrose helps explain how this power of God communicated through the words of Christ operates instrumentally. The *sed contra* citation of Ambrose draws a parallel comparison between the power of Christ's word to create *ex nihilo* and its power to change a creature into

⁹⁹ ST III, q. 31, a. 4, resp.

¹⁰⁰ ST III, q. 75, a. 4, resp.

¹⁰¹ ST III, q. 75, a. 7, obj. 3; Ambrose, *De myst.* 9.52.

¹⁰² ST III, q. 16, a. 8, sc.

¹⁰³ In ST III, q. 78, a. 2, obj. 2, Thomas cites a passage of Ambrose (*De sacr.* 4.4) in which he draws a connection between Christ's word creating the heavens and earth and his word consecrating the sacrament.

¹⁰⁴ ST III, q. 78, a. 1, sc.

something else.¹⁰⁵ Since the words are spoken in the person of Christ, Thomas writes, “they receive their instrumental power from him.”¹⁰⁶ In the words of consecration, we hear Christ speaking to us his efficacious word, the word that renders him fully present.

Ambrose helps Thomas explain the soteriological import of the *way* in which Christ comes to us in the Eucharist. In this sacrament, we meet Christ as our food and drink. Thomas employs Ambrose’s reflections on the Eucharist as spiritual food and drink to explain the effects of the sacrament. In the question on the matter of the sacrament (*ST* III, q. 74), Ambrose witnesses to the Church’s practice and shows the fittingness of the matter in relation to the sacramental effects. Following Lombard, he cites a passage actually from Ambrosiaster which argues that the sacrament is offered under the species of bread for the health of the body and under the species of wine for the health of the soul.¹⁰⁷ Although not authentic, the idea is not totally alien to Ambrose’s thinking.¹⁰⁸ In explaining why water is added to the wine, Ambrose supplies the fourth reason, one drawn from the effect of the sacrament—eternal life: “The water flows into the chalice, and springs forth unto everlasting life.”¹⁰⁹ The reply to the first objection further expands his reflection on this passage from *De sacramentis*. Thomas notes that Christ’s sacrifice is signified by both the offering of Melchizedek and the water flowing from the rock in the desert (1 Cor 10:4).¹¹⁰

Thomas turns to a particular passage from *De sacramentis* twice to explain that the Eucharist provides spiritual nourishment. In Thomas’s question on the accidents which remain (*ST* III, q. 77), Ambrose appears in an objection that claims the species cannot nourish the body. In the citation, Ambrose describes the Eucharist as “the bread of everlasting life, which supports the substance of our soul.”¹¹¹ The point is the spiritual effect of the sacrament. Thomas’s reverential reading of Ambrose in his reply explains how Ambrose, in using the word “bread,” refers to Christ’s body, the mystical bread. Hence, he explains, Ambrose meant that this substance (Christ’s body) “is not

¹⁰⁵ *ST* III, q. 78, a. 4, sc.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* III, q. 78, a. 4, resp.

¹⁰⁷ *ST* III, q. 74, a. 1, resp.; Peter Lombard, *Sentences* IV, d. 11, a. 4, no. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ambrose, *De myst.* 9.58; *De sac.* 5.3.

¹⁰⁹ *ST* III, q. 74, a. 6, resp.

¹¹⁰ *ST* III, q. 74, a. 6, ad 1. In a. 8, resp., Thomas also uses Ambrose to argue that it is better not to add a large quantity of water. Thomas cites Ambrose to affirm that nothing remains after consecration except the body and blood. See Ambrose, *De myst.* 9.54.

¹¹¹ *ST* III, q. 77, a. 6, obj. 1. The citation reproduces nearly exactly the passage from *De sac.* 5.4.

changed into man's body, but nourishes his soul."¹¹² Thomas turns again to this passage in the corpus of his first article on the effects the sacrament. He distinguishes four ways in which one can consider the effect of the sacrament. The third way considers the Eucharist from the way it is given—as food and drink. Thomas asserts, therefore, that “this sacrament does for the spiritual life all that material food does for the bodily life, namely, by sustaining, giving increase, restoring, and giving delight.”¹¹³ He cites Ambrose, as quoted above, and Chrysostom as his authorities. Christ comes as saving spiritual food and drink to nourish our souls.

Further, Ambrose provides Thomas with significant justification for meeting Christ in this sacrament daily. When Thomas considers whether the Eucharist forgives venial sins, he affirms this both with respect to the *sacramentum ipsum* (*sacramentum tantum*) and the *res sacramentum*. Given as food and drink, the Eucharist restores the spiritual energy of charity lost through venial sins, just as natural food restores the energy lost through activity. This is why, Thomas argues, Ambrose says that the Eucharist is received daily “as a remedy against daily infirmity.”¹¹⁴ Meeting Christ daily in the Eucharist, we receive the remedy that restores the health of our souls. On the question of daily reception itself, Thomas makes much the same point, again with Ambrose's help. The *sed contra* authority gives strong and straightforward support to daily reception: “This is our daily bread; take it daily, that it may profit you daily.”¹¹⁵ Thomas attributes this quotation to Augustine, but it actually comes from Ambrose.¹¹⁶ On the side of the sacrament itself, which gives health, daily reception is profitable. Hence, Ambrose says, “if, whenever Christ's blood is shed, it is shed for the forgiveness of sins, I who sin often, should receive it often: I need a frequent remedy.”¹¹⁷ Thomas cites the same quotation again when considering daily reception on the side of the recipient. He then continues the citation: “So live as to deserve to receive it daily.”¹¹⁸ Thomas's point is that only the lack of a proper

¹¹² ST III, q. 77, a. 6, ad 1.

¹¹³ ST III, q. 79, a. 1, resp.

¹¹⁴ ST III, q. 79, a. 4, resp. Rather than an exact quote, this is a paraphrase or summary faithful to the meaning of *De sacr.* 5.4.

¹¹⁵ ST III, q. 80, a. 10, sc. I altered the translation slightly.

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, *De sacr.* 5.4: “If it is daily bread, why do you take it once a year, as the Greeks are accustomed to do in the East. Take it daily, that it may profit you daily! [Si cottidianus est panis, cur post annum illum sumas, quemadmodum Graeci in oriente facere consuerunt? Accipe cottidie, quod cottidie tibi prosit!]” (trans. mine). I am grateful to Andrew Hofer, O.P. for pointing out this further hidden influence of Ambrose.

¹¹⁷ ST III, q. 80, a. 10, resp.

¹¹⁸ ST III, q. 80, a. 10, resp.; Ambrose, *De sacr.* 5.4.

disposition impedes daily reception. One should receive whenever properly disposed. Christ comes daily to heal, forgive, and nourish in the saving food and drink of the Eucharist. Ambrose helps Thomas develop his theological support for daily communion.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

For Thomas, Ambrose represents the tradition that hands on what the Church has received about the Eucharist. From Ambrose, along with other authorities, Thomas receives the Church's faith regarding the matter, form, change, real substantial presence, and effects of the Eucharist. Thomas's understanding of Christ coming to us in the sacrament involves the interpretation of Christ's words in Scripture mediated through the tradition of the Church. As Reinhard Hütter has recently written, "the ecclesial mediation of the divine faith that sacred theology entails renders theologically moot the necessity of trying to reconstruct Jesus' Aramaic diction during the Last Supper—a reconstructive process whose results are unavoidably provisional not only due to their varying degrees of probability but also to their inherent surpassability by alternative construals."¹²⁰ The same could be said of attempts to reconstruct Eucharistic theology more broadly. That the faith is *received* through the Church as witnessed to by authorities such as Ambrose shows the parameters, but also the stability of the Church's teaching. Attempts to circumvent the tradition embodied in figures like Ambrose or Augustine or Thomas, to move beyond their "restrictive" articulations, are misguided. There is no need, as one recent article argued, to shift the emphasis from the presence of the "*substance* of Christ's body to the personal presence of the risen self of Christ, in and through the matter of the eucharistic bread and wine."¹²¹ As Ambrose helps Thomas show, Christ's substantial presence is preeminently personal. The same person, fully God and fully human, who

¹¹⁹ For the distinctive nature of Thomas's theology of daily reception and his influence on St. Ignatius of Loyola on this point, see Andrew Hofer, "Frequent Communion for the Greater Glory of God: Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius of Loyola," in *Ignatius Loyola and Thomas Aquinas: A Jesuit Ressourcement*, ed. Justin Anderson, Matthew Levering, and Aaron Pidel, S.J. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming). Hofer discusses the influence of Ambrose on Thomas's theology of daily reception.

¹²⁰ Reinhard Hütter, *Aquinas on Transubstantiation: The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 13.

¹²¹ For such an attempt, see Bernard P. Prusak, "Explaining Eucharistic 'Real Presence': Moving beyond a Medieval Conundrum," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 2 (2014): 258.

came to us in the Incarnation, who lived among us as one of us, comes to us personally *because* he comes to us substantially present in the Eucharist.

Thomas's incorporation of Ambrose in the *tertia pars*, especially in his treatment of the Eucharist, represents another example of the ways "in which Thomas tried to bridge the gap between the pastoral teachings of the Fathers, often expressed in literary style, and the rigorously scientific theology of the scholastics of his day."¹²² In drawing on Ambrose's mystagogical preaching about the sacraments, Thomas does just that. The insights and rhetorical flare of Ambrose's preaching are taken up in the vision Thomas announces at the beginning of the *tertia pars*:

Forasmuch as our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to *save His people from their sins* (Matt 1:21), as the angel announced, showed unto us in His own Person the way of truth, whereby we may attain to the bliss of eternal life by rising again, it is necessary, in order to complete the work of theology, that after considering the last end of human life, and the virtues and vices, there should follow the consideration of the Savior of all, and of the benefits bestowed by Him on the human race.¹²³

Christ himself shows the way to salvation, he shows himself to be the way, and he shows us himself. That reality of his presence through the Incarnation continues sacramentally, above all in the Eucharist. Thomas realized that Ambrose grasped this truth and witnessed to it eloquently. As Romanus Cessario comments, Ambrose saw that the sacraments permit us to "enter into contact with the eschatological reality already, in a sense, accomplished in Christ."¹²⁴ For, there, Christ comes to meet us face-to-face. N.V

¹²² Elders, "Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church," 337.

¹²³ *ST* III, prol.

¹²⁴ Romanus Cessario, O.P., Introduction to O'Neill, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments*, xiv.