

From Within the Mediation of Christ: The Place of Christ in the Christian Moral and Sacramental Life According to St. Thomas Aquinas

ROGER W. NUTT

Ave Maria University

Ave Maria, Florida

Introduction

THE SECOND Vatican Council, when treating the renewal of ecclesiastical studies in *Optatam Totius*, commends St. Thomas Aquinas when it says, “[I]n order to throw as full a light as possible on the mysteries of salvation, the students should learn to examine more deeply, with the help of speculation and with St. Thomas as teacher, all aspects of these mysteries, and to perceive their interconnection.”¹ But, however strong or weak an interpretation is given to this passage from Vatican II, one thing is certainly clear: It has not been evident to theologians since the time of the Council that St. Thomas’s theological system can carry out the task prescribed for theology by the Council—especially regarding the renewal called for in moral theology.² As a case in point, I cite Livio

Nova et Vetera Lecture, June 2, 2006, Ave Maria University.

¹ Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *The Second Vatican Council*, vol. 1, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport: Costello Publishing Company, Inc, 1996), §16.

² *Optatam Totius* §16 takes up a number of other theological disciplines beginning with moral theology: “In like manner [item] the other theological subjects should be renewed [*instaurentur*] through a more vivid contact with the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.” Also, Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*,

Melina. Melina is a very Thomist-friendly scholar. Speaking specifically of *Optatam Totius*, he notes, “Vatican Council II . . . proposed the Christological reference as essential for moral theology. In its Decree on the Training of Priests, the Council affirms that the teaching of moral theology has the task of illustrating the height of the vocation of the faithful in Christ (see *Optatam Totius*, no. 16).”³ Melina then goes on to make the following observation about St. Thomas’s theology within the Christocentric renewal proposed by the Council:

Saint Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae*, with brilliant originality but still in his character as “Common Doctor,” proposed a very different form of ethics consistent with the classical tradition and centered on the virtues. It was a profoundly theological ethics, beginning with the fact that the formal perspective is always that of Christian revelation: the last end is to be grasped as supernatural beatitude, the human acts that prepare it are placed in the perspective of merit, and the virtues become integrated in the dynamic of love, which is their

§67, describes the organization of theology in similar terms: “The individual theological disciplines are to be taught in such a way that, from their internal structure and from the proper object of each as well as from their connection with other disciplines, including philosophical ones and the sciences of man, the basic unity of theological instruction is quite clear, and in such a way that all the disciplines converge in a profound understanding of the mystery of Christ, so that this can be announced with greater effectiveness to the People of God and to all nations.”

For a summary of the debate about the place of Christ within the narrative of the *Summa theologiae*, see J.-P. Torrell, O.P., *St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 150–56. Also, a more detailed and technical analysis can be found in Inos Biffi’s *Teologia, Storia e Contemplazione in Tommaso d’Aquino*, vol. 3, *La Costruzione della Teologia* (Milano: Editoriale Jaca Book, 1995), 225–312.

For an engagement between Thomas’s Christology and other prominent contemporary contributions to Christology, cf. D. Ols, *Le Cristologie contemporanee e le loro posizioni fondamentali al vaglio della dottrina di S. Tommaso* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991). On pp. 7–14, Ols briefly reviews the use—or lack thereof—of Aquinas in the Christological writings of the most prominent recent authors, including Galot, Kasper, Balthasar, Bultmann, and Rahner. Throughout his book Ols provides detailed descriptions of points of convergence and divergence between Aquinas, and Rahner and Schillebeeckx on numerous Christological topics.

³ L. Melina, *Sharing in Christ’s Virtues: For a Renewal of Moral Theology in Light of Veritatis Splendor*, trans. William E. May (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 2001), 116.

mother and form. *However, the explicitly Christological reference, while present, is very slight, we must frankly admit that the centrality of Christ for morality is not very evident in the moral theology of Aquinas. It is in this direction, however, that Vatican Council II and recent magisterium of the Church invites us to proceed.*⁴

Certainly these lines reflect the thoughts of many, and from such a formidable theologian they deserve to be taken seriously. However, my research into St. Thomas Aquinas leads me to disagree with Melina's assessment. I believe that Aquinas's understanding of Christ as priest and mediator serves as a tripwire or as what Fr. Torrell calls a "subterranean current"⁵ (or "Christological reference point") running through his theological system. I have titled this lecture "From Within the Mediation of Christ" because I think that is precisely how St. Thomas understands the implications of his Christological conclusions. The whole of Christian life is a life lived within the mediation of Christ—a life contingent upon his priestly sacrifice. While the sacraments and moral theology can be studied in their own right, they depend in their inner theological nature on the effects won by Christ's priestly activity. What a renewed theology needs is not simply an athematic Christocentrism, but an awareness of the irreplaceable importance of Christ as priest and mediator. And I think that what Aquinas has to say about Christ as priest and mediator is an aspect of his theology that has special resonance with the renewal called for by the Council, as well as for the overall integration that is so lacking today between the diverse theological specializations.⁶

I hope to demonstrate this in two parts. First, I will summarize what Aquinas has to say Christologically about Christ's priesthood and mediation. Second, I will demonstrate how these conclusions inform and appear in his moral and sacramental theology.

⁴ Ibid., emphasis added.

⁵ J.-P. Torrell, O.P., *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 27.

⁶ For a distinct, though related work, cf. A. N. Williams, "Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*," *Modern Theology* 13 (1997): 53–74. While not intending to offer a *rapprochement* between Aquinas and Vatican II, on p. 56 Williams presents Aquinas as a true model for reestablishing unity within theology. Also for a brief treatment of the relationship between Aquinas, the Council, and recent theology, cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell's *La "Somme de théologie" de saint Thomas* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), esp. 156–57.

Part I: The Priestly Mediation of Christ According to St. Thomas⁷

The topic that Thomas places before himself in question 22 of the Treatise on Christ in the *tertia pars* is *de sacerdotio Christi*.⁸ In the body of the first article of question 22, Aquinas explains that “the office proper to a priest is to be a mediator between God and the people.”⁹ Aquinas further

⁷ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 22, a. 1. “Proprium officium sacerdotis est esse mediatorem inter Deum et populum.” This close rapport between the nature of priestly and mediatorial activity clearly demonstrates the necessity of discussing both. The overlap between the offices of priest and mediator is established by Scripture. For example, Hebrews 8 (verses 1 and 6) speaks of Christ as both a high priest (*archiereus*) and mediator (*mesites*). The Greek word *mesites* (mediator) is applied directly to Christ four times in the New Testament: in 1 Tim 2:5; and in Heb 8:6, 9:15, and 12:24.

There are a number of other places in Aquinas’s corpus in which he defines a priest as a mediator. For example, Fr. Serge-Thomas Bonino in his article “Le sacerdoce comme institution naturelle selon saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 47, provides six texts from Thomas’s opera that all define the role of a priest as that of mediator or medium. Three citations that are not found in the *tertia pars* or in Thomas’s commentary on the *Letter to the Hebrews* include: (1) *In IV Sent.*, d. 5, q. 2, a. 2, q1a 2, arg. 2: “Sacerdotes sunt medii inter Deum et plebem”; (2) *ST II–II*, q. 102, a. 4, ad 6: “Sacerdos Mediator inter Deum et populum”; and (3) *ST II–II*, q. 86, a. 2: “Sacerdos quodammodo constituitur sequester et medius inter populum et Deum.”

⁸ The question is ordered around several biblical-Christological themes that flow especially from the Letter to the Hebrews. This structure is not uncommon to medieval theology. “This is, in fact,” one author explains, “an artificial method, typical of the literary genre of a *summa*, for presenting the teaching of the Scriptures.” *Summa theologiae*, ed. Colman E. O’Neill, O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1965), vol. 50, 137 n. a.

⁹ *ST III*, q. 22, a. 1, c.: “Proprium officium sacerdotis est esse mediatorem inter Deum et populum.” N.B. All English citations to the *Summa theologiae*, unless otherwise noted, will be taken from the translation provided by the English Dominican Province published in 5 volumes, now available as *Summa theologiae* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981).

The recognition of the connection between the two offices of priest and mediator is not absent from the secondary literature on St. Thomas. For example, Battista Mondin, in “Sacerdozio di Cristo,” *Dizionario Enciclopedico del Pensiero di San Tommaso d’Aquino* (Bologna: ESD, 1991), 539, offers the following comments on this relationship: “To define the priesthood of Christ, St. Thomas has recourse to the category of mediation, which is the category that he uses to define the priesthood in general. In fact, the priest is, by definition, the mediator between God and men. Now, since Jesus Christ is not only the mediator between God and men, but he is also the unique person who performs suitably such a function, it is evident that to him the title and office of priest belong eminently” (Per definire il s.d.C., S.T. ricorre alla categoria della mediazione, che

specifies Christ's priestly action by delineating two principle functions. The first function Thomas recognizes is that: "He [Christ the Priest] bestows divine things on the people." Thomas speaks of the second priestly function as follows: "forasmuch as he offers up the people's prayers to God, and, in a manner, makes satisfaction for their sins."¹⁰ For St. Thomas, Christ is a priest in the fullest or most fitting sense of the word because he carried out the twofold priestly office in the highest (superlative) manner.¹¹ "For in him," Thomas points out, "are gifts bestowed on

è la categoria che si usa per definire il sacerdozio in generale. Infatti, il sacerdote è, per definizione, il mediatore tra Dio e gli uomini. Ora, poiché non solo Gesù Cristo è mediatore tra Dio e gli uomini, ma è anche l'unica persona che assolve adeguatamente tale funzione, è evidente che a lui compete eminentemente il titolo e l'ufficio di sacerdote). [My translation.]

¹⁰ ST III, q. 22, a. 1, c.: "In quantum scilicet divina populo tradit . . . et iterum in quantum preces populi Deo offert, et pro eorum peccatis Deo aliquantulum satisfacit."

¹¹ Ibid.: "Hoc autem maxime convenit Christo." For a treatment of the insight and influence of Aquinas's theological exegesis in his theology of Christ as priest and mediator, I refer the reader to the following: Firstly, in "The Twofold Division of St. Thomas's Christology in the *Tertia Pars*," *The Thomist* 60 (1996), John Boyle notes that the structure of the *tertia pars* uniquely captures the *ordo* of the theological narrative of the New Testament that Lombard and his commentators failed to identify: "The epistles provide a great number of decisive categories that interpret the mission of Christ: Christ the redeemer of a fallen humanity; Christ the true mediator between God and man; Christ the great high priest; Christ the head of the Church. . . . In a temporal narrative of Christ's life, there is no obvious place for the treatment of his mediatorship, priesthood, or headship. Each extends throughout, and even beyond his earthly life, although each is intimately bound to particular aspects of that life. The problem is thus one in which both the narrative and its primary categories of intelligibility are in Scripture" (440).

Secondly, within Aquinas's method for organizing and appropriating the biblical categories in his Christology, we find that he uses what Boyle refers to as the "primary categories" in a special way. When Aquinas applies biblical terms to Christ as names, e.g., *mediator* (or *priest*), he uses the word in a unique and special way. The names then, as Aquinas uses them, take on a new significance for understanding who Christ is, and this significance is the result of Aquinas's theological exegesis. Henk Schoot describes St. Thomas's methodology of exegetically "naming" Christ according to the following consistently discernible pattern: "This one example [mediation] enables us to ascertain some typical features of the analysis of names applied to Christ. According to the fullness of its meaning, the name is applicable to one only. In order to determine the meaning of the word, one should consult the meaning it has when applied to priests, prophets, and angels. The word turns out to be used analogously, i.e., all the aspects that constitute the meaning of the word when used for priests, prophets, and angels are present when applied to Christ, but only Christ is the perfect mediator." (Henk J. M. Schoot, *Christ the 'Name' of God: Thomas Aquinas on Naming Christ* [Leuven: Peeters, 1993], 81.) Schoot's point here is important.

men. . . . Moreover, he reconciled the human race to God. . . . Therefore it is most fitting that Christ should be a priest."¹²

There are other personages in the Bible who exercise the office of priest or mediator, but when Christ assumes these offices he exercises them in a unique and exclusive manner. Therefore, Aquinas's appropriation of the biblical categories used to name Christ and explain his saving work take on a superlative connotation when he develops their meanings. Christ is not simply one priest among many, but the priest. He is not yet another mediator similar to the angels or even Moses; he is the perfect and unique mediator between God and man.

Finally, Ocariz, Mateo Seco, and Riestra, in *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, trans. M. Adams and J. Gavigan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), 166, note the importance of Christ's priestly mediation as a theme revealed in Hebrews. "The author of the Letter to the Hebrews not only makes our Lord's priesthood the central theme of his message, but depicts the entire messianic work of Christ as a 'priestly mediation,' describing him as the great priest of the New Alliance. Our Lord himself spoke at the Last Supper about his blood being poured out like 'blood of the covenant' (Mk 14:24). The underlying argument of the Letter can be summed up in this way: the covenant implies sacrifice, and therefore a mediator with priestly functions. When Hebrews speaks, therefore, about a new covenant it also has to speak of a new priesthood." It follows, in a sense, that Christ as the priest and mediator of a new "superlative" (everlasting) covenant, should be described in analogously superlative terms. The superlative manner in which Christ exercises his *munera* is affirmed by Aquinas when he treats the various objections to Christ's priesthood. In response to the objection that Christ could not be a priest because in the Old Testament there was a separation between the lawgiver and priests, Aquinas appeals to the impact that the hypostatic union and consequent fullness of grace had on Christ. "Christ," he explains, "as being the head of all, has the perfection of all graces. Wherefore, as to others, one is a lawgiver, another is a priest, another is a king; but these concur in Christ as the fount of all grace." *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, ad. 3: "Christus, tanquam omnium caput, habet perfectionem omnium gratiarum. Et ideo, quantum ad alios pertinet, alius est legislator, et alius sacerdos, et alius rex: sed haec omnia concurrunt in Christo, tanquam in fonte omnium gratiarum."

Also, in his *In Heb.*, cap. III, lect. I, Aquinas sees a manifold superiority of Christ over Moses. Aquinas uses the important distinction between Moses as a servant of God and Christ as the Son of God to establish the points of Christ's superiority. Firstly, Aquinas comments that Christ is the builder (*aedificator*) of God's house, while Moses dwells (*inhabitat*) in the house built by Christ. Secondly, regarding Christ and Moses as administrators within God's house, Aquinas calls Christ the "legislator principalis," whereas Moses is the "legis pronuntiator." Thirdly, *in domo patris* Christ bears the name of *filius*, but Moses acted as a *famulus*.

¹² *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, c.: "Nam per ipsum dona hominibus sunt collata, secundum illud 2 Pet. 1, 'per quem, scilicet Christum, maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, ut per haec efficiamini divinae consortes naturae.' Ipse etiam humanum genus Deo reconciliavit, secundum illud Coloss. 1, 'in ipso, scilicet Christo,

Having discussed the fittingness of referring to Christ as a priest, Thomas then proceeds to demonstrate exactly what it was that Christ offered as his priestly sacrifice, the “type” of priesthood that Christ exercised, and the effects of Christ’s priesthood.

The first of these issues that Aquinas deals with is the nature of Christ’s sacrifice. Thomas approaches this question by asking whether or not Christ was at once both “priest and victim.”¹³ It is here that St. Thomas forcefully displays his Augustinianism. Thomas constructs his affirmation that Christ indeed is both priest and victim by applying St. Augustine’s understanding of sacrament and sacrifice to Christ’s priestly work. In the tenth book of *The City of God*, Augustine explains the sacramental correspondence between the visible and invisible. Aquinas, citing Augustine’s classic formula, teaches that, “Every visible sacrifice is a sacrament, that is, a sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice.”¹⁴ In applying this formula to

complacuit omnem plenitudinem inhabitare, et per eum reconciliare omnia. Unde Christo maxime convenit esse sacerdotem.”

In *In Heb.*, cap. V, lect. I, Aquinas argues that the dignity of Christ’s priesthood supercedes all other valor because it and the things it is concerned with, “pertain to the worship of God, they exceed temporal things, thus the high priestly dignity in this way exceeds all other dignities” (*Sicut ergo illa quae pertinent ad Dei cultum, excedunt temporalia, ita dignitas pontificalis excedit omnes alias dignitates*). [My translation.]

¹³ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2: “Utrum ipse Christus fuerit simul sacerdos et hostia.”

¹⁴ Cf. *The City of God*, X, 5, cited by Thomas in *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2, c.: “Omne sacrificium visibile invisibilis sacrificii est sacramentum, idest sacrum signum.”

Aquinas is much more indebted to Augustine in relation to his theology of Christ’s priestly offering than he discloses with his citation of Augustine’s definition of a sacrifice from *The City of God*. However, later in the *tertia pars*, q. 48, a. 3, in treating Christ’s passion, Aquinas returns to Augustine’s treatment of the matter and offers further clarification. In the same work, just a few lines below, Augustine develops an understanding of “true” sacrifice by commenting on Ps 51:17, “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” God, Augustine explains, “does not desire the sacrifice of a slaughtered beast, but He desires the sacrifice of a contrite heart. Thus, that sacrifice which he says God does not wish is the symbol of the sacrifice which God does wish.” *The City of God*, trans. M. Dods, vol. 18, *The Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 301.

In the next chapter of the same book, Augustine applies this understanding of sacrifice to Christ’s own offering: “Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy to ourselves or others, done with reference to God, and since works of mercy have no other object than the relief of distress or the conferring of happiness . . . it follows that the whole redeemed city . . . is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered himself to God in his passion for us that we might be members of this glorious head, according to the form of a servant. For it was this form he offered, in this he was offered, because it is according to it he is Mediator, in this he is our Priest.” *The City of God*, 302.

Christ's priestly sacrifice, Aquinas was able to see Christ's offering as more than just the external and physical act of offering his human nature on the cross. Christ's external offering is intimately connected to his invisible and interior disposition, especially his full enjoyment of charity.¹⁵ This charity-based understanding separates Aquinas's reading of Christ's sacrifice from those who view it exclusively in terms of an impersonal juridical act of satisfaction.¹⁶

Aquinas then articulates three reasons why man needs (*indiget*) to offer sacrifice. The first need that man has is "for the remission of sin, by which he is turned away from God." Secondly, man needs to offer sacrifice "that man may be preserved in a state of grace, by ever adhering to God, wherein his peace and salvation exist."¹⁷ And the third reason is "in order that the spirit of man be perfectly united to God: which will be most

These words of Augustine contain the primary structure of Aquinas's treatment of Christ's priestly offering. Namely, that his priestly sacrifice remedies the "distress" of sin, because in Christ there is a perfect harmony between the offering itself and the interior dispositions of the one making the offering. For a treatment of mediation in the theology of Augustine, cf. Deborah Ruddy, "The Humble God: Healer, Mediator, and Sacrifice," *Logos* 7 (2004): 87–108, esp. 93–99.

- ¹⁵ Fr. Romanus Cessario has concisely summarized this point in the following line: "Consistent with previous teaching, Christ's satisfaction finds its value not in suffering but in love." *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1982), 185.

Also, for a helpful exposition of Aquinas's understanding of the saving value of Christ's human actions, cf., Bernard Catão, *Salut et rédemption chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin; l'acte sauveur du Christ* (Paris: Éditions Mouton, 1965), 150–55. Catão explains that Christ's human love is not divorced from the divine plan for salvation—to the contrary Christ's human love is an integral part of the divine plan of salvation. He notes on p. 155: "Son [Christ's] âme participe humainement à l'oeuvre de la divinité, et le salut jaillissant de la profondeur divine de son être, en fait de son Coeur une source et un principe humain."

- ¹⁶ For a treatment of the relationship between justice and charity in Aquinas's soteriology, cf. Levering, "Juridical Language in Soteriology: Aquinas's Approach," *Angelicum* 80 (2003): esp. 321–22. Also, later in the *tertia pars*, when dealing with the "Efficiency of Christ's Passion" (q. 48), Thomas mentions the relationship between Christ's charity and his sacrifice, "passio Christi ex parte ipsius ex caritate patientis fuit sacrificium. Unde hoc sacrificium ipse Christus obtulisse dicitur, non autem illi qui eum occiderunt." *ST* III, q. 48, a. 3, ad. 3. For a Thomistic treatment of the relationship between Christ's sonship and Christian adoptive sonship, see Romanus Cessario, "The Light of Tabor: Christian Personalism and Adoptive Sonship," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 2 (2004): 238–40.
- ¹⁷ Thomas also argues that this is the reason for the "peace offering" (cf. Lev 3, and ultimately for the other types of offerings described in the opening chapters of Leviticus) of the Old Law. For Thomas's own treatment of the diverse sacrifices of the Old Testament, cf. *ST* I–II, q. 102, a. 3, ad. 8.

perfectly realized in glory.”¹⁸ Aquinas affirms that these three needs were all satisfied in Christ’s priestly offering—*per humanitatem Christi*. “For, in the first place,” Thomas explains,

our sins were blotted out. . . . Secondly, through him we received the grace of salvation. . . . Thirdly, through him we have acquired the perfection of glory. . . . Therefore, Christ himself, as man, was not only priest, but also a perfect victim, being at the same time victim for sin, victim for peace-offering, and a holocaust.¹⁹

Then Thomas develops the “effect” that he ascribes to Christ’s priesthood by asking, “Whether the effect of Christ’s priesthood is the expiation of sins?”²⁰ In answering this question, Aquinas first addresses the twofold reality of the “*macula culpae*” and the “*reatus poenae*.” Since mankind suffers from both the “stain of sin” and the “debt of punishment” due to sin, a true cleansing or expiation for sin would need to satisfy for both. The “*macula culpae*” is removed “by grace, by which the sinner’s heart is turned to God.” The “*reatus poenae*” is remitted by “the satisfaction that man offers to God.” Therefore, “the priesthood of Christ produces both of these effects,” Aquinas acknowledges: “For by its [Christ’s priesthood] virtue grace is given to us, by which our hearts are turned to God. . . . Moreover, he satisfied for us fully. . . . Wherefore it is clear that the priesthood of Christ has full power to expiate sins.”²¹

¹⁸ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2, c.: “Indiget homo sacrificio propter tria. Uno quidem modo ad remissionem peccati, per quod a Deo avertitur. . . . Secundo, ut homo in statu gratiae conservetur, semper Deo inhaerens, in quo eius pax et salus consistit. . . . Tertio, ad hoc quod spiritus hominis perfecte Deo uniatur: quod maxime erit in gloria.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: “Nam primo quidem, nostra peccata deleta sunt. . . . Secundo, gratiam nos salvantem per ipsum accepimus. . . . Tertio, per ipsum perfectionem gloriae adepti sumus. . . . Et ideo ipse Christus, in quantum homo, non solum fuit sacerdos, sed hostia perfecta, simul existens hostia pro peccato, et hostia pacificorum, et holocaustum.” Regarding Christ’s humanity and the effect of his sacrifice, Smith notes, “In other words . . . it is Christ’s humanity which provided for us, and through it all the needs of sacrifice are completed: Christ removes our sins, we receive saving grace, and we are fitted for heavenly glory.” J. C. Smith, “Christ as ‘Pastor,’ ‘Ostium’ and ‘Agnus’ in St. Thomas,” *Angelicum* 56 (1979): 113.

²⁰ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3: “Utrum effectus sacerdotii Christi sit expiatio peccatorum?”

²¹ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, c.: “Macula quidem culpae deletur per gratiam, qua cor peccatoris in Deum convertitur, reatus autem poenae totaliter tollitur per hoc quod homo Deo satisfacit. Utrumque autem horum efficit sacerdotium Christi. Nam virtute ipsius gratia nobis datur, qua corda nostra convertuntur ad Deum. Ipse etiam pro nobis plenarie satisfecit. . . . Unde patet quod Christi sacerdotium

To close out question 22, Thomas asks whether or not the effect that Christ accomplished through his priesthood was beneficial only for others or for himself as well,²² how we are to understand the eternal nature of Christ's priesthood, and the significance of Christ's relationship to the priesthood of Melchizedek.

In Christ's case, unlike that of the Old Testament priests who themselves are in need of atonement for sin, Christ exercised his priesthood exclusively on behalf of others. Thomas explains this important point in the following passage:

For the influence of the first agent in every genus is such that it receives nothing in that genus: thus the sun gives but does not receive the light; fire gives heat but does not receive heat. Now Christ is the fountain head of the entire priesthood [*fons totius sacerdotii*]: for the priest of the Old Law was a figure of him; while the priest of the New Law works in his person. . . . Therefore it is not fitting that Christ should receive the effect of his priesthood.²³

The eternity of Christ's priesthood has important moral, soteriological, and eschatological implications for St. Thomas. Building his argument on Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever," Aquinas focuses on the "end" of Christ's priestly sacrifice. Since the priestly action consists in offering sacrifice, the nature of the priest and priesthood that makes the offering must be viewed in light of the effect brought about by the offering. Thus, in the case of Christ, "the end of the sacrifice," Aquinas explains, "consisted not in temporal but in eternal good, which we obtain through his death . . . , for which reason the priesthood of Christ is said to be eternal."²⁴

habet vim plenam expiandi peccata." In *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2, c., Aquinas describes Christ's satisfaction as "superabundans satisfactio."

Also, later in the *tertia pars*, Thomas describes this twofold sense of satisfaction in terms of redemption from the perspective that Christ "redeemed" us from both the "bondage of sin" and the "debt of punishment" due to it. Christ, therefore, is a "redeemer" in relation to both. Cf. *ST* III, q. 48, a. 4.

²² For a helpful presentation of Aquinas's treatment of this same issue later in the *tertia pars*, cf. W. Jerome Bracken's "Of What Benefit to Himself Was Christ's Suffering? Merit in Aquinas's Theology of the Passion," *The Thomist* 65 (2001): 385–407.

²³ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 4, c.: "Primum enim agens in quolibet genere ita est influens quod non est recipiens in genere illo: sicut sol illuminat sed non illuminatur, et ignis calefacit sed non calefit. Christus autem est fons totius sacerdotii: nam sacerdos legalis erat figura ipsius; sacerdos autem novae legis in persona ipsius operator. . . . Et ideo non competit Christo effectum sacerdotii suscipere."

²⁴ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 5, c.: "Finis autem sacrificii quod Christus obtulit, non fuerunt bona temporalia, sed aeterna, quae per eius mortem adipiscimur . . . ratione cuius Christi sacerdotium dicitur esse aeternum."

Similarly, Thomas interprets Christ's ascension into heaven as "the way for us, that we might enter by virtue of his blood, which he shed for us on earth."²⁵ Heaven, therefore, is entered through the power of Christ's blood. Hence, according to Aquinas, Christ remains a priest forever, not because he is repeatedly offering sacrifice, but because of the eternal and eschatological end that his sacrifice accomplishes by bringing the faithful to eternal beatitude.

In his corresponding presentation of Christ's mediation, St. Thomas underscores three central and overlapping themes, each of which is related to Christ's priestly activity: first, "the office of mediator"; second, the "locus" of Christ's mediation; and, third, the "perfect" or "exclusive" nature of Christ's mediation. For the sake of brevity, I will simply summarize the conclusions that Aquinas draws in the two articles of question 26.

Thomas attributes Christ's activity of mediation to his human nature for two reasons.²⁶ The first reason concerns the mediator's office of "uniting" the extremes. The second is that he "conjoins" the aspects of each extreme to the other.²⁷ Thomas concludes that "[n]either of these can be applied to Christ as God, but only as man."²⁸ As his reason for this position Thomas argues as follows: "For as God, he does not differ from the Father and the Holy Ghost in nature and the power of dominion."²⁹

²⁵ Ibid.: "et nobis viam paravit intrandi per virtutem sanguinis sui, quem in terra effundit."

²⁶ Gérard Remy, in "Le Christ médiateur dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Thomiste* 93 (1993): 192, commenting on the rank or "position" of the mediator, notes the following: "Le fondement de la 'médieté,' à savoir sa position entre deux termes extrêmes et son acte qui est de les joindre. La qualité de médiateur revient à celui qui, en vertu de sa position médiane, est capable d'opérer la jonction entre ces termes extrêmes. En outre, cette position suppose un ordre de supériorité par rapport au premier terme et d'infériorité par rapport au terme ultime."

Regarding Thomas's treatment of Christ's unique place between God and man, Fr. Ruggero Biagi wrote: "In questa natura umana superdignificata dalla grazia divina, S. Tommaso trova il mezzo capace di congiungere Dio e l'umanità." *Cristo Profeta Sacerdote e Re: Dottrina di S. Tommaso e sviluppi della teologia moderna* (Bologna: ESD, 1988), 27. Obviously, the "super-dignified" state of Christ's human nature cannot be divorced from the hypostatic union.

Also, for a helpful presentation of Aquinas's understanding of the instrumentality of Christ's human nature in the *Summa theologiae*, see J. Martinez, "La medicación de la humanidad de Cristo: clave de lectura de la soteriología de santo Tomás Aquino (I)," *Ciencia Tomista* 128 (2001): 264–68.

²⁷ St. Thomas uses the verbs *coniungit* and *defert*.

²⁸ ST III, q. 26, a. 2, c.: "Neutrum autem horum potest convenire Christo secundum quod Deus, sed solum secundum quod homo."

²⁹ Ibid.: "Nam secundum quod Deus, non differt a patre et spiritu sancto in natura et potestate dominii."

The tasks of “uniting” the extremes and “conjoining” come together in Christ only as man, as Thomas notes in the following text:

Because as man, he is distant both from God, by nature, and from man in the dignity of both grace and glory. Again, it belongs to him, as man, to unite men to God, by communicating to men both precepts and gifts, and by offering satisfaction and prayers to God for men. And therefore he is most truly called mediator, as man.³⁰

Having defined the office of mediator and the locus of Christ’s mediation, Thomas then moves directly into his reasons for affirming that Christ, as mediator, exercised his office in a perfect and unique way.³¹ “Now to unite men to God perfectly belongs to Christ,” he explains,

³⁰ Ibid.: “Secundum quod est homo, distat et a Deo in natura, et ab hominibus in dignitate et gratiae et gloriae. In quantum etiam est homo, competit ei coniungere homines Deo, praecepta et dona hominibus exhibendo, et pro hominibus ad Deum satisfaciendo et interpellando. Et ideo verissime dicitur mediator secundum quod homo.”

³¹ The biblical text of 1 Timothy 2:5 figures importantly in Thomas’s considerations on Christ’s mediation. The text of 1 Timothy 2:5 reads as follows: “One is God and one is the mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself for the redemption of all” (RSVCE). St. Thomas often draws on the text of 1 Timothy 2:5 in his writings on Christ’s mediation. In the *sed contra* of ST III, q. 26, a. 1, Thomas provides 1 Timothy 2:5 as his defense of Christ’s unique mediation. In his commentary on this text, Thomas develops a concise existential interpretation of the perfect nature of Christ’s mediation; that is, Thomas uses this text to show how Christ’s mediation overcomes the existential imperfections of the Fall, by exchanging man’s condition of separation from God via injustice and death through his own perfect justice and atoning death. Here again Aquinas is forcefully Augustinian, drawing nearly verbatim on Augustine’s distinction between the true and false mediator in tenth book of *The Confessions*. Brian Daley argues that mediation was such a point of emphasis in Augustine’s Christology that as his theology developed, “Augustine came to express Christ’s mediating role, too, not simply as the heart of his work but as rooted in the very structure of who he is.” “Christology,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 168.

In *In I Ad Timoth.*, cap. II, lec. I, Thomas makes the following commentary: “Tunc ponitur ratio ex parte hominis Christi, ibi *unus et mediator*, et cetera. Ubi primo probat intentum, secundo inducit signum, ibi *qui dedit*. Dicit ergo: homo Christus Iesus est mediator Dei et hominum, non quorundam, sed inter Deum et omnes homines, et hoc non fuisset nisi vellet omnes salvare. Et potest dici quod Christus mediator est similis utrique extremo, scilicet Deo et homini in quantum Deus et in quantum homo, quia medium debet habere aliquid de utroque extremorum. Et haec sunt homo et Deus. Sed quia medium est distinctum ab utroque extremorum, et filius non est alius Deus a patre, ideo melius est dicendum quod mediator est secundum quod homo. Sic enim communicat cum utroque extremorum. In Deo enim sunt duo, scilicet iustitia et immortalitas; in hominibus vero est

“through whom men are reconciled to God, according to 2 Corinthians 5:19: ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.’ And, consequently, Christ alone is the perfect Mediator of God and men, inasmuch as, by his death, he reconciled the human race to God.”³² For this reason, Christ is not only the unique mediator between God and man, but also his mediation alone is “perfect.”

Thomas Aquinas’s exegesis of the Christological-biblical titles of priest and mediator meant something very specific theologically—something that has intrinsic moral, soteriological, and liturgical implications. It is this understanding of the centrality of Christ’s work and its effects that places Christ at the heart of Aquinas’s thought and leads me to see the Christian life as one lived from within Christ’s mediation.

Part II: The Proactive and Retroactive Impact of Christ’s Priestly Mediation in the Sacramental and Moral life

How do the nature and effects of Christ’s priestly-mediatorial activity establish Christ’s presence in the Christian moral and liturgical life—or

iniustitia et mortalitas. Media ergo sunt duo: unum in quo est iustitia et mortalitas. Aliud in quo est immortalitas et iniustitia. Et utrumque est medium, sed primum medium convenit Christo, secundum vero Diabolo. Et ideo Diabolus est medium disiungens, quia per iniustitiam suam disiungit nos a divina iustitia; sed Christus est medium coniungens, quia est iustus et mortalis, et per suam mortem coniungit nos Dei iustitiae. 1 Io. 2:2: *ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris*, pro aliquibus efficaciter, sed pro omnibus sufficienter, quia pretium sanguinis eius est sufficiens ad salutem omnium: sed non habet efficaciam nisi in electis propter impedimentum.”

³² ST III, q. 26, a. 1, c.: “Unire autem homines Deo perfective quidem convenit Christo, per quem homines reconciliantur Deo: secundum illud 2 Cor 5 [19]: Deus erat in Christo mundum reconcilians sibi. Et ideo solus Christus est perfectus Dei et hominum mediator, inquantum per suam mortem humanum genus Deo reconciliavit.”

In *Cristo Profeta Sacerdote e Re*, 27, Ruggerro Biagi points out that: “Since Christ has united men to God in the activity of his human nature, his mediation is most perfect, because he in a perfect and unique way has reconciled God with humanity” (*Benché Cristo abbia unito gli uomini a Dio nell’attività della sua umanità, la sua mediazione è perfettissima, perché egli in modo perfetto e unico ha riconciliato Dio con l’umanità*). [My translation.]

Similarly, Henk Schoot, explaining Aquinas’s affirmation of the perfect nature of Christ mediation, concludes: “according to the full, perfect signification of the word, only Christ is called mediator. Only Christ, through his death, has united and reconciled God and humankind. Others are said to be mediator as well, but only according to a certain meaning of the word, only in a certain respect, i.e., *dispositive et ministerialiter*, in the manner of preparation and not principally.” *Christ the ‘Name’ of God*, 80.

integrate the diverse branches of theology? It is here that I think we can see the “tripwire” effect. The conclusions that Aquinas makes about Christ’s priestly-mediatorial activity establish a Christological reference point upon which the moral and liturgical life rest. The following comment from Fr. Torrell encapsulates the general thrust of this point:

[T]he end will not be achieved without grace and without following Christ who came to show us, in his humanity, the way to happiness. . . . Between the study of human action described in the Second Part and that of the happy life which concludes the *Summa*, Thomas will insert, in the Third Part, a study of Christ—“the unique mediator between God and humanity” (1 Tim 2:5)—and the sacraments which are part of the “means” left to his followers to assist them in reaching their end.³³

Because of the effects that Aquinas attributes to Christ’s priestly mediation, I maintain that, within the narrative of the *Summa theologiae*, it has a proactive value for the sacramental theology that comes later and a retroactive value for the moral theology that comes before it.

Aquinas commences his treatment of the sacraments of the Church with question 60 of the *tertia pars*. The sacraments (and the Church), therefore, in Aquinas’s system flow as a natural extension or outgrowth of his Christology, which is presented in the previous fifty-nine questions.³⁴

Aquinas’s sacramental theology allows him to answer the all-important question of how it is that Christ’s saving work and exclusive mediation touches and affects people through the ages. For Aquinas, the sacraments are the means by which the believer is brought into contact (*communio*) with Christ the priest, and the efficacy of the sacraments flows directly from the efficacy of Christ’s own priesthood and mediatorial activity. The following declaration from Aquinas well summarizes the impact that his understanding of Christ as a priestly mediator has on his sacramental theology: “Every sacrament makes man a participator in Christ’s priesthood, from the fact that it confers some effect thereof.”³⁵

³³ Torrell, *Aquinas’s Summa*, 29.

³⁴ For a general explication of the place of Christ as mediator in the liturgy of the Church with an emphasis on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, cf. Riccardo Barile, “Cristo centro e mediatore nel culto cristiano,” *Divus Thomas* 31 (2002): 225–40. Also helpful are, L. Walsh, O.P., “Liturgy in the Theology of St. Thomas,” *The Thomist* 38 (1978): 559; and Colman O’Neill, O.P., *Sacramental Realism: A General Theory of the Sacraments* (Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 1998).

³⁵ *ST* III, q. 63, a. 6, ad. 1: “Per omnia sacramenta fit homo particeps sacerdotii Christi, utpote percipiens aliquem effectum eius.”

Journet explicates this connection in the following terms: “Our salvation is the fruit of the noblest of all acts of love, which because it came from a Man and

In the third article of question 60, Aquinas discusses what it is that the sacraments signify. He answers that:

A sacrament properly speaking is that which is ordained to signify our sanctification. In which three things may be considered: namely, the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ's passion; the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; and the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life. And all these are signified by the sacraments. Consequently a sacrament is a sign that is both a reminder of the past, i.e., the passion of Christ; and an indication of that which is effected in us by Christ's passion, i.e., grace; and a prognostic, that is, a foretelling of future glory.³⁶

Thus the sacraments, as sacred signs, draw their power of signification (or sign value) from Christ's passion, which is nothing other than his priestly offering. Not only do the sacraments signify Christ's passion, but they also signify the effects of Christ's passion, namely, grace and glory, and these effects correspond directly to the importance that Aquinas devotes to the eternity and effects of Christ's priesthood.³⁷ Aquinas then seeks to establish whether or not they are necessary. On face value it would seem that the sacraments are not necessary in so far as Christ sufficiently satisfied for sins by offering himself on the cross.³⁸ "Christ's passion is a sufficient cause of man's salvation," Aquinas explains. "But it does not follow

was to be a rallying point for men, expressed itself in visible sacrifice, preordained by God from all eternity. A liturgy, ascending and descending, is at the root of the Christian religion. It constitutes as it were its framework. It cannot be detached from it—not at any rate without tearing Scripture to bits and changing Christianity into something else. The Priest of the liturgy is Christ. . . . And if the priest is a mediator consecrated to send up the prayers of the people to God, and to bring the favors of God down to the people, it is clear that no one ever was or ever will be a priest like Christ, 'a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech' and 'mediator of the New Testament.'" *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Hierarchy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 57.

³⁶ ST III, q. 60, a. 3, c.: "Sacramentum proprie dicitur quod ordinatur ad significandam nostram sanctificationem. In qua tria possunt considerari: videlicet ipsa causa sanctificationis nostrae, quae est passio Christi; et forma nostrae sanctificationis, quae consistit in gratia a virtutibus; et ultimus finis nostrae sanctificationis, qui est vita aeterna. Et haec omnia per sacramenta significantur. Unde sacramentum est et signum rememorativum eius quod praecessit, scilicet passionis Christi; et demonstrativum eius quod in nobis efficitur per Christi passionem, scilicet gratiae; et prognosticum, idest praenuntiativum, futurae gloriae."

³⁷ In ST III, q. 61, a. 4, c., Aquinas argues that after Christ's coming the sacramental system remains necessary because the sacraments are signs and expressions of the faith in Christ's passion that justifies us.

³⁸ Cf. ST III, q. 61, a. 1, obj. 3.

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."³⁹

Hence, Christ's irreplaceable priestly activity remains alive and active in the world in and through the sacramental life of the Church which perpetuates it.⁴⁰ From these conclusions Aquinas moves on to establish how it is that the sacraments actually place one in real and efficacious contact with Christ's saving merits. Aquinas engages this issue from the perspective of whether or not the sacraments cause grace and, if so, how. To assert that the sacraments cause grace would seem to displace the centrality already attributed to Christ's priestly offering. Aquinas affirms the causality of the sacraments in the order of grace by arguing from the effect ascribed to the sacraments, which is grace or the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ In presenting his understanding of sacramental causality, Aquinas rejects those theories that view the sacraments simply as non-causal signs. By appealing to the twofold nature of efficient causality as "*principalis et instrumentalis*,"⁴² Aquinas notes that: "In this way none but God can cause grace: since grace is nothing else than a participated likeness of the Divine Nature."⁴³ As a result, Aquinas further clarifies the nature of the instrumental causality by which the sacraments work as causes of grace:

Now the principal efficient cause of grace is God himself, in comparison with [*ad quem comparatur*] whom *Christ's humanity is as a united instrument*, whereas the sacrament is as a separate instrument. Consequently, *the saving power must needs be derived by the sacraments from Christ's Godhead through his humanity*.⁴⁴

³⁹ ST III, q. 61, a. 1, ad 3. "passio Christi est causa sufficiens humanae salutis. Nec propter hoc sequitur quod sacramenta non sint necessaria ad humanam salutem: quia operantur in virtute passionis Christi, et passio Christi quodammodo applicatur hominibus per sacramenta."

⁴⁰ In ST III, q. 61, a. 3, c., Aquinas notes that, "Nullus autem sanctificari potest post peccatum nisi per Christum."

⁴¹ ST III, q. 62, a. 1, c.: "Necesse est dicere sacramenta novae legis per aliquem modum gratiam causare. Manifestum est enim quod per sacramenta novae legis homo Christo incorporatur: sicut de Baptismo dicit apostolus, Galat. III, [27]: *Quotquot in Christo baptizati estis, Christum induistis*. Non autem efficitur homo membrum Christi nisi per gratiam."

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.: "Et hoc modo non potest causare gratiam nisi Deus: quia gratia nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo divinae naturae."

⁴⁴ ST III, q. 62, a. 5, c., emphasis added: "Est autem duplex instrumentum: unum quidem separatum, ut baculus; aliud autem coniunctum, ut manus. Per instrumentum autem coniunctum movetur instrumentum separatum: sicut baculus per manum. Principalis autem causa efficiens gratiae est ipse Deus, ad quem comparatur

From this it follows that the humanity of Christ, which he offered as his priestly sacrifice, and which was the locus of his mediation, is also the foundation of the efficacy of the sacraments as instrumental causes of grace. This relationship which Aquinas recognizes between the salvific value of Christ's human nature and the causality of the sacraments is precisely why Christ's priestly mediation has a proactive value in the *Summa theologiae*. For Aquinas, the causality of the sacraments cannot be divorced from Christ's activity as priest nor from his unique status as the one true mediator between God and man.⁴⁵ The special status that Christ's human nature enjoyed because of its union with the Eternal Word allows it to exert a truly spiritual effect on others as an instrumental cause. In the following passage Aquinas further specifies this point and connects it with the activity of the Eternal Word:

The Word, forasmuch as he was in the beginning with God, quickens souls as principal agent; but his flesh, and the mysteries accomplished therein [*mysteria in ea perpetrata*], are as instrumental causes in the process of giving life to the soul: while in giving life to the body, they act not only as instrumental causes, but also to a certain extent as exemplars [*per quamdam exemplaritatem*].⁴⁶

Likewise, in another question, Aquinas argues that the spiritual effect of grace produced by the sacraments is caused by Christ as both God and man. "Christ produces the inward sacramental effect," Aquinas explains:

Both as God and as man, but not in the same way. For, as God, he works in the sacraments by authority: but, as man, his operation conduces to the inward sacramental effects meritoriously and efficiently, but instrumentally. For . . . Christ's Passion which belongs to him in respect of his human nature, is the cause of justification, both meritoriously and efficiently, not as the principal thereof, or by his own authority, but as an instrument of his Godhead.⁴⁷

humanitas Christi sicut instrumentum coniunctum, sacramentum autem sicut instrumentum separatum. Et ideo oportet quod virtus salutifera derivetur a divinitate Christi per eius humanitatem in ipsa sacramenta."

⁴⁵ In ST III, q. 62, a. 4, ad 3., Aquinas again affirms that the sacraments draw their spiritual efficacy from Christ, "Sacramentum consequitur spirituales virtutes ex benedictione Christi et applicatione ministri ad usum sacramenti."

⁴⁶ ST III, q. 62, a. 5, ad 1: "Verbum prout erat in principio apud Deum, vivificat animas sicut agens principale: caro tamen eius, et mysteria in ea perpetrata, operantur instrumentaliter ad animae vitam. Ad vitam autem corporis non solum instrumentaliter, sed etiam per quamdam exemplaritatem."

⁴⁷ ST III, q. 64, a. 3, c.: "Interiorum sacramentorum effectum operatur Christus et secundum quod est Deus, et secundum quod est homo: aliter tamen et aliter. Nam

Furthermore, Aquinas teaches that Christ's offering on the cross acted as the beginning of the sacramental system and the uniquely Christian form of worship. "Likewise by his Passion," Aquinas states:

He inaugurated the rites of the Christian religion by offering *himself*—an oblation and a sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2). Wherefore it is manifest that the sacraments of the Church derive their power specially from Christ's passion, the virtue of which is united to us by our receiving the sacraments. It was in sign of this that from the side of Christ hanging on the Cross there flowed water and blood, the former which belongs to Baptism, the latter to the Eucharist, which are the principal sacraments.⁴⁸

Furthermore, sacramental character is intimately connected with Christ's own priesthood. It is by character that the faithful are "deputed" in various ways to participate in the full sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, which has as its source Christ's own perfect act of worship on the cross. Thomas explains the connection between sacramental character and Christ's priesthood in the following terms:

Now the whole rite of the Christian religion is derived from Christ's priesthood. Consequently, it is clear that the sacramental character of Christ, to whose character [*sacerdotio*] the faithful are likened by reason of the sacramental characters, which are nothing else than certain participations of Christ's Priesthood, flowing [*derivatae*] from Christ himself.⁴⁹

secundum quod est Deus, operatur in sacramentis per auctoritatem. Secundum autem quod est homo, operatur ad interiores effectus sacramentorum meritorie, et efficienter, sed instrumentaliter. . . . Passio Christi, quae competit ei secundum humanum naturam, causa est nostrae iustificationis et meritorie, et effective, non quidem per modum principalis agentis, sive per auctoritatem, sed per modum instrumenti, inquantum humanitas est instrumentum divinitatis eius."

⁴⁸ ST III, q. 62, a. 5, c.: "Similiter etiam per suam passionem initiavit ritum Christianae religionis, *offerens seipsum oblationem et hostiam Deo*, ut dicitur Ephes. 5, [2]. Unde manifestum est quod sacramenta Ecclesiae specialiter habent virtutem ex passione Christi, cuius virtus quodammodo nobis copulatur per susceptionem sacramentorum. In cuius signum de latere Christi pendentis in cruce fluxerunt aqua et sanguis, quorum unum pertinet ad Baptismum, aliud ad Eucharistiam, quae sunt potissima sacramenta.

⁴⁹ ST III, q. 63, a. 3, c.: "Deputatur quisque fidelis ad recipiendum vel tradendum aliis ea quae pertinent ad cultum Dei. Et ad hoc proprie deputatur character sacramentalis. Totus autem ritus Christianae religionis derivatur a sacerdotio Christi. Et ideo manifestum est quod character sacramentalis specialiter est character Christi, cuius sacerdotio configurantur fideles secundum sacramentales characteres, qui nihil aliud sunt quam quaedam participationes sacerdotii Christi, ab ipso Christo derivatae."

Sacramental character, therefore, is not simply an abstract concept for Aquinas. Character is what incorporates the faithful in various ways into Christ's own priesthood.

Perhaps less evident on the surface, though equally logical in presentation, is the place of Christ's priestly mediation in Aquinas's exposition of the moral life located in the *secunda pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. In point of fact, it is specifically in this area of his theology that Aquinas *appears* to be most out of harmony with the vision of theological instruction advocated by Vatican II. It must be recalled that Christ, for Aquinas, is both the moral and ontological exemplar of the Christian life.⁵⁰ As such, both the interior and exterior elements of Christian morality can be traced back to Christ as their source. For this reason, I describe Christ's work as mediator and priest as having a retroactive value for the moral life in Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. In a certain sense, Aquinas's understanding of the sacraments as instrumental causes of grace likewise influences the Christian moral life.⁵¹

In his Treatise on Law (*ST* I–II, qq. 90–108), Aquinas dedicates the last two questions to the New Law, or the Law of the Gospel. These questions take us to the heart of the overlap that exists between the content of the New Law, the life of grace, and the work of Christ. In question 106, Aquinas asks himself whether or not the New Law is written or unwritten. Aquinas affirms the interiority of the New Law while also insisting that it is planted, so to speak, in the hearts of men through the virtue of faith given by Christ:

⁵⁰ For treatments of exemplarity in Aquinas, see Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 82; and Dauphinais's "Christ the Teacher: The Pedagogy of the Incarnation According to Saint Thomas Aquinas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2000), 259–70.

⁵¹ Cessario, in *The Moral Virtues and the Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 21–22, adequately summarizes this point of discussion in the following passage: "For the Christian believer conformity to Christ in the Church of faith and sacraments provides the only legitimate way to attain the 'truth of life.' The conciliar documents repeatedly emphasize the centrality of Christ in salvation history. Admittedly, certain scholastic theologians, including Aquinas, developed their tractates on the virtues without prolonged and repeated reference to the uniquely Christian claim that moral perfection exists in anyone only to the extent that the person maintains a living relationship with Christ. In the case of Aquinas, the absence of frequent reference to Christ in the *secunda pars* happens simply because of his methodological presuppositions in developing the *Summa theologiae*. Still, any theologian who fully grasps the New Testament teaching on the gratuity of divine grace realizes that every meritorious deed performed by the believer derives its efficacy from God's goodness. And Aquinas surely realized this happens only through the mediation of Jesus Christ."

Now that which is preponderant in the law of the New Testament, and whereon all its efficacy is based, is the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is given through faith in Christ. Consequently the New Law is chiefly [*principaliter*] the grace itself of the Holy Ghost, which is given to those who believe in Christ.⁵²

Also, contrasting the Old Law and the New, Aquinas explains that it is Christ's Passion that brings the Old Law to perfection.⁵³ And, since it fulfills the Old Law, the New Law of Christ, through the power of his Passion, brings with it the justification of the sinner. Aquinas explains that apart from Christ the Old Law "[c]ould not accomplish this: but foreshadowed it by certain ceremonial actions, and promised it in words. And in this respect, the New Law fulfills the Old by justifying men through the power of Christ's Passion."⁵⁴ Therefore, it is Christ who, through his priestly offering, brings to fulfillment the Old Testament and efficiently and sufficiently causes the New Law of grace.

Drawing on this Christological foundation of grace, in question 108 of the Treatise on Law, Aquinas argues as follows:

Now men become receivers of this grace through God's son made man, Whose humanity [*humanitatem*] grace filled first, and then flowed forth to us. . . . Hence it is added that *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. Consequently it was becoming that the grace which the incarnate Word should be given to us by means of certain external sensible objects [Aquinas is here referring to the sacraments].⁵⁵

⁵² ST I-II, q. 106, a. 1, c.: "Id autem quod est potissimum in lege novi testamenti, et in quo tota virtus eius consistit, est gratia spiritus sancti, quae datur per fidem Christi. Et ideo principaliter lex nova est ipsa gratia spiritus sancti, quae datur Christi fidelibus."

⁵³ For an explication of Christ's saving work in terms of Aquinas's understanding of the Old Law/New Law relationship, cf. Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ ST I-II, q. 107, a. 2, c.: "Quam quidem lex efficere non poterat, sed figurabat quibusdam caeremonialibus factis, et promittebat verbis. Et quantum ad hoc, lex nova implet veterem legem iustificabo virtute passionis Christi." In this article Aquinas specifies a number of ways that Christ brought the Old Law to fulfillment.

⁵⁵ ST I-II, q. 108, a. 1, c.: "Hanc autem gratiam consequuntur homines per Dei filium hominem factum, cuius humanitatem primo replevit gratia, et exinde est ad nos derivata. Unde dicitur Ioan. I, *verbum caro factum est*; et postea subditur, *plenum gratiae et veritatis*; et infra, *de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus, et gratiam pro gratia*. Unde subditur quod gratia et veritas per Iesum Christum facta est. Et ideo convenit ut per aliqua exteriora sensibilia gratia a verbo incarnato profluens in nos

Thus the grace enjoyed by Christ's followers comes to them through his own fullness, which animated his priestly offering to its eternal efficacy. Thomas offers a number of reflections on the significance of Christ's fullness in his *Commentary on John*. In commenting on John 1:16–17, Aquinas notes that John,

in order to show this unique fullness of efficiency and overflow in Christ, said, "Of his fullness we have all received," i.e., all the apostles and patriarchs and prophets and just men who have existed, do now exist, and will exist, and even the angels.

Note that the preposition *de* [of, from] sometimes signifies efficiency, i.e., an originative cause, as when it is said that a ray is or proceeds "from" the sun. In this way it signifies the efficiency of grace in Christ, i.e., authorship [*seu auctoritatem*], because the fullness of grace in Christ is the cause of all graces that are in [*omnibus*] intellectual creatures.⁵⁶

Thomas also argues that the first grace, that is, the grace of conversion (which cannot be merited), thus flows gratuitously to the sinner from Christ's own meritorious fullness. Aquinas holds that the "first grace" or the grace of conversion, cannot be merited by one person for another person, except in the unique case of Jesus. "It is clear," Aquinas recognizes,

that no one can merit condignly for another his first grace, save Christ alone; since each one of us is moved by God to reach life everlasting through the gift of grace; hence condign merit does not reach beyond this motion. But Christ's soul is moved by God through grace, not only so as to reach the glory of life everlasting, but so as to lead others to it, inasmuch as he is head of the Church, and the author of human salvation.⁵⁷

deducatur; et ex hac interiori gratia, per quam caro spiritui subditur, exteriora quaedam opera sensibilia producantur."

⁵⁶ *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, part I, trans. J. A. Weisheipl and F. R. Larcher (Albany: Magi Books, 1980), 98. *Super Ioannem*, cap. 1, lect. 10: "Ut ergo Evangelista hanc singularem plenitudinem redundantiae et efficientiae de Christo ostenderet, dixit *de plenitudine eius omnes accepimus*, scilicet omnes apostoli, et patriarchae, et prophetae, et iusti, qui fuerunt, sunt et erunt, et etiam omnes Angeli. Nota, quod haec praepositio de aliquando quidem denotat efficientiam, seu originalem causam, sicut cum dicitur, radius est vel procedit de sole; et hoc modo denotat in Christo efficientiam gratiae, seu auctoritatem, quia plenitudo gratiae, quae est in Christo, est causa omnium gratiarum quae sunt in omnibus intellectualibus creaturis."

⁵⁷ ST I–II, q. 114, a. 6, c.: "Ex quo patet quod merito condigni nullus potest mereri alteri primam gratiam nisi solus Christus. Quia unusquisque nostrum movetur a Deo per donum gratiae ut ipse ad vitam aeternam perveniat, et ideo meritum condigni ultra hanc motionem non se extendit. Sed anima Christi mota est a Deo

When Aquinas moves from treating the interiority of the New Law of grace to treating the external parts of the New Law, he unites the concepts of grace and the sacraments by treating the sacraments as external acts instituted by Christ for the sake of communicating the gift of grace. "The New Law," he explains, "had to make such prescriptions or prohibitions alone as are essential for the reception or right use of grace. And since we cannot of ourselves obtain grace, but through Christ alone, hence Christ himself instituted the sacraments whereby we obtain grace."⁵⁸ Likewise, from the perspective of the relationship between the sacraments and grace, in treating the effects of baptism, Aquinas argues that grace and the virtues are enjoyed by the recipient of baptism because they flow into the individual soul, through baptism, from Christ's own superabundant headship. "Now the fullness of grace and virtues," Aquinas observes, "flows from Christ the Head to all his members, according to John 1:16: 'Of his fullness we have all received.' Hence it is clear that man receives grace and virtues in baptism."⁵⁹

In his treatment of the theological virtues, Aquinas draws on the concept of infusion. Because man's ultimate perfection and happiness is supernatural, the perfection coming to man's natural activity as a result of the acquired virtues still falls short of producing the supernatural effects needed to elevate the soul to eternal beatitude. Consequently, Aquinas argues that beyond the natural effects and happiness of the human or acquired virtues, there is "a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of

per gratiam non solum ut ipse perveniret ad gloriam vitae aeternae, sed etiam ut alios in eam adduceret, in quantum est caput Ecclesiae et auctor salutis humanae."

In a distinct question on the "timing" of the dispensation of the New Law, Aquinas argues that the grace of the Holy Spirit was fittingly put off until the repellant of sin had been removed by Christ: "[T]he New Law, as stated above, consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost: which it behooved not to be given abundantly until sin, which is an obstacle to grace, had been cast out of man through the accomplishment of his redemption by Christ." *ST I-II*, q. 106, a. 3, c.: "Quarum prima est quia lex nova, sicut dictum est, principaliter est gratia spiritus sancti; quae abundanter dari non debuit antequam impedimentum peccati ab humano genere tolleretur, consummata redemptione per Christum."

⁵⁸ *ST I-II*, q. 108, a. 2, c.: "lex nova in exterioribus illa solum praecipere debuit vel prohibere, per quae in gratiam introducimur, vel quae pertinent ad rectum gratiae usum ex necessitate. Et quia gratiam ex nobis consequi non possumus, sed per Christum solum, ideo sacramenta, per quae gratiam consequimur."

⁵⁹ *ST III*, q. 69, a. 4, c.: "A capite autem Christo in omnia membra eius gratiae et virtutis plenitudo derivatur, secundum illud Ioan. I, *de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus*. Unde manifestum est quod per Baptismum aliquis consequitur gratiam et virtutes."

the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Pt 1:4) that by Christ we are made 'partakers of the Divine nature.'"⁶⁰ The theological virtues, then, are held by Aquinas to be infused into the soul for the sake of elevating and directing man's moral activity to the supernatural order. This infusion, or participation in the divine nature, is an effect of Christ's activity and a result of the reunification of God and man brought about by Christ's mediation.⁶¹

The theological virtue of charity has a special connection with Christ.⁶² Out of his insatiable love for his Father and his neighbors, Christ offered himself to the Father so that man through him may be reunited to the Father.⁶³ Thus, the theological virtue of charity is closely related to Christ, not simply as a moral effect of his mediation, which it

⁶⁰ ST I-II, q. 62, a. 1, c.: "Alia autem est beatitudo naturam hominis excedens, ad quam homo sola divina virtute pervenire potest, secundum quamdam divinitatis participationem; secundum quod dicitur 2 Petr. 1, quod per Christum facti sumus 'consortes divinae naturae.'"

⁶¹ For a helpful presentation on the role of Christ in the moral life, cf. Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 1996), 17–25. Cessario titles this section of the book, "Christ: Source of the Theological Life."

⁶² For Aquinas's treatment of Christ's place within the life of faith, cf. ST I-II, q. 106, a. 1, ad 3: "nullus unquam habuit gratiam spiritus sancti nisi per fidem Christi explicitam vel implicitam. Per fidem autem Christi pertinet homo ad novum testamentum."

Also, Fr. Servais Pinckaers offers the following reflections on the importance of faith in the Christian moral life and Christ's role therein: "[Faith] centers the moral life on a particular person: Jesus, the Christ. In his historical particularity—in his body that suffered and was resurrected—Jesus becomes the source and cause of justice and wisdom. In short he becomes the source and cause of moral excellence for those who believe in him. . . . This view is unique among the moralities and religions of the world: *For Christians, the person of Jesus has become the center of the moral life, as he is also the center of prayer and the liturgy that nourishes it.*" *Morality: The Catholic View*, trans. Michael Sherwin, O.P. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 85–86. [Emphasis added.]

⁶³ In fact, Aquinas holds that because of its importance, all the moral virtues are infused with charity to support it in making good human acts. "All the moral virtues are infused together with charity. . . . Now it is evident that charity, inasmuch as it directs man to his last end, is the principle of all the good works that are referable to his last end. Wherefore all the moral virtues must needs be infused together with charity, since it is through them that man performs each different kind of good work" (cum caritate simul infunduntur omnes virtutes morales. . . . Manifestum est autem quod caritas, in quantum ordinat hominem ad finem ultimum, est principium omnium bonorum operum quae in finem ultimum ordinari possunt. Unde oportet quod cum caritate simul infundantur omnes virtutes morales, quibus homo perficit singula genera bonorum operum). ST I-II, q. 65, a. 3, c.

truly is, but also as a participation in Christ's own fullness. Charity connects mankind with Christ's mediation because, as a virtue, charity communicates to man a certain friendship with God—a friendship that follows from the reconciliation caused by Christ. "For he [Christ]," St. Thomas recognizes, "received all the gifts of the Holy Spirit without measure, according to a perfect fullness; but we participate through him some portion of his fullness; and this according to the measure which God grants."⁶⁴

Charles Journet further develops this notion by connecting the charity of Christ, especially as it is manifest in his priestly sacrifice, with Christian worship and the sacramental system. "Christ," Journet explains, "inaugurated the regime of the New Law by his death on the Cross, which is simultaneously the supreme act of worship and the supreme act of love. The cult, which is the container, so to speak, and love, which is the content, are inseparably united in it."⁶⁵ Christ's charity is not only the essence of the Christian moral life, it is also the ethos that animates the Christian cult that he inaugurated.

Conclusion

In light of the above argument, I think that it can be fairly claimed that the real question for contemporary theology is not how to make moral theology Christocentric, but whether we are adequately aware of the moral and sacramental theology intrinsic to an authentically biblical Christology. When Aquinas's theology is read from the perspective of the nature and effects that he attributes to Christ's exercise of the offices of

⁶⁴ *Commentary on St John's Gospel*, vol. 1, 99. *Super Ioannem*, cap. 1, lect. 10: "Ipse enim accepit omnia dona spiritus sancti sine mensura, secundum plenitudinem perfectam; sed nos de plenitudine eius partem aliquam participamus per ipsum."

⁶⁵ Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szczurek, O. Praem (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 173.

The wider presence of Christ in Aquinas's theology is well described by Fr. Pinckaers when he notes a common error of myopic nearsightedness in reading the *Summa*: "It is the third part, centering on Christ as our one way to God, that gives the entire *Summa*, and especially to the virtues and gifts, their Christological dimension. Similarly, the Trinitarian dimension of the *Summa* is provided by the study of the divine Persons in the first part. In order to undertake a study of charity according to St. Thomas, we would need to consider the questions devoted to the Holy Spirit seen as love and as gift, in the first part, and the grace of Christ formed in the Passion and communicated through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, in the third part." Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 170. See also Thomas Hibbs, "Imitatio Christi and the Foundation of Aquinas's Ethics," *Communio* 18 (1991): esp. 572.

priest and mediator, both the sacramental life of the Church and the Christian moral life find their wellspring. Therefore, in St. Thomas's theology of Christ's priestly mediation we are not only able to detect Christ's presence in the Christian life—more importantly, we learn that the Christian life is one that is only truly found within Christ's mediation. **N.V**