

Thomas Aquinas on Divine Illumination and the Authority of the First Truth

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TO COUNTER widespread relativism and skepticism John Paul II and Benedict XVI have endeavored to set forth the ontological grounds of truth and our knowledge of it. A central feature of this endeavor has been the re-presentation of the traditional philosophical teaching that man participates from God a primordial, natural knowledge of truth—truth that has authority from God. Both popes speak of the “authority of truth,” and of the need for “obedience to the truth.”¹ And for both popes an indispensable touchstone and resource in their common effort has been the teaching of Thomas Aquinas on divine illumination. In this essay I shall argue that for Thomas Aquinas divine illumination, God’s governance of our natural knowledge of truth, brings to bear on our truth-knowing the authority of God as First Truth. The effect of divine illumination is that every one of our truth-judgments is a participated act of authority—a participation in the authority of the First Truth.

¹ In his planned lecture at La Sapienza University in Rome Benedict XVI says, “Certainly, La Sapienza was once the Pope’s university, but today it is a secular university with that autonomy that, on the basis of its foundational concept itself, has always been part of the university, which must be bound exclusively to the authority of the truth.” Benedict XVI, lecture at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” 17 January 2008. Cf. his remarks at Regensburg in September, 2006: “The scientific ethos, moreover, is—as you yourself mentioned, Magnificent Rector—the will to be obedient to the truth, and, as such, it embodies an attitude which belongs to the essential decisions of the Christian spirit.” Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections,” *Aula Magna* of the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006. John Paul II speaks of the authority of truth and of obedience to truth in *Veritatis Splendor*, §1.

My study will serve two purposes. First, it will fill a gap. The ontological dimension of Aquinas's teaching on illumination—a dimension so central to his philosophical and theological anthropology—has yet to be examined and appreciated as it should.² Indeed, at times Aquinas's language of illumination has been dismissed as mere deference to Augustine.³ And when Aquinas's illumination teaching is addressed, it is usually treated as part of a doctrine of intellectual abstraction and judgment.⁴ My focus will not be this "epistemological" dimension of illumination, however important, but the ontology that grounds it.

The second purpose of my study is to support the work of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to recover the foundations and authority of truth. In section I, I shall review the two popes' teaching. In section II, I shall set forth the outline for my study of Aquinas.

I

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's well-publicized remark the day before his election as pope, that "we are building a dictatorship of relativism,"⁵ is but one manifestation of his long-standing concern with what he has called the "crisis of truth."⁶ "The really critical issue of the modern age," he says in his 1991 essay "Conscience and Truth," is that "the concept of truth has been virtually given up, and replaced with the concept of progress."⁷ One way to recover truth, he argues, is through a proper account of human

² Though a fine introduction to Aquinas's ontology of illumination remains Martin Grabmann, *Der göttliche Grund menschlicher Wahrheitserkenntnis nach Augustinus und Thomas von Aquin. Forschungen über die augustinische Illuminationstheorie und ihre Beurteilung durch den Hl. Thomas von Aquin* (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1924).

³ An example is Joseph Owens, "Faith, Ideas, Illumination, and Experience," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), the section "Aquinas and the Rejection of Illumination," 452–4.

⁴ See for example Wayne J. Hankey, "Participatio divini luminis, Aquinas' doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation," *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 149–78; and Huston Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 85–118.

⁵ "We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Mass *Pro eligendo romano pontifice*, 18 April 2005.

⁶ Meeting with Catholic Educators, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, 17 April 2008, in Pope Benedict XVI, *Pope Benedict in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 73.

⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Conscience and Truth," in *On Conscience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 26.

conscience: prior to the act of conscience, every person possesses a “primordial knowledge” of truth that is “implanted,” “stamped,” and “instilled” by the Creator—a knowledge that medievals call “synderesis” and that Ratzinger calls “anamnesis.” “Conscience signifies the perceptible and demanding presence of the voice of truth in the subject himself. It is the overcoming of mere subjectivity in the encounter of the interiority of man with the truth from God.”⁸

For Ratzinger, the dictatorship of relativism usurps the authority of the truth God speaks within us. In a 1999 essay on *Fides et Ratio*—an encyclical whose goal, he says, is “to rehabilitate the question of truth in a world characterized by relativism”⁹—Ratzinger argues that “we have been handed over to the rule of positivism,”¹⁰ to “the dictatorship of what is accidental.”¹¹ But “God’s Torah,” spoken within each man’s conscience, permits us to “transcend what is merely subjective,”¹² to break into “the wide open spaces” of a truth that is common and binding.¹³

In *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio*, yoked by their focus on truth,¹⁴ John Paul II argues for the authority of divine truth over the human mind. At the start of *Veritatis Splendor* he says man is called to “obedience to the truth.”¹⁵ A central argument in the document is that as reason is not sovereign in the line of being, so it is not sovereign in the line of truth: “Reason draws its own truth and authority from the eternal law, which is none other than divine wisdom itself.”¹⁶ The truth of the “knowledge of good and evil” belongs first to God. “Man does not originally possess such ‘knowledge’ as something properly his own, but only participates in it by the light of natural reason and divine revelation, which manifest to him the requirements and the promptings of eternal wisdom.”¹⁷ Man is shown those requirements of eternal wisdom by the

⁸ Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 24.

⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 184.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹² *Ibid.*, 207.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 199, 201. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1777: Moral conscience “bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments.” See also *Donum Veritatis*, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, 24 May 1990, esp. para. 14.

¹⁴ See *Fides et Ratio* 6 at the passage where the pope refers to *Veritatis Splendor*.

¹⁵ *Veritatis Splendor*, §1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §40; cf. §36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §41. In the same section: “Law must therefore be considered an expression of divine wisdom: by submitting to the law, freedom submits to the truth of creation.”

natural law, which the pope defines, with Thomas Aquinas, as the *impressio* of the divine light in us.¹⁸

In *Fides et Ratio* John Paul looks to establish the authority of truth for philosophy and theology. The first three chapters contain an extended argument that human reason aspires naturally toward belief, that is, toward adherence to authority.¹⁹ Later the pope exhorts philosophers and theologians to “let themselves be guided by the authority of truth alone.”²⁰ Near the end of the encyclical he says that “the Truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as a universal authority that governs, stimulates, and gives increase to theology and philosophy alike.”²¹

As I mentioned, the teaching of Thomas Aquinas on divine illumination is a touchstone and resource for the two popes in these treatments of our participated knowledge of truth, and the authority of truth. We see this in *Veritatis Splendor*, §§42–45,²² in *Fides et Ratio*, §§43–44,²³ and in Ratzinger’s account of anamnesis and synderesis.²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid., §42.

¹⁹ By chapter 3 the pope argues that since belief is indispensable in the search for truth, and since belief is entrustment to someone who “can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself” (*FR*, §33), the search for universal truth is at least implicitly the search for a person to whom one may entrust himself. I shall take this up in section V below.

²⁰ *Fides et Ratio*, §79.

²¹ Ibid., §92. I have modified the Vatican translation in view of the French and Latin versions, replacing “support” with “govern” (the French *gouverne* and the Latin *gubernat*). The Italian *regge*, Spanish *dirige*, and German *leiten* also uphold the change to “govern.”

²² The opening lines of *Veritatis Splendor* appeal to divine illumination: the Creator’s light of truth “enlightens man’s intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence the psalmist prays: ‘Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord (Ps. 4:6).’” Psalm 4:5–6 is one of the most important texts of the Western illumination tradition. In *Veritatis Splendor*, §42 the pope appropriates Aquinas’s interpretation of it at *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 91, a. 2, where Aquinas says that the “light” in the Psalm is the imprint (*impressio*) of the divine light in us by which God promulgates the natural law. In *Veritatis Splendor*, §§43–45, as the pope develops Aquinas’s definition of law into a teaching on participated theonomy, he remains very sensitive to Aquinas’s language concerning the way the authority of the divine light is exercised: the light of the natural law governs from within (citing *ST* I–II, q. 90, a. 4 ad 1); it guides gently, in accordance with our natural inclinations; it is our share in divine providence, making us provident for ourselves and for others (citing *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 2). The new law of the Spirit, still more interior, inclines the affections and teaches about things to be done (citing Aquinas, *In Epistolam ad Romanos*, c. 8, lect. 1); it is a law for our fulfillment, rejoicing the heart. These principles drawn from Aquinas ground the conclusion that “God’s plan poses no threat to man’s genuine freedom; on the contrary, the acceptance of God’s plan is the only way to affirm that freedom” (*VS*, §45).

II

Over the course of the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas carefully appropriates the illumination tradition he inherits, and works out a teaching on the illumination of the human intellect in its own line, that is, in the line of truth.²⁵ The distinguishing feature of Aquinas's teaching is the explanation of illumination in terms of an intelligible sequence of mutually implying lines of causality. God illuminates the intellect as its efficient cause, exemplar cause, and governing cause, where "to govern" means to move and direct the intellect to its end, the knowledge of truth.²⁶ Indeed, this sequence of causes, mapped out in *ST I*, q. 44,²⁷ explains God's action in any creature and orders the flow of topics in the *prima pars* from question 45 on. It also orders the presentation of salient texts on divine illumination: in q. 79, a. 4, God is efficient cause of the light of the agent intellect; in q. 84, a. 5, God is exemplar cause of that light; in q. 105, a. 3, and q. 106, a. 1, God is governing cause of the intellect.

²³ In *Fides et ratio* the appeal to Aquinas's teaching on illumination is less prominent than in *Veritatis Splendor* but still significant. In *Fides et Ratio*, §79 the pope links divine illumination and the authority of truth: "By virtue of the splendor emanating from subsistent Being itself, revealed truth offers the fullness of light and will therefore illumine the path of philosophical enquiry. . . . It is to be hoped therefore that theologians and philosophers will let themselves be guided by the authority of truth alone so that there will emerge a philosophy consonant with the word of God." The only mention of divine illumination prior to this passage is in *Fides et Ratio*, §§43–44, in the treatment of Aquinas's teaching on faith and reason. The pope settles quickly into Aquinas's language of illumination: "the light of reason and the light of faith come from God"; "illuminated by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin" (as in *Veritatis Splendor*, §1 he links divine light, obedience to God, and freedom). Shortly thereafter he says Aquinas was "profoundly convinced that 'whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit'" (*FR*, §44), citing *ST I–II*, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1, where the full sentence reads, "Omne verum a quocumque dicatur est a Spiritu Sancto sicut ab infundente naturale lumen et movente ad intelligendum et loquendum veritatem." In section V below I discuss further John Paul's use of Aquinas in *Fides et Ratio*.

²⁴ See Ratzinger, "Conscience and Truth," 37; 38, n. 19.

²⁵ See my "Light and Form in St. Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of the Knower" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1998), introduction, and chaps. 3 and 4.

²⁶ In *ST I*, q. 67, a. 1 Aquinas argues that the language of light and illumination can be applied properly to immaterial things.

²⁷ "Cum Deus sit causa efficiens, exemplaris et finalis omnium rerum, et materia prima sit ab ipso, sequitur quod principium omnium rerum sit unum secundum rem. Nihil tamen prohibet in eo considerari multa secundum rationem, quorum quaedam prius cadunt in intellectu nostro quam alia." *ST I*, q. 44, a. 4, ad 4.

Aquinas calls each of these causal lines “illumination.” But because God’s governing illuminative causality flows from and so implies his efficient and exemplar illuminative causality, God’s governing illumination, his moving and directing of the intellect to “the truth as known,”²⁸ is illumination in the fullest sense. This illumination is described in the “treatise on governance” at the end of the *prima pars*, particularly questions 105–107. My study of Aquinas on illumination will focus on selections from these three questions.

The study will proceed as follows. Since God’s illuminative governance of the created intellect is an instance of His governance of all creatures, in section III I shall review some basic principles of divine governance. I shall then examine Aquinas’s application of those principles to God’s governance of the created intellect in *ST I*, q. 105, a. 3, where he argues that God is the intellect’s first and immediate mover. In section IV I shall examine the “execution” of God’s illuminative causality through secondary, mediate illuminators, treated in *ST I*, q. 106, a. 1, on whether one angel illuminates another.²⁹ A careful account of this article’s brief but pregnant third reply will form the core of my study. Aquinas does three things in that reply: he lays out the intelligible sequence of causes according to which divine illumination is executed; he explains the way God’s immediate and a creature’s mediate illumination work together; and most important, he describes the intellect’s end in the line of truth as “adherence to the First Truth.” My account of this reply will lead me to conclude, with the help of q. 107, a. 2, that divine illumination brings to bear on our truth-knowing the authoritative rule (*regula*) of the First Truth. Indeed, “First Truth” names a divine *ratio gubernationis*, an intelligible aspect of the eternal law, that authoritatively moves and directs the intellect to knowledge of truth. Hence, every one of our truth-judgments is a participation in the authority of the First Truth. And Aquinas’s teaching on the authority of the natural law should be understood as the extension of his teaching in *ST I*, qq. 105–107 on the First Truth’s illuminative authority with respect to the speculative intellect.

²⁸ “Perfectio autem intellectus est verum ut cognitum.” *ST I*, q. 16, a. 2. “[P]erfectio autem est consummatio in finem intellectus, qui est veritas cognita.” *ST I*, q. 106, a. 2, ad 1.

²⁹ In his treatments of angelic illumination Aquinas sets forth an ontology of illumination that he readily applies, often within the treatment itself, to human knowledge. See James Collins, *The Thomistic Philosophy of the Angels* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 139, 163.

III

In the first question of the treatise on governance, *ST* I, q. 103, Aquinas establishes that there is a natural flow from God's creation of things to his governance of things, from his production of things (*producere*) to His drawing them to perfection (*perducere*).³⁰ Divine governance is a motion from God, *within* the creature,³¹ by which he leads and directs his creature to its proper perfection.³²

The first and founding effect of God's governance is his conservation of the creature in being. For Aquinas, God is conserving cause because of the way he causes the creature's form: he does not cause merely the *becoming* of the form; he causes the form *as such a form*. And because the form is formal cause of the *esse* of a creature—*esse per se consequitur formam creaturae*³³—the cause responsible for the form as such is the cause of the *esse* that flows from that form.³⁴ Hence, divine conservation should be conceived as the continuous bestowal of *esse* through form, or as the continuous bestowal of the form from which *esse* flows.³⁵

Because form is the principle whereby a creature appropriates *esse* and makes it its own, divine conservation is the ground and pattern of God's governance from *within* that which is each creature's *own*.³⁶ That is, as

³⁰ "Unde ad divinam bonitatem pertinet ut sicut produxit res in esse, ita etiam eas ad finem perducatur. Quod est gubernare." *ST* I, q. 103, a. 1. "Secundum eandem rationem competit Deo esse gubernatorem rerum et causam earum quia eiusdem est rem producere et ei perfectionem dare quod ad gubernantem pertinet." *ST* I, q. 103, a. 5. Cf. *ST* I, q. 22, a. 3.

³¹ "Gubernatio est quaedam mutatio gubernatorum a gubernante." *ST* I, q. 103, a. 5, ad 2.

³² *ST* I, q. 103, a. 3.

³³ "Esse per se consequitur formam creaturae supposito tamen influxu Dei." *ST* I, q. 104, a. 1, ad 1. On form as formal cause of *esse* see Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause," in his *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 167–74.

³⁴ *ST* I, q. 104, a. 1. Cf. *Summa contra Gentiles* III, chap. 65 at "Nullum particulare agens univocum. . ." Cf. also *ST* I, q. 4, a. 3.

³⁵ See Dewan, "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause," 169–70: "What one is saying, in attributing a *priority* to form over existence is that the influence of the efficient cause on the caused thing will be the *existence* of the caused thing only inasmuch as the efficient cause *also* provides *form* for the caused thing, whereby that thing *appropriates* the influence. This is because 'existence' names a thing's *own* act." See also Aquinas, *Treatise on Separate Substances*, ed. Lescoe (1959), chap. 8.43–44, for example, "res participat esse proprium sibi per suam formam."

³⁶ "God acts in each thing according to what is its own." "Deus operatur in unoquoque secundum eius proprietatem." *ST* I, q. 83, a. 1 ad 3. Cf. *ST* I, q. 103, a. 5, ad 2; *ST* I, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3.

God bestows *esse* through form, he bestows any “subsequent” governing motion through and in accordance with the creature’s form, so that the creature reaches the end to which God moves it *by its own striving*.³⁷ In q. 105, a. 5 Aquinas works out this deep bond between conserving causality and God’s governance from within. The third objector argues that God gives creatures their powers to act but does not *continue* to act within creatures. Aquinas counters: “God not only gives things [their] forms, but also conserves them in being, applies them to action, and is the end of all actions.”³⁸ God moves the creature to every particular action from within and in accordance with the form he continuously conserves.³⁹

This is the way God governs the intellect. In q. 105, a. 3 Aquinas addresses God’s governance of the intellect in its own line,⁴⁰ and fits divine illumination squarely within the setting of divine governance.⁴¹ In doing so, he sets his teaching on illumination apart from any other in the tradition.

Aquinas asks in q. 105, a. 3 whether God moves the created intellect immediately. Two preliminary remarks help us approach this important article. First, the word “immediately” alerts us to a distinction between God’s immediate moving of the intellect, treated here, and his mediate moving of the created intellect through angels and men, treated from questions 106–117.⁴² As we shall see, God *executes* his full illuminative motion

³⁷ “Unde omnia quae aguntur vel naturaliter vel voluntarie, quasi propria sponte perveniunt in id ad quod divinitus ordinantur. Et ideo dicitur Deus ‘omnia disponere suaviter.’” *ST I*, q. 103, a. 8.

³⁸ “Deus non solum dat formas rebus, sed etiam conservat eas in esse, et applicat eas ad agendum, et est finis omnium actionum, ut dictum est.” *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, ad 3.

³⁹ “Unde non solum est causa actionum inquantum dat formam quae est principium actionis, sicut generans dicitur esse causa motus gravium et levium; sed etiam sicut conservans formas et virtutes rerum. . . . Et quia forma rei est intra rem, et tanto magis quanto consideratur ut prior et universalior; et ipse Deus est proprie causa ipsius esse universalis in rebus omnibus quod inter omnia est magis intimum rebus sequitur quod Deus in omnibus intime operetur.” *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5. See also the citation of Job 10:11 at the end of the body of the article: “Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh. Thou hast put me together with bones and sinews.” On God’s presence to creation see *ST I*, q. 104, a. 1, at the end of the corpus; q. 104, a. 1, ad 4; q. 104, a. 2, ad 3.

⁴⁰ The next article treats God’s moving of the will. Distinct treatments of the moving of the intellect and the will are also found in *ST I*, q. 106, aa. 1 and 2. Cf. *ST I*, q. 103, a. 5, ad 3; *ST I–II*, q. 19, a. 4.

⁴¹ Martin Grabmann aptly describes q. 105, a. 3 as “one of those sweeping articles that reveals the perspective of [Aquinas’s] philosophical-theological system.” Grabmann, *Der göttliche Grund*, 63.

⁴² See *ST I*, q. 105, prologue: “Deinde considerandum est de secundo effectui gubernationis divinae qui est mutatio creaturarum a Deo. Et primo de mutatione

with the cooperation of mediate illuminators. Second, when Aquinas says in the *sed contra* that because God moves man's intellect, God is man's teacher,⁴³ he begins a motif that runs through questions 106–117, and that will also run through this paper: to teach is to illuminate, and to illuminate is to move a created intellect to know the truth.

In the body of q. 105, a. 3 Aquinas names two causal lines along which, in general, the created intellect is moved to know: "that is said to move the intellect which either gives to the intellectual knower the power to understand, or which impresses the likeness of the thing understood."⁴⁴ In each of these lines God is first cause and mover. He is first immaterial being, and so he is first cause of the intellectual power. He is the first being (*primum ens*), in whom preexist the exemplars of all things knowable, so he is first cause of the intelligible species by which any created intellect knows, and first cause of the creatures that bear the likeness of his ideas.⁴⁵ Aquinas concludes:

Therefore, God so moves the intellect inasmuch as He gives it the intellectual power, natural or superadded, and impresses intelligible species on it, and holds and conserves both [power and species] in existence [*esse*].⁴⁶

This text brings home the central and distinguishing feature of Aquinas's teaching on illumination: God moves the intellect, as God moves every creature, from within and through its nature—a nature he bestows and continuously conserves. God's illumination of the intellect in its natural knowledge is not intermittent.⁴⁷ It is not, as for Bonaventure, an influence

creaturarum [q. 105], secundo de mutatione unius creaturae ab alia [qq. 106ff]" (my emphasis).

⁴³ "Sed contra, docens movet intellectum addiscentis. Sed Deus docet hominem scientiam, sicut dicitur in Psalmo. Ergo Deus movet intellectum hominis." *ST I*, q. 105, a. 3, *sed contra*.

⁴⁴ "Dicitur ergo aliquid movere intellectum sive det intelligenti virtutem ad intelligendum sive imprimat ei similitudinem rei intellectae." *ST I*, q. 105, a. 3.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ST I*, q. 12, a. 2.

⁴⁶ "Sic igitur Deus movet intellectum inquantum dat ei virtutem ad intelligendum vel naturalem vel superadditam et inquantum imprimit ei species intelligibiles et utrumque tenet et conservat in esse." *ST I*, q. 105, a. 3. When Aquinas says God "impresses intelligible species" on the created intellect, including the human intellect, he does not override his teaching that the human intellect acquires its intelligible species from sensible material things (for example, *ST I*, q. 84, a. 6). He is making the point that God is first cause of those intelligible species.

⁴⁷ This is something Aquinas found in other teachings on illumination. See for example *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, prooemium, q. 1, a. 1 in its entirety, especially ad 6.

distinct from God's concurrent causality,⁴⁸ but is altogether continuous with it.

Aquinas concludes that God is first cause in the line of intellect, but does not say that God is the intellect's immediate mover. Why this omission? One reason is that Aquinas has already established in *ST I*, q. 90 that the rational soul is created immediately by God.⁴⁹ So when he says in the current setting that God moves the intellectual power in bestowing (that is, creating) it, he can count on our knowing that this bestowing-as-moving is also immediate. But the more intriguing reason for the omission is that he leaves furtherance of the subject—whether God moves the created intellect immediately—until q. 106, a. 1, on whether one angel illuminates another. For Aquinas, it befits God's wisdom and goodness to execute His governance through an order of many second causes to which he communicates the dignity of being causes.⁵⁰ Aquinas situates God's immediate moving of the intellect in the context of God's mediate moving of the intellect, through secondary illuminators.

IV

From question 106 to the end of the *prima pars* Aquinas treats of divine governance through second causes.⁵¹ The first and most eminent instance of mediate divine governance is mediate divine illumination, treated in q. 106, a. 1. This article offers Aquinas's most formal account of illumination in the *Summa theologiae*. It clearly extends the discussion in q. 105, a. 3, just treated, for angelic illumination tracks the two causal lines of God's moving of the intellect.

"To illuminate," says Aquinas, "is nothing other than to communicate to another the manifestation of the truth known,"⁵² along two causal lines: the line of the intellectual power, and the line of the intelligible likeness. A

⁴⁸ See Bonaventure, *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi*, q. 4. Étienne Gilson notes difficulties with Bonaventure's position in "Sur quelques difficultés de l'illumination augustinienne," *Revue néoscholastique de philosophie* 36 (1934): 321–31. See also his "Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 1 (1926–27): 5–127.

⁴⁹ *ST I*, q. 90, a. 3.

⁵⁰ "[A]d providentiam duo pertinent, scilicet ratio ordinis rerum provisarum in finem et executio huius ordini, quae gubernatio dicitur. . . . Quantum autem ad [gubernationem], sunt aliqua media divinae providentiae. Quia [Deus] inferiora gubernat per superiora non propter defectum suae virtutis, sed propter abundantiam suae bonitatis, ut dignitatem causalitatis etiam creaturis communicet." *ST I*, q. 22, a. 3. See also *ST I*, q. 105, a. 6; *Treatise on Separate Substances*, chap. 13.79.

⁵¹ See note 42 above.

⁵² "Unde illuminare nihil aliud est quam manifestationem cognitae veritatis alteri tradere." *ST I*, q. 106, a. 1.

higher angel “strengthens” the intellectual power of a lower angel by “turning toward” it. And since a higher angel knows a truth more universally than does a lower angel, the higher angel “in a certain sense distinguishes” or “divides”⁵³ the more universal truth and “proposes” it to a lower angel according to a more particular, less universal likeness.

Aquinas applies this ontology of illumination (of truth-manifestation, of teaching) to every instance of illumination between creatures: one angel illuminates another, an angel illuminates a man (q. 111, a. 1), and one man teaches another (q. 117, a. 1). In each case illuminative causality strengthens the intellectual power of the one taught, and proposes a less universal intelligible likeness. The reason that creaturely illumination tracks the lines of God’s moving of the intellect is that one creature’s illumination of another is the participated execution of God’s moving of the intellect to truth.

Aquinas returns to the subject of God’s immediate moving of the intellect in the last reply of q. 106, a. 1. An objector argues that one angel cannot illuminate another because “the rational mind is formed by God alone, with no creature in between,” as Augustine says.⁵⁴ In his reply Aquinas addresses the cooperation of creaturely illuminators with the divine illuminator:

The rational mind is formed immediately by God, whether as image by exemplar, for it is made to no other image but to God’s, or as the subject by the ultimate completing form, for the created mind is always considered unformed, unless it adhere to the First Truth. Other illuminations, from man or angel, are as it were dispositions to the ultimate form.⁵⁵

This reply confirms the teaching of q. 105, a. 3 that God moves the intellect immediately. But it goes further. With remarkable pith it expresses Aquinas’s entire teaching on illumination. First, it sets forth the intelligible sequence of causes: God is immediate efficient, exemplar, and moving and directing cause of the intellect and its truth-knowing. Second, God’s

⁵³ “Et hoc quidem in angelis fit, secundum quod superior angelus veritatem universalem conceptam dividit secundum capacitatem inferioris angeli. . .” *ST* I, q. 111, a. 1.

⁵⁴ “Praeterea, lumen est forma quaedam mentis. Sed mens rationalis a solo Deo formatur nulla interposita creatura, ut Augustinus dicit. . .” *ST* I, q. 106, a. 1, obj. 3.

⁵⁵ “Rationalis mens formatur immediate a Deo vel sicut imago ab exemplari, quia non est facta ad alterius imaginem quam Dei, vel sicut subiectum ab ultima forma completiva, quia semper mens creata reputatur informis nisi ipsi primae veritati inhaereat. Aliae vero illuminationes, quae sunt ab homine vel angelo, sunt quasi dispositiones ad ultimam formam.” *ST* I, q. 106, a. 1, ad 3.

immediate moving is executed within an economy of “other,” “dispositive” illuminators. Third, if “adherence to the First Truth” is the intellect’s “ultimate completing form,” then fully to know the truth is to adhere to the First Truth.

An Intelligible Sequence of Causes

The contemporary⁵⁶ *Quaestio disputata De spiritualibus creaturis*, article 10 makes an argument that threshes out the sequence of causes in the above reply. Man’s intellectual light can come only from the human soul’s creator. But God, not an angel, is the human soul’s creator, for “God breathed into man’s face the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). Hence, the light of the intellect is caused “immediately by God” (efficient causality).⁵⁷ And because man is made to God’s image and not to an angel’s, “the light of the agent intellect is impressed in us immediately by God” (exemplar causality). According to this light “we discern the true from the false, the good from evil,” for “the light of your face O Lord is signed upon us,” as Psalm 4 says (governing causality).⁵⁸

The intelligible sequence of causes in *De spiritualibus creaturis*, article 10 shows the *exitus-reditus* pattern of the rational nature’s “immediate ordering to God”⁵⁹: from God’s immediate creation of the intellect, to his stamping of it with his image, to an illuminative “impress” or “signing” that directs the intellect to discern the true and the good. Nourished by biblical passages that put God and man “face to face” (Genesis 2:7 and Psalm 4:6–7), this text develops Augustine’s teaching on the intimacy of the divine light to the mind, and of God to man.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Jean-Pierre Torrell dates the composition of the *Quaestio disputata De spiritualibus creaturis* from 1267–1268; Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Initiation à Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1993), 490.

⁵⁷ “[C]um istud lumen intellectuale ad naturam animae pertineat, ab illo solo est a quo animae natura creatur. Solus autem Deus est creator animae, non autem aliqua substantia separata, quam angelum dicimus; unde significanter dicitur Gen. quod ipse Deus in faciem hominis spiravit spiraculum vitae. Unde relinquitur quod lumen intellectus agentis non causatur in anima ad aliqua alia substantia separata, sed immediate a Deo.” *Quaestio disputata De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 10.

⁵⁸ “Unde dicimus, quod lumen intellectus agentis de quo Aristoteles loquitur est nobis immediate impressum a Deo, et secundum hoc discernimus verum a falso et bonum a malo. Et de hoc dicitur in Psal.: *multi dicunt: quis ostendet nobis bona? Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui domine*, scilicet per quod nobis bona ostenduntur.” Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Sola autem natura rationalis creata habet immediatum ordinem ad Deum.” *ST* II–II, q. 2, a. 3.

⁶⁰ Cf. Anton C. Pegis, *At The Origins Of The Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 58–59: “Whatever corrections St. Thomas introduced into

Immediate and Mediate Illumination

If God immediately creates and illuminates the intellect, “other illuminations” are secondary and “dispositive.” In two treatments of creaturely illumination after *ST* I, q. 106, a. 1—angel illuminates man, one man teaches another—Aquinas takes care to show that a creature’s dispositive illumination presupposes and depends on God’s immediate illumination.⁶¹ For in any knowledge of truth, from one’s own discovery or from being taught, the proximate and “principal cause of knowledge” is the interior light of the agent intellect. But God alone bestows this power,⁶² and He alone moves it from within.⁶³ In *all* learning, *all* truth-knowing, God is first, interior illuminator, for “‘the light of His face is signed upon us’ [Ps. 4:7], by which [signing] we are shown all things.” Any other teacher is an “external minister.”⁶⁴

How can divine illumination be at once immediate, and executed through creatures? The assertion that adherence to the First Truth is the “ultimate completing form” gives the clue. In an ordered series of agents and their ends, the achievement of the final end belongs to the first agent. Created *esse*, for example, is the proper effect and end of the first and universal agent, God, a “final end” of which God must be proper cause. But though *esse* is first in God’s intention, it is the last effect achieved, and along

Augustinianism, his purpose was to give a proper metaphysical grounding to the teaching of Augustine.” *Quaestio disputata De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 10, taken as a whole, bears this out.

⁶¹ See *ST* I, q. 111, a. 1, ad 2: A man’s natural reason “which is immediately from God, can be strengthened by an angel.” The implication is that God’s illuminative motion, like the act of creation from which it flows, is immediate, whereas an angel’s “strengthening” illumination of the human intellect is dispositive. *ST* I, q. 111 as a whole indicates how common is angelic illumination of our natural knowledge.

⁶² *ST* I, q. 79, a. 4.

⁶³ “Deus illuminat immutando intellectum et voluntatem.” *ST* I, q. 106, a. 2, ad 1. Aquinas’s arguments that God alone moves the intellect immediately and from within are akin to, and located next to, his arguments that God alone moves the will immediately and from within. See *ST* I, q. 105, aa. 3 and 4; q. 106, a. 1, ad 3 and a. 2, ad 1.

⁶⁴ “Homo docens solummodo exterius ministerium adhibet sicut medicus sanans: sed sicut natura interior est principalis causa sanationis ita et interius lumen intellectus est principalis causa scientiae. Utrumque autem horum est a Deo. Et ideo sicut de Deo dicitur [Ps. 102:3] *Qui sanat omnes infirmitates tuas* ita de eo dicitur [Ps. 93:10] *Qui docet hominem scientiam in quantum lumen vultus eius super nos signatur* [Ps. 4:7] per quod nobis omnia ostenduntur.” *ST* I, q. 117, a. 1, ad 1. Cf. *ST* II–II, q. 173, a. 2: “Homo enim suo discipulo repraesentat aliquas res per signa locutionum, non autem potest interius illuminare sicut facit Deus.”

the way *esse* becomes the “effect of other causes.”⁶⁵ Still, as the “completion” of every form, created *esse* remains the proper effect of the universal cause, and “no cause gives *esse* unless it participates the divine action.”⁶⁶

Likewise, adherence to the First Truth is a completion that is the proper effect of God as first cause of truth—first in his intention, last in achievement. Creaturely illuminators, who teach only so far as they partake of divine illuminative causality, are “other illuminators,” “other causes” of the knowledge of truth. Creaturely illuminators truly teach, truly move another intellect to truth. But the final effect, knowledge of truth as adherence to the First Truth, is the proper and immediate effect of an illuminative motion from God.⁶⁷

Adherence to the First Truth

When Aquinas says that “the created mind is always considered unformed, unless it adhere to the First Truth,” he presents “adherence to the First Truth” as a completion, a “being all there,” in the line of truth-knowing. Hence, I take “adherence to the First Truth” to be a constituent of the act of “approval” that consummates any truth-judgment.⁶⁸ It is the full real-

⁶⁵ “Esse ergo quod est proprius effectus et finis in operatione primi agentis oportet quod teneat locum ultimi finis. Finis autem licet sit primum in intentione, est tamen postremum in operatione, et est effectus aliarum causarum. Et ideo ipsum esse creatum, quod est proprius effectus respondens primo agenti, causatur ex aliis principiis, quamvis esse primum causans sit primum principium.” *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 10.

⁶⁶ “Per hoc autem aliquid maxime fit actu quod participat per similitudinem primum et purum actum. Primus autem actus est esse subsistens per se; unde completionem unumquodque recipit per hoc quod participat esse; unde esse est complementum omnis formae, quia per hoc completur quod habet esse, et habet esse cum est actu: et sic nulla forma est nisi per esse. Et sic dico quod esse substantiale rei non est accidens, sed actualitas cuiuslibet formae existentis, sive sine materia sive cum materia. Et quia esse est complementum omnium, inde est quod proprius effectus Dei est esse, et nulla causa dat esse nisi in quantum participat operationem divinam; et sic proprie loquendo, non est accidens.” *Quodlibet* 12, q. 5, a. 1. I thank Lawrence Dewan for directing me to the text in this note and in the preceding note.

⁶⁷ This teaching on dispositive illuminators anticipates and undergirds Aquinas’s teaching on human positive law (the similarity of *disponere* and *ponere* should be noticed). Human law truly teaches, moves, and directs men’s actions to the common good and ultimately to God, but as partaking a motion from the eternal law. See *ST* I–II, q. 93, a. 3; q. 95, a. 2.

⁶⁸ On the act of approval see *ST* I, q. 79, a. 9, ad 4: “Diudicare vero, vel mensurare, est actus intellectus applicantis principia certa ad examinationem propositorum. Et ex hoc sumitur nomen mentis. Intelligere autem est *cum quadam approbatione* diudicatis inhaerere” (my emphasis). Aquinas describes the act of judgment itself

ization of what Aquinas calls, in two texts from earlier in the *prima pars* that we shall now take up, judgment according to, or in light of, the First Truth. This aspect of Aquinas's teaching on truth has received too little attention.

The two texts from earlier in the *prima pars* are, first: "The soul does not judge of things according to just any truth, but according to the First Truth inasmuch as it results in the soul as in a mirror, by reason of the first intelligibles."⁶⁹ That is, because the first intelligibles, chiefmost *ens*, are a created likeness (a "mirror-image") of the First Truth, the intellect, going forth from these principles in "the way of inquiry and discovery," then turning back to them in the "way of judgment,"⁷⁰ judges all things according to the First Truth. The First Truth *is active from the start* through its participated likeness in us, hence it is active in the truth-judgment that completes our knowledge.⁷¹

Second: "We understand and judge everything in the light of the First Truth, insofar as the very light of our intellect, natural or gratuitous, is nothing other than an impress [*impressio*] of the First Truth."⁷² Because the First Truth, from the start, is exemplar and mover of the human intellect that is its impress, the intellect judges all things in the light of the First Truth. An *impressio*, in general and in this case, is a participated likeness through and according to which God moves and directs a creature's action.⁷³

"Adherence to the First Truth" implies precisely the turning back to the First Truth required to judge according to it. These texts together—

as the completion of knowledge: "iudicium est completivum cognitionis." *ST* II-II, q. 173, a. 2.

⁶⁹ "Anima non secundum quamcumque veritatem iudicat de rebus omnibus sed secundum veritatem primam in quantum resultat in ea sicut in speculo secundum prima intelligibilia." *ST* I, q. 16, a. 6, ad 1.

⁷⁰ *ST* I, q. 79, aa. 8 and 12.

⁷¹ The causality the First Truth exercises through its participated likeness in us is analogous to God's action through participated *caritas* in us: "Caritas operatur formaliter. Efficacia autem formae est secundum virtutem agentis qui inducit formam." *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 2, ad 3.

⁷² "In luce primae veritatis omnia intelligimus et iudicamus, in quantum ipsum lumen intellectus nostri, sive naturale sive gratuitum nihil aliud est quam quaedam impressio veritatis primae." *ST* I, q. 88, a. 3, ad 1.

⁷³ See the use of *imprimere* and *impressio* in *ST* I, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3. See also *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 2, and *ST* I-II, q. 93, a. 6: "Sicut autem homo imprimit denuntiando quodam principium actuum homini sibi subiecto, ita etiam Deus imprimit toti naturae principia propriorum actuum." This last use of *imprimere* should be read in view of the first article of the same question, wherein God is described as exemplar and governor of creatures. In other words, an *impressio* is a participated likeness through and according to which God moves the creature to actions that are *its own*, and to ends that are *its own*.

the two just treated and *ST I*, q. 106, a. 1, ad 3 above—show that the First Truth illumines our truth-knowing from origin to fulfillment through the first intelligibles that are its participated likeness in us. The emphasis of the three texts is on exemplar, moving, and directing causality. Because the *principia certa*⁷⁴ we grasp and judge by are a participated likeness of the First Truth, every judgment in light of them (which is every truth-judgment) comports at least a material grasp of the First Truth through the medium of its likeness in us.

The First Truth as Authoritative Rule

In consequence Aquinas can assert in q. 107, a. 2 that illumination from the First Truth is the rule (*regula*) of the intellect's knowledge of truth—a notion that brings us near to the notion of the authority of the First Truth.

Those things which the mind conceives can be referred to two principles: to God himself, who is the First Truth, and to the will of the one who understands, through which we actually consider something. Since truth is the light of the intellect and the rule [*regula*] of all truth is God himself, the manifestation of that which the mind knows is both speech and illumination inasmuch as it depends on the First Truth, such as when one man says to another: "The heavens are created by God," or "Man is an animal." But the manifestation of things which depend on the will of the one understanding cannot be called illumination, but speech only, such as when one says "I want to learn this," or "I want to do this or that." The reason is that the created will is not light, nor the rule [*regula*] of truth, but something that participates light.⁷⁵

To understand the First Truth as *regula* on which the created intellect depends for its truth, we must appreciate that in this passage Aquinas is extending "divine truth as *regula*" from the line of creation to the line of governance (akin to the extension from *producere* to *perducere* at the start of the treatise on governance).⁷⁶ But Aquinas laid the ground for this

⁷⁴ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 9, ad 4 (see note 68 above).

⁷⁵ "Ea vero quae mente concipiuntur ad duplex principium referi possunt, scilicet ad ipsum Deum, qui est prima veritas, et ad voluntatem intelligentis per quam aliquid actu consideramus. Quia vero veritas est lumen intellectus, et regula omnis veritatis est ipse Deus, manifestatio eius quod mente concipitur secundum quod dependet a prima veritate et locutio est et illuminatio, puta si unus homo dicat alii, caelum est a Deo creatum, vel homo est animal. Sed manifestatio eorum quae dependent ex voluntate intelligentis non potest dici illuminatio sed locutio tantum, puta si aliquis alteri dicat, volo hoc addiscere, volo hoc vel illud facere. Cuius ratio est quia voluntas creata non est lux nec regula veritatis, sed participans lucem." *ST I*, q. 107, a. 2.

⁷⁶ See note 30 above.

extension earlier in the *prima pars*. In *ST* I, q. 16, divine truth is the creative art by which God rules and measures things.⁷⁷ In *ST* I, q. 21, a. 2 Aquinas extends truth as *ratio* of the divine art to truth as *ratio* of divine governance: divine truth is God's "wisdom, which is His law," the "ruling law" (*lex regulans*) by which he "establishes the order of things."⁷⁸ In q. 107, a. 2 above, Aquinas is presenting the First Truth precisely as the intellect's *lex regulans*, the rule and measure of its truth-knowing.⁷⁹

What has come into view is that *the First Truth is the eternal law*, the divine *ratio gubernationis* in the line of intellect.⁸⁰ Herein lies its *authority*. The First Truth imposes, promulgates,⁸¹ its rule and measure through an unbroken illuminative *impressio* in the agent intellect and the first intelligibles that the agent intellect naturally brings about in the possible intellect from the earliest contact with sensible things.⁸² These first intelligibles—*ens*, the terms of the first principles, and the first principles—are the active principles in every

⁷⁷ More precisely, divine truth is God's knowledge of the conformity of his being to his intellect, and of the being of creatures to his art, that is, his ideas of them. See *ST* I, q. 16, a. 5: "Nam esse suum non solum est conforme suo intellectui sed etiam est ipsum suum intelligere, et suum intelligere est mensura et causa omnis alterius esse et omnis alterius intellectus, et ipse est suum esse et intelligere. Unde sequitur quod non solum in ipso sit veritas sed quod ipse sit ipsa summa et prima veritas." The whole of question 16 is shaped by question 15 on God's creation through ideas.

⁷⁸ "Sicut se habet artificia ad artem ita se habent opera iusta ad legem cui concordant. Iustitia igitur Dei quae constituit ordinem in rebus conformem rationi sapientiae suae quae est lex eius convenienter veritas nominatur." *ST* I, q. 21, a. 2. "Iustitia quantum ad legem regulantem est in ratione vel intellectu. . . ." *ST* I, q. 21, a. 2, ad 1. A similar extension from the divine art to the divine governance is made in *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 1.

⁷⁹ "Lex quaedam regula est et mensura actuum. . . ." *ST* I–II, q. 90, a. 2. Cf. *Lectura super Ioannem*, ed. R. Cai (Marietti), chap. 18, lect. 6, no. 2365: "Et sic veritas increata et intellectus divinus est veritas non mensurata nec facta sed *veritas mensurans* et faciens duplicem veritatem: unam scilicet in ipsis rebus inquantum facit eas secundum quod sunt in intellectu divino, et aliam quam facit in animabus nostris, quae est veritas mensurata tantum et non mensurans" (my emphasis). Cf. also *ScG* I, chap. 62.

⁸⁰ In *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 1 Aquinas calls the eternal law the "ratio gubernationis rerum in Deo."

⁸¹ This is the vocabulary of legal authority in *ST* I–II, q. 90, a. 4: "Regula autem et mensura imponitur per hoc quod applicatur his quae regulantur et mensurantur. Unde ad hoc quod lex virtutem obligandi obtineat, quod est proprium legis, oportet quod applicetur hominibus qui secundum eam regulari debent."

⁸² *ST* I–II, q. 51, a. 1. There is a natural, prompt (*statim*) progression, activated by the light of the agent intellect, from the understanding of *ens* and the terms of the first principles, to the grasp of the first principles themselves, to the formation of the first speculative habit of *intellectus* in the possible intellect.

act of knowledge, every habit, every science.⁸³ They are the principles from which we go out in discovery and to which we return in judgment. And so the illuminatively promulgated divine rule is authoritative from origin to end, from emanation to return: "Illumination concerns those things that emanate from the first rule of truth"⁸⁴; "illumination, properly speaking, is the manifestation of truth *according as it has an ordering to God*, who illuminates every intellect" (emphasis added).⁸⁵ This ordering to God requires a turning back to adhere to the divine rule through its likeness in us.⁸⁶

If the intellect must turn back to the divine rule to judge truth, then every judgment of truth is an act of participated authority. "Judgment," says Aquinas, properly signifies the act of a judge with public authority who applies the law to some case, but the word can be extended to mean

⁸³ "This means that our original and altogether first knowledge of ens is . . . the vital force for the entire development of our intellectual life. . . . Thus, I am saying that the first knowledge of ens is a perfect light, which will reveal itself in our lower-level intellectual endeavors, all having a somewhat secret movement toward the knowledge of God." Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "St. Thomas, Physics, and the Principle of Metaphysics," in *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, 60. See also by Dewan in the same volume "St. Thomas and the Seed of Metaphysics," 35–46.

⁸⁴ "Illuminatio est de his quae emanant a prima regula veritatis." *ST* q. 107, a. 5, ad 3. Cf. *ST* I, q. 16, a. 5, ad 3: "Omnis autem apprehensio intellectus a Deo est unde quidquid est veritatis in hoc quod dico istum fornicari est verum totum est a Deo."

⁸⁵ "Illuminatio proprie est manifestatio veritatis secundum quod habet ordinem ad Deum qui illuminat omnem intellectum." *ST* I, q. 109, a. 3.

⁸⁶ If the First Truth is the eternal law, and if divine illumination is the exercise of its authority, the ultimate end of illumination is a *political common good*. That Aquinas conceives of divine illumination as the exercise of political authority can be seen in *ST* I, q. 108, a. 1, where he describes God as *princeps* of the "city" constituted by the multitude of good angels and men. Or again, he says, because God rules men and angels differently, God can be likened to a "king" who governs two cities, each with its own "laws and administrators." The difference between God's governance of angels and his governance of men flows precisely from the difference between the way men and angels "receive divine illuminations"—angels receive them in intelligible purity, whereas men receive them under sensible likenesses. But this distinction rests on what is common: for angels and men God's governing authority is exercised by illumination. The remaining seven articles of question 108 describe God's illuminatively exercised authority over the angelic hierarchy, in which there is a "diversity of orders" determined by the way that angels receive and communicate illumination to lower angels or men. God always governs through "other illuminators." See *ST* I, q. 108, a. 2, the corpus and ad 2. Fuller explanation of God's illuminative governance of men awaits the treatise on law, where the natural law is an *impressio* of the divine light in us (*ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 2), and where human law must be derived from natural law by way of conclusion or determination (*ST* I–II, q. 95, a. 2).

“a right determination in any matter, speculative or practical.”⁸⁷ In the following text from the *Compendium theologiae* Aquinas spotlights the distinctive causality of the First Truth as giving the authority to judge with certitude:

God helps [*iuvat*] man to understand not only on the part of the object, which is proposed to man by God, or through the addition of light, but also insofar as man’s natural light, by which [he] understands, is from God. Furthermore, since God is the First Truth, from which every other truth gets [its] certitude in the way that secondary propositions [get their certitude] from first [propositions] in the demonstrative sciences, [so God helps man to understand] in that no intellect can be certain except by the power of God [*nisi virtute divina*], just as conclusions in the sciences cannot be certain except by the power of the first principles.⁸⁸

This passage makes it plain that for Aquinas divine illumination is not merely God’s bestowal of the intellectual power. It is, “furthermore,” the concurrent “help” of “the power of God,” the *continuous governing motion* from the First Truth as it impresses the divine likeness on the first principles of judgment and draws the intellect—with the help of other teachers—to its ultimate completing form, adherence to the First Truth. The mind’s requirement of this help in the line of nature confirms, in keeping with a leading insight of the Augustinian illumination tradition, that the first principles by which we judge truth must come from *above* the mind.⁸⁹ They are the mind’s law.

This teaching from *ST* I, qq. 105–107 undersets the teaching, later in the *Summa theologiae*, on the authority of the natural law.⁹⁰ When Aquinas

⁸⁷ *ST* II–II, q. 60, a. 1, ad 1.

⁸⁸ “Deus autem ad intelligendum hominem iuvat non solum ex parte obiecti, quod homini proponitur a Deo, vel per additionem luminis, sed etiam per hoc quod lumen naturale hominis, quo intellectualis est, a Deo est, et per hoc etiam quod cum ipse sit veritas prima, a qua omnis alia veritas certitudinem habet, sicut secundae propositiones a primis in scientiis demonstratives, nihil intellectui certum fieri potest nisi virtute divina, sicut nec conclusiones fiunt certae in scientiis nisi secundum virtutem primorum principiorum.” *Compendium theologiae* I, chap. 129.

⁸⁹ See for example Augustine, *De trinitate* 12.2.2: “But it belongs to the higher reason to judge of these corporeal things according to incorporeal and eternal reasons. [Now] unless [these incorporeal reasons] are above the human mind, [they] would certainly not be unchangeable, and unless [they are] joined to something in us, we would not be able to use them to judge of corporeal things” (my translation).

⁹⁰ On the authority of the natural law see Russell Hittinger, *The First Grace: Rediscovering The Natural Law in a Post-Christian World* (Wilmington: ISI, 2003), chap. 2, “Natural Law as ‘Law’”; chap. 4, “Authority to Render Judgment.”

describes the natural law as an *impressio* in us of the divine light, a divine instruction that moves to the good,⁹¹ he is merely extending the First Truth's illuminative authority from the speculative to the practical intellect. He makes the same extension in *ST* I–II, q. 93, aa. 1 and 2, in which he outright identifies divine truth and the eternal law.⁹² In article 2, on the way we know the eternal law, he says that while no one this side of heaven can know the eternal law in itself,

every rational creature knows it, either more or less, according to a certain inshining [*irradiatio*] of it. For *any knowledge of the truth* is a certain inshining and participation of the eternal law, which is unchangeable truth, as Augustine says in *De vera religione* (emphasis added).⁹³

The premise in this passage is that *any* knowledge of the truth, speculative or practical, is an inshining of the eternal law, “unchangeable truth.” The conclusion is that everyone knows the eternal law in its effect, the inshining that bears the likeness of the eternal law. But both premise and conclusion were established in questions 105–107, in the doctrine of adherence to the First Truth and judgment by its rule: any knowledge of truth comports an implicit, virtual knowledge of the First Truth through our grasp of its likeness in the first intelligibles. Any knowledge of truth implies reference to the authority of the First Truth. Indeed, how can the natural law, divine instruction with respect to the good, be authoritative, if divine instruction with respect to the true, from which our first knowledge of natural law's first precepts arises, is not already authoritative?⁹⁴

⁹¹ “Principium autem exterius movens ad bonum est Deus, qui et nos instruit per legem et iuvat per gratiam.” *ST* I–II, q. 90, prologue. Recall the identification of the divine motion and teaching in *ST* I, q. 105, a. 3, *sed contra* (see note 43 above).

⁹² See *ST* I–II, q. 93, a. 1, obj. 3 and ad 3. The objector cites Augustine's *De vera religione*, “above our minds is a law, which is called truth,” and concludes that “truth,” not a *summa ratio* in God's mind, is the eternal law. The objector is citing Augustine, *De vera religione*, chap. 30: “satis apparet supra mentem nostram esse legem quae veritas dicitur.” This text is widely cited in the Western illumination tradition. In his reply Aquinas identifies *summa ratio*, eternal law, and truth. It must be stressed how serious and sympathetic is Aquinas's effort, in q. 93, aa. 1 and 2, to appropriate Augustine's teaching on truth as the mind's law.

⁹³ “Sed omnis creatura rationalis ipsam cognoscit secundum aliquam eius irradiationem vel maiorem vel minorem. Omnis enim cognitio veritatis est quaedam irradiatio et participatio legis aeternae, quae est veritas incommutabilis ut Augustinus dicit in libro *De vera religione*. Veritatem autem omnes aequaliter cognoscunt ad minus quantum ad principia communia legis naturalis.” *ST* I–II, q. 93, a. 2.

⁹⁴ On the authority of natural law, the role of knowledge of God in natural law, and Aquinas's derivation of the first practical principle, see Lawrence Dewan, O.P.,

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Cardinal Ratzinger writes that modern man “presupposes the opposition of authority to subjectivity” and freedom.⁹⁵ Both Ratzinger and John Paul II have argued that adherence to divine authority frees and fulfills whereas relativism and a flawed assertion of subjectivity imprison.⁹⁶ This is a leading theme of *Veritatis Splendor*, in its teaching on participated theonomy,⁹⁷ and of *Fides et Ratio*, in its teaching that the authority of Truth “governs, stimulates, and gives increase to theology and philosophy alike.”⁹⁸ The harmony between adherence to divine authority and human fulfillment finds its ontological ground in Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on God’s illuminative governance. Divine illumination, continuous with a divine conserving causality which moves “sweetly” from within,⁹⁹ fosters and fulfills our yearning for truth.

In *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul finds the ontological ground for participated theonomy in the *impressio* of the divine light that promulgates the natural law.¹⁰⁰ In *Fides et Ratio* he finds the ontological ground of truth, natural and supernatural, in Aquinas’s account of “the role of the Holy Spirit in the process by which knowledge matures into wisdom.”¹⁰¹ Aquinas, says the pope, accords philosophical and theological wisdom their proper place; he gives primacy to a third kind of wisdom, the one that is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This wisdom “enables judgment according to divine truth” (quoting *ST* II–II, q. 45, a. 1, ad 2). The pope adds: Aquinas was “profoundly convinced that ‘whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit’ (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*).”¹⁰² The text he is quoting is *ST* I–II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1, where the full sentence reads, “Every truth, by whomever it is spoken, is from the Holy Spirit as the one who infuses [our] natural light, and who moves [it] to understand

“St. Thomas, Our Natural Lights, and the Moral Order,” in his *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 199–212.

⁹⁵ Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 23–24.

⁹⁶ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 191.

⁹⁷ See note 22 above.

⁹⁸ *Fides et Ratio*, §92. Cf. §15: “Christian Revelation is the true lodestar of men and women as they strive to make their way amid the pressures of an immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technocratic logic.”

⁹⁹ On God’s governance of every creature according to its nature, including the intellectual creatures, who have “dominion over their actions,” see *ST* I, q. 103, a. 5, ad 2 and 3. On divine governance as moving the creature “sweetly,” see note 37 above, and *ST* II–II, q. 23, a. 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Veritatis Splendor*, §42. See note 22 above.

¹⁰¹ *Fides et Ratio*, §44.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

and speak the truth.” In this one sentence Aquinas sums up the illumination teaching we have examined.¹⁰³

Aquinas’s teaching on illumination is what explains how the knowledge of truth can mature into wisdom from the Holy Spirit, where “maturation” implies continuity. In natural knowledge of truth we *already* judge according to the divine rule, since we judge according to its likeness in us. By wisdom from the Holy Spirit, says Thomas, we are moved “to judge and order all things according to the divine rules.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed any wisdom, natural or supernatural, will *imitate*¹⁰⁵ and *perfect* this basic dynamism of our natural knowledge of truth. Suchwise does faith imitate and perfect the adherence of natural knowledge to the authority of the First Truth: by faith, itself a partaking of the divine light,¹⁰⁶ the believer “adheres” to the First Truth formally and explicitly, as the authority on account of which he assents to what is believed.¹⁰⁷ Among all these ways of knowledge and wisdom there is an ontological continuity that is explained not merely by truth’s common origin in God but also by divine illumination.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ “Omne verum a quocumque dicatur est a Spiritu Sancto sicut ab infundente naturale lumen et movente ad intelligendum et loquendum veritatem.” *ST I–II*, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1. Note once again the flow from *producere*, bestowal of the power, to *perducere*, illuminative motion to the truth as known. The three replies of *ST I–II*, q. 109, a. 1 are also, taken together, a concentrated distillation of Aquinas’s teaching on illumination.

¹⁰⁴ *ST II–II*, q. 45, a. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *ST II–II*, q. 31, a. 3: “Gratia et virtus imitantur naturae ordinem, qui est ex divina sapientia institutus.”

¹⁰⁶ For example *ST I–II*, q. 109, a. 1: “Altiora vero intelligibilia intellectus humanus cognoscere non potest nisi fortiori lumine perficiatur, sicut lumine fidei vel prophetiae.”

¹⁰⁷ “Et sic ponitur actus fidei credere Deo, quia, sicut supra dictum est, formale obiectum fidei est veritas prima, cui inhaeret homo ut propter eam creditis assentiat.” *ST II–II*, q. 2, a. 2. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization,” 7 October 2007: “In the search for the good and the true, the Holy Spirit is already at work, opening the human heart and making it ready to welcome the truth of the Gospel, as Thomas Aquinas stated in his celebrated phrase: *omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*.”

¹⁰⁸ John Paul II’s exhortation that philosophers promote “a recovery of the determining role of [the great] tradition for a right approach to knowledge” (*FR*, §85), and work “in the flow of an enduringly valid tradition” (*FR*, §106), rises naturally from his teaching on the authority of truth. By “tradition” he means “the great tradition which, beginning with the ancients, passes through the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Scholasticism, and includes the fundamental achievements of modern and contemporary thought” (*FR*, §85). But this tradition can have a “determining role” for philosophy only if it has authority for philosophy, and it will have authority only if it partakes somehow of the authority of the First

In section I above I asserted that in the first three chapters of *Fides et ratio* John Paul presents a case that reason aspires naturally toward belief, that is, toward adherence to authority. He says the search for the truth is also the search for a person to whom one may entrust himself, a person “who can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself.” Christian faith “comes to meet” the truth-seeker and offers Jesus Christ—the Truth, the Word, the embodiment of the “unity of truth, natural and revealed”—as the authoritative truth to whom he may entrust himself.¹⁰⁹ In his April 2008 address to Catholic educators in the United States, Benedict XVI refers to *Fides et ratio* on just this point: “the one who seeks the truth becomes the one who lives by faith.”¹¹⁰ He asserts that the “crisis of truth” is rooted in a “crisis of faith,” and argues that faith is the way back to truth, for faith is a *commitment* of “our entire self—intellect and will, mind and heart—to God,” a commitment that brings “the certainty of truth.” “Only in faith,” he says, “can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom.”¹¹¹

Such claims by the two popes about the way that reason is fulfilled by faith and becomes thereby “truly human” take on deeper meaning when supported by Aquinas’s teaching on divine illumination: faith and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit perfect an intellect already being moved by divine instruction, already under authority, already judging according to the First Truth. So faith’s explicit commitment to authority should indeed have power to awaken the insight that any truth is a teaching from and adherence to the First Teacher. When Benedict argues in the April 2008 address to Catholic educators that truth is not the mere “communication of factual data,” not just “informative” but “performative,”¹¹² he shows that he is keen to recover truth-knowing as an illumination from God that carries the knower back to God.¹¹³ “With Saint Augustine,”

Truth. By drawing on Aquinas’s teaching on illumination, the pope offers the ontology that can ground whatever authority the great tradition has for philosophy. On tradition’s authority and role for philosophy, see Josef Pieper, “Tradition: Its Sense and Aspiration,” in his *For the Love of Wisdom* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 233–94. See also Kenneth Schmitz, “Josef Pieper and the Concept of Tradition,” in *A Cosmopolitan Hermit: Modernity and Tradition in the Philosophy of Josef Pieper*, ed. Bernard N. Schumacher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 171–98; and in the same volume my “Josef Pieper on the Truth of All Things and the World’s True Face,” 228–50.

¹⁰⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, §§33–34.

¹¹⁰ Meeting with Catholic Educators, 73, quoting *Fides et Ratio*, §31.

¹¹¹ Meeting with Catholic Educators, 74.

¹¹² Meeting with Catholic Educators, 76, citing *Spe Salvi* 2.

¹¹³ See notes 84 and 85 above. Benedict’s distinction between knowledge of facts and knowledge of truth bears a striking likeness to Aquinas’s discussion, in his *Lectura*

Benedict exhorts, “let us say: ‘we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher’.” He could also cite Thomas Aquinas: one man teaches another man from without, but God teaches from within, “for ‘the light of His face is signed upon us’, by which signing we are shown all things.”¹¹⁴ N.V

super Ioannem, of the fallen angels’ knowledge of truth. Because their fall did not destroy their natures, demons know “some kind of truth,” but not “completively,” because they “turn away from truth, that is, from God, who is complete Truth and Wisdom.” “Sic igitur aliqua veritas est in eis, sed non completa, a qua aversi sunt, scilicet a Deo, qui est veritas et sapientia completa.” *Lectura super Ioannem*, chap. 8, lect. 6, no. 1247. We might say that the feature common to knowledge of mere “factual data,” in Benedict’s words, and the demon’s knowledge of merely “some kind of truth,” is the lack of, perhaps refusal of, referral to the First Truth. Compare Aquinas’s account of the demons’ refusal with Ratzinger’s assertion that the rejection of truth brings both the precedence of “technique” and “power” over truth, and “the distorted form of being-like-God of which the account of the fall speaks” (Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 29).

¹¹⁴ ST I, q. 117, a. 1, ad 1 (see note 64 above). I would like to thank Russell Hittinger, Giuseppe Butera, and John Cuddeback for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.