

Christ according to Saint Thomas*

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Is Saint Thomas a Christian Theologian?

SUCH A provoking question signals a possible suspicion. There is no doubt that Saint Thomas was a Christian in his faith and in his sanctity. But does Christ hold the first place in his theology? The opinions differ. One recent manual of theology skips Thomas's Christology altogether in its historical survey. Another characterizes the medieval period as a rationalization of the mystery. Elsewhere, Thomas is principally studied as a philosopher, as a disciple of Aristotle. He is thought to have generated an abstract Scholasticism entirely removed from the historical context. A survey of his works, especially his great *Summas*, reveals that Christ appears rather late, almost at the end of his famous *Summa theologiae*. The summaries of Thomas's Christology often focus exclusively on the obscure expression "hypostatic union." Even the treatment of Christ's humanity appears to be a conceptual game far removed from the Jesus of the Gospels, from the Christ of faith, the savior of the world. These are some current interpretations.

We need, therefore, to rediscover the Christology of St. Thomas.

The Place of Christ in the *Summa Theologiae*

It is true that the *Summa theologiae* begins with God and not with Christ. Nevertheless, we should note that Christ is the first Person mentioned. In the general Prologue, a citation of St. Paul (1 Corinthians 3:1–2) specifies that the Apostle, and thus the theologian, addresses his interlocutors

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as “little children in Christ.” This *in Christo* placed at the beginning of the work defines its deepest identity. But why does Christology not appear until the last part of the *Summa*, after the long expositions on God, creation, and ethics? Thomas has produced a work of wisdom. He thus applies a certain order to his work. This order has a pedagogical end, to facilitate the students’ interest and assimilation. It also has a properly theological end, which is to allow us to comprehend better the place of Christ in God’s design.

The placement of Christology within the *Summa theologiae* is best understood with the help of two distinctions. The first is rather traditional, as it deals with “theology” and “economy.” The second has a philosophical origin: the return of a being to its principle.

Numerous Fathers of the Church reserve the term “theology” to their discourse that deals exclusively with God and the mystery of the Trinity. For the rest of Revelation, they employ the term “economy.” Economy is everything that God has done for the salvation of humankind, notably, the Incarnation and Redemption. Thomas structures his *Summa* by combining these two dimensions. Certainly, whatever the theologian knows of the mystery of God begins in the economy. For example, Christ reveals a privileged relationship with the Father as well as the sending of the Spirit. This is the Trinitarian mystery. Then, the theologian deepens his investigation of this mystery by searching for the possibility of one God subsisting in three Persons. The theologian thus passes from “economy” to “theology.” It is normal for the theologian to begin his most mature exposition with the end of his reflection, since the end is its most intelligible aspect. For example, Christ reveals the truth of God and of the Trinity. By his investigation of this gift of Revelation, the theologian also arrives at a better systematic expression of these mysteries. This is why the *Summa* begins with God and the Trinity. Far from relegating Christ to an insignificant place, it embraces the essential end of his mission and appropriates a better means of apprehending it.

Christ’s place in the *Summa* is also understood with the help of a second ordering principle. In the thirteenth century, the following metaphysical truth was generally acknowledged: every being returns to its principle. It was undoubtedly influenced by neo-Platonic philosophy. The plenitude of a being is in the “before” and the “beyond” of this earthly existence. Thus, this principle can involve a return to this lost plenitude. But one can also understand it in the Christian context of the theology of creation. All being comes from God and receives its plenitude from him. It is therefore normal that every being would tend toward its plenitude by a return to its Creator God. Metaphysical analysis of *finality* also

confirms this proposal. The human being is a privileged creature with regards to this return. Having come forth from God, the human being returns to God. But theology, notably that of St. Thomas, also avoids two pitfalls of the Platonic tradition. We do not come from God as from a state of existence that we had before our earthly life, nor as a part or emanation of God. Because we are created “from nothing,” as beings we are absolutely original, for our lives begin with our earthly existence. We come from God by the act of creation. We carry within ourselves the dynamism of our return. But we do not return to God in just any manner. Union with God is not the result of an ascetic effort or of speculative ability. Union with God requires the aid of another order, of the supernatural. Our path of return to God must pass through Christ. It is precisely this “return through Christ” that justifies the place of Christology in the third part of the *Summa*. One already knows God’s existence, the mystery of the Trinity, source of all of creation, the mystery of the human being in his moral complexity and the failure of sin. One can then show that our return to God is possible only through Christ and the sacraments, so that we may attain our ultimate end, eternal beatitude (eschatology).

Far from relegating Christ to the realm of secondary developments, Thomas situates his Christology at the key moment of his work. Christ is the one who makes all else possible and intelligible. The human being proceeds from the hands of God by creation (*exitus*), and should return to God through Christ (*reditus*). Thomas explains that this circular movement of creatures, and especially of the human being in the grace of Christ, finds its principle of being in the very mystery of the Trinity, in the Trinitarian processions. It is hard to be a more Christian theologian, to be situated simultaneously at the heart of the mystery of Christ, of the Trinity, and of the human being called to participate in this mystery.

Why Christ?

Before demonstrating how Thomas deepened his reflection on the mystery of Christ, one ought to ask him a radical question: why Christ? Thomas has left us numerous reflections in his two *Summas*, the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*, where he speaks of the “fittingness” of the Incarnation. By Revelation and by faith, the theologian knows that the Word was made flesh. He or she then tries to understand the meaning of the divine choice. Far from multiplying superfluous hypotheses, he or she engages in theological research that is within the frame of the harmonies of creation and the salvific economy.

Thomas gives us a number of fitting reasons for the Incarnation. We will highlight his two principal reasons. The first considers the immense

difference between God and humanity. God is invisible because he is completely spiritual, while the human being is at once spiritual and physical. We make use of the visible world in order to gain knowledge. The Incarnation thus appears as a divine adaptation to the mode of knowledge that is proper to the human being, that is, knowledge through sensible things. In Christ, God makes himself visible to the senses, so that faith in the invisible may be born in our hearts. This “visibility to the senses” has a vast meaning, namely, the Incarnate Word’s real participation in human existence in a specifically earthly condition. Henceforth, the human being can decipher the mystery of God in this concrete humanity that is Christ.

A second fitting reason for the Incarnation is the historical state of sinful humanity. For Thomas, the principal motive for the Incarnation is redemption, that is, salvation. This question of “the motive for the Incarnation” divides theologians to this day. It determines two approaches to Christianity. The first approach emphasizes the Incarnation as the perfection of creation, and of the human being in particular. Its defenders include numerous Franciscans. In this view, Redemption is considered secondary, an accident of history. The second approach, maintained by Thomas and the Thomistic tradition, prefers to stay close to the motive indicated in Sacred Scripture. The latter presents the real human being as a sinner who can be saved only by God. Thus, the principal motive of the Incarnation becomes salvation; Redemption has a central place in Christianity.

Through his exposition of our access to the invisible mystery of God and the salvation of the human being for a new communion with God, Thomas summarizes the essential fittingness of the Incarnation by teaching us that everything is explained by the goodness of God. The good tends to communicate itself. The love of God is so good that he freely wills to cause our participation in his own goodness. Why Christ? So that, in spite of sin, the human being can attain this communion of love.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

In order to respond to this question, Thomas uses the usual theological sources, which are Sacred Scripture and Tradition. Scripture is cited very often in his Christology. This is not just for the sake of simple illustrations, nor is it a theatrical background. He keeps his most elaborate theological proposals in close proximity to the Word of God. Thomas taught and wrote numerous commentaries on Scripture, including almost the whole of the New Testament. These commentaries are themselves treasures of Christological doctrine.

The Catholic theologian also thinks within the Tradition. It is inconceivable that one might write a Christology without integrating the developments of the ancient Tradition. Thomas knew well the Christological teachings of the great ecumenical councils. He always applied himself to the task of making them more intelligible, especially the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, which defined the dogma of Christ as “one divine Person subsisting in two natures, the human nature and the divine nature.” Thomas attained a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ with the help of many citations from the Fathers of the Church. He crafted a “golden chain” of patristic citations that comment on the four Gospels. His growing knowledge of the Fathers, both Latin and Greek, led to several well-known evolutions in his Christology—in particular, on the role of Christ’s humanity. Finally, one ought not to ignore the heresies. Thomas explains that the theologian should know not only the truth of his discipline but also the contrary errors.

In the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas divides his Christology according to three major themes: ontology, Christ’s “psychology,” and the mysteries of the life of Christ. “Ontology” asks about the being of Christ: Who is Jesus Christ? He is the Word of God, a divine Person whose being subsists in two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. Thomas offers numerous illuminating explanations of this dogma. He also often mentions that the mystery of the “hypostatic union” (the union of two natures in one person) largely exceeds anything that the theologian can say. By the method privileged in Thomism, that of analogy, one can show the possibility and intelligibility of this mystery.

Having analyzed the metaphysical truth of Christ, Thomas proceeds to study the consequences of these two natures. The metaphysics of Christ thus gradually leads to the second major theme, the “psychology” of Christ. Here, St. Thomas explicates a unique case, that is, the special way in which humanity is connected to the Word. In the past, the Fathers of the Church sometimes allowed their philosophical conception to determine their theology of Christ’s humanity. The most famous of these cases involved the influence of Stoic philosophy, which kept some of the Fathers from conceiving of the “passions” in Christ. Certainly, Thomas also used various philosophies in his Christology, notably the anthropology of Aristotle. But the latter made him more conscious of his method, particularly of the connection between theology and philosophy. Thomas was always careful to give a certain primacy to the revealed data. This is why he did not hesitate to reintroduce the totality of human emotions into his Christology. His argument is simple. He invokes the witness of the Gospel of John (Jesus cries, is angry, etc.) and uses it to argue for two

positions: (1) the *realism* of the Incarnation, which is to say, God did not pretend to be human; and (2) the traditional principle of “the soteriological motive” (the Greek word *soteria* means “salvation”) so dear to the Fathers of the Church, according to which anything that is not assumed in the human nature of Christ is not saved. Therefore, Christ must have a complete human nature: body, soul, affectivity, memory, intelligence, and will. Thomas applies himself to a detailed description of this reality.

This humanity is that of the Word Incarnate. Thus, it has a special call to the supernatural life. It needs grace, the theological virtue of charity, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This integral humanity perfected by grace has some exceptional characteristics. For example, the humanity of Christ has the fullness of grace because Jesus Christ is the principle of all the graces that are henceforth given to human beings. This is the “capital grace,” the grace of Christ the Head (*caput*) of the Mystical Body the Church, according to St. Paul’s profound metaphor, on which Thomas comments at length.

Another question taken up by Thomas and highly disputed to this day is that of Christ’s knowledge. Today, the question is posed in a radical way: how did Jesus know what he taught, and in what way was he conscious of his personality? One might respond that he knew everything, since he was God. But this answer is too simple, for it does not take the reality of Christ’s humanity into consideration. How did Christ in his humanity know the truths of the faith? Thomas does not take up the modern question of the consciousness of Christ. However, he treats the problem of Christ’s knowledge with great nuance and offers an original solution: Christ is exceptional in that he had a humanity which lived simultaneously in the two conditions that other human beings live successively, that is, the earthly condition with its acquired knowledge, and the heavenly condition with its vision of God. He also explains that the “infused ideas” could directly inform the human intelligence of Jesus. This explanation is disputed today, even by some of Thomas’s disciples. The quest for an answer ought to continue. However, some fundamental positions ought to be maintained. Christ was conscious of himself, of his profound identity, and of the meaning of his mission. These are immensely important for our understanding of Jesus Christ. They also determine the connection between Christ and his Church (Did Jesus will the Church? Did he will this Church?), and the continuity between the teaching of Jesus and the dogmas of the Tradition (Do the dogmas express the substance of the truths of which Jesus was conscious?).

Finally, the third major theme of Thomas’s Christology is his theology of the mysteries of Christ. Having identified the Person of Christ in his

profound being and his psychology, one desires to understand what Jesus has done on earth for our salvation, or, as Thomas likes to say, all that Christ did and suffered for us. Theologians often neglect this part of Thomas's doctrine. Fortunately, it has recently been demonstrated that this is an essential part of is Christology. The whole of Jesus' life is surveyed, from the Annunciation to his Exaltation, in order to show the manner in which he is the source of grace.

Who is Jesus Christ? Thomas again proceeds like a sage who begins with the contemplated truth. This is the reason for the order of his exposition: being, psychology, the mysteries. Certainly, like all believers, Thomas first discovered Jesus in the mysteries of the Gospel. But as a theologian assured by faith and the developments of the Tradition, he returns to these same mysteries of the Gospel with an ever-greater awareness of the reality of the Person of Christ. Jesus' actions witness to the identity of his Person, but this identity allows one to understand better the meaning of his actions. For Jesus Christ, identity and actions are intimately connected. Thomas belongs to that rare breed of theologians who do not fragment their Christology. Instead, he offers a vision of Christ that penetrates simultaneously the metaphysical profundity of his being and the salutary fruitfulness of his concrete existence.

Christ the Universal Savior in His Humanity

Thomas carefully presents the *integral* humanity of Jesus Christ. God wills to save all human beings, and Christ saves all of humanity. The theology of the mysteries of the life of Jesus manifests the essential place of Christ's *humanity* for the salvation and sanctification of human beings. A key phrase keeps recurring in Thomas's works: "All that Christ did or suffered in his humanity is the source of salvation." Today, one often speaks of the "Paschal mystery" as the center of the Christian faith. The death and Resurrection of the Lord also form the heart of the mysteries for Thomas, but he considers the totality of the life of Jesus. Because the humanity of Christ was sanctified so abundantly by his union with the Word, his actions have an infinite spiritual fruitfulness.

In his explication of the efficacy of these mysteries, Thomas did not restrict himself to edifying declarations or a collection of biblical citations. Jesus is really human. One can therefore apply to him the philosophical tools that allow us to know human nature. Thomas's intellectual generosity was not always well received. Is it permissible to introduce philosophy at the very heart of the mystery? Thomas applied this method with a great deal of theological prudence. He considers human actions in their different aspects: their source, efficacy, finality, and expressions. In order to realize this delicate

project, he combines the Aristotelian notion of “cause” with the Platonic notion of “exemplarity.” First, he contemplates the mysteries of Jesus in the Gospel. Then, instructed by what he has gleaned from his studies of Christ’s being and psychology, he proceeds toward a deeper understanding of each of the mysteries. Thus, the “life of Jesus,” or rather a typology of his existence drawn from the Gospel, is scrutinized with the diverse kinds of causes: efficient, final, exemplar. Efficient causality is subdivided into “principal causality,” that of God, of the Word, and “instrumental causality,” that of Christ’s humanity. These (causal) explanations are interspersed with biblical citations and a great number of patristic confirmations. Thomas consistently shows how grace comes to human beings by this humanity living the episodes of his earthly existence.

As an example, let us consider the subject of the miracles that Jesus accomplished:

Christ came to save the world [*final causality*] not only by the Divine power [*principal efficient causality*] but also through the mystery of his Incarnation [*instrumental efficient causality*]. Consequently, in healing the sick he frequently not only made use of his Divine power, healing by way of command, but also by applying something pertaining to his human nature [*efficient and exemplar causality*]. Hence on Luke 4:40: “He, laying his hands on everyone of them, healed them,” Cyril [of Alexandria] says: “Although, as God, he might, by one word, have driven out all diseases, yet he touched them, showing that his own flesh was endowed with a healing virtue.” [Having cited Scripture and a Father of the Church, Thomas cites four other biblical passages and several Fathers of the Church in this same passage.] (*ST III*, q. 44, a. 3, ad 2)

Thomas specifies the role of human liberty in the face of a miracle:

It was unfitting that the human being should be made righteous unless he willed: for this would be both against the nature of righteousness, which implies rectitude of the will, and contrary to the very nature of the human being, which requires to be led to good by the free will, not by force. Christ, therefore, justified the human being inwardly by the Divine power, but not against the human being’s will. Nor did this [justification] pertain to his miracles, but to the end of his miracles. (*ST III*, q. 44, a. 3, ad 1)

A major conclusion is the *universality* of the *mediation* of Christ’s humanity. This point is disputed today because of the inter-religious situation: is Christ the only Savior? Is the Church, his Mystical Body, necessary for salvation? The solutions that relativize the religions always end up

doing harm to the role of Christ's humanity. It is hard to accept that a human life of thirty years in a corner of Palestine two thousand years ago could claim a universal significance, especially with regards to the efficacy of grace, one that is valid for all human beings in every time and place. The basis for a solution can be found in the Thomistic theology of Christ's humanity. Thomas even makes a comparison with the universality of creation. In effect, to create is for God to communicate being. Thomas says: in the same way that God communicates being to all things, Christ, according to his humanity, communicates grace to all spiritual beings, though certainly according to different modalities.

The Mysteries of the Life of Jesus

The term "mystery" is being used here in the Christian sense: it signifies the efficacy of an action whose origin is God and whose meaning he reveals. The life of Jesus is "mysterious," not like an esoteric secret, but because a humanity is connected to the Word in a unique manner. Jesus was born, ate, and slept like every human being. But his actions carry within them a treasure of the spiritual life, one that is "hidden" to the profane, but enlightening for those who believe. Indeed, the authority of his word, the profundity of his teachings, and the power of his miracles point toward this mysterious meaning. But Jesus Christ cannot be "deduced." There must be a conversion of the heart and the light of faith.

In harmony with the *exitus/reditus* approach, Thomas presents these mysteries according to three moments of the economy of salvation: (1) the entry of the Son of God into the world; (2) Christ's progress in the world; and (3) the manner of Christ's departure from the world.

Here, one can discover how, from the beginning, the Blessed Virgin Mary was a mother sanctified by her infant son. This efficiency of grace in Mary's womb should suffice to establish the dignity of human embryonic existence, founded upon this tapestry of the human and the divine in the maternal womb.

Thomas introduces the public life of Jesus through a general reflection on his manner of life. The essential rule is formulated in this way: "the manner of the life of Christ ought to agree with the end of the Incarnation, with the reason for which he came into the world." Now Jesus came into this world in order to manifest the truth, which implies that he displayed it in public and preached openly. He also came into this world in order to deliver human beings from their sins. Therefore, he led an itinerant life, one oriented toward the ultimate sacrifice. Finally, he came into the world to open a path to relationship with God. This explains his convivial and familial earthly life, whose purpose was to inspire confidence.

Thomas comments at length on the temptations and miracles of Jesus, both in the *Summa theologiae* and in his biblical commentaries. As a good theologian, he gives particular attention to preaching. Christ is the doctor of truth. Jesus' preaching should be placed in the larger context of his origin, the Father, in the context of its content, the object of study for all of theology, and connected to the extensive Old Testament teaching on the unique efficacy of the Word of God. Thomas also shows the manner in which Christ carried out his ministry of the Word. This ministry is the fulfillment of the ancient promises. This is why Jesus first preached to the Jewish people, the first mediator of Revelation. Thomas then explains why Jesus' words provoke a certain scandal, why they needed to be proclaimed publicly, and why they remain in an oral purity without being written down by Jesus himself. The words of Jesus have salvific power: "only the teaching of Christ procures salvation." This efficacy is inseparable from the action of the Holy Spirit: "If Christ had taught by writing down his doctrine, one might think that nothing more profound can be discovered here than that which is in the written formulation." Instead, Jesus directly "impressed" his doctrine into the hearts of his disciples by the Spirit who gives faith. The task of writing will fall to his closest disciples. Thomas then explains a key principle of the economy foreseen by God, that is, the cooperation of human beings: "to accomplish something through others demonstrates a much greater power than to accomplish something by oneself." It is in this context that Thomas provides the Dominican tradition with the most beautiful motto of the friar preacher: "to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation," because the preaching comes from the abundance of contemplation, beginning with the mysteries of the life of Christ. The teaching of Jesus is centered on the Passion. It becomes efficacious, salutary, and universal only after the total gift of himself.

The Passion is Christ's "departure" from this world. Christ's ultimate passage is rooted in prayer. Thomas speaks of an "ascension of prayer." The Christ, the Word Incarnate, ought to pray insofar as he is human, so that his human will may be perfectly obedient to the Father's plan. In Jesus' prayer of petition, the Gospel demonstrates that all other forms of prayer are included: praise, thanksgiving, and contemplation. Christ's prayer therefore has an exemplary value. In particular, by his agony Jesus shows us how to orient our human affectivity toward God, despite the reality of death, which is repugnant to him. This prayer shares in the economy of salvation. For Thomas, the events of salvation history have come about through Christ's prayer. This remains true for the prayer of the Church.

Christ's departure from this world is incomprehensible without recalling his priestly dimension. The priesthood of Christ includes a double

mediation. Indeed, the gifts of God are transmitted to human beings through Christ. This is his *descending* mediation, from God to human beings through Christ. Christ also reconciles the human race with God. This is his *ascending* mediation, of humankind to God through Christ. The three powers—priesthood, royal wisdom, and prophecy—which were dispersed in the Old Testament are united in Christ. Henceforth, the baptized will receive grace according to this triple qualification. Christ is the source of every priesthood, that of the baptized who offer their life to God, and that of the ministerial priests, those men who enable the union of the offering of the faithful with the sacrifice of Christ.

The plenitude of salvation is found in the death and Resurrection of Jesus. The Passion, death, burial, and descent into hell are the great mysteries of Jesus' departure from this world. According to Thomas, two kinds of plenitude characterize the Passion of Christ: suffering and salvation. The greatest suffering corresponds to an abundance of love. Thomas explains that the Passion is a sacrifice, inasmuch as it is a most acceptable offering to God *in virtue of the liberty and charity* that inspire it. Thus, the plenitude of love is primary. Still, Christ really suffered in his human nature. His heart bore our sins. Thomas speaks of the "charity of Christ's suffering" that is stronger than all sin. Christ's abasement *merits* salvation for us. In contrast to all who try to exalt themselves, Christ's humility merits him the exaltation of glory as well as the salvation of all human beings. The Passion of Christ is the proper efficient cause of the remission of sins, always by the humanity of Jesus. His Cross is not some esoteric symbol. Rather, it is the fulfillment of every Old Testament prefiguration of universal sanctification. Christ liberates in an extensive and in a profound way: extensive, in that all of humanity draws its salvation from him; profound, in that by his Passion, Christ liberates us from original sin and from all other sins. This plenitude extends itself into the past, because before his Passion, one could enter the kingdom by faith in Christ's future Passion, the Passion that was hidden in the Old Testament figures, though no one could obtain eternal beatitude before Christ's Passion. Finally, this abundance extends itself to the realm of the deceased. Christ's descent into hell is the application of the Passion to the just among the dead, but not to the damned.

The Resurrection is closely connected to the Passion. Together, these two mysteries are the source of the remission of sins and of new life. The plenitude of salvation is anthropological: the whole human being, body and soul, is resurrected and justified. All bodies will be resurrected at the end of time for the Last Judgment. All human beings are therefore called to benefit from the grace of the Resurrection. In this mystery, the human

being is oriented toward the fulfillment of his life, as the very movement of the Ascension confirms: "our spirit is turned toward him." His hidden corporeal presence facilitates belief in Christ's continual and universal presence in his divinity: "[Christ ascended] in order to increase our faith, which is of things unseen . . . to uplift our hope. . . . For by placing in heaven the human nature which he assumed, Christ gave us the hope of arriving there" (*ST* III, q. 57, a. 1, ad 3). Christ's plentitude thus continues as the plentitude of the Holy Spirit.

The Imitation of Christ

The celebrated work *The Imitation of Christ* post-dates Thomas, but its theme traverses the whole Christian tradition. Its source is Sacred Scripture. St. Paul traces some fundamental lines such as "Christ the Head" and "the Body the Church," the idea of conformity to Christ, and the entire foundation of his ethics. Thomas retrieves these themes when he says, for example, that Christ and the Church form "a single mystical Person," and that, if Christ is the Head of the Church, the Spirit is its Heart. With Thomas, the imitation of Christ is also understood with the help of two themes: communion in the mysteries of Christ and the exemplarity of these same mysteries.

Communion in the mysteries of Christ requires "faith and the sacraments." By faith and the sacraments, God's salvific plan in Christ continues and is given to us by this blend of the visible and the invisible. Christ's Passion plays a determining role in this process: "The sacraments of the Church derive their power especially from Christ's Passion, the virtue [i.e. power] of which is in a manner united to us by our receiving the sacraments" (*ST* III, q. 62, a. 5c). Thomas recalls the Johannine symbolism of Christ on the Cross. The baptismal water and the Eucharistic blood flowing from his pierced side manifest "the most important sacraments." The connection is clear: "the sacraments of the Church . . . derive their efficacy from the Word incarnate himself" (*ST* III, q. 60, prologue).

Nevertheless, Thomas affirms that "all" the mysteries of Christ's life cause our salvation. He proposes an original thesis: there is an actuality or abiding power of Christ's mysteries beyond the sacraments. How can this be? On Christ's part, this comes about by the special unity of his humanity with the Word that transcends time. The power of the mysteries can therefore be applied everywhere and in the time to come. On the part of the beneficiary, faith is required, one that is at least implicit. Thus, a communion with Christ's past life is possible. Certainly, these episodes are buried in history, but the power of grace remains. The mysteries of the life of Jesus conceal in themselves the capacity for an extraordinary communion.

Christ's exemplarity deepens this communion even more. The Passion is the exemplar of the remission of faults and of our death to sin. The Resurrection is the exemplar of new life. One must also consider "all" of the mysteries. For Thomas, one can distinguish two types of Christological exemplarity: a "moral" exemplarity and a "fontal" exemplarity (*fons* = source). The first is commonly known. This is the imitation of the small child in the presence of its parents. Thomas uses this example very often. Christ is a moral example. Thus, in his temptations, he teaches us to fight against our own temptations. In a general way, Christ is a model of the virtues.

But the "fontal" or ontological exemplarity goes further still. Indeed, the humanity of Jesus is not only an exterior model, but also a source of grace, because of Christ's profound being. All that Christ lived is the source of grace. Grace proceeds from each mystery of his concrete existence. I have a model and, at the same time, the grace to accomplish this imitation. Not only do I see how Christ resists temptation, but he communicates to me the appropriate grace to fight against my own temptation. As in art, I see the work; but in addition, the spirit of the artist dwells in me so that I can reproduce this work. The great difference here is that there is neither a counterfeit nor a simple reproduction, because the Spirit of the masterpiece is really present. Thus, the interior edification of human personalities is always an original work. Every saint imitates the same charity of Christ, and yet no two are identical, while all resemble their first exemplar. Christ's mysteries can be imitated according to an infinite participation.

Grace comes from God. But it "passes through" the humanity of Jesus. Jesus experienced all grace through the mysteries of his life. God's gift, divine in its source, is profoundly human in its modality. It is rare if not impossible for the human being to receive from another a help that has been so well adapted. In being human like Christ, I am led into God like Christ.

This theology of the mysteries, of their efficacy, merits, and exemplarity, has numerous consequences. As the Prologue of the *Summa theologiae* announced, the Christian life is indeed *in Christo*. At any moment, it is possible to commune in the mysteries of Christ with the efficacy of his "Christo-forming grace." The believer who meditates on the mysteries of Christ with his simple rosary is directly applying this high theology. *Lectio divina* becomes a "holy reading" because Christ really gives himself here. Each mystery that is read and reread can be a source of grace in a similar situation.

Yet we must go still further. The imitation of Christ introduces us to the greatest mystery, that of the Trinity. Christ is the perfect image. The human being is only "to" the image. But in Christ, the human being is freed from sin and rediscovers the Trinitarian mystery of his spiritual

being. As the processions of wisdom and love accomplish themselves in God between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so God's image accomplishes itself in us through the processions of wisdom and love by our intellect and will, both in our nature and in our elevation through grace. The human being is thus called to "imitate the Trinity." I do not lie, not only "because it is not good," but because, from all eternity, the Father begets the Word of truth, and my intellect was created in his image, was made for the truth, to receive the light of faith and then the light of glory. Similarly, I do not love in just any way, since the Spirit of love proceeds in God from all eternity, and the natural as well as supernatural dynamism of my being was constituted to this very image and called to resemble it freely. How can one concretely realize this Trinitarian imitation? By the imitation of Christ, through the mysteries of his humanity. Why this imitation? In order to prepare oneself "to see God." These Christo-conforming graces structure our spirit and prepare it for this future encounter. Thomas's Christology gives its "earthly emphasis" to Christ and his disciples while orienting human existence toward its definitive dwelling place, to the vision of God and the definitive communion of the saints.

The "actuality" of the mysteries of the incarnate Word explains why Thomas was so attached to the most beautiful realization of the presence of Christ here below: *the Eucharist*. He brought his head close to the tabernacle in order to be confirmed in his theology. He offered the most profound theological developments on the presence of Christ in this sacrament. He also composed the Office of Corpus Christi. This was a decisive moment in Thomas's spiritual evolution. Christ, perfect God and perfect man, is entirely contained in this sacrament. Thomas does not say, "receive the body of Christ" but "receive Christ." He explains that Christ "joins us to himself" by this sacrament because it is utterly proper to live with one's friends.

Clearly, the Christology of St. Thomas needs to be rediscovered. **NV**